

Backgrounder

Climate change; Gender

Keywords:

Gender justice; sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex (LGBTQI+); social justice

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Issue date

July 2023

Flooding in the Philippines. Discrimination against bakla in the Philippines worsens during floods Credit: Arlynn Aquino EU/ECHO via Flickr (CC BY-SA 2.0)



Beyond inclusion: a queer response to climate justice

Intersectional action that amplifies LGBTQI+ voices

As climate impacts escalate and the links between climate and gender are increasingly recognised, it is timely to understand how climate change affects sexual and gender diversities. Vulnerability to climate change is intersectional, often based on gender, race and disability, as well as sexual orientation, gender identity/expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).

The root causes of climate vulnerability are in who holds power and privilege and who is disadvantaged and excluded. Globally, LGBTQI+ groups continue to be marginalised in accessing rights, resources and decision-making processes. This marginalisation is made worse because LGBTQI+ groups are invisible in discussions about climate change vulnerability and impacts. This must change to ensure climate action does not perpetuate the same injustices queer people consistently face in other realms.

Queer people face worse experiences of climate impacts

Pervasive heteronormativity and cisnormativity marginalise people of diverse SOGIESC in

everyday life, which is exacerbated during climate shocks and in disaster responses. They face many issues in the aftermath of climate hazards, including increased levels of stigma, discrimination and gender-based violence; limited access to social services and healthcare; inadequate resources for recovery; and religious communities blaming them as the cause of disasters. These compounded vulnerabilities decrease capacity to respond to extreme events. Crucially, disaster response and relief efforts overlook people of diverse SOGIESC, so they are often excluded from accessing assistance and face violence, discrimination and abuse at relief distribution points and emergency shelters. This means they are often hesitant to seek assistance.

There is a small collection of case studies that documents these vulnerabilities in [Pakistan](#), [Nepal](#), [India](#), [Haiti](#), [Fiji](#), [Samoa](#), [the Philippines](#), [Indonesia](#) and [Vanuatu](#). For example, *bakla* in the Philippines is a culturally specific, heterogeneous and dynamic gender identity outside both the man-woman binary and the Western LGBTQI+ framework. Discrimination against *bakla*, such as being left to eat last and

KEY TERMS

- **SOGIESC:** sexual orientation, gender identity/expression and sex characteristics. Everyone has SOGIESC, so this acronym is usually used in the context of 'diverse SOGIESC'. It is employed in global policy and programming for its inclusivity of non-Western identity categories.
- **Cisnormativity:** the assumption that all people are cisgender, and the organisation of the world on that basis.
- **Heteronormativity:** the assumption that all people are heterosexual, and the organisation of the world on that basis.
- **LGBTQI+:** lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex, with the + acknowledging many other sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions. This is one version of a widely used acronym (LGBTQI+), to refer to people with shared or intersecting sexual and gender identities. It was developed as an umbrella term in English-speaking countries and is used globally; however, it does not fully capture the diversity of sexuality and gender identities in non-Western and Indigenous cultures.
- **Sexual and gender minority:** people with diverse (that is, non-heterosexual, non-cisgender or non-binary) sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions or sex characteristics. We use 'minority' to represent the power imbalances that make these groups invisible or excluded.

WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

As gender approaches are gaining traction in climate action, it is important to emphasise that 'gender' is not synonymous with women. The Western understanding of gender as a binary has fed into gender approaches to

least within households, worsens during cyclones and floods.

Queer people are excluded from climate action

Gender and sexual minorities often lack access to resources and means of adaptation. These include finance, formal networks and climate change information, which would allow them to adapt and plan. Queer people are also excluded from decision making and so are unheard in policy design and climate change adaptation plans. Climate adaptation policies and actions therefore “often sustain, instead of challenging, the exclusion and marginalisation of SOGIESC populations.”¹

Acknowledge agency and leadership of queer communities

Despite long being excluded by disaster response actors, queer people have demonstrated agency, resistance, leadership and capabilities to respond to climate impacts. Given their exclusion from mainstream support networks and services, queer communities are a primary source of support to each other in the aftermath of disasters, sharing information, protection and safe spaces. They also help respond to urgent local community needs, sometimes by leveraging specific aspects of gendered identities, such as people of non-binary genders undertaking tasks traditionally associated with both men and women. These systems are vital, but are borne of necessity and do not replace the need for institutional and formal support.

Priorities for climate action

Understanding vulnerability and exposure to climate impacts. Discrimination and exclusion in everyday life make it harder for queer people to access justice and health services, housing, education, employment and food. They also face economic insecurity, have limited access to climate information or warnings about extreme events, and are more likely to live in informal settlements in hazard-prone areas. These factors lead people of diverse SOGIESC to be more vulnerable to negative climate impacts, which should be included in vulnerability assessments.

Adapting to climate change. Queer people face exclusion from existing adaptation plans and processes, with queer civil society siloed from climate adaptation initiatives, as they mostly receive funding focused on human

rights and health initiatives. There is a need to bridge this gap.

Addressing loss and damage from climate change. The increasing frequency and severity of extreme events is creating losses and damages globally, and the challenges that queer people experience during and after disasters heighten their experience of these. Loss and damage action must involve people of diverse SOGIESC.

Aligning work on adaptation, loss and damage, disaster risk reduction, humanitarian response and recovery. The full ecosystem of actors should be equipped for and committed to people of diverse SOGIESC. Queer people must be involved in climate action, research and planning on their own terms. Climate finance should be channelled to queer civil society and those addressing climate vulnerability among queer people, to support them to undertake climate adaptation and loss and damage initiatives.

Looking ahead

People of diverse SOGIESC face marginalisation, creating significant difficulties in the context of climate change. These difficulties, along with the insights and capabilities of those who face them, must be accounted for in designing and implementing adaptation and loss and damage actions. This requires involving queer people in climate action and policy and engaging with queer civil society.

However, queering climate justice could move beyond inclusion and present a radical alternative to the status quo. Much climate work is apolitical and based on traditional development models. Queering climate justice could disrupt those norms, assumptions and power dynamics. Instead of including queer people in a broken system, might we challenge the structures and climate politics it is built upon?



Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.

development and climate action that focus almost entirely on women's vulnerabilities and agency, and therefore exclude sexual and gender minorities.

Gender approaches must be culturally and geographically grounded and take an intersectional approach to understanding vulnerability to climate change. Fundamentally, we must challenge and transform the everyday power relations that marginalise people of diverse SOGIESC, as well as disabled people, ethnic minorities and other groups who are usually overlooked in climate action.

Climate justice involves understanding the root causes of interlinked oppressions, connecting struggles for climate justice, gender justice, racial justice, intergenerational justice, disability justice and others to colonialism, capitalism and extractivism. There are important links between the coloniality of climate change and that of the historical oppression of sexual and gender diversity. A climate-just future also requires queer justice.

“Structurally disadvantaged people, who are subject to social, economic and political inequalities resulting historically from discrimination, marginality or disenfranchisement because of gender, age, ethnicity, class, language, ability and/or sexual orientation, are disproportionately vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change hazards.”

— IPCC AR6 WGII p.1 191

¹ Baumann, L, Sharan, A, Gaillard, JC, Dwyer, E, Doron, RO, Dalisay, SN and Sapalo, N (2021) Recognising the rights, concerns and strengths of people with diverse SOGIESC for inclusive disaster risk reduction policy and action. ReNDES, New Zealand.

This backgrounder has been produced with the generous support of Irish Aid and Sida (Sweden).



FIND OUT MORE

Our work on LGBTQI+ contributions to climate action is part of IIED's project “What does queer have to do with it? Making space for LGBTQI+ contributions to sustainable development and climate action”. Find out more at www.iied.org/what-does-queer-have-do-it