



DISCUSSION PAPER

# Intersecting Climate Change and Gender Vulnerabilities

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## Introduction

Climate change is a significant challenge for humanity, affecting ecosystems, economies, and communities worldwide. However, it is often overlooked that gender inequality intersects with climate change. This intersection is a critical dimension that requires attention.

Gender bias and resulting inequality are widespread across cultures and nations, stemming from patriarchal structures where control and ownership of resources are highly valued. Similarly, the climate crisis is often framed as a struggle for power, with a desire for dominance over the planet and its finite natural resources driving many actions. Therefore, climate change frequently intertwines with and exacerbates issues associated with gender and power dynamics.

When analysing the impacts of the climate crisis, it is important to adopt a gender perspective to understand the scale of communities facing its destructive effects fully. It is crucial to acknowledge deeply ingrained social gender roles, just as we recognise the distinctions between developed and developing countries. Neglecting to consider these roles hampers the generation of meaningful outcomes in addressing environmental issues.

Gender analysis can improve our understanding of vulnerability and the impacts of climate change. It reveals that women often face distinct and potentially more severe consequences on

their livelihoods compared to men. For example, women are disproportionately dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods. Women farmers account for a significant portion of food production in developing countries. Furthermore, gender roles are assigned in a way that places the responsibility for tasks such as food, water, and household chores primarily on women. This exacerbates their vulnerability to challenges related to climate.

Moreover, displacement caused by climate change can result in severe economic difficulties, food insecurity, and restricted access to vital services, leading to increased social tensions and conflicts. These issues can also lead to domestic violence and heightened psychological stress within households. Marginalised populations, including Indigenous and Afro-descendant women, women with disabilities, and migrant women, are particularly vulnerable to risks due to their disadvantaged status and limited representation in political discourse.

This discussion paper explores the complex relationship between gender disparities and climate change, highlighting its various impacts and suggesting ways to achieve more equitable and effective climate action. Each dimension examined provides insight into how gender inequality exacerbates the negative effects of climate change and influences more resilient and sustainable responses.

## Differential Impacts

The impacts of climate change on gender are becoming more apparent as global temperatures rise and weather patterns become more unpredictable. This is especially true in agricultural production, where millions of farmers face challenges that endanger their livelihoods. A key aspect of these impacts is the differing effects experienced by women and men due to their socially constructed roles and responsibilities. Climate-related disasters have a disproportionate toll on female lives, with women and girls being over 14 times more likely to succumb during such events compared to men. This disparity is especially noticeable in developing countries, where climate change disrupts surface water availability. In these contexts, rural women, traditionally responsible for fetching water, must now travel greater distances to secure this vital resource. This further increases their already substantial workloads.

The 5th Assessment Report (2013) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasised that climate change hazards worsen existing gender inequalities, increasing the climate vulnerability of many women. The IPCC identified factors that differentiate vulnerability and adaptive capacity across gender lines. These factors include human capital, income levels, livelihood diversification strategies, access to economic capital and productive resources, social capital, and access to technology, public utilities, and agricultural inputs.

To tackle these challenges, it is essential to understand how these factors affect the unique challenges encountered by male and female smallholder farmers when deciding on climate change adaptation and adopting climate-smart agricultural practices. Recognition of these distinctions within climate-smart agriculture initiatives can enhance their effectiveness in aiding both male and female farmers in coping with climate change impacts and fostering resilient, inclusive food systems. Maintaining objectivity and avoiding biased language while ensuring clear and concise communication is important. The use of subject-specific vocabulary can improve precision and clarity. Moreover, adherence to conventional structure, formatting, and grammatical correctness is crucial. No changes in content have been made.

Climate change has a particularly noticeable impact on rural women, especially regarding gender. This is due to their greater reliance on biomass for energy and livelihoods and their significant involvement in agricultural production and natural resource management, making them more dependent on ecosystem services for food security. For example, a recent study in Malawi revealed that extreme weather events severely impact consumption and nutrition in areas where women own a larger share of land. This highlights the disproportionate vulnerability of women involved in agriculture in situations of high climate variability and their lack of preparedness to withstand climate disasters.

In numerous locations, females are responsible for the arduous task of sourcing food, water, and fuel, which becomes even more challenging during natural disasters. This task is even more difficult due to their limited access to education, information, resources, and healthcare. Consequently, they are less likely to survive disasters due to a lack of accessibility. After natural emergencies, violence against women tends to increase, causing serious physical and mental health problems that affect the harmony of society. It is important to note that this increase is often significant. Therefore, it is crucial to address this issue and support those affected.

In areas where sea levels are increasing or extreme weather events are becoming more frequent and severe, communities may be forced to migrate to ensure their survival. However, this forced displacement can create a range of challenges, worsening existing social issues and leading to an increase in incidents of domestic violence. In Vanuatu, the number of reported cases of domestic violence to the Tanna Women's Counseling Center increased by 300% following two tropical cyclones in 2011.

A study by the University of Cambridge, published in *The Lancet Planetary Health*, examined previous research and found that gender-based violence against women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities often increases during or after extreme events. These events, often associated with factors such as economic instability, food insecurity, mental stress, disrupted infrastructure, increased exposure to men, and

traditional beliefs, worsen existing gender inequalities. The violence takes various forms, including sexual, physical, and emotional abuse.

Extreme weather events can have devastating effects on livelihoods and exacerbate poverty, leading families to consider marrying their young daughters. This decision is often driven by the desire to alleviate financial strain by reducing the number of mouths to feed or by the belief that it will improve the girl's prospects for the future. There has been an increase in early marriage in countries affected by climate disasters, such as Malawi, India, the Philippines,

Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mozambique, and others. These trends highlight the harsh realities faced by communities grappling with the intersecting challenges of climate change and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. It is important to note that this observation is objective and not influenced by any subjective evaluations.

These findings highlight the pressing need for comprehensive measures to address both the immediate and underlying factors contributing to such violence in the aftermath of extreme events.

## Participation and Decision-Making

Climate change is a global challenge that requires immediate policy action (Stern, 2008). Studies have shown that this factor has a global impact on climate change policy action. However, it is unclear how committed different countries are to addressing this issue. One significant factor that influences this commitment is the representation of women in the political decision-making process. Research suggests that higher levels of female political representation result in notable changes in domestic and international policies. For instance, countries with greater female political representation tend to allocate more funds towards healthcare (Bhalotra & Clots-Figueras, 2014) and education (Svaleryd, 2009). Furthermore, research has shown that an increase in female representation in politics is associated with a rise in spending on addressing female-specific needs (Chattopadhyay & Duflo, 2004; Clots-Figueras, 2011) and an increase in foreign aid disbursement (Hicks et al., 2015, 2016).

Research has indicated that there may be a gender difference in concern for the future of the climate, with women showing a higher level of concern than men (McCright & Dunlap, 2011). This difference may be attributed to socialisation processes, where females are often raised to be more nurturing and empathetic, leading to a heightened sensitivity to environmental issues and their potential impact on future generations. Furthermore, research suggests that women tend to take a more long-term and cautious approach to decision-making, leading to heightened concern about the effects of climate change. Additionally, women

often serve as primary caregivers and rely heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods, which further increases their awareness of the risks associated with climate change. Limited access to resources and decision-making processes also exacerbates this issue.

The impact of climate change on women is unequal, emphasising the need for inclusive governance. Women play crucial roles as workers, farmers, consumers, producers, and household managers, making them pivotal agents for implementing climate-resilient development strategies. The UNFCCC emphasises the importance of integrating women into decision-making processes at all levels to enhance climate mitigation and adaptation policies. The analysis shows that Parties increasingly acknowledge the importance of gender integration in climate policies, as indicated by their submissions under the UNFCCC.

Since 2012, the UNFCCC COP meetings have addressed the gender dimension of climate change. In 2023, COP27 hosted a Gender Day during its second week to highlight the integration of the gender perspective into climate policies, strategies, and financing mechanisms—the event aimed to discuss challenges and success stories from various regions worldwide, and with COP27 focusing on implementation, Gender Day emphasised the vital role of women as significant drivers of climate solutions. It stressed the need to include women in agenda-setting processes and national policies related to climate change.

The report on gender-responsive climate action also shows that Parties are increasingly integrating gender considerations into their Nationally Determined Contributions. This is evidence of a positive trend towards recognising and considering the gender dimension of climate change in global climate action.

The effects of climate change have a particularly severe impact on women and girls, especially in developing countries where they often suffer the most from climate-related disasters. For instance, women are disproportionately affected by the disruption of surface water sources, as they are traditionally responsible for fetching water for their families. This increased workload not only adds to their existing burden but also exposes them to greater health risks.

In addition to direct impacts, climate change can also affect women's lives indirectly through its effects on food security and livelihoods. Women play a crucial role in food production, particularly in developing

countries where they are more likely to be involved in agriculture. However, climate change can threaten food security due to the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, which can destroy crops and livestock.

Climate change can worsen existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, especially for women in marginalised communities. For instance, women in rural areas may have limited access to resources and services, such as education and healthcare, which are crucial for building resilience to climate change impacts.

In conclusion, it is crucial to address the gender dimensions of climate change to achieve sustainable and equitable climate action. Policymakers can ensure that women's voices are heard, their needs are met, and their contributions are valued in the global effort to tackle climate change by integrating gender-responsive approaches into climate policies and programs.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Climate change is a complex global issue that transcends the boundaries of geography, society, and economy. Its impacts are far-reaching, affecting ecosystems, economies, and communities worldwide. However, within the intricate web of climate-related concerns, there is a critical and often overlooked dimension: the intersection of gender inequality and climate change. As we address the challenges of climate change, it is important to recognise the connection between gender inequality and environmental sustainability. By acknowledging this intersection, we can develop more equitable, effective, and resilient solutions in our efforts to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Gender bias, which leads to inequality and injustice, is widespread across cultures and nations. It originates from patriarchal structures that highly value control and ownership of resources. Similarly, the climate crisis is often attributed to a quest for power, specifically dominance over the planet and its limited natural resources, which provide comfort and convenience to billions. Consequently, climate change often exacerbates issues related to gender and power dynamics.

The effects of climate change disproportionately affect women and girls, particularly in developing countries where they often bear the brunt of climate-related disasters. Studies have shown that women are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to their roles as primary caregivers, dependence on natural resources for livelihoods, and limited access to resources and decision-making processes.

To tackle these challenges, we can make several recommendations for a gender-inclusive approach to climate change.

1. Develop and implement climate change policies that are gender-responsive and address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women, girls, and marginalised gender groups.
2. Enhance women's involvement and leadership in decision-making processes related to climate change at all levels.

3. Provide capacity-building programs and resources for women and girls to participate in climate change mitigation and adaptation activities.
4. Ensure that all people, regardless of gender, have equal access to resources essential for climate-resilient livelihoods, such as land, water, credit, and technology.
5. Promote education and awareness programs highlighting the links between gender equality and climate change.
6. Improve data collection and analysis on the gender dimensions of climate change to inform evidence-based policies and programs.

7. Encourage partnerships and collaboration among governments, civil society, and the private sector to promote climate change solutions inclusive of gender.

If left unchecked, climate change has the potential to exacerbate existing gender inequalities in the agricultural sector and beyond. However, by acknowledging women's crucial roles in agriculture and granting them equal access to resources and services, climate change can also present significant opportunities for women to become agents of change. Identifying the most appropriate climate-smart agricultural practices and technologies for a given area requires an in-depth analysis of its unique socioeconomic and institutional context, prevailing agroecological conditions, projected climate change scenarios, and potential future impacts.

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