

Project: A gender lens to facilitate sustainable climate actions

Aim of the Project

This project aims to introduce a gender lens to strengthen sustainable cooperation towards a climate safe common future. Climate problem and its solutions affect men and women differently and often exacerbate the existing gender inequality regarding economic power, political power and social status. The widening gender inequality places women in an even more marginalised position in climate solutions, which in turn, further widens the gender gap and limits the roles women can take in collective climate actions. Such a vicious cycle severely limit the active roles women can take to facilitate climate actions within family, workplace and institution and jeopardize the collective action and large scale behavioral change to tackle the climate urgency. This project will contribute to the current climate discussion by a gender-focused analysis on the feedback cycle between gender inequality and sustainable climate actions. First, it asks if, how and why contributions and responses to the climate problem differ systematically between women and men. Carbon footprint by gender will be estimated and compared. This will be complemented with results from survey and experimental studies revealing key mechanisms that clarify how such gender differences can be reinforced or undermined by the gender dynamics within family, workplace and institution. Second, the insights gained from above will be used to review the existing policies and interventions, and to propose more effective solutions. The impact of more gender-aware interventions will be explored as a way to coordinate and speed up the transformation needed in individuals, households, communities and organizations.

Background

To overcome the commons dilemma, individuals need to be incentivized to cooperate instead of maximize self-interest. In the context of climate problem, individuals with different socioeconomic status contribute to the climate commons dilemma differently. In turn, an escape of the common tragedy must respect and leverage such heterogeneities to encourage and sustain cooperation. To this end, efforts have been made to study the nexus between climate change and a wide variety of socioeconomic inequalities. Differences between the social conditions, development opportunities, and life outcomes of men and women represent one of the largest and most impactful inequalities across the world. Compared to the significant advance in studying the impact of economic (or income) inequality on climate change activities, however, much less research attention has been devoted to the impact of gender differences and how this speaks to the feasibility and likely impact of climate interventions. It results in a worrying phenomenon that most existing climate interventions are gender-blind, or at worst, widening gender inequalities and weakening the social foundations for collective action and large scale behavioral change (EEB&WECE, 2021). Existing studies suggest the potential of a significant gender gap - both in the causes of climate problem as well as the use of strategies to cope with this problem. Comparing single men and single women in several European countries, reveals that men are responsible for an 8 to 40% larger carbon footprint than women, mainly due to their mobility and dietary behaviour, and independently of differences in income (Räty & Carlsson-Kanyama, 2010, Kanyama et al., 2021). A UK study suggests that female-headed households have a smaller carbon footprint than male-headed households (Buchs & Schnepf, 2013). Coping strategies to deal with the impact of climate change or to mitigate its magnitude (e.g. through energy management) also show variations between genders. In the Netherlands, the motivation to invest in energy efficiency for men was primarily based on environmental reasons, reducing energy wastage and cost-saving. By contrast, women were more motivated to improve comfort of their homes and to

become more independent of utility companies (Tjalma 2016). Further, women were considered to be more likely than men to respond to social pressure to adopt energy efficiency measures (Straver, et al., 2017). Theories rooted in environmental psychology are usually used to explain known gender differences, such as the gender-biased cognitive dissonance (Dowsett, et al., 2018), masculine identity (Rosenfeld, 2020), and perceived social norms (MacInnis & Hodson, 2017). While the above theories provide useful insights, they tend to attribute the gender differences into psychology, but disentangle observed gender differences from the embedded context of family, workplace and institutions that convey and maintain these gendered identities, power, position and social norms. Several studies suggest that observed gender differences relate to gender stereotypes and social inequalities within families, workplaces and at institutional levels. Within a household, for instance, the observed difference is relevant to power relations, division of labor (e.g., who cares versus who works) (Tiikkaja & Liimatainen, 2021), or household time usage (Wiedenhofer, et al., 2018). In the workplace, a study comprising companies in industrialized economies found that gender diversity within organizations can have a significant impact in combatting climate change: an increase in the share of women managers was associated with a decrease in firms' CO2 emissions. More interestingly, such a mitigating effect is even stronger if women are also well-represented in political institutions and civil society organizations (Altunbas, et al., 2021). What is less clear at this stage, are the mechanisms through which gender differences and social role relations relate to environmental strategies and behavior change at these different levels – or how these can be engaged to mitigate the damage of climate change. In this project, we argue that we are not only in need of a better understanding of the gender differences in the causes and responses to the climate problem. Additionally, we need to specify how such differences relate to the gender dynamics within family, workplace and institution, and how this knowledge can be used to help mitigate climate change. The key hypothesis is that by illuminating the gender difference in concerns with climate issues and its interaction with the persisting gender roles and norms in family, workplace and institution, the vicious cycle between gender inequality and sustainable climate action can be disrupted and result in coordinated transformation between individuals, households, communities and organizations.

The research questions are:

- 1. What are the gender differences in consumption patterns and carbon footprints?*
- 2. How do such gender differences relate to the persisting gender dynamics in family, workplace and institution?*
- 3. How well do the current climate policies include the gender dimension?*
- 4. How can gender differences in different social contexts be leveraged to design more effective interventions to escape the climate commons dilemma?*