Case Studies Exploring the Intersection of Gender and Climate Action in the Private Sector

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Summary

Applying a gender lens to climate mitigation and resilience is a developing area of interest for businesses. This project aims to increase industry focus on how companies can integrate gender into climate change mitigation and into their just transition activities. BSR seeks to identify companies that are currently addressing this intersection beyond building climate resilience through the agricultural sector. The research identifies three companies that address gender issues in their climate strategies and seeks to highlight key initiatives so that other companies can learn from and integrate aspects into their climate mitigation activities and solutions.

About BSR

BSR is a global nonprofit organization that works with its network of over 250 member companies like Google, Microsoft, Loreal, Coca Cola and other partners to build a just and sustainable world. The organization develops sustainable business strategies and solutions through consulting, research, and cross-sector collaboration. In 2018, BSR produced "Climate + Women," a report that looks at the intersection of climate change and the empowerment of women primarily through climate resilience activities.[1] This project aims to expand on BSR's nexus report examples and highlight how companies can integrate gender into climate change mitigation activities across sectors .

Background: Climate Change and Gender Equality

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report released in 2018, to avoid the worst impacts of climate change we need to limit global warming to 1.5°C, which would require reaching net zero emissions by 2050.[2] The science is clear, and there is growing public concern and awareness over climate change. For example, the 2019 Gallup poll found that 66 percent of Americans believe that climate change is caused by human activities[3] and businesses are increasingly committing to carbon emissions reductions.[4]

Companies are also starting to view climate change as a material risk that could negatively impact business strategy, operations, supply chains and vital communities in which business depends on. Major investors like BlackRock are looking for companies to serve a social purpose, and most companies believe that sustainability is more important now than it was five years ago, and that it will continue to grow in significance.[5] By preparing for and mitigating the impacts of climate change, companies can ensure their operations and supply chains are resilient to climate-related risks.

In recent years, the intersection of women and climate change has gained prominence in both the corporate world and the international policy sphere and is viewed crucial to sustainable development and reaching the goals of the Paris Agreement and the Sustainable Development Goals. Climate change is now seen as a fundamental human rights issue and even in the best scenarios, "hundreds of millions will face food insecurity, forced migration, disease, and death."[6] Women, as well as other vulnerable communities, are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change, and "face social, economic and political barriers" that limit their ability to respond to climate threats.[7] However, while considered more vulnerable, they are also effective

agents of change in both mitigation and adaptation to climate change.[8] Women have unique skills and knowledge that can enhance climate resilience, and gender responsive solutions to climate change.

In 2017, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) adopted the Gender Action Plan. This plan highlights the role of women in climate action, pushes for gender-responsive climate policy and for equal representation of women at the global climate meetings.[9] Both climate change and gender inequality present risks and opportunities for businesses, and by addressing the intersection between these two topics, companies can develop a more resilient business strategy.[10]

The business community has slowly started to act at the intersection of climate and gender, but primarily through climate resilience activities in their supply chain. For example, Mondelez International developed the Cocoa Life Program to increase women's access to farm inputs and land ownership, provide trainings to improve livelihoods, and connect young women to youth programs.[11] By addressing some of the underlying barriers impacting women, there's an opportunity to expand women's empowerment and climate change solutions.

Case Studies

This project researched examples of how businesses can empower women to lead in climate initiatives under BSR's Act, Enable, and Influence framework, primarily through climate change mitigation and emissions reductions. Under this framework, they can:

- **Act** throughout operations and supply chains to ensure a gender lens in climate activities, including by providing access to gender-sensitive climate trainings, inputs, financing, and technologies.
- **Enable** suppliers and other partners to include women in climate solutions, and women to have access to local partnerships. For example, including women when preparing for and responding to climate change and ensuring as we transition communities away from high-carbon technologies, which are predominantly men, women are included within the new job solutions.
- **Influence** through advocacy and raising awareness on issues within and across industries, and through legislative and policy changes.

The research identifies three examples of companies that are influencing the broader market and driving solutions to address the gender dimensions of climate change.

1. **Act: Schneider Electric**

Schneider Electric is a multinational corporation that specializes in electric products and energy management. Schneider Electric has instituted several corporate policies to advance gender equality within their business. Energy is a critical area for promoting gender equality and renewable energy is a key climate change mitigation strategy and is critical to ensure a just transition to a low-carbon future.[12] Schneider Electric was designated as 31st in Equileap's 2019

Gender Equality Ranking and first in the industrial sector ranking.[13] They've helped promote gender equality within the organization through several initiatives:

a. The Canadian headquarters signed the Leadership Accord to Advance Gender Diversity in the Energy Sector. The Leadership Accord on Gender Diversity is a public commitment by Canadian industries to promote the values of diversity and inclusion within their organizations.[14]
b. The company foundation funded a report gathering census data about renewable energy and found that women play a big part in the informal decentralized renewable energy workforce.[15]
c. Forty country presidents of Schneider Electric ratified the UN Women's global Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and implemented their Pay Equity Framework. These 40 leaders oversee more than 90 percent of Schneider Electric's global workforce.[16]
d. Committed to increase the representation of women across the company. So far, they have increased representation to 42 percent at the board level, 30 percent in top leadership positions, and 40 percent at entry level.[17]

Schneider Electric is promoting equal representation in the energy sector. They can use this strategy as they move away from fossil fuels, and to increased renewable energy, to ensure that women are included into the just transition movement.

2. **Enable: Onergy Solar**

Onergy is an Indian-based startup that provides energy solutions and consulting work. They are a leading social enterprise that provide clean energy solutions like lighting, cooking and electrification, to underserved households and institutions. Onergy has 20 renewable energy branches spread across northern India.[18] The company creates and sells products for solar irrigation, low-cost solar computer systems, and solar micro-grids.

To promote solar as a clean and reliable source of energy and provide jobs for women, Onergy trains women entrepreneurs in its products, technology, and usability. Onergy partners with local grassroots organizations, like microfinance institutions, NGOs and women's self-help groups to train and enable women to serve as company distributors.[19] This initiative provides both income and empowerment to women in rural areas and directly addresses the link between distributed power and gender equality.

a. Onergy has trained 1 million women and they aim to reach 5 million women in India in the next three years.

3. **Influence: PROYA**

PROYA cosmetics is a multi-billion-dollar cosmetics company in China. The company has made a substantial effort in influencing and raising awareness about the gender dimensions of climate change in China.

In 2013, PROYA partnered with UN Women and became the first Chinese company to sign on to the Women Empowerment Principles. A notable impact of the partnership was that they funded the research and dissemination of the report: Gender Dimensions of Vulnerability to Climate Change in China. The report was published in 2015 and sheds light on how gender equality, climate change and disaster risks intersect in China, as well as recommendations for how China can integrate gender into climate action.[20] The report reached over 150,000 people, and at the time of publication it was considered the most comprehensive research available on gender and climate change in China.[21]

PROYA also contributed over $800,000 USD to UN Women to date and supported several gender equality programs related to equal employment, climate change, and corporate social responsibility. The company contributes to the China Gender Fund for Research and Advocacy, which advances "evidence-based advocacy and social dialogue on gender equality and women's empowerment in the country."[22]

Conclusion

The three examples point to different ways that businesses can empower women in climate-related initiatives. They provide pathways for how companies can lead under BSR's Act, Enable, and Influence framework, and address systemic barriers that face women globally.

As this topic continues to develop internationally, these examples will help companies develop a greater understanding of the intersection of women and climate and articulate opportunities to empower women against climate change threats as well as take part in solving the climate crisis.

Endnotes

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