

## Policy pointers

- Most major planning and policy decisions about building climate change resilience in Vietnam are taken by men because the involvement of women is restricted by social norms, gender biases and domestic work burdens. This often means that their needs and capacity are not sufficiently taken into account.
- Women often have low levels of education in Vietnam, which means they have little awareness of climate change and climate change risk reduction, and this hinders their active involvement in helping to build climate resilience. This can be overcome through formal education and training to raise awareness, as well as helping women to find stable and well-paid jobs, which will give them the confidence to engage in community activities including responding to climate change.
- To enable women to fully participate in planning and decision making associated with climate change, it is crucial to have supportive mechanisms in place – for example, regulations on the minimum number of female members on councils or steering committees.
- Gender-sensitive indexes/indicators should be integrated into plans, programs and projects at the city and district/ward levels to guide gendered interventions or actions so that both men and women's needs, roles and responsibilities are taken into account when reducing vulnerability and enhancing climate resilience.

# Gender Analysis in Building Climate Resilience in Da Nang, Vietnam

## Challenges and Solutions

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Climate resilience is more likely to be achieved when men and women fully participate in planning, decision making and implementation. This study looks at what roles men and women play in climate change planning and action, and to what extent women's needs and capacity are fully taken into account. It focuses on Da Nang, Vietnam, a city extremely vulnerable to climate change. The three core components of urban climate resilience – systems, institutions and agents – which have been used by the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition (ISET) since 2012, were examined through the gender lens by conducting a series of stakeholder consultations and household interviews. The results indicate that (i) Da Nang has paid increasing attention to gender equality and the empowerment of women in general administration, policy making and implementation; (ii) social norms and gender biases still exist but they are not thought to be especially serious; (iii) both male and female groups are engaged in the process of planning and approving policies, plans and strategies on climate change; and (iv) gender relations have recently been given a positive signal in the form of support from a robust legal system and the formation of women's associations within the municipal administrative system.

### A need for 'true gender equality'

*The issue of power and voice is a key aspect in shaping urban resilience (Friend and Moench, 2013). Resilience is frequently linked with underlying social relations of power, in which the issue of "resilience for whom... and by whom" has emerged (ibid.). Different rights and roles of different groups may inform and shape different levels of vulnerability and*

*resilience. For example, in coastal cities that are subject to floods, storms, sea level rise and salinisation due to climate change, people on low incomes are more vulnerable than those on high incomes because they frequently live in disaster-prone areas. Furthermore, their homes and livelihoods are not stable and resilient to climate change (Dodman *et al.*, 2013).*

*Such differences in vulnerability and resilience also applies to different gender groups. Modern Vietnam is influenced by historically*

patriarchal and feudalised social norms and biases in which women are often limited to domestic tasks, such as childcare and food preparation, whereas men are in charge of making decisions outside the home — for example, in development planning. During the feudal period (1802-1945), the rights and potential of women were not fully appreciated; their education was intended to help them understand their role in supporting the well-being of families, communities and society – not to equip them to engage with important matters of community and society. Now, in Vietnam, gender equality is widely recognised as an important principle and objective for social development, but translating it into practice and implementation is still problematic. The term ‘*true gender equality*’ (*bình đẳng giới thực chất*) highlights the real impact and influence of so-called gender-based or gender-sensitive strategies and practices (Mai, 2009). Decision making is commonly made through consultations, meetings and dialogues where men are the majority of participants (UN-Vietnam, 2009).

Climate change impacts are likely to exacerbate gender inequality and enlarge gender gaps if coping and adaptive strategies underestimate the importance of gendered interventions and the necessity of gender mainstreaming in planning and implementation. Gendered analyses have played an important role in recent debates and discussions related to climate change in assessing the gendered impacts of climate change and the gendered outcomes of resilience and adaptation strategies (Sultana, 2014). This study examines climate change impacts on gender groups, the effects of climate change policies, plans and actions on gender groups, and the role and capacity of gender groups in climate vulnerability reduction and resilience building.

## Method

This study combined a literature review with a field investigation in Da Nang, Vietnam. There were two multi-stakeholder consultations to capture the opinions and perceptions of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaption (CCA) actors in the city. The first consultation was conducted in January 2016 with 10 participants and the second consultation was done in March 2016 with 16 participants. In addition, 60 households were qualitatively interviewed, of which half were economically ‘poor’ and half were ‘near poor’. The inclusion of poor and near poor households ensured that the study focused on highly vulnerable groups that face greater exposure and vulnerability to climate change compared with higher-income groups.

The field data were analysed against the three components – agents, systems and institutions – of urban climate resilience. This involved analysing the strengths and weaknesses of women and men (the agents) to identify what roles they could play in the process of reducing vulnerability and building resilience. The operations of groups trained for climate change adaptation were also examined to see whether gender roles and equity were incorporated or not. The legal system (the systems) and the socio-economic structures of the city (the institutions) were also examined to assess whether gender had been addressed and mainstreamed in planning and action.

## Findings

The study found that men are more likely to have completed secondary school, high school and university, while women are more likely to have attended primary school or had no formal education at all. This lower level of education hinders women from comprehending and engaging with social and development issues, including climate change response and adaptation. It is also one of the reasons why women are less confident when participating in social activities and voicing their opinions. In addition, the lack of education constrains women’s opportunities to hold higher positions in society, such as well-paid jobs, which can help reduce their vulnerability.

The study also found that loss of human life was relatively low in recent climate events in Da Nang. Damage induced by climate change mainly impacted household assets (eg. household appliances, parts of the house and production tools) and public infrastructure (eg. traffic roads, drainage systems and power stations). This suggests that climate change is less about injuries and fatalities and more about the indirect impacts it has on people’s lives. This was borne out by the household interviews, which demonstrated several indirect impacts of climate change on women and men – for example, housing damage put more pressure on men, while lack of clean water or electricity generated more work for women (Figure 1).

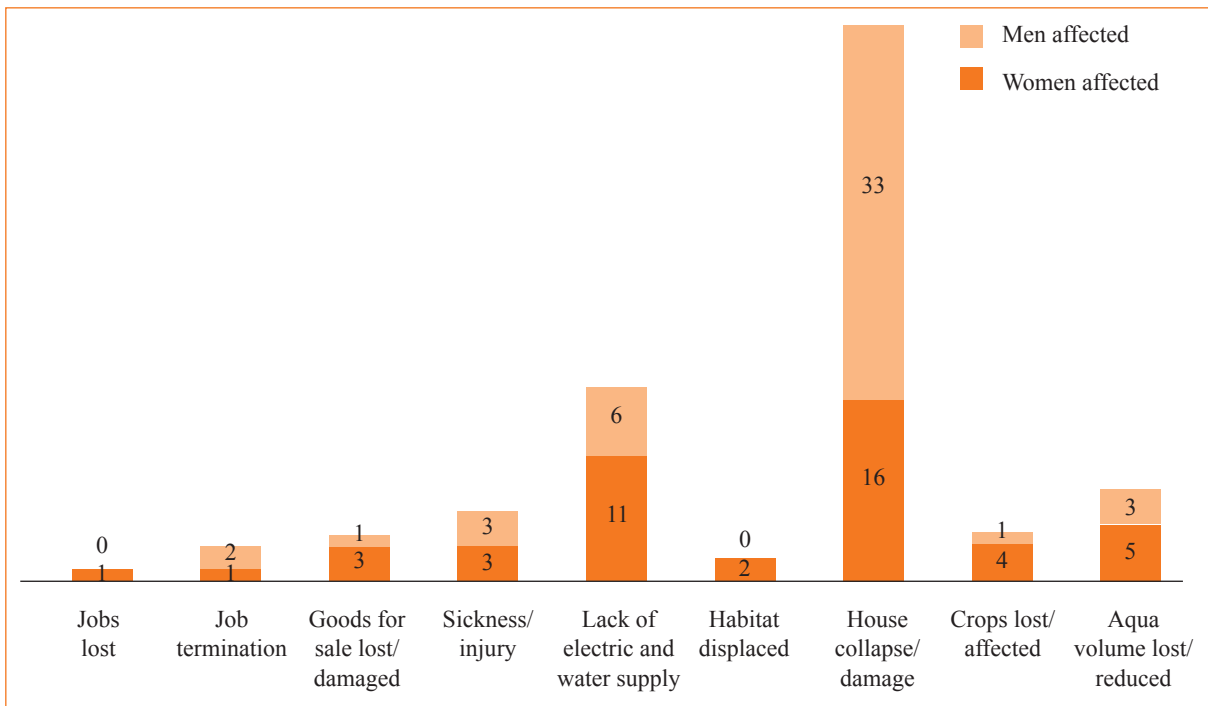
Gender bias mainly relates to the perception that housework and childcare is done by women, while men are responsible for earning money outside the home. This is arguably the legacy of previous social norms, where feudal structures failed to respect men and women equally. According to the study, gender bias is gradually being reduced thanks to better education, of both men and women, among other social changes, so is not currently significant in Da Nang.

It also found that social norms/biases around gender were not considered to have a significant effect on the construction and implementation of plans and policies on climate change. Though men frequently occupied a higher proportion of decision-making boards, their decisions were always made with regard to the wellbeing and benefit of other groups, especially women and the elderly. Though well intended, this reinforces the patriarchal culture where the voices of women are not fully appreciated.

At the household level, the household interviews revealed that some responses to climate change/natural disasters require physical strength, such as repairing shelter or moving household items to safe places, which men tend to undertake, while others require no physical strength, such as saving money or preparing food, which women tend to do. But some actions – for example, updating information about disaster occurrences – can be shared equally by both men and women.

Yet women receive little support and encouragement from their families to participate in social activities for climate change response and adaptation. According to female respondents, the domestic work burden in families is the biggest barrier to women joining such activities because they have limited or no time left after completing family tasks.

**Figure 1: The gendered nature of the work burden after disaster damage and loss**



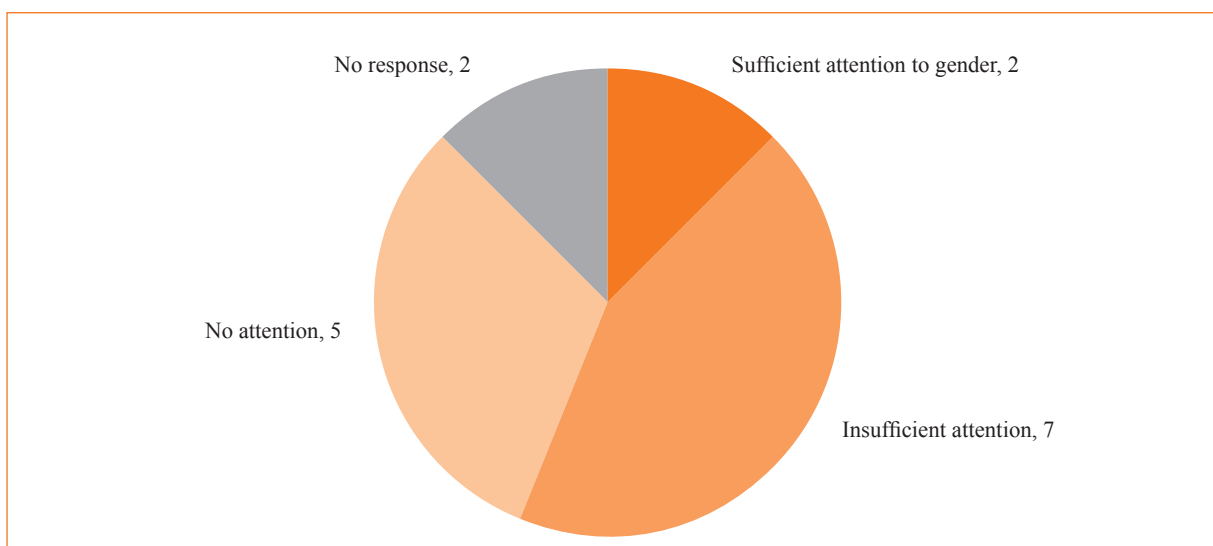
According to stakeholder consultation respondents, awareness campaigns on gender, gender equality and gender mainstreaming in responding and adapting to climate change was not done effectively in Da Nang. Respondents said that the messaging lacked specific instructions on how to enable or achieve gender sensitivity in practical ways.

The study also found that attention to gender issues, particularly in public buildings for evacuation purposes, were already mainstreamed in public buildings but it was not done sufficiently (Figure 2). This was blamed on the fact that such buildings (usually offices or schools) were

used for disaster evacuation purposes on a temporary basis and had not been designed with these safety considerations in mind. This meant that gender sensitivity was sometimes addressed in a limited way. Some of those interviewed for this study said such buildings did not consider gender issues – such as separate spaces for women and men during a stay of several days during a flood or typhoon – because when they were planned the focus was usually on making sure there were sufficient facilities for evacuation purposes.

Finally, the study found that both men and women are regarded as having equal roles and responsibilities in monitoring and managing the implementation of policies,

**Figure 2: Degrees of attention to gender in public buildings for evacuation purposes in vulnerable areas**



plans and strategies on climate change. This was not only due to the widespread engagement of the Women's Union<sup>2</sup> in monitoring policy/plan implementation, but also because of an increasing involvement of female staff in the responsible administrative departments/units due to the recently established women-based associations, and a robust legal system upholding gender equality.

## Recommendations

It is important that men, as well as women, take some responsibility in helping to mainstream gender. There is a need to change men's mindsets – for example, through awareness-raising campaigns – so that they recognise the strengths of women and their potential as climate change actors. The importance of including and amplifying the voices of women in situations where they are vulnerable must be recognised, so that climate actions respond to their needs.

It is essential to improve women's capacities – for example, through raising awareness or vocational training to address their vulnerabilities – but it's important to note that their vulnerabilities are not merely generated by their own limited capacity. This will indirectly help reduce their vulnerability to future climate hazards, increase their self-confidence and heighten their position and role in the community and society. Such improved self-confidence will also allow women to better participate in social and community activities,

including those related to reducing climate vulnerability and building resilience.

There should be programs and projects to mobilise and empower women to join community and social activities, thereby acknowledging and enhancing the social roles and responsibilities of women in tackling climate change-related problems.

It is also necessary to include gender-sensitive design standards and regulations for hard infrastructure such as public spaces, green parks and public buildings (for evacuation purposes), especially in climate-exposed areas. Such an approach ensures gender sensitivity in the use and operation of such public spaces and buildings when climate shocks and stresses occur (eg. storms, floods and fires). Gender considerations should also be incorporated into "soft" infrastructure, such as information and communication systems, for climate risk reduction and resilience enhancement (eg. early-warning systems and climate-related policy dialogues). Specific instruction or guidance on how to translate gendered requirements/conditions in policies, plans and strategies into practical actions are important to close the gap between policy/theory and implementation/practice.

Once these recommendations are put in place, women will be able to participate more effectively in building climate change resilience and their needs and capacity are more likely to be fully captured and promoted in resilience planning, decision-making and implementation.

## Aim of Series:

The findings presented here are drawn from research published in the Asian Cities Climate Resilience working paper series. The series has arisen out of the Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network (ACCCRN), an initiative funded by the Rockefeller Foundation – more information can be found at [www.acccrn.org](http://www.acccrn.org)

Collaborators: ISET-International.

## Notes

1 This study is set out in the working paper of the same name published by IIED in June 2016 and available online at <http://pubs.iied.org/10784IIED.html>

2 Women's Union is a mass organisation under the governmental system that represents the voice of women, protects women's rights and promotes the role of women in socio-economic development

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