



# *Gender equality in the test of climate change*

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## *Abstract —*

*The correlation between gender equality and human rights requires a significant consideration in the context of climate change. The latter seriously affects the well-being of the human species as a whole, especially women and girls who remain highly vulnerable to its effects. Indeed, climate change is responsible for more gender-based violence, which in turn stems from the increasing women's poverty echoed by health risks and the loss of revenues and household assets.*

*Women, although historically marginalized, have proven their undeniable positions as knowledge holders and promoters of adaptability and mitigation by actively contributing to shape a sustainable future for all. In this context, a cohesive, gender-responsive, human-based approach is relevant to deal with the obstacles to sustainability; and thus question the efficiency of the international legal and policy framework to do so.*

*Keywords— Climate change, equality, gender-responsive, climate action, international instruments, enforcement mechanisms*

## *I. INTRODUCTION*

Climate change is an obvious reality of which the consequences are revealed in our daily lives. Therefore, several IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) alarming reports call for urgent measures, especially for vulnerable populations, such as women and children.

Indeed, the complexity and scope of the havoc caused by climate disruption are widespread and have a direct impact on human well-being. It has consequences on both livelihood protection and economic and social development regulations. Thus, many human rights are violated. As highlighted by the IPCC and Human Rights Council in resolution 41/21,



climate change touches, inter alia, rights to life, food, adequate housing, health, water, development and sanitation [1].

As women are particularly impacted by these rights, they suffer gender inequalities with respect to lack of opportunities, limited access to environmental goods, and the decline in housing conditions which exacerbates their exposure to violence and poverty.

Undeniably, climate turmoil is a threat multiplier that affects women, girls, men, and boys in distinct ways, jeopardizing transformation approaches aimed at tackling gender gaps. This reality was already established by the IPCC Assessment Report in 2007, which argued that climate change will have disproportionate effects according to age, class, and gender with heightened impacts on the poor. Worse still, women and girls are subject to higher poverty rates.

They are more likely to suffer the consequences because of their numerous tasks to respond to household pressures such as sanitary and health conditions, care for

dependents, food production, and natural resource management. This fact was confirmed by the IPCC report of February 2022 on impacts, adaptation, and vulnerability, once relating “an atlas of human suffering” excessively affecting women and girls. Besides, women and children are not only the most tormented by the ramifications of climate change but their abilities to adapt and cope with its direct and indirect effects are also worsening. Thus, women and girls bear the impact of intensified discrimination which impede their resilience and endurance levels. They need ambitious responsive governance that fulfills the background and requires constant feedback.

Significant efforts are undertaken by women who paved the way forward to climate actions with their generational knowledge that allows them to contribute effectively to enhancing local adaptive capacity and sustaining a community’s livelihood, hence becoming a reliable driving force for climate change.



## *II. SYSTEMIC SHIFT IN UNDERTAKING CLIMATE CHANGE*

Women are prone to accumulated vulnerabilities that magnify the harm they suffer, yet; history demonstrates their resilience and coping mechanisms in defense of their right to life and their ability to assume the family burden. Climate change is the utmost challenge that is perpetrating further stress on women as they are facing inconveniences in adapting to its impacts.

Women are frequently subject to overlapping natures of inequalities and discrimination. Their restricted access to resources, decision-making processes, and limited mobility due to their roles as primary caregivers, it all places them in a position where they are disproportionately affected by climate change. This, in conjunction with other factors that may work against them, such as education, ethnicity, profession, disability, and marital status, disconnects them from economic and social safety systems and institutions. So, it is important to identify gender-sensitive strategies to respond to the environmental and

humanitarian crises caused by climate change.

Furthermore, it is imperative, particularly in policy and programs on climate change, to avoid assumptions and generalizations. Only an intersectoral approach in climate action will guarantee that sidelined women are not left behind. It is then crucial to integrate gender issues into climate actions to prevent further aggravation of existing inequalities.

In this context, equality and non-discrimination is a human right principle that requires action to tackle and alleviate the disparities of climate change impacts on sidelined populations by ensuring the reach of climate action to the most marginalized people and reducing gender inequalities. This must go through enhanced efforts incorporating a gender perspective in climate change adaptation and mitigation plans in compliance with the gender-responsive climate action call in the Paris Agreement [2].



Conferring to Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report from last February, several effects of climate change will arise. Water availability will reduce, with heightened levels of water scarcity, particularly in Southern and North Africa, and intensified frequency of meteorological drought. Not to mention the duration of these events will prolong from 2 to 4 months over North Africa if a temperature rise exceeds 2°C.

Undeterred by these persistent challenges, women continue to defend the causes of human rights and equality, sustainable development, and climate action.

As solution-multipliers, they are active agents of change and strong advocates for gender equality and thus rightfully earned the shift from right holders to decision-makers. Their role and ability to respond to extensive climate actions arise whenever they are involved through their inherited wisdom and generational knowledge relating to water harvesting and storage, food preservation, and various skills in agriculture and natural resource management. These attributes will

enable them to contribute effectively to enhancing local adaptive capacity and improving daily life at local levels while sustaining a community's livelihood. According to a study conducted by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on gender-responsive climate action (A/HRC/41/26), the presence of women with diverse backgrounds in climate action and decision-making processes is crucial for effective, informed and meaningful action that respects women's rights [3].

Women's contributions and leadership are still left out of decision-making processes when an equal gender perspective is vastly needed in addressing climate policies and their effectiveness.

A logic of ownership will positively convey the winds of change. In fact, this kind of inclusivity is fundamental and impacts several areas of the adaptational mitigation process in climate action.

Besides, climate calamities could be managed in a gender-responsive mode. As UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated during a side event of



the Commission on the Status of Women, nowadays challenges are mainly due to “suppression of women’s voices” and “our male-dominated world and male-dominated culture.” He also mentioned that as the main reason why gender parity and equality are “fundamental prerequisites for a safer, more peaceful, more sustainable world for all” [4].

Also, multiple human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights defend the rights of people in vulnerable situations to participate and access information; participation which is a basic human right that preconditions the fulfillment of other human rights [5].

Better yet, if combined with gender-responsive climate finance, gender inclusivity could convert impediments into catalytic alternatives to address resilience in adaptation and mitigation. Yet, according to the latest IPCC report on mitigation of climate change, released in April 2022, climate finance

failed to integrate some essential gender considerations. In fact, to avoid the worsening of women’s vulnerabilities, climate finance should take into account their requisites such as social services, safety, etc.; it must also be focused on reinforcing their adaptation needs, sustaining their mental health and welfare, obtaining inventive approaches to shape resilience so that they can run strong households. This not only requires a shift in development institutions and banks’ mindsets but especially an integration of women’s needs with a particular focus on inequality, equity, and climate justice.

Therefore, a systemic shift in tackling climate effects is highly required. It must consider social and behavioral change which needs to properly address gender inequalities and discrimination. Both of which are widely manifested in areas like agricultural systems and political participation and need a special focus when it comes to target climate actions. These systemic injustices prevent women from realizing their full potential.



Also, climate finance provided to developing countries should be consistent with justice, equity, and equality, with a spotlight on the manner this funding is allocated to the population [6].

An integrated finance system along with inclusive roles and green businesses are the *modus operandi* to integrate gender equality into climate action and hence inclusive climate justice.

### *III. WOMEN IN A JUST AND INCLUSIVE ENERGY TRANSITION*

There is no doubt that developed countries have several tasks to assist developing countries in making the transition from fossil fuels to clean energies. This shift to further sustainable renewable energy systems entails more inclusion. In this context, anticipatory actions focusing on inequality, social impacts, and women's inclusiveness in the shift to climate-resilient economies are levers to moderate rising inconveniences.

Nevertheless, most energy sector policies are gender-neutral. They lack to acknowledge neither women's potential in terms of socio-economic benefits and mitigation efforts nor women's role as primary managers of traditional energy resources and consequently as entrepreneurs in renewable energy.

Also, the use of renewable energy offers further advantages for adaptation in terms of livelihood options in green jobs and health outcomes.

It is then essential to seize the opportunity to shift to a fair transition where gender dimensions and human rights are considered, especially when moving from traditional fossil fuels to renewable and cost-effective energy sources to counter rising energy demands.

With this in mind, some large-scale renewable energy projects have some reverse effects due to their imminent effects on land loss, livelihood nuisance and displacement and could prolong gender inequality and poverty cycles. Moreover, access to renewable energy remains unaffordable in rural areas, particularly for women





undergoing poverty. Therefore, renewable energy programs do need to include gendered access and use of renewable energy technologies.

From another perspective, green jobs in renewable energy sectors are extremely male-oriented as they offer unfair chances for women because of their potentially restricted knowledge in technology, science, and engineering.

Inclusiveness and justice coupled with decent job creation for women should then remain at the center of the transition aspects. Concrete policies through integrated capacity-building approaches are encouraged. It should provide an empowering environment for women to be involved in energy transition and thus guarantee a recovering climate and planet for all [7].

Sustainable Energy for All initiative is a good example of an action directed toward Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7–Affordable and Clean Energy, throughout multi-stakeholder cooperation to guarantee a shift to clean energy that leaves no one behind and conveys further chances for all hands to achieve their potential. It

identifies women’s access to up-to-date energy services as a great impact necessity for attaining the 2030 agenda. In this regard, the achievement of SDG 7, along with its targets, calls for taking gender concerns into consideration while establishing policies and programs.

It is then clear that women’s exclusion from energy transition negatively impacts the accomplishment of this transition and the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris agreement.

Likewise, it is worth exploring in what way international legal and policy frameworks are improving gender-sensitive actions.

#### *IV. KEY INTERNATIONAL PLEDGES TO ENLIGHTEN GENDER-RESPONSIVE CLIMATE ACTION*

Several international agreements propose a configuration of gender concerns rights and commitments. Actually, human rights, along with climate change and environmental legal and policy instruments,



advocate for women’s rights. The interconnection between these instruments is also revealed through climate action. This framework includes, inter alia, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) protects women’s rights and forbids all forms of discrimination against them. CEDAW has direct implications for climate change. It compels parties to take “*all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development*” and, “*participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels*”, and “*in all community activities*” [8].

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,

through its general recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, stresses the significance of gender-responsive climate action and defines general principles of the Convention along with specific obligations related to disaster risk reduction and climate change.

In the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, more than 60 decisions refer to gender. The Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) was established in 2014 during the 20<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP 20), which underlined the need to advance gender-responsive climate action through appropriate targets and goals within the work of the UNFCCC. In 2015 during COP 21, the Paris Agreement was adopted. Some of its provisions have a clear impact on gender. The preamble compels states to promote, protect and fulfill all human rights, including women’s empowerment, gender equality, and intergenerational equity. Article 7 (5) raises the necessity for gender-responsive climate adaptation, while





Article 11 (2) entails gender-responsive capacity-building. In 2016 during COP 22, the Marrakech conference adopted a decision perceiving the importance of grassroots women's participation in gender-responsive climate action on all levels. During COP 23 in 2017, the Gender Action Plan was implemented to guide ongoing work on gender-responsive approaches to climate change under the Lima Work Program.

2018 marked the adoption of the Paris Agreement implementation guidelines during COP 24. Therefore, states are requested to make information concerning available gender-responsive approaches as part of nationally determined contributions and adaptation communications. A new technology framework must address gender equality, international human rights standards, and gender must be considered in the Warsaw International Mechanism's Task Force on Displacement adaptation communications.

In 2021 during COP 26, the Glasgow agreement recognized the integration

of the care economy into daily life, through the mutual responsibility of persons unrelatedly to their gender identity, for care and maintenance activities inside homes and within society. Also during that COP, the Glasgow Women's Leadership statement was launched and signed by international leaders.

This statement seeks for the acknowledgement of the differentiated impact of climate change by factors such as gender, age, location and disability. Moreover, it increases ambition via expanded financing, enlarged partnerships, and advocacy while ensuring women's and girls' effective contribution and leadership in policy at all decision-making levels [9].

On the other hand, the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development and its 17 goals endorse human rights and pledge to leave no one behind. As every dimension of sustainable development requires gender mainstreaming, the impacts of climate change on women should be reflected in each SDG.

Along the same line, due to all the goals' interconnection, Goal 5–



Gender Equality– is transversal and should then be considered in the realization of the other goals, together with Goal 13–Climate Action. The latter requests unequivocally the promotion of inclusive instruments for effective climate change planning and supervision. The nonappearance of gender equality in some goals, especially Goals 7, 12, 14, and 15, which are pertinent for climate action, does not disregard making efforts to attain these goals in a gender-responsive manner [10]. These key instruments are levers to fulfill the gender concerns commitments. It is then logical to question the degree to which they are successful in meeting their objectives by delivering desired outcomes.

#### *V. MECHANISMS TO FULFILL COMMITMENTS*

Most human rights and climate change agreements recognize and often define the effects of climate change on human well-being. They also set obligations on parties to avoid such inconveniences.

Multilateral agreements and related international declarations and resolutions mainly clarify some aspects of the nexus between human rights and climate change.

They also determine the link between the rights to access to information and public participation in decision-making and outcomes. Once people are aware and participate in decisions concerning them, they are willing to contribute to their compliance [11]. This is very significant for the expected effects of climate instruments since some of them lack enforcement mechanisms.

For instance, in the Paris agreement, parties are legally obligated to undertake a Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and commit to updating it every five years, respecting the Global Stocktake (GST) process. Nevertheless, the achievement of the NDC is not an enforceable commitment nor the failure to submit a more ambitious one.

It is worth mentioning here that few NDCs' analyses consider gender equity or women and girls' climate action roles. Albeit, it would be more



significant for NDCs not just to determine the scope of women's vulnerability but to acknowledge them in the same way as leaders and change-makers in climate action.

Additionally, the 2023 forthcoming NDC assessment process must be an opportunity to seize in order to increase determination for efficient gender rights-based climate action. That being said, the NDC Equity tracker is a helpful project which gives tangible recommendations for countries to ameliorate their commitments and provides an international platform to underline the experiences of vulnerable populations. This project can be a practical instrument for urging systemic shifts and initiating gender intersectionality in climate decisions.

Consequently, the effectiveness of NDCs relies on setting up high-reaching domestic climate policies and laws, which include the regulation required to fulfill these NDCs.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of the latest IPCC Reports show how dire the situation actually is and how it can get even more dreadful, particularly for vulnerable populations. Hence, the crossroads at which we are currently located requires us to act instantly to avoid the worst impacts.

As women are particularly vulnerable to climate change, they must have access to vigorous solutions embracing judicial and other compensation mechanisms.

Further attention should then be paid to climate finance and technology transfer cooperation, with a particular focus on women's participation in all adaptation and mitigation processes.

The success of gender-responsive climate action remains highly dependent on the adoption of a human rights-based approach in all decisions. It relies on accountability in prevailing commitments and cooperation for implementation.

This requires a worldwide, multi-stakeholder action in all areas to ensure that no one is left behind,



which is the core value of SDGs. Yet, their current rate of progress remains too slow to turn pledges into action. To step it up, public action is an irrefutable requirement to address such inequalities, especially if coupled with more thorough data to properly assess what responsive actions actually work for women and girls.

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