Women, children and climate change: 
Designing an economic policy research agenda

On June 13, PEP hosted a high-level policy forum to conclude the 2018 PEP Annual Conference, held June 7-13 in Bangalore, India. The Policy Forum aimed to identify specific evidence gaps where research can engage with policy to define inclusive solutions for women and children in the face of climate change.

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges facing humanity today. It has implications on all dimensions of welfare, livelihoods and economic prospects. All countries feel these effects, but developing countries are the hardest hit. Within them, the most vulnerable populations—especially women and children—are impacted the most.

The effects of climate change differ from one population to another, depending on a number of factors. Gaining a deeper understanding of how different populations will be affected or respond to these challenges is crucial to informing the design of policies and interventions that can support mitigation and adaptation effectively.

PEP invited policy actors, development partners and international experts from around the world to participate in this special policy forum to define priority issues for an effective and inclusive policy research agenda on “women, children and climate change”. The discussions concentrated on how children and women in developing countries are affected by and respond to climate change effects, as well as the policy needs and perspectives that researchers should understand before engaging in related studies.
Welcome remarks and official opening

The event began with Professor Jane Mariara, Executive Director of PEP, welcoming all in attendance on behalf of the organisation. She highlighted the importance of the policy forum’s theme and outlined the objectives of the day: to gain a better understanding of climate change issues facing women and children in the developing world, to identify priority issues for policy research, and to explore some possible research avenues that could shed light on this priority area.

Dr. Mustapha Nabli, Chair of the PEP Board of Directors, spoke briefly about PEP as an organisation for the benefit of visitors and newcomers. He explained that the theme of climate change is important for PEP as the organisation moves to diversify its research areas, funding sources, and partnerships. Dr. Nabli thanked the National Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS) for hosting the PEP Annual Conference, underlining the contribution of Dr. Shailesh Nayak, Director of NIAS, in the event’s organisation. He also said that for PEP as a global organisation, the presence and contribution of Indian researchers and research projects is vital.

Arjan de Haan, Employment and Growth Program Leader for Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC) spoke as a representative of one of PEP’s two main donor organisations—alongside the UK’s Department for International Development—and a longstanding partner. He emphasised the importance of the day’s activities saying: “I believe that PEP, as a network of young researchers, is in a very strong position to contribute to the research agenda for policy.” He stressed the importance of the day’s theme to the IDRC and the Canadian Government, which has introduced a feminist international assistance policy.

Dr. Shailesh Nayak, Director of the National Institute of Advanced Studies in Bangalore, India—the host organisation for the 2018 PEP Annual Conference—spoke about the importance of gathering data and evidence in different regions to inform policy, particularly on the global issue of climate change. He also said that understanding climate change as it relates to the health of women and children is particularly important: “If women’s health is affected, it will affect the health of all the generations to come.”
Children and Climate Change: Panel discussion

The panel discussion on the subject of children and climate change highlighted current knowledge gaps that research can help to fill, including issues surrounding child resilience in urban environments, migration, children with disabilities, and education for both better awareness and adaptation.

Paul Mitchell, Climate Change Manager for Save the Children Australia, opened the panel discussion by giving an overview of why children should be considered specifically within climate change debates and policies. He explained: “The areas with the highest concentrations of children are also the areas that are hardest and first hit by climate change.” However, most policy responses do not consider the points of view of children as they are developed. **While there is substantial anecdotal evidence that tackling climate change action through a child-centred lens is more effective, Mr. Mitchell said there is a severe lack of empirical evidence.**

Sudeshna Chatterjee, CEO of Action for Children’s Environments, India, explained how children in urban areas are particularly vulnerable to poverty and inequality due to climate change. “There is a very strong correlation between informal housing in climate hotspots and the number of young people,” she said. Climate-caused migration to urban areas and a lack of security in land tenure are linked to an increase in informal settlements. Informal or illegal housing settlements generally means a lack of basic services, such as health, education and sanitation, for the inhabitants. She asked: **“How can access to basic services help reduce children’s vulnerability to climate change? How can better basic services increase the chances of children’s survival in climate hotspots?”**

Nicholas Rees, Policy Specialist in Climate and Economic Analysis for UNICEF looked at climate-caused migration from another angle. “We know that migration takes an emotional toll, especially on young people,” he said. However, more research is needed into the effects of climate change on child migration. He highlighted the need for research to consider climate change responses for children with disabilities, a group particularly vulnerable to poverty and inequality. Finally, he questioned **how national, regional and global policies could support climate change education for adaptation, awareness, and to attract young people into climate change-related employment in the future.**

Following the presentations, moderator Neeta Goel, Senior Evaluation Specialist for the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) in India, invited questions and comments from the floor.

Nicholas Rees joined the panel from New York via video link.
In response to a comment that climate change needs to be addressed through holistic policies, Paul Mitchell replied that rather than creating specific policies for children and climate change, “Children need to be evident and visible within existing planning structures and processes at all levels.” Similarly, Sudeshna Chatterjee said that it is important to look at “How we can integrate children into climate change policies and other policies that affect their lives.”

A researcher from NIAS highlighted the need for solutions to providing environmental and climate change education to very poor and very deprived children and communities where there is no access to schools.

**Children and Climate Change: Breakout session**

Those present were then invited to discuss potential research projects that could address the knowledge gaps highlighted by the panel. A range of research solutions was proposed.

Researchers specialising in macro-micro policy simulation suggested modeling how climate change affects decisions to migrate by looking at the impact of climate change on agricultural productivity and urban investment. They proposed using a thorough risk evaluation to help design adjustment policies, and using simulations to help governments prioritise spending and investment choices in response to climate change and natural disasters.

Researchers specialising in microeconomic analysis explained that impact evaluation studies can be useful for advising governments on how to relocate populations following a climate disaster and how to choose the regions that can best support migration. They also explained that data from household surveys can be used to investigate the education and health outcomes of how land tenure is assigned.

Researchers specialising in the Community-Based Monitoring System methodology (CBMS) explained that CBMS household survey questionnaires could be used to investigate the effect of how household resources are allocated on child wellbeing and to calculate the poverty of individual household members.
Researchers specialising in experimental methodologies suggested comparing child-centred actions to non-child-centred actions and comparing the risk and social preferences of populations in areas that are more affected by climate change to those in areas less affected.

**Women and Climate Change: Panel discussion**

The panel discussion on the subject of women and climate change highlighted the issues that women in particular face in trying to adapt to climate change, including financial, social, and institutional barriers.

Jyoti Parikh, Executive Director of Integrated Research and Action for Development (IRADe), explained women’s particular vulnerability to climate change due to social norms and the roles they play. For example, heat stress can be exacerbated by working in the kitchen or doing manual work while pregnant. Similarly, she said that clothing norms can make women more vulnerable during climate disasters.

Dr. Parikh also explained the role of women as agents for change in climate mitigation and adaptation. However, for this to happen policymakers need firstly to recognise that women are more vulnerable to climate change, and secondly increase women’s participation at all levels of social, economic, political, financial and technological decision making.

Bijal Brahmbhatt, Director of Mahila Housing Trust (MHT), explained that many climate change issues are long-term or “slow” stresses, for example heat stress, water scarcity, flooding and inundation, and water and vector-borne diseases.

Ms. Brahmbhatt said that the women-led model of the MHT interventions brought about improved climate resilience: more than 70% of households have a reduced risk of climate vulnerability, by at least 20% in at least two risk dimensions, following the interventions. She also highlighted areas for further research, asking: “How can policies and programs promote the use of gender-friendly technologies at the household level to increase climate resilience?” She noted that affordability and user-friendliness are key concerns. Additionally, due to the quick uptake of technology by adolescent girls, Ms. Brahmbhatt asked whether including this group can multiply the impact of climate change interventions. Finally, she asked how policies should be framed to promote city-level, multi-stakeholder engagement with the poor women on a continual basis.
Following the presentations, moderator Nancy Spence, Director of Economic and Social Development Affiliates in Canada, spoke briefly about a UN Women project in Bangladesh to reduce the vulnerability of women affected by climate change through livelihood options. She explained the main lesson from the project was that viable, climate-resilient livelihood initiatives need to be developed because traditional livelihoods (such as goats and chickens) cannot withstand climate disasters.

Ms. Spence then invited questions and comments from the floor. Responding to a question on how to make climate financing more gender sensitive, Dr. Parikh said that women need to be included and be able to bring their perspectives to all discussions that affect them. In response to a question on how climate change affects gender relations, Ms. Brahmbhatt explained that in times of water scarcity it is often the women’s job to fetch water. The hours spent transporting water for the household mean that women have less time for work and are susceptible to health issues.

**Women and Climate Change: Breakout session**

The audience was then invited to discuss potential research projects that could address the knowledge gaps highlighted by the panel. A variety of research solutions was proposed. Researchers specialising in experimental methodologies said that it is important to investigate how policy can be sensitive to gender and the different consequences of climate change on women. They also suggested that improving empirical evidence that women are more (or more likely to be) affected by climate change would be important for setting the policy agenda. Similarly, researchers specialising in the Community-Based Monitoring System methodology (CBMS) said there is currently not enough evidence on how climate change affects women differently from men.
They explained that by using community-level CBMS, the impact of climate change on women’s intra-household bargaining power can be investigated: an important dimension for understanding household decision making.

Researchers specialising in microeconomic analysis also highlighted the importance of analysing the change in women’s household bargaining power due to climate change. They then explained that looking at how households cope using survey data would be very important for governments in deciding how to provide assistance.

Researchers specialising in macro-micro policy simulation explained that modeling can be used to analyse incentives to involve women in mitigation activities. They also suggested investigating labour supply and household decisions relating to rural-urban migration from a gender perspective. In particular, how public works programs and rural non-farm employment can mitigate climate change vulnerability for seasonal workers.

Closing remarks

Professor Swapna Mukhopadhyay, Founder-Director of the Arpan Mukhopadhyay Memorial Trust (AMMT), offered the closing remarks. She said that designing an economic policy research agenda on women, children and climate change is extremely ambitious, difficult and challenging. She explained: “Climate change is a very fuzzy thing. Is it environmental or ecological? Is it reversible or irreversible? Do we look at it at the local, regional, or global level?” She also remarked that a lot of the day’s discussions were not entirely economic: “When we talk about resilience, we are talking about psychology.”

Prof. Mukhopadhyay thanked the panellists for their “hugely interesting” contributions to the discussion and said that, to address the panelists’ questions, the discipline of economics would need to open up and for researchers to “consciously take an interdisciplinary approach.” She proposed multi-stakeholder projects as a way to bring together people from different disciplines and called on PEP to “take the first step towards well-designed, properly multi-disciplinary research.”

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