



MenEngage Alliance

working with men and boys for gender equality



Men, Masculinities
&
Climate Change:
A Discussion Paper

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

“Men, Masculinities and Climate Change: A Discussion Paper” aims to establish a rationale for understanding boys’ and men’s multiple roles in climate change by conducting an analysis of masculinities (characteristics associated with what it means to be a man) in patriarchal systems that play a contributing role in perpetuating climate change and by presenting key areas for further exploration. The purpose of such an analysis is to identify opportunities to engage men and boys as agents of positive change, alongside women and girls, and further strengthen the call for social, economic and environmental justice for all.

Climate change is one of the most urgent global challenges facing the world today. We are the first generation to know that we are capable of undermining the Earth’s delicate ecosystem and most likely the last generation with the ability to do anything about it.¹ Globally, the ten warmest years on record all occurred since 1998. The year 2015 was the hottest year on record globally.²

After an assessment of over 30,000 scientific papers from 80 countries, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) recently confirmed that “human influence on the climate system is clear and growing.”³ The more human activities disrupt the climate, the greater the risks of severe, pervasive and irreversible impacts for people and our ecosystems. The IPCC also highlighted that it is within our grasp to limit climate change and its risks in ways that allow for continued economic and human development. However, without radically challenging and transforming existing economic, political, technological and social systems – where the one percent own as much as the other 99 – such efforts will fall short. Indeed, according to the IPCC 2014 report, climate change will amplify existing risks and create new risks for natural and human systems.

“This paper seeks to build on and complement the foundational perspectives women’s rights colleagues and feminist activists have contributed to the climate debate.”

Though there is significant pressure from wealthy nations for poorer nations to cut their emissions (through carbon credits, for example), scientific analysis on the causes of climate change consistently reveals that it is the “cheerful recklessness” with which wealthier societies emit greenhouse gases that have caused unprecedented climate change.⁴ Climate data from the World Resources Institute finds that China is the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, followed by the United States, the EU, India, Russia and Japan.⁵ Looked at a different way, an analysis by the Climate Accountability Institute on carbon producing entities such as oil corporations finds that 90 percent of historical emissions since the 1750s can be traced to just the 90 largest fossil fuel and cement producers, most still in business today.⁶

However, the threats of climate change are not gender-neutral. Gender analysis on climate change over the past three decades has brought to light the disproportionate effects of climate change and environmental degradation on women’s lives – particularly those of low-income women in global South settings.^{8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15} In countries where there is marked gender inequality, four times as many women as men die in floods. In some cases during natural disasters, women and children are 14 times more likely to die than men.¹⁶ This phenomenon will grow more frequent with global warming. Research has also shown that women often have a smaller carbon footprint than men, regardless of whether they are rich or poor.¹⁷ Therefore, a greater understanding of how gendered identities affect men and women’s roles, activities and subsequent contributions to carbon emissions is essential if mitigation politics and programs are to achieve their desired effect.



Simultaneously, activists – often led by women’s groups in the global South – have conducted policy advocacy on climate change to stress that the human rights of women and girls who live in poverty, or in vulnerable and unsafe conditions, are threatened by the double injustice of climate change and gender inequality. Such strict gender norms and expectations limit the options available to them as they try to manage the new risks brought about by climate change.¹⁸ For example, the work of Vandana Shiva advocates for an engagement of women in agriculture^{19,20}, and Wangari Maathai works for the reforestation in Africa.²¹ Globally, women’s advocacy networks and coalitions such as the Women’s Environmental and Development Organization (WEDO) have highlighted the intersectionality between social inequalities and climate change and have mobilized feminists to take action. Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the Women’s Major Group has facilitated women’s civil society input into UN policies on sustainable development. And most recently, the Women’s Global Call for Climate Justice campaigned for the urgent need for just action on climate change during the 2015 Paris Climate Conference.

At the same time, an understanding of boys’ and men’s multiple roles in climate change have remained almost invisible, except in certain areas of research. And in areas where there is research, boys and men have mostly been analyzed as a monolithic group responsible for the negative effects of climate change due to their patterns of consumption and the association between

modern industrialisation and key aspects of hegemonic masculinities.^{22,23,24,25,26,27} Few studies look at the diverse and nuanced ways in which boys and men also impact and are impacted by climate change, including as heads of large corporate sector organizations that are the drivers of climate change, as energy consumers, as victims of environmental degradation, and as agents of change alongside women and girls. There is little recognition that men’s diversity – according to social class, ethnic group, sexuality and other factors – also affects not only the way that they live their lives, but the way that they drive or respond to climate change.

This discussion paper presents the need for a more nuanced analysis of boys’ and men’s multiple roles vis a vis climate change. The purpose of such an investigation is to contribute to a more complete understanding of the gendered root causes, impacts and solutions to climate change adaptation and resilience and to further strengthen the call for social, economic and environmental justice for all. Boys and men must be seen as part of the solution to achieve gender-informed climate justice, as they are in different capacities in the fields of gender-based violence prevention, unpaid care work, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and peace and security. This paper seeks to outline these multiple roles to identify possible ways forward to engage boys and men as agents of sustainable, positive change alongside girls and women.



Photo Credit: CGIAR

THE NEED TO ADDRESS MASCULINITIES AND PATRIARCHY IN CLIMATE CHANGE

Understanding the influences of patriarchy – a system that upholds men’s power over women as well as unequal power dynamics among men and among women – is critical to identifying causal relationships and developing solutions to tackle climate change. Such analyses have already led to more sophisticated understandings of and solutions for the fields of sexual and reproductive health and rights, violence against women, and women’s economic empowerment, amongst other topics. This section also aims to further strengthen the call of women’s rights colleagues to integrate a gender lens into climate change debates, which thus far have been more focused on technical and economic arguments to underpin rationale for action.

Since the Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries, the progress of modern societies has been predicated on the need for continued modernization and economic growth. The phrase “man versus (mother) nature” perhaps best epitomizes how men’s identities within patriarchal societies have been based upon the need to subordinate the surrounding natural environment. It comes, then, as no surprise that ambitious international agreements on limiting CO₂ emissions are viewed as threats to the current social and economic orders. Recent analyses on climate skepticism, primarily from specific corporate groups and politically conservative groups in the global North, show how such actors view the legitimization of climate change science as a threat to “modern industrial rationality” and hegemonic masculinities.²⁹

In the United States and elsewhere, the modern fields of science such as meteorology, physics and chemistry have connections to military tradition where weapons and technology continue to be central to victory in wartime. The process of militarization, states the scholar-activist Amina Mama, exaggerates the bipolarization of gender

identities *in extremis* for the purpose of waging war.³¹ This bipolarization perpetuates a system where men prove their masculinity through performance such as military combat.³² The field of climate science has often been just another function of this war machine that showed promise in allowing states to predict, control and alter the natural world.

Most recently, resources have also been invested into investigating how geographic areas vulnerable to climate change can become breeding grounds for political instability and terrorism³³ and ways in which military intervention can prevent violent acts from being perpetrated in the homeland. Thus, the alliance between the military and scientific research results in solutions more consistent with military missions than with empowering men and women to develop sustainable strategies for mitigation and adaptation.³⁴

On the side of those aiming to address the development impacts of climate change, the over-representation of male researchers on intergovernmental bodies such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which is tasked with setting climate change policy and negotiating climate change agreements, has been historically gender blind. Women and indigenous groups, for example, have had to lobby for decades to ensure their needs and realities were reflected in international agreements.³⁵ Due to calls for gender parity, the UNFCCC has recently acknowledged that women’s representation within some of the constituted bodies of the Convention on Climate Change was as low as 11-13 percent.³⁶ As a result, consensus documents now emphasize the importance of gender balance and the participation of women in UNFCCC negotiations, though there is still much more to be done.³⁷ Achieving gender parity is not enough to develop and achieve a true transformational agenda to address climate change.

"Environmental disasters brought about by climate change also negatively affect boys and men in gendered ways that are, in general, different from girls and women."

Feminists also critique that climate scientists have focused too many resources on understanding the geophysical characteristics of climate change, a phenomenon already well understood, and less on its social impacts, consequences, and grassroots solutions to adaptation. Current research reveals that women in some countries have less social and physical mobility and more domestic and caregiving responsibilities than men.³⁸ Therefore, they are more likely to suffer the negative consequences of climate disruptions because they are often left to prioritize the safety of family members, particularly children. In many societies, rural women play a major role in agriculture, but have little power to invest in crops that are more resilient to climate change.³⁹ There is also evidence, though not as frequently acknowledged, given the emphasis on the 'women and girls as victims' analysis, of women's courage and resilience in coping with disasters and in rebuilding communities afterward.

At the same time, environmental disasters brought about by climate change also negatively affect boys and men in gendered ways that are, in general, different from girls and women. The invisibility of their vulnerabilities is also the result of the ways in which climate science and research has been driven by a patriarchal agenda. For example, in times of drought, male farmers in developed and developing countries experience higher rates of suicide due to weaker or non-existent support networks.⁴⁰ In some parts of Latin America, expectations of male heroism require boys and men to engage in risky behavior in the face of danger and make them more likely to die in an extreme event.⁴¹ The notion of the "big man" in rural southern Africa, which includes the ability to accumulate wealth in the form of people (women and children) and assets such as land, cattle, and equipment is causing a crisis of masculinity in areas of changing natural resources. In cases such as these, participation in conflict and use of violence can become an alternative means to achieving and wielding power in society.⁴² And in western Zambia, ascribing to harmful masculine ideals worsens poverty in areas already made vulnerable by climate change. In these floodplains, privileged ideas of what it means to be a man are seen as the culprit for the "masculinization of spending," where men spend money on women and

alcohol, further burdening women and girls with the responsibility of holding the household together.⁴³

Gender socialization at the individual level, where boys and young men are often taught to be assertive, unfeeling, and unafraid, and girls and young women are taught to be passive and emotionally caring (particularly towards their families), may also impact how men and women view and respond to climate change in general. In recent polls conducted in wealthy countries, men are less likely to consider climate change a serious threat. In Germany, 67 percent of women versus 52 percent of men are concerned that climate change will harm them personally.⁴⁴ In the United States, the gender gap is even wider (69 percent of women versus 48 percent of men).

In what is perhaps the most worrisome statistic, men are much less likely than women in wealthy countries to agree that personal lifestyle changes are necessary to reduce the effects of climate change – changes that are desperately needed since most greenhouse gas emissions are caused by wealthier nations.⁴⁵ In poorer countries, however, where populations are much more likely to experience natural disasters caused by climate change firsthand, men and women respond in similar ways and are much more likely overall to view climate change as a real and visible threat.

Reluctance to address the gendered root causes of climate change also impacts the extent to which countries invest financially in solutions. Just three percent of aid to address climate change has targeted gender equality as a primary objective, while 26 percent of aid targeted gender equality as a secondary objective.⁴⁶ Such aid is primarily aimed at women and girls without a deeper understanding of the relational nature of gender. Critics from environmental organizations also see the international development field's instrumentalist use of women and girls as a way to further enhance economic growth and profit. Such approaches often see women and girls as independent actors who can "save" their communities if they are the target of investment, while not changing the underlying economic and political systems that produce gender inequality and poverty.



CLIMATE JUSTICE AS GENDER JUSTICE

"Climate justice is feminist because it's visionary."⁴⁷

Given the urgency of climate change and its immediate impacts already being felt around the globe, activists are now sounding the call for mass intersectional social movements that challenge dominant economic, political and social systems perpetuating climate change.⁴⁸ Such movements would seek to achieve "climate justice" – reconstructions of the ways in which we consume, work, and live our lives.⁴⁹ It is argued that focusing on the deconstruction and transformation of masculinities and other gender identities will strengthen future and existing solutions for climate change adaptation and resiliency.

Patriarchy is harmful to our climate. Efforts are needed to advance this perspective by engaging men as human beings who are also vulnerable to disasters brought on by climate change and as actors with agency to enact change alongside women activist allies. The challenge lies in having boys and men engage in this process as a transformative

"From a climate justice perspective, addressing the root causes of the climate crisis also requires tackling social inequalities and eradicating forms of oppression that movements can also reproduce, include gender inequalities."⁵⁴

- Maria Alejandra Rodriguez

step that leads away from rigid ideas of masculinity too often based on conquest, control and domination. Indeed, experts have highlighted the need to better understand how harmful ideals of masculinity that include the need to have power over others – 'others' being understood as women, other men, children and nature⁵⁰– perpetuate environmental degradation. A gender-equitable response to climate change must not only be sensitive to gender differences in roles and needs, but must also address social and economic power imbalances between and among women and men.

However, it must be noted that carrying out a gender sensitive analysis and engagement on climate change and masculinities is not a magical silver bullet. It is not the key piece to shift action on climate change. A major challenge of climate change is, in fact, that there are no easy single-step solutions. Working with men and women on gender transformative approaches to responding to climate change is, therefore, not presented here as the only answer, but a valuable opportunity to synchronize different voices towards the shared concern of addressing harmful climate change.



Photo Credit: The People's Goals

AREAS OF FURTHER EXPLORATION AND WAYS FORWARD

The previous sections provided a preliminary framework for addressing climate change resiliency, adaptation and mitigation using a masculinities lens. However, more efforts are needed to engage key stakeholders in order to develop a holistic approach to this topic.

Overall, such actions should include the following aims:

- Map out who is doing what in the intersectional field of gender and climate change and what evidence of good practices already exists;
- Develop key messages on what patriarchy, gender norms, masculinities and/or engaging men and boys have to do with climate change and formulate of a plan of action;
- Strategize how to unite this approach with existing work with men and boys as allies for gender justice;
- Ally the men, masculinities and gender justice field with other economic justice movements that also work on climate justice.

Furthermore, the analysis conducted within this paper highlighted thematic gaps around advocacy, research and programming that merit further exploration and action in future discussions. Those gaps are posed as 'kick off questions' here:

1. How can organizations that are engaging men and boys more intentionally share spaces with feminist advocacy groups and add further strengths to the call for climate justice?

It is important to echo the call of the *Women's Global Call for Climate Justice* that states, "We refuse to allow corporate control of our planet, our rights, or sanction a world that prioritizes growth and greed over human rights, decent and equal work, healthy ecosystems and a just

distribution of wealth."⁵¹ How can activist organizations that are engaging men and boys and networks such as the MenEngage Alliance, which already signed onto the Call, become active members of such movements alongside women's rights and feminist activist allies?

And in doing so, how can organizations that are engaging men and boys integrate climate justice and environmental issues into existing programs and initiatives? Such efforts should aim to be gender-transformative. Some ideas include:

- Advocating for the voices of women on the climate change agenda;
- Promoting the inclusion of women in decision-making processes around climate change decisions such as the IPCC;
- Highlighting, through advocacy and research, the gender gaps in science and technological innovation;
- Promoting gender-transformative approaches in agriculture, aquaculture and climate change resilience programs;
- Serving as allies on other issues that gender-informed climate justice activists are advocating for.

2. How can we engage men in position of power

How can we reach male leaders in climate change negotiations, in companies that produce high levels of fossil fuels, as decision-makers on environmental matters at local, national and international levels? Can we approach men as fellow citizens, consumers and producers for a gender just environment? Can we approach them as caregivers and fathers who are concerned about their children's lives and futures?

3. What about a child-centered approach to promoting sustainable development?

Most research on the environment has been conducted in relation to adult men and women and not boys and girls. This is a critical gap in implementing solutions. From an advocacy perspective, children must also be engaged in conversations about the environment. They will be more affected by climate change than adults today. There is, therefore, a parenting and child participation angle to this conversation where discussions on gender equal and non-violent parenting include building a more sustainable world for their children. This includes asking children what they think about climate change and what their ideas are.⁵² It would also be important to examine how education systems can become more sensitive to climate and gender justice issues by integrating such topics into the everyday school curriculum.

Furthermore, can the MenEngage Alliance and/or members of the MenCare Campaign work with men as caregivers to join and sign the [Global Parents Call \(http://ourkidsclimate.org\)](http://ourkidsclimate.org). Can we also engage parents (men, women and parents of all genders) to require their insurance companies, for example, to divest from fossil fuels, to only buy clean electricity, to invest in solar power?

4. Research Gap: What are the linkages between hegemonic masculinities and environmental degradation?

More research must be conducted to understand men in all their diversity (across age, race, caste, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc.) and how views about manhood influences men's beliefs about climate change.

This includes:

- Understanding how climate change affects or alters

gender norms for men and boys;

- Developing gender-transformative solutions as to how boys and men can acknowledge and challenge these changing, harmful gender norms
- Understanding how better to integrate a masculinities lens within existing and future climate change policies and strategies. This includes considering the implications of gender inequalities and power imbalances for the current market-based responses that are being proposed now to address climate change.

5. How can we build on existing innovative areas of research?

Similar to time use surveys for unpaid care work, approaches like the “Environmental Space” approach may be useful to highlight how gender inequalities play out in environmental terms. “Environmental Space” builds on the idea that people should have equal access to natural resources and uses the popular ecological footprint method to show how much environmental space a particular person or group takes up. The core of the argument is that there is a limited amount of non-renewable natural resources available, that use of these should be minimized and that all people should benefit from their usage equally. This method could be used to measure gendered difference to this usage and to assess the question if, for any particular context, women and men (and specific groups of men or women, from high income segments, for example, or those in urban areas) have different profiles as consumers or decision makers in institutions that affect consumption. Similar studies have already been carried out in some European countries and showed that men, on average, eat more meat than women and drive longer distances (but again, we need to look at which men are more likely to do so), potentially leading to higher total energy use by men.⁵⁴



CONCLUSION

In this discussion paper, the authors aimed to establish a rationale for understanding boys' and men's multiple roles in climate change by conducting an analysis of masculinities in patriarchal systems that play a contributing role in perpetuating climate change.

It seeks to build on and complement the foundational perspectives women's rights colleagues and feminist activists have contributed to the climate debate to bring about transformative change.

In doing so, this paper supports the position that men and boys must be recognized for the multiple roles they play in addressing climate change mitigation and adaptations and, most importantly, how they can be seen as part of the solution.

This paper ended by posing a series of questions and areas for future action on research, programming and advocacy. Some of the areas presented will take long-term visioning and planning while other ideas can be made actionable today.

By working together, men, women and persons of all genders can challenge the patriarchal systems that perpetuate climate change to leave behind a more gender just and ecologically sustainable society for future generations.

Such solutions are not the only answer, but an important opportunity to strengthen the call for social, economic and environmental justice for all.



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About MenEngage Alliance

MenEngage Alliance is a global network of civil society organisations, uniting activists, academics, UN agencies and other stakeholders, from continents around the world on transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys in gender justice. As a network, MenEngage Alliance counts among its members many of the leading voices on transforming masculinities and engaging men and boys work – researchers, practitioners, advocates, funding partners, and activists across 66 countries globally through its 35 country and 6 regional networks.

Contact Information

MenEngage Global Alliance
1875 Connecticut Avenue
Floor 10, Suite 12069
Washington, D.C. 20009, USA
contact@menengage.org
www.menengage.org
www.facebook.com/menengage
 [@menengage](https://twitter.com/menengage)