



Climate Change and Gender: An Analysis of Gender-Responsive Adaptations

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is a universal problem affecting each being on this planet but interestingly the effects of it are not uniform for everyone, especially when we look at it through the lens of gender. The ingrained and systematic discrimination with underrated and narrow roles of genders especially of women, as well as the lack of international and national prioritization and accounting of their rights and roles in climate action, lead to discerned gendered impacts of climate change concerning food and agriculture, water and biodiversity, health, migration and settlement, natural disasters. When we look at climate change through the lens of intersectional feminism, it is clear that climate change risks are far more problematic for indigenous and older women, LGBTIQ+ people, women and girls who are specially-abled, migrant women, and those living in rural, remote, conflict and disaster-prone areas. Despite efforts made by international agencies like UNFCCC, COPs, and non-profit NGOs, in advancing both gender responsiveness and equality in climate action and policy measures, progress all over the world and in India is specifically minimal. Since women are a significant part of the world's population and their voice needs to be highlighted, this paper, thereby, analyses the various impacts on women of different backgrounds due to climate change, emphasises the valuable participation of women from varied backgrounds in climate change action; studies and scrutinizes the present lack of priority in national and international policies and discusses ways to come up with inclusive gender-responsive climate change action.

Keywords: Climate Change, gender inequality, sustainable development, intersectional feminism

INTRODUCTION

As times are changing, the emergence of complex ways of living has revealed a clear correlation and linkage between the discerned impacts of climate change and women's equality and effectiveness in global climate action. Despite the presence of legal instruments and efforts by many international agencies and agreements like UNFCCC, COPs, and non-profit NGOs in advancing both gender responsiveness and equality in climate action and policy measures, the progress is grim. Also, though the Paris Agreement's treaty emphasised that climate action should prioritise and take into account the furthering of human rights and inclusion of vulnerable groups, the underwhelming ability to adopt a gendered lens with a lack of 'sex-disaggregated data' (UN GCNI

& PWC,2022) in documenting women's role in climate action all over the world and in India stands in complete opposition to gender equality and rights-based commitments of the CEDAW and Beijing Declaration leading to gender-blind climate change policy and programmes. The negative effects of these events on women can be discussed specifically in areas, relating to - food and agriculture, water and biodiversity, health, migration and settlement, and natural disasters (UN WomenWatch,2009). In all these areas, women are affected more than men mainly because they are dependent on natural resources, face continued structural inequalities and poverty, face social, economic, and political hurdles that limit their capabilities as well as due to the intersection of different forms of discrimination. It is therefore imminent to make and implement gender-responsive strategies to cope with crises of all kinds caused by climate change.

Most of the present data and research and international programmes mainly focus on the vulnerability of women to climate change but it is however important to add that women are not only more intensely affected by climate change but they are also valuable actors and agents of change in both mitigation and adaptation. Women with their knowledge and expertise, the experience of holding responsibilities in households and communities, as well as with active political participation can be of vital use in climate change actions, disaster management and advancing a safe climate change response strategy.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The negative impacts of climate change can be seen all over the world and continuous efforts and dialogues have taken place to curb it. However, it manifests itself in different forms and intensities, specifically affecting older women, LGBTIQ+ people, specially-abled women, migrant women, and those living in rural, remote, conflict and disaster-prone areas. They have been more prone to these vulnerabilities due to a heavy dependence on natural resources for their livelihood and daily life and lack of resources and know-how to deal with natural hazards and also due to the ingrained and intersectional forms of discrimination, social, economic, and political barriers, undervaluation of their work and knowledge as contributors and other structural inequalities. Moreover, the roles they play in climate change adaptations must be studied and analysed as the less the women of different backgrounds are engaged in its mitigation the more vulnerable, they become. Therefore, this descriptive and analytical study highlights the vulnerabilities of different women relating to climate change, emphasizes the link between their empowerment and participation and effective climate action, critically studies the lack of national and international priority in this area and finds ways to incorporate a gendered lens in adaptations and mitigation of the climate change giving women a place in solving the problem at hand.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This descriptive and analytical article, through the lens of intersectional feminism and gender inequality, studies how climate change affects women of diverse backgrounds and statuses more due to their intersectional

identities. It emphasises the links between women's empowerment and climate change adaptations and strategies in the light of present national and international initiatives on climate action and women's undermined roles in the same.

OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the aggravated negative effects of climate change affecting women of diverse backgrounds through a lens of intersectional feminism
- To study the importance of the role, women of varied backgrounds can play in climate change adaptations.
- To critically study the initiatives on climate change adaptations and its gender-responsiveness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is being done through the framework of gender equality and intersectional feminism and is descriptive and analytical. The data has been collected through secondary sources like journals, articles, books, and the Internet.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

There are several short and long-term effects of climate change that impact women of diverse backgrounds in the forms of natural hazards/disasters and gradual environmental degradation respectively. The aspect of agriculture and food security in regard to Climate change has serious ramifications in four dimensions of food security: food availability, accessibility, resources face food shortages, bad harvests, and consequent low incomes due to the unpredictability and scarce availability of traditional food sources due to climate change. They often lack equitable access to the same tools, seeds, and other resources as men, meaning that their land is less productive. Furthermore, as stated in the UN Women Watch Report 2009, women are often excluded from decision-making on access to and the use of land and resources critical to their livelihoods. This means they are also left out of many initiatives to help farmers adapt to the effects of climate change. (FAO,2023). The case of declining biodiversity impacts not only women's material well-being but also their freedom of choice, security, and quality of living. Women who are responsible for household work and collection of firewood, water, etc. have to travel a lot of distance in the face of the declining resources and thereby face health issues and are prone to more sexual violence/harassment. In the face of the changing climate, inadequate access to water and poor water quality does not only affect women, their responsibilities as primary givers, and the health of their families, it also impacts agricultural production and the care of livestock; and increases the overall amount of labour that is expended to collect, store, protect and distribute water (UN Women Watch,2009). Moreover, in places where there is arsenic contamination, arsenic poisoning

may result in the deaths of women and especially affect older, disabled women. The health issues and bodily changes occurring due to carrying water and arsenic poisoning affect their appearance and thereby result in further social exclusion. More than 70 per cent of people who died in the 2004 Asian tsunami were women and similarly, Hurricane Katrina, which hit New Orleans (USA) in 2005, predominantly affected poor African-Americans, especially women (UNDP,2015). Parochial and irrelevant gender norms, lack of full information and important life-saving skills and resources they need in an early warning system or following a climate event, and in some circumstances, inability to leave their home without a man's consent make women more vulnerable during times of disaster. Many do not have the. Moreover, unmarried, or separated women or women of the LGBTQ+ are more vulnerable to sexual abuse and human trafficking. There are several health issues affecting women that can be attributed in part to climate change. They are prone to more inhalations of toxins due to cooking through non-eco-friendly mediums, and the continuous use of dirty water makes them susceptible to parasitic infections. Moreover, they are the ones to cut back on food intake when the harvest is not good enough. Also floods and cyclones make them prone to water-borne diseases owing to structural and institutional inequalities. Maternal and child health is affected by climate-related events, especially if a climate disaster requires a country or community's healthcare system to divert maternity resources to emergency response (UNDP,2016). Eighty per cent of people displaced by climate change are women (UNDP 2015). They face unique challenges further enforced by a situation of historical discrimination and lack of human rights accounting in the climate change policies over the world. They usually do not find safe shelter and settlement options thereby making them more prone to gender-based violence. Analysis shows that governments and international agencies are not doing enough to cope with these problems. India's NDCs show a lack of a gendered lens in adapting to climate change despite its commitments to gender equity and empowerment, as they are non-specific and ambiguous from a functional point of view. India's NDCs, also do not outline sector-specific vulnerabilities and consider requirements for women-specific constraints. Instead, it works on a 'generalized approach without taking into consideration the Indigenous knowledge of vulnerable groups, especially that of women, although stipulated in the Paris Agreement and India's NDC policy framework. At COP26, for the first time, India pledged to reduce emissions to net zero by 2070. To meet this target, the country must think together, think out of the box, and make the most of its initiatives gender-responsive to build accountability and endurance (UN GCNI & PWC,2022). Further, the National Action Plan on Climate Change,2008 also lacks gender responsiveness in the implementation since it has no specific mission in this plan regarding gender sensitivity towards climate change.

Although the overall spending in the world regarding climate change adaptation is increasing, and despite increased international dialogue on women being crucial stakeholders and consumers of climate finance interventions, a CPI report has shown that **less than 2% of the total climate change investments in 2021 was gender-responsive** (UNGCNI & PWC 2022). **The financial gap for women-owned MSMEs was 6.37 trillion rupees, which is 73% of the total demand** (Buteau S,2021).

FINDINGS

- Although women are the major dependents and contributors to food production, they are the ones who have less land ownership and resources and face severe food security issues as well as less know-how relating to climate change adaptation measures thereby having low participation in the same. Moreover, they experience increased domestic violence as a result of water and food shortages caused by climate change.
- Women are the ones who are frequently displaced in the face of natural disasters and climate change events. They are the ones who bear the brunt of it due to a lack of training, skills, resources, and knowledge regarding climate change emergencies owing to their poverty, illiteracy, and overall backward status in all spheres.
- LGBTQIA+ people and people with disabilities are at greater risk of marginalisation, violence and casualties during disasters and response Lesbian feminists state that the few humanitarian initiatives that are available are heteronormative and further emphasise the patriarchal structures of the society
- The health of women is again severely affected due to various effects of climate change and yet being the sole homemaker in most situations, have a low-nutrient diet and lesser accessibility to healthcare facilities in the face of climate change events.
- National and international organisations and agencies have given lesser priority to a gender-responsive climate change approach and have overlooked the inclusion of diverse women into these adaptations owing to lesser gender-oriented financing mechanisms, technological developments, training, and representation in world forums.

SUGGESTIONS

- Financing mechanisms must be flexible and gender oriented. Effective gender analysis and participation of women in budgets, allocated to climate action must be encouraged to reflect women's priorities and needs.
- Technological developments related to climate change should prioritise women's specific needs and roles, and make full use of their knowledge and expertise, including indigenous knowledge and traditional practices. Moreover, they should also be provided with basic knowledge, training, and operational skills regarding the mitigation of climate change events to ensure their full participation in climate change initiatives.
- Governments should incorporate gender lenses into their national policies, action plans and other measures through proper data collection, practical tools for analysing gender-centred implementations and gender-specific benchmarks and indicators regarding climate change must be set up.
- More representation of women of diverse backgrounds in national and world decision-making processes should be given so that they can bring their problems to the forefront and help solve them through their specific expertise and knowledge regarding the same.
- Moreover, an overall change in society's mindset is needed who shape irrelevant and oppressive gender norms for women so that they are not left behind in the effective participation and contribution towards change in climate change measures.

CONCLUSION

Climate change adaptation and mitigation is a serious affair and for its effective implementation, a gendered lens is required at all levels. Rooting out structural inequalities, discriminations and socio-cultural barriers is important for women's empowerment in climate change adaptations as well as for participation in national and international decision-making and policies relating to the same. Moreover, a lot needs to be done by national governments and international agencies to make women of various backgrounds part of their fight against climate change making people aware and informed about the need for it to have a sustainable present and future.

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