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CLIMATE CHANGE: PROTECTING WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Systemic inequalities can lead to climate change impacting women, men and non-binary persons differently. Women constitute most of the world's poor and are often directly dependent on natural resources as their main source of food and income. Therefore, they are more likely to suffer from the impacts of environmental degradation. Yet, women are agents of change with unique perspectives and expertise. In the last decades, **55% of the improvement in food security** in developing countries **came from programmes promoting women's empowerment**. Ensuring the meaningful participation of women with diverse backgrounds in relevant decision-making processes lies at the heart of a rights-based, gender-responsive approach. This inclusive approach is not only a legal, ethical and moral obligation; it will also make climate action more effective.

Impacts on Women

Food Security: Climate change negatively affects the production, availability and accessibility of food. Many smallholder farmers are women whose livelihoods and food sources are at risk from climate change. Women are more exposed to food insecurity than men and it can affect them differently because of their nutritional needs during pregnancy and lactation. Male-dominated structures often govern land ownership, making it hard for women to access fertile land.

Health: During disasters, women are more likely to die than men. Women also suffer more from indoor air pollution due to their use of polluting fuels used for cooking and heating. Extreme weather events and increased incidence of vector-borne diseases such as malaria, combined with unequal care burdens, can cause a disproportionate pressure on women to support their families. Water scarcity increases the burden on women, who often have primary responsibility for its collection. Exclusion from decision-making can further exacerbate the stress of dealing with climate change. The destruction of essential infrastructure can decrease the quality, availability and accessibility of sexual and reproductive health services which can lead to unplanned pregnancies and maternal mortality. High temperatures and salinization of drinking water can impact maternal and child health.

Gender-based violence: There are clear links between poverty, which climate change deepens, and sexual and gender-based violence. Child and forced marriages can occur as a harmful coping strategy among those who suffer from climate change related economic stress. Disasters can push women survivors into evacuation centres where they may be subjected to violence. In particular, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons may lack access to emergency shelters that satisfy their needs. Law enforcement may be less effective after disasters, and women may not report violence. The economic impacts of climate change can contribute to increased human trafficking.

Beyond the immediate trauma, gender-based violence can also spread sexually transmitted infections and impede economic productivity, which can lead to greater poverty, in turn exacerbating the effects of natural disasters.

Decent work: Climate change may deepen inequalities in the job market where women already face significant obstacles. Climate action that excludes women can intensify these challenges. Intersecting dynamics, such as indigenous or disability status, may compound the vulnerability of some women, particularly when adequate social protection systems are lacking. Reduction in incomes or deterioration of working conditions can have particularly negative implications for women. Following a natural disaster, women may be expected to attend to increased family demands and deprived of time and opportunities necessary for rejoining the labour market, limiting their income generation.

Women environmental human rights defenders: Climate change intensifies threats to land, water, species and livelihoods. Women defending ecosystems, lands, resources and territories often pay a high price. In common with all human rights defenders, women face risks, including assassination, criminalization, intimidation and gender-specific violence, including sexual violence.

POSITIVE EXAMPLES

Climate action can empower women to be part of the solution. Studies have found correlations between women in positions of political authority and lower national carbon footprints illustrating the importance of women's participation in decision-making. Promoting women's education, participation in decision-making are among the most effective ways of reducing future emissions of carbon dioxide. It also helps addressing discrimination.

The Women and Gender Constituency, which aims to embed women's rights within the UNFCCC, helped secure a new five-year Gender Action Plan to scale up gender justice in climate solutions at the 25th Conference of the Parties in 2019.

In Tanzania, the Pastoral Women's Council led the Energize project that is building pastoralist adolescent girls' capacity to adapt to climate change through trainings on leadership, entrepreneurship, microcredit and banking, sexual and reproductive health information, as well as solar systems installation and maintenance.



What Can We Do?

Take more ambitious, rights-based climate change mitigation and adaptation action to limit negative impacts on all persons, particularly women.

Ensure the meaningful participation of women with diverse backgrounds in climate change mitigation and adaptation at all levels.



Take measures under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change to, inter alia: Ensure gender-responsive mitigation and adaptation; Integrate gender equality into nationally determined contributions; Ensure gender balance in the composition of constituted bodies and national delegations; Support capacity-building for women of diverse backgrounds to engage in climate decision-making.

Empower women as economic and climate actors, both as workers and employers, to help shape the transition to a low-carbon economy through, inter alia: promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women in agriculture; strengthening women's land rights; ensuring women's access to finance and technology; improving working conditions.

Ensure that climate funds benefit most affected countries and people and systematically integrate women's human rights and gender equality into their governance structures, project approval, implementation processes, and public participation mechanisms.

Promote an improved understanding of the differentiated human rights impacts of climate change on women, including through disaggregated data collection specifically focusing on gender and its intersections with characteristics such as age, disability and ethnicity.

Take effective measures to address sexual and gender-based violence in the context of climate change, including through women's meaningful participation in the design and implementation of humanitarian, migration and disaster risk reduction plans.

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Analytical study: undocs.org/A/HRC/41/26
Resolution 38/4: undocs.org/en/A/HRC/RES/38/4