

Global warming: A warning of gender inequality

Lama Al Rayess

Lkr03@mail.aub.edu

Due to the rapid rise in the emission levels of greenhouse gases, the world has been witnessing an alteration in its climate also known as climate change. As a result of natural disruptions, several disasters are taking place such as the rising sea levels that cause floods, acidic rains, depletion of fresh water, etc. In fact, 68% of the disasters that are taking place are related to climate change [1]. These natural disasters affect countries, age categories, income groups, gender, etc. in different manner. In fact, developing countries, especially those that rely on natural resources, are more heavily impacted than developed ones. Particularly, climate change exacerbates already existing gender inequalities where the burden on women is much greater than that on men. Previous data have shown that women and children are 14 times more likely to be affected during a disaster as compared to men [1]. Hence, this paper tackles the effects of climate change on gender, in specific how and why women are affected, along with some suggestions to tackle the issue.

To start, women in developing countries that are more vulnerable to disasters constitute 70% of the world poor [2]. These women are typically responsible for partaking in agricultural tasks, collecting water, and providing food and fuel sources for cooking and heating. However, due to global warming, clean water sources are getting drained and depleted. Therefore, women are taking more time in order to collect water for their household. Moreover, due to the contamination of groundwater and surface

water, the quality of water is decreasing and water-borne diseases are emerging which directly affects human health. As a result, women and girls are spending more time taking care of their ill family members since they are usually the care-providers in the household.

Moving on to the agricultural activities and food security, women in developing countries produce 60 to 80% of the food [3]. Nonetheless, ironically, they have very limited ownership of agricultural lands ranging from 10 to 20% worldwide [3]. Given that global warming results in acidic rains, changes the rainfall seasons and patterns, and affects the quality of the soil, the yield of the crops is significantly reduced. That said and in addition to the limited access to technology and financial resources, the burden on women increases in order to secure food for their household. In fact, it is believed that if women were to have the same access to resources as men, the yield of the crops would increase by 20 to 30% [2], [3]. In other words, the total agricultural production of the developing countries would increase by 2.4 to 4% and around 100 to 150 million less people would be hungry [2], [3].

Moving on to extreme natural disasters such as flooding and cyclone, inhabitants are forced into displacement camps. In addition to the loss of lives and homes, women and girls are more likely to be affected than men and boys. This is due to an increase in sexual violence and labor work where girls are pulled out of school in order to help out in the coping mechanism or to collect money through sex work. As a consequence, it was seen that the cases of domestic violence increased by 300% after the unfortunate two cyclones that hit Vanuatu in 2011 [1]. Moreover, women and girls are incapable of

surviving floods because they didn't learn how to swim or how to climb a tree due to sociocultural ethos.

As for the environmental projects, transport is the main culprit that needs to be adjusted in order to mitigate climate change. Findings have shown that 23% of the greenhouse gases emitted from the world energy consumption is due to transport [4]. Moreover, transport is believed to be the fastest growing emitter of greenhouses gases since 1990 which calls for the need of reducing its emissions and coming up with sustainable projects. However, the key to a successful sustainable project is to take into account the social aspect of the initiative. For instance, one suggestion would be to encourage people to use eco-friendly transportation modes such as bicycles for short distance trips. However, this might not be applicable in some countries due to sociocultural norms where the mobility of women is restricted. For example, in some regions in Africa, women are not allowed to ride a bicycle or even a scooter and hence they have to opt for other transportation methods. Another suggestion in order to decrease the emissions of vehicles is to encourage people to use public transportation modes. Nonetheless, the actual reach of this project might not be as predicted since many women do not feel safe and comfortable using public buses. A good example of such situation would be the case of Lebanon where young girls, including myself, would much rather opt for private mode of transport because it is simply safer.

Gender inequalities are exacerbated by climate change as women are seen to be more vulnerable and affected in comparison to men. This is due to the discrepancies in the roles attributed to men and women in the society and the household. For instance, restrictions are imposed on women such as limited access to education, financial

resources, technology, training and land ownership rights. Furthermore, women rarely take part in any decision-making roles due to social norms such as political positions, climate-related planning, policy making and implementation projects, etc. Nonetheless, the participation of women is key in order to mitigate climate change and to implement effective projects. This is due to their contribution in sustainable practices on both household and national levels. Hence, Paris Climate Change agreement and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are current environmental initiatives that recognize gender inequalities. Furthermore, these international agreements work on promoting and integrating women's rights in their sustainability projects [5].

At last, since women are more vulnerable to global warming effects, it is critical to ensure that equal gender measures are taken when mitigating climate change. These include offering equal opportunities in decision-making frameworks such as political roles as well as strategy and policy implementation positions. In fact, when addressing gender equality, the effects of climate change on all genders such as women, men, children, transgender, etc. should be taken into account. Moreover, women should not be viewed as victims; on the contrary, they play a major role and show excellent leadership skills especially when promoting sustainability. Thus, initiatives should be taken in order to extend the access of resources to women such as education, financial sources, technologies, etc. Furthermore, another possible solution would be to opt for less fuel-demanding practices such as switching to cooking appliances that rely on renewable energy. This does not only reduces greenhouse gases emissions, but also saves up on costs.

References

- [1] "Why is climate change a gender issue?," UN Women, 2013. [Online]. Available: <https://www.uncclearn.org/wp-content/uploads/library/unwomen704.pdf>.
- [2] "Gender and climate change," IUCN, [Online]. Available: <https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-briefs/gender-and-climate-change>.
- [3] "Gender and Climate Change: Evidence and Experience," CIFOR, [Online]. Available: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GenderClimateBriefs.pdf>.
- [4] "Gender, Climate Change and Health," World Health Organization, [Online]. Available: <https://www.who.int/globalchange/GenderClimateChangeHealthfinal.pdf>.
- [5] "Delivering on the Paris Promises:Combating Climate Change while Protecting Rights," Wedo, [Online]. Available: <https://wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Delivering-On-Paris-Web.pdf>.