

Unpacking the Linkages: Climate Crisis and Gender Inequality

Fatima Binte Zahid¹



Source: United Nations

Introduction

Climate change is the most pressing crisis of our time, and it is hitting us even faster than we initially anticipated. There is nowhere on Earth where the catastrophic effects of climate change are not felt. The main drivers of climate change include the large-scale burning of fossil fuels, massive deforestation, and over-consumption.²

Global temperatures are rising as the production of coal, oil, and gas results in the annual release of billions of tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. With no signs of slowing down, greenhouse gas emissions from human activity are also at a historic high. Over two-thirds of this

¹ Fatima Binte Zahid is a Research Assistant at the Bangladesh Institute of Peace and Security Studies (BIPSS). Previously, she was a Teaching Assistant at the Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP). She completed her MSS and BSS (honors) from the Department of International Relations under the Faculty of Security and Strategic Studies at BUP.

² “Causes and Effects of Climate Change”, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/causes-effects-climate-change>.

warming has occurred since 1975, raising the Earth's average temperature by roughly 1.2°C since the 1800s.³ The past four years have been the hottest on record.⁴

The adverse effects of climate change and global warming on the environment and people are collectively called the "climate crisis." It also draws attention to the grave issues that climate change will bring about, such as natural disasters, extreme weather, rise of sea level, loss of biodiversity, environmental degradation, food and water crisis, and negative impact on economic activities. The climate crisis is a threat to over 3 billion people worldwide, with lower-income nations being disproportionately impacted.⁵ International peace and security are seriously threatened by climate change. Competition for resources like land, food, and water will be intensified due to climate change consequences, which might exacerbate socioeconomic tensions and frequently result in mass displacement. The impact of climate change also aggravates pre-existing problems by increasing risks.

The effects of climate change negatively impact the lives of women and girls. The link between gender inequality and the climate crisis has put women and girls' lives, livelihoods, health, safety, and security at risk all around the world. Gender inequality and climate change have links because climate change has the potential to exacerbate already-existing gender disparities. Due to their higher likelihood of poverty and reliance on natural resources for both food and money, women and girls are more likely to be impacted by climate change.

In this commentary, gender inequality is discussed in the context of climate change, how women are disproportionately affected, specific challenges faced by women, and its root causes before ending with how the issue should be addressed.

³ "The Climate Dictionary: An everyday guide to climate change", UNDP, February 2, 2023, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/climate-dictionary-everyday-guide-climate-change>.

⁴ "The Climate Crisis – A Race We Can Win", United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/un75/climate-crisis-race-we-can-win>.

⁵ "The Climate Dictionary: An everyday guide to climate change", UNDP.



Source: UN Photo/Martine Perret

Gender Inequality in the Context of Climate Change

Climate change is not a "gender-neutral" issue. The effects of climate change are more severe for women and girls. The unequal distribution of power between men and women, the disparity between genders in terms of access to jobs and education, the cost of providing unpaid care, the frequency of violence against women, and all other forms of systemic discrimination against women are to blame for this severe effect.⁶

Climate change exacerbates already-existing gender disparities. It can make it harder for women to be financially independent and increase gender inequality, particularly in economies based on agriculture. Women make up only 12.6% of landowners globally, although accounting for one-third of all employment in the agricultural sector.⁷ They only receive 10% of all funding for agriculture, forestry, and fishing as a result of their lack of control over resources.⁸ In addition, women have less access to information about weather occurrences, cropping patterns, and adaptation technology, which increases their vulnerability. Gender roles can make women more reliant on the natural environment for income and subsistence, which can increase their vulnerability to the adverse consequences of climate change.

⁶ "What does gender equality have to do with climate change?", UNDP, February 28, 2023, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-does-gender-equality-have-do-climate-change>.

⁷ "What does gender equality have to do with climate change?", UNDP.

⁸ *ibid*

Women's unpaid caregiving duties impede their ability to lead on climate change and participate in decision-making. Over 75 percent of unpaid care work worldwide is performed by women, which is 3.2 times greater than by men.⁹ This number only goes up in the event of climate-related disasters, as women shoulder more responsibility to aid in the reconstruction and recovery of their homes and communities.

Climate-related stressors can also affect women's and girls' access to school and the labor market, which makes them spend more time doing housework and feeds a vicious cycle of disempowerment. Women and girls are also more susceptible to gender-based violence in the wake of climate-related disasters.

Women and girls are disproportionately affected globally by the climate crisis. When considering climate change from the perspective of intersectional feminism—which emphasizes how different kinds of inequality frequently coexist and exacerbate one another,—it becomes evident that certain groups are particularly vulnerable to its effects: migrant women, women of color, older women, women and girls with disabilities, and those who live in remote, rural, conflict- or disaster-prone areas.¹⁰

Women are more reliant on natural resources globally, but they also have less access to them. Women are disproportionately responsible for securing fuel, water, and food in many locations. For women in low- and lower-middle-income nations, agriculture is the most important sector of the labor market.¹¹ As primary procurers and agricultural workers, women put in extra effort to provide supplies and income for their family amid dry spells and unpredictable rainfall. Girls are particularly affected since they frequently have to drop out of school to assist their mothers in carrying the heavier load.¹²

As a "threat multiplier," climate change intensifies social, political, and economic pressures in unstable and conflict-affected environments. Women and girls are more vulnerable to all sorts of gender-based violence, such as child marriage, human trafficking, sexual violence

⁹ “What does gender equality have to do with climate change?”, UNDP.

¹⁰ “Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected”, UN Women, February 28, 2022, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected>.

¹¹ “Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected”, UN Women.

¹² *ibid*

associated with conflicts, and other forms of violence, as a result of climate change driving conflict throughout the world.¹³

Due to historical gender disadvantages that have produced differences in information, mobility, decision-making, and access to resources and training, women are more likely to sustain injuries during disasters than to survive them. Women and girls are less likely to receive aid and support in the wake of the disaster, which puts their healing, well-being, and means of subsistence at risk. This creates a vicious cycle of susceptibility to more tragedies.¹⁴

The climate crisis poses a threat to women's and girls' health because it increases the risks associated with maternal and child health and restricts access to services and healthcare. Studies reveal that high temperatures raise the risk of stillbirth and that vector-borne diseases, including dengue fever, zika virus, and malaria, are spreading more widely due to climate change. These infections are associated with poorer outcomes for both mothers and newborns.¹⁵



Source: UN Women/Mohammad Rakibul Hasan

¹³ “Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected”, UN Women.

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ *ibid*

The underlying factors contributing to both climate change and gender inequality

The underlying factors that make women and girls more susceptible to the consequences of climate change include:¹⁶

1. Women make up a large percentage of the impoverished people on the planet, who are generally more impacted.
2. Women are more likely to be reliant on the land and the endangered natural resources for their food and livelihood.
3. Women are less likely to hold positions of authority or be involved in making decisions.
4. Within their families, women are more likely to be in charge of obtaining food, fuel for cooking, and water—all of which are under threat. For example, when local water sources dry up, women and girls are frequently the ones who must go long distances in search of water.
5. Women are frequently subjected to the detrimental effects of disasters, such as death and injury, especially in developing nations. Climate change is causing these disasters to occur more frequently and with greater severity.
6. In addition to being more susceptible to early marriage, teenage pregnancies, rape, and human trafficking when forced to flee their homes due to climate change, women also face an increased risk of gender-based violence during and after disasters.

Furthermore, women have clearly been underrepresented in research and intergovernmental agencies that determine policy and negotiate climate change accords, including the distribution of resources for adaptation, mitigation, and resilience. The political sectors that deal with climate change, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Climate Finance Mechanism boards, National Focal Points of the Global Environment Facility, Adaptation Fund, Climate Investment Funds, and Green Climate Fund, are dominated by men. It is crucial to comprehend the various roles that boys and men play in the patriarchal structures

¹⁶ “Climate change and gender”, Actionaid, February 9, 2023, <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/our-work/emergencies-disasters-humanitarian-response/climate-change-and-gender>.

that exacerbate climate change in order to find ways in which they can work with women as allies to effect positive change.¹⁷



Source: Turjoy Chowdhury/ActionAid

Way Forward

Although science shows that climate change is real, it also suggests that there is still time to stop the current trajectory. This will necessitate profound changes in every facet of society, including the way we cultivate food, utilize land, move commodities, and fuel our economies. New and efficient technologies can help us cut net emissions and build a cleaner environment, even though technology has contributed to climate change.

Gender equality and women's empowerment must be taken into account at every stage of the process for climate solutions to be effective. **Gender analysis** is an essential first step in determining how the effects of climate change differ for men and women.¹⁸ This makes it easier to pinpoint the areas with gender disparities and inequality so that appropriate action can be taken. More evidence-based climate policies and actions that address the needs of men, boys, and

¹⁷ Edward Wageni, “Masculinities, Patriarchy And Climate Change”, HeForShe, <https://www.heforshe.org/en/masculinities-patriarchy-and-climate-change>.

¹⁸ “What does gender equality have to do with climate change?”, UNDP, February 28, 2023, <https://climatepromise.undp.org/news-and-stories/what-does-gender-equality-have-do-climate-change>.

women and girls can be developed after we have a better understanding of the relative distribution of resources, opportunities, restrictions, and power in a specific setting.

We must make sure that budgetary allotments to climate action benefit men and women equally when creating and implementing new climate policies. This makes it possible for everyone to use their leadership and skill set to address the situation. In exchange, deep changes necessary to address the climate catastrophe and guarantee social justice are more likely to be achieved by climate policies that are coordinated with and integrated with goals related to gender equality.

Although they are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change, **women and girls are also crucial to finding a solution.** When it comes to disaster relief, reducing climate change, and developing plans for a more sustainable future, women frequently possess a wealth of knowledge and experience. They frequently take care of the natural resources and domestic goods because of their customary, cultural roles within the family. Women are in a good position to contribute to new approaches for sustainable, climate-resilient livelihoods because of these cultural roles.

Because of their local expertise and leadership in areas like sustainable resource management and promoting sustainable practices at the home and community level, women can play a significant role in responding to climate change. Women's involvement in politics has increased responsiveness to the interests of citizens, frequently fostering cooperation across party and ethnic divides and bringing about more durable peace. The presence of women in leadership roles can enhance the results of climate-related policies and programs at all levels.