

Women, Climate Change and his Consequences

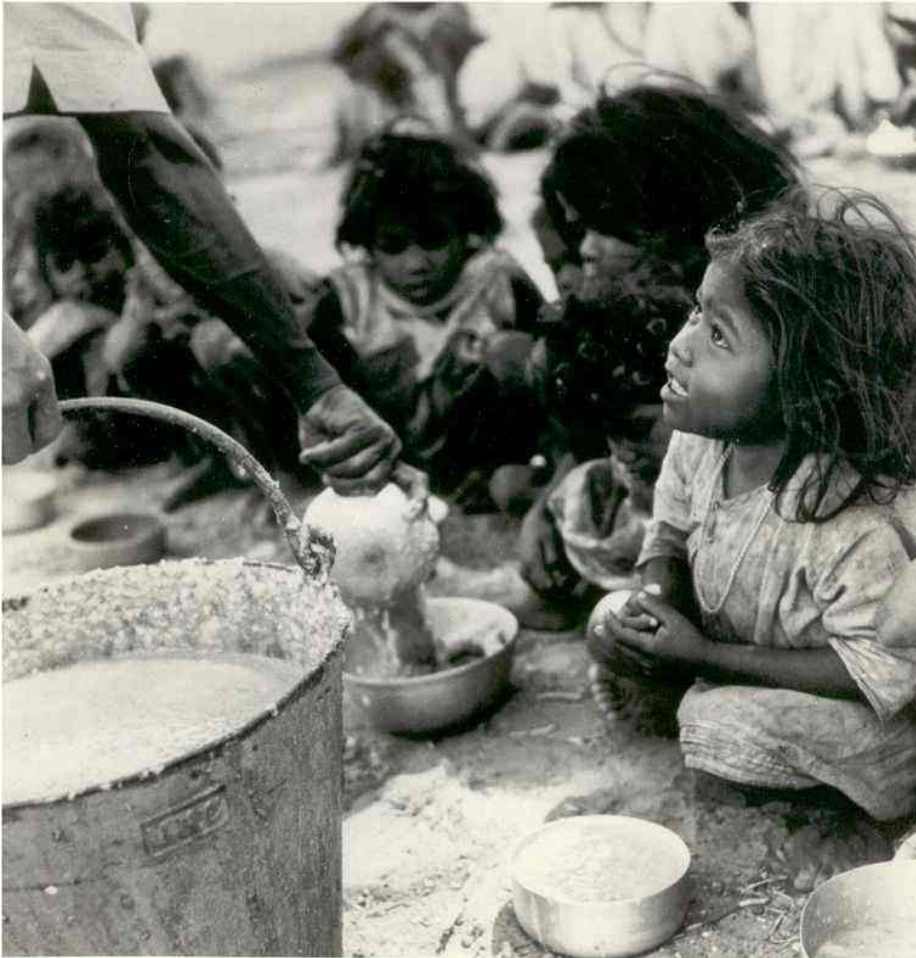
Detrimental effects of climate change can be felt in the short-term through natural hazards, such as landslides, floods and hurricanes; and in the long-term, through more gradual degradation of the environment.



In many of these contexts, women are more vulnerable 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.

Women and men in rural areas in developing countries are especially vulnerable when they are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood. Those charged with the responsibility to secure water, food and fuel for cooking and heating face the greatest challenges.

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.



Women face loss of income as well as harvests—often their sole sources of food and income. Related increases in food prices make food more inaccessible to poor people, in particular to women and girls whose health has been found to decline more than male health intimates of food shortages. Furthermore, women are often excluded from decision-making on access to and the use of land and resources critical to their livelihoods. For these reasons, it is important that the rights of rural women are ensured in regards to food security, non-discriminatory access to resources, and equitable participation in decision-making processes.

In the rural areas of Africa and Asia, women and men are highly dependent on biomass, such as wood, agricultural crops, wastes and forest resources for their energy and livelihoods. However, in the face of climate change, the ability of women and men to obtain these indispensable resources is reduced.



All over the developing world, women and girls bear the burden of fetching water for their families and spend significant amounts of time daily hauling water from distant sources. The water from distant sources is rarely enough to meet the needs of the household and is often contaminated, such that women and girls also pay the heaviest price for poor sanitation. To give an example, in cases where the arsenic contamination of groundwater is prominent, increased flood levels intensify the rate of exposure among rural people and other socio-economically disadvantaged groups.

Significant resources are needed to cover the cost of the goods, services and technologies required in the implementation of climate change measures in developing and developed countries.³⁵ Climate change financing instruments are supposed to be custom-built to suit the different levels of economic development of the different countries of the global economy. However, factors such as gender inequality in access to social and physical goods; gender gaps in education, income, time use and leisure; and gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities in the household, community and labour markets affect the effective channelling of financing to women. In the first instance, women's response and ability to cope with climate change issues depend on the robustness of their underlying health and wellbeing and the breadth of their social networks. In the second instance, women's ability to adapt to the demands of climate change depends on the extent of their control over economic resources and access to economic and financial resources.



At the most basic level, mortality rates for women and men are often different in natural disasters. A 2006 study of 141 natural disasters by the London School of Economics found that when economic and social rights are fulfilled for both sexes, the same number of women and men die in disasters.³⁷ At the same time, when women do not enjoy economic and social rights equal to men, more women than men die in disasters. This gender discrepancy has come to light in a range of major disasters, including the Asian Tsunami; Hurricane Mitch, Hurricane Katrina, and other storms in the Americas; European heat waves; and cyclones in South Asia, etc. In some cases, such as in Central America, more men than women have died in natural disasters as they placed themselves at risk while helping their families.

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