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Understanding the Implications of Climate Change Through a  
Gendered Lens

Currently, climate change is a dominant topic of discussion as it causes universal threats to humanity, such as global warming, scarcity of natural resources, and amplified natural disasters (Tickner, 2019). These issues are being observed by scholars and scientists, and their implications are being considered in terms of multiple aspects such as political, economic, and in policymaking (MacGregor, 2010). However, the gendered implications that climate change are largely ignored as climate issues are considered to affect humanity all the same without gendered differences (MacGregor, 2010). Moreover, gendered implications are being viewed in a negative light or as an extra burden (MacGregor, 2010). For example, in the *New Scientist* magazine, headlines are implicitly undermining and ridiculing the idea of gendered differences of climate change implications such as “Men to blame for global warming” and “Even climate change can’t escape the gender wars” (MacGregor, 2010). Regardless, studies show direct correlations between gender and climate change and the different impacts it will have on different genders.

Before delving into the proven gendered implications of climate change, it is important to note that when talking about gender, it is not only limited to women. It is often assumed that issues concerning gender are only focused on women, which is a misconception as other genders are and should be recognized in all issues as well (MacGregor, 2010). This also causes the problem of viewing women as being one entity without connection to other genders and not being a dynamic group impacted by cultural, economic, and political differences (MacGregor, 2010). Women are not all affected the same by climate change, as women from the global South are more directly affected by climate change than women from the global North, and this is an important point that should be taken into consideration, as well as different gendered implication between men and women in the same areas (Arora-Jonsson, 2011).

There are various ways in which gender is related to climate change. In some cases, the connection is direct, but in others, climate change and policies surrounding it affect women and minorities indirectly. The reason why women make most of the gendered climate change talk is because they are the poorest of the poor, 70% of 1.3 billion poor people are women living at poverty threshold (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Moreover, women make up 80% of refugees, which might make them the biggest group that will be displaced by climate change (MacGregor, 2010). Women also face a higher mortality rate during natural disasters, they are fourteen times more likely to die than men from natural disasters (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). There are multiple reasons to why that is the case, such as cultural norms that can limit them from leaving their houses, even

during natural disasters like floods or landslides, and discourages them from learning skills such as swimming, therefore reducing the probability of surviving in water related disasters such as floods (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Additionally, because of the already existing inequalities, women might not have access to information warning them of coming natural disasters to take any precautions (Williams, 2016). Therefore, the culture is very important when talking about these issues because sometimes it determines who is at a higher risk of death or injury (Arora-Jonsson, 2011).

The social position of women in some cultures makes them more at risk of injury and death during natural disasters (Nagel, 2015). In countries where men and women have more equal rights, life expectancy during and after disasters is less different than in countries where women's rights are not implemented (Nagel, 2015). It is important to mention the role intersectionality plays in climate issues, most importantly motioned here is gender, but there are also various other aspects such as age, race, ethnicity, social class, sexuality, and disabilities (Pearse, 2017). However, not all climate change affect men and women differently, sometimes gender matters and sometimes it doesn't (Nagel, 2015).

In some cases, men are more likely to die from natural disasters (Williams, 2016). For example, in Vietnam and China, men are more likely to die after floods because of the actual flood or in attempt to protect or rescue their fields (Williams, 2016). Moreover, in cultures where the men are supposed to be the heroes and save everyone, male deaths and injuries might be higher, however it also puts a risk on women where they might be injured or die while waiting for a man to help them (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). It is also noted that there are increased suicide rates among male Indian farmers during periods of food insecurity when they can't provide for their families (Arora-Jonsson, 2011).

Nevertheless, climate change will be harshest in tropical areas, which are located in the global South, which makes women and girls in the global South the most affected by climate change (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; MacGregor, 2010). Moreover, lower class families live in unfavorable locations such as next to rivers which raises their risk of dying or getting injured during natural disasters (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). However, saying who is certainly more affected by climate change is not possible because it depends on various factors such as time, location, type of problems faced, vulnerability, and it also depends on each person (Arora-Jonsson, 2011).

There are many problems caused by climate change that will affect women, whether directly or indirectly. Changes in temperature will affect men and women differently. For example, hotter climate leads to the increase of mosquitos and shifting of their habitats, and floods and increased amounts of rain also promote mosquito growth as humidity increases (Williams, 2016). These mosquitos can be responsible of transmitting waterborne diseases such as malaria, which causes a threat to women, especially pregnant ones, as malaria is responsible for quarter of maternal mortality (Williams, 2016). These weather changes will also affect women's sources of income, as it affects their access to water sources and grazing lands, thus increasing their poverty (Williams, 2016). In some areas such as Senegal, decreased precipitation and shorter rain seasons caused for women the need to walk farther distances to be able to access water sources, but also encouraged them to reforest their lands (Williams, 2016). Additionally, because of food insecurity caused by climate change, women might sacrifice their food intake to feed their children, which will negatively affect their health and nutrition (MacGregor, 2010). Moreover, after natural disasters, women might need to purchase new appliances instead of their damaged ones, which also causes financial burden on women as in most cases they do not have access to credit, forcing them to use their entire income and savings, which puts them in financial disadvantage (Williams, 2016).

There are indirect effects of climate change on women, such as increased sexual and domestic violence after disasters (Nagel, 2015). For example, in Bangladesh, there is an increase in sex trafficking during and after natural disasters such as floods, cyclones and droughts because of economic problems (Nagel, 2015). Moreover, after natural disasters that force women to leave their house or make them homeless, it is reported that rape, sexual assault, and gender-based violence increases against women and girls (Williams, 2016). Even when traveling further distances to access water because of its scarcity, they also face more assault and attacks (Williams, 2016). Additionally, because of climate change, natural resources will become scarce causing conflict over them, which might lead communities to lose their lands, which increases their risk of domestic and community violence over women (Williams, 2016).

Already existing inequalities and lack of women rights will increase the hardships on women such as lack of land rights, higher illiteracy rates, less access to employment and income, and less representation in decision making (Williams, 2016). The gendered implications of climate change will highlight the social and economic inequalities that women faced before the increased

climate change (Williams, 2016). The vulnerability of women *vis-à-vis* issues such as climate change must not be seen as an opportunity to denote women as weak and helpless, but to highlight the existing inequalities and absence of rights that cause them to be put in vulnerable positions (Pearse, 2017). It also makes it seem that climate change is only affecting women living in the South and not humanity as a whole, which discourage people from the North to take action (MacGregor, 2010). In other cases, women are seen as saviors who will use their knowledge of nature and the environment to help the world face climate change (MacGregor, 2010). While this puts women in a more positive light, it can also put them under pressure to provide for everyone even while not having enough resources to do so, and even if resources were provided, all responsibility will be given to them (MacGregor, 2010).

Women can also be perceived as the problem causing climate change, as they are the ones who bring more people into the world which contributes to the overpopulation (MacGregor, 2010). However, the reasons behind having several children are not recognized, such as poverty, where children are seen as a source of income when they'll grow older to help with work and provide for their parents and siblings (MacGregor, 2010). There are also cultural reasons, such as preferring having boys, or the devaluation of women in the society unless they have many children (MacGregor, 2010). Moreover, male assault also plays a role, where women are sometimes forced or raped which ends up in them getting pregnant (MacGregor, 2010).

Policies that are being implemented to mitigate climate change are being set by the men in power without consulting women or other marginalized groups and minorities, therefore only addressing the agendas in favor of men's businesses and profits, which only amplify and assert the privileges they have over the rest of the population (Nagel, 2015). These policies are assumed to include all people and give rights to everyone equally, which is not the case, because women and other marginalized groups are left out of policy discussions which often leaves their needs unmet (Williams, 2016). For example, one of the ways climate change is tackled is by using biofuels, which in turn affect women that use the same land to gather resources for household food production that corporates will use to produce biofuels (Nagel, 2015). The biofuel production industry will cause food and water insecurity and take advantage of female workers in the industry (Nagel, 2015).

Moreover, there are many movements carried out by women that contribute to the preservation of the environment (Williams, 2016). Many of these movements were started to

combat deforestation such as the Chipko Movement in India that successfully contributed in the reforming of forestry laws, Wangki women in Nicaragua, the Green Belt Movement by Kenyan women that saved thousands of trees, and combats soil erosion and water scarcity (Williams, 2016). However, because of new policies, access to forests is being restricted and forest landscapes are being changed which cause the loss of income to women who work in saving the forests up to 50%, and stops the environmental work from happening (Williams, 2016).

Moreover, the policies being implemented are putting even more pressure on women to be the only ones to help their families and the world in implementing new domestic technologies, or in attempt to transform women from victims to heroines by assigning them to handle resources and funds to get rid of poverty and reduce climate change (Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Therefore, climate change policies should focus on enhancing women's roles in nature appropriately by helping and supporting them, instead of restricting their access and give them more problems and responsibilities than before (Williams, 2016). Additionally, including women and other marginalized groups in discussions is extremely important in ensuring the representation of everyone's needs and thoughts to equally distribute responsibilities based on capabilities.

In conclusion, while climate change is a global issue, it will not affect humanity all the same. Women, especially the ones living in the South, will be severely affected by climatic changes that will cause them food insecurity, lack of resources, and disruption of their income. Additionally, indirect problems will arise, such as increases in gender-based violence, assault, and sex trafficking. Including women and other marginalized groups in negotiations to make policies combating climate change is crucial to ensure fair representation for all genders, races, and ethnicities.

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