

Women and Climate Change



Climate change is one of the most fundamental challenges facing the international community today. Already it is affecting the livelihoods, health and well-being of millions of the poorest people across the world, as crop yields fall and food, energy and water scarcity intensifies. Detrimental effects of climate change can be felt in the short-term through natural hazards, such as landslides, floods and hurricanes; and in the long-term, through more gradual degradation of the environment. In many of these contexts, women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men, primarily as they constitute the majority of the world's poor and are more dependent for their livelihood on natural resources that are threatened by climate change. It is recorded that women typically outnumber men by 14 to 1 amongst those dying from natural disasters. For example, women and girls were recorded as comprising up to 80 percent of those who lost their lives in the 2004 Asian Tsunami.

Because they are the main actors in the home and in the household food production they tend to be more directly reliant on natural resources and are particularly vulnerable as resources become scarce. In drought-prone regions affected by desertification, for example, the time for water and fuel collection increases as women and girls have little option but to travel greater distances. Heavy rainfalls and more frequent flooding also exacerbate women's workloads as more time and energy is expended in maintaining houses after flooding. In poor households thorough the world, women go without food for the benefit of their children or male family members. As food prices rise, poor households tend to experience a reduction in the quality or quantity of food they are able to purchase, with women most likely to make sacrifice.

It is important to remember, however, that women are not only vulnerable to climate change but they are also effective actors or agents of change in relation to both mitigation and adaptation. Women often have a strong body of knowledge and expertise that can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction and adaptation strategies. Furthermore, women's responsibilities in households and communities, as stewards of natural and household resources, positions them well to contribute to livelihood strategies adapted to changing environmental realities.

Despite this, representation of women and girls in climate change negotiations still remained very low and it is therefore necessary to recognize and draw on local women's knowledge in planning, financing and implementation of adaptation and mitigation efforts and also to increase female participation in all areas of decision-making both nationally as well as internationally.

Priyankari Alexander – Programme Officer (SACEP)