

Virtue and Vulnerability

Discourses on women, gender and climate change

Seema Arora-Jonsson

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences

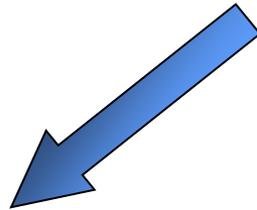
Gender as a category of analysis

Studying the organization and relationships of power in environmental work

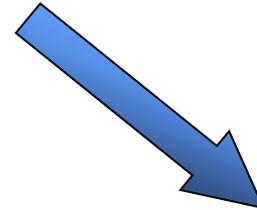
Gender \neq Women

Gender = Relationship

What does gender have to do with climate change? A review of existing literature.



Vulnerability



Virtue

Arguments or 'truths' about women:

1. poorest of the poor
2. more prone to die in natural calamities
3. more environmentally conscious

Examine these truisms in relation to evidence

Unconvincing – why do these truisms persist?

Implications for work on climate change and gender? Next steps?

3 bodies of literature

- **Poorest of the poor**
research on poverty
- **More prone to die in natural calamities**
research on natural disasters and post-disaster reconstruction
- **More environmentally conscious**
research on environmental behavior

1st truism: Women are the poorest of the poor

The poor in the developing world will suffer the most

- Since women represent a disproportionate share of the poor, hence likely to be disproportionately vulnerable.

1st truism

- 70% of the 1,3 billion people in the developing world living below the poverty line are women
- Gender differences greatest among the poorest: women eat least and last.



- NYHETER
- BAKGRUND
- TRANSPORT
- ENERGI
- KONSUMTION
- MAT
- DEM GÖR VAD?
- REKOMMENDATIONER
- LÄNKAR

- :: Arkiv
- :: 2011

Du är här: [Hem](#) > [Nyheter](#) > [Arkiv](#) > [2011](#) > [Klimatet en jämställdhetsfråga](#)

Klimatet en jämställdhetsfråga

Klimatförändringen har konsekvenser för både fattigdom och jämställdhet i världen, sa Finlands utrikesminister Erkki Tuomioja.



Finlands utrikesminister Erkki Tuomioja höll ett av inledningstalen på den Nordiska klimatfestivalen som ordnades i Esbo i Finland i slutet av augusti.
 – Klimatförändringen påverkar inte alla på samma sätt. Fattiga drabbas till exempel hårdare än rika och kvinnor hårdare än män. Därför är frågan om klimatförändringen också en jämställdhetsfråga, betonade Tuomioja.

Temat för den fyra dagar långa festivalen var att föra fram de bästa Nordiska initiativen för hållbara samhällen. Festivalen riktade sig till studerande och toppforskare i hela Norden, och under festivalen debatterade även representanter från universitetsvärlden och affärslivet olika sätt att stoppa klimatförändringen.

Den Nordiska klimatfestivalen är ett av huvudevenemangen under det finska ordförandeskapet i Nordiska ministerrådet 2011. Evenemanget ordnades 30.8-2.9 2011 vid Aalto-universitetet i Esbo.

Läs mer:
[Climate Festival 2011](#)

Foto: Johannes Jansson/norden.org



norden
 Nordiskt institut för



norden
 Nordiska ministerrådet

E-post: info@equalclimate.org



idium WEBBPUBLICERING



1st truism

‘ ‘Many developing countries are especially vulnerable to climate effects because of poverty, conflicts, *lack of gender and social equality*, environmental degradation and lack of food’ (Regeringens Proposition, 2008:220).

Truism 2

Women most prone to dying in natural disasters

14 times more likely to die in natural calamities caused due to climate change

e.g. Asian Tsunami where the largest number of fatalities were women, Bangladesh flooding, European heatwave

Truism 2

Exception – Hurricane Mitch – but also gendered reasons say researchers

3rd truism: Women more environmentally conscious

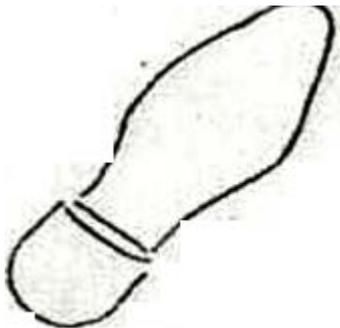
- Considered more sensitive to risk, more prepared for behavioural change and likely to support more drastic policies.
- Women tend to worry more about the environment.
- Who are the polluters?

3rd truism: Women more environmentally conscious

- The unequivocal answer is men
- Men drive more while women use public transport or cycle or walk
- Eat more meat

3rd truism: Women more environmentally conscious

- Rich or poor men pollute more while women leave a smaller ecological footprint (Report to the Environment Advisory Council, Sweden).



Examining the arguments

1. Poorest of the poor – feminisation of poverty?
 - 70% figure anecdotal rather than statistically rigorous
 - Implausible given the age distribution of the global population and its' household characteristics (Marcoux 1998)

Examining the arguments

- Difficult to generalize – men and women family breadwinners
- Cecile Jackson – 'The poverty trap'
- A simplification leading to the fallacy that poverty alleviation would lead to gender equality

Examining the arguments

2. More women die in disasters? 14 times more likely to die?
 - Lack of data
 - Socio-economic factors more relevant: Neumayer and Plumper 2007, Orissa
 - Analysis must be context dependent - theories

Examining the arguments

3. More environmentally conscious?

- Clubbing together all women's motivations, perspectives and actions
- People's responses need to be understood in the context of their material reality
- Embeddedness: identities and agendas shaped by circumstances

Why and what next?

- To put gender and inequality on the map of climate change discourse
- Pressures to simplify, to sloganize, to move

Consequences

- Credibility undermined
- Static conceptions of women's roles – a homogeneous group suffering because of their sex

Consequences

- Assumption that we know what the problem is – gender and power ignored
- Gender is made invisible
- What relations produce vulnerability?

Consequences

- Little understanding of gendered experiences
- Feminisation of responsibility
 - “victims to heroines”
- Saviours of the environment

Consequences

Assumption: A problem for the developing world (e.g. Swedish Bill)

“Since climate adaptation has a high degree of international interdependence, if gender inequity aggravates climate problems in other countries, this can have significant indirect effects in Sweden” (FOI Report, 2007).

What do we need?

- Challenge technical, expert oriented discourse but also stereotypes
- Gender in its particular context
- Flexible policy and decision-making

How can gender research lead to better action

- By helping to ask questions and figure out what the problem is
- technical solutions are not going to solve our problems if we don't know what our problems really look like
- our roles in propagating or challenging gender myths