



Climate Change and Women

(*Swaraj Adakney¹, Yash Khalasi¹, Ashutosh Danve¹, Mehul Patel¹ and Aditi Banasure²)

¹ICAR-Central Institute of Fisheries Education, Mumbai, Maharashtra, India-400061

²The Neotia University, West Bengal, India- 743368

*Corresponding Author's email: swaraj.cife@gmail.com

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Human activities have been the main culprit of climate change, majorly due to the burning of fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas. Fossil fuel combustion produces greenhouse gas emissions, which trap solar heat and raise the temperature. Whom most influences the climate and who is most impacted by it are both issues. The unequal distribution of wealth and power is just one of the factors contributing to climate change. 75% of the world's energy is consumed by just one billion people, who also account for the majority of emissions from industry, pollutants, and consumer products (Johnsson-Latham 2007).

But do you believe that everyone is impacted equally by climate change? Without a doubt, the answer is no. People in poverty are the ones that suffer the most. Women make about 70% of the 1.3 billion individuals who live in poverty worldwide (UN Chronicle, 2009). 40% of the poorest households in metropolitan areas are headed by women. The CEDAW Committee emphasised how disasters and climate change affect men and women differently, with many women enduring disproportionate risks and effects. This is due to the fact that women are typically poorer than men and more reliant on natural resources like farming and fishing. In the majority of developing nations, women produce between 60 and 80% of the food, but they only possess less than 10% of the land. Yet, despite their contribution to global food security, women farmers are frequently underestimated and overlooked in development strategies (FAO, 2006).

Why are women more vulnerable to climate change?

Women are more vulnerable to climate change due to several interconnected social and economic factors. These factors again oppress the women and this vicious cycle goes on.

- Socioeconomic disparities:** Compared to men, women frequently experience economic and social disadvantages, particularly in developing nations. They are more likely to be poor and have restricted access to resources, such as financial resources, financial assets, and healthcare. Women have a harder time adjusting to and recovering from the effects of climate change as a result of these discrepancies (Bridge, 2008).
- Unequal access to resources:** In many countries, women are in charge of providing their families with the necessities like food, water, and energy. Women have to work harder to obtain resources as resource scarcity is made worse by climate change. Their ability to adjust to changing situations is further hampered by limited access to land, credit, and technology (Bridge, 2008; Dankelman, 2002).
- Gender roles and responsibilities:** Gender roles are frequently established by societal conventions, with women typically responsible for childcare and household duties. Women are disproportionately impacted by climate-related disasters because they frequently have to put their families' vulnerable members' safety and well-being first. This

restricts their ability to generate income or take part in climate change-related decision-making processes. Women are prevented from emigrating, finding safety in other locations, or working when a calamity strikes due to sociocultural conventions and childcare obligations (UNDP, 2007).

4. **Health impacts:** Food insecurity, waterborne diseases, and an increase in vector-borne diseases are just a few of the health hazards brought on by climate change. Inadequate access to healthcare, higher rates of malnutrition, and increased exposure to indoor air pollution from cooking and heating methods can all be detrimental to women's health.
5. **Gender-based violence:** Gender-based violence seems to increase during and after climate-related disasters. Economic challenges, social structure breakdown, and displacement can all worsen already-existing gender disparities and increase the risk of violence and exploitation for women (Davis *et al.*, 2005).
6. **Limited participation in decision-making:** In decision-making processes pertaining to climate change adaptation and mitigation, women are frequently underrepresented. They are usually left out of negotiations and policy discussions, despite the fact that their viewpoints and experiences are essential for creating successful strategies.



Fig. 1. Role of Women in Society

Strategies to reduce climate change impact on women

Minimizing the effects of climate change and fostering resilience depends on empowering women and advocating the society towards gender equality. It requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both the underlying causes of gender inequality and the specific vulnerabilities women face.

1. **Gender-responsive policies:** Governments and international organisations should create gender-responsive policies and programmes that acknowledge and address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of women in adjusting to and mitigating climate change. This entails incorporating gender perspectives into climate action plans, making sure women are represented in decision-making processes, and allocating resources to assist initiatives headed by women.
2. **Women's empowerment and education:** In order to lessen women's vulnerability to climate change, it is essential to invest in their economic empowerment and education. Women's skills, knowledge, and decision-making abilities can be improved by giving them access to high-quality education and vocational training. Their resilience and capacity for adaptation can be enhanced by economic empowerment, such as access to financing, land rights, and income-generating opportunities.

3. **Access to resources and technology:** It is crucial to ensure that women have fair access to resources and technologies. This includes having access to financial services, agricultural resources, water and sanitation facilities, and sustainable energy technologies. By removing obstacles that prevent women from accessing markets, financing, and land, they will be able to adopt climate-resilient practices and diversify their sources of income.
4. **Food security:** It is possible to increase food security and empower women economically through promoting sustainable, resilient, and gender-inclusive climate-smart agriculture practises. Women's productivity and potential for change can be increased through providing training, access to resources, and encouragement of their participation in agricultural cooperatives.
5. **Health and reproductive rights:** For women to stay healthy in the face of the effects of climate change, it is necessary that they have access to healthcare, particularly sexual and reproductive health services. Recognising and addressing the particular health hazards that women experience, such as their higher susceptibility to vector-borne illnesses and difficulties with pregnancy, might help them become more resilient.
6. **Women's participation and leadership:** It is crucial to support women's leadership and meaningful participation in climate change decision-making processes. At all levels, women should be involved in the creation, planning, and execution of policies. Supporting women's organisations and networks can increase their advocacy for gender-responsive climate policy by amplifying their voices, promoting knowledge sharing, and facilitating these processes (Gay-Antaki *et al.*, 2017).

Conclusion

Women are both disproportionately affected by and crucial agents of change in the face of climate change. Due to socioeconomic inequalities, a lack of resources, gender roles, and health risks, they suffer the most from the effects of the climate. However, minimising the effects of climate change and fostering resilience depends on empowering women and advocating for gender equality. There is a need for gender-responsive policies and programmes that acknowledge and address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of women. This involves boosting women's access to resources and technology, economic empowerment, and education. Reproductive rights, healthcare, and climate-smart agriculture methods should all be given the attention they deserve. Effective climate action requires the participation and leadership of women in decision-making processes as well as the gathering of gender-disaggregated data and research. Supporting grassroots movements and projects run by women can make them more heard and lead to creative solutions. We can build a more just, inclusive, and sustainable future for everyone by addressing gender inequality and recognising the relationship between women and climate change. Women's empowerment not only enhances their quality of life but also increases our capacity as a society to address the pressing issues brought on by climate change.

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