

Fact Sheet

Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change



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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. The adverse effects of these events are already felt in many areas, including in relation to, inter alia, agriculture and food security; biodiversity and ecosystems; water resources; human health; human settlements and migration patterns; and energy, transport and industry.

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. Furthermore, they face social, economic and political barriers that limit their coping capacity.

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. Secondly, when coupled with unequal access to resources and to decision-making processes, limited mobility places women in rural areas in a position where they are disproportionately affected by climate change. It is thus important to identify gender-sensitive strategies to respond to the environmental and humanitarian crises caused by climate change.¹

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.¹

An analysis of how women are affected by these issues; and how they respond, is provided below together with references to relevant United Nations mandates and information sources.

THE NEED FOR GENDER SENSITIVE RESPONSES TO THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Women, agriculture and food security in the context of climate change

Climate change has serious ramifications in four dimensions of food security: food availability, food accessibility, food utilization and food systems stability. Women farmers currently account for 45-80 per cent of all food production in developing countries depending on the region. About two-thirds of the female labour force in developing countries, and more than 90 percent in many African countries,



Photo Credit: UNICEF/LeMoyné

are engaged in agricultural work.⁴ In the context of climate change, traditional food sources become more unpredictable and scarce. 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 in times 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.⁵ 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.

UN publications:

- Rural Households and Sustainability: Integrating environmental and gender concerns into home economics curricula
<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/V5406e/V5406e00.htm>
- Environment and Natural Resource Management: IFAD's Growing Commitment
<http://www.ifad.org/pub/enviorn/EnvironENG.pdf>

Other resources on UN websites:

- Gender and Food Security – Environment
<http://www.fao.org/gender/en/env-e.htm>
- FAO FOCUS: Women and Food Security
<http://www.fao.org/FOCUS/E/Women/Sustin-e.htm>
- Climate Change, a Further Challenge for Gender Equity: How men and women farmers are differently affected
<http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2008/1000809/index.html>
- Climate Change: Focusing on how the vulnerable can cope – News Room: FAO pilots emerging strategies to alleviate weather-related consequences
<http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/news/2007/1000724/index.html>

Women, gender equality and biodiversity in the context of climate change

According to the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, climate change is likely to become the dominant driver for the loss of biodiversity by the end of the century. Biodiversity plays an important role in climate change adaptation and mitigation. For example, in contexts where deforestation is responsible for an average of 20% of human-induced carbon dioxide emissions, the conservation of natural habitats can reduce the amount of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere.⁶ Additionally, the conservation of mangroves and drought-resistant crops can reduce the impacts of climate change such as flooding and famine.

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.⁷ It is important to note that the declining biodiversity does not solely impact the material welfare and livelihoods of people; it also cripples access to security, resiliency, social relations, health, and freedom of choices and actions.⁸



Photo Credit: FAO / Pius Ekpei

The majority of the biodiversity decline has a disproportionate impact primarily on poor people in developing countries. To give a few examples, declining fish populations have major implications for artisanal fishers and communities that depend on fish. Moreover, in many parts of the world, deforestation has meant that wood - the most widely used solid fuel - is located further away from the places where people live. In poor communities in most developing countries, women and girls are responsible for collecting traditional fuels, a physically draining task that can take from 2 to 20 or more hours per week. As a result, women have less time to fulfil their domestic responsibilities, earn money, engage in politics or other public activities, learn to read or acquire other skills, or simply rest. Girls are sometimes kept home from school to help gather fuel, perpetuating the cycle of disempowerment. Moreover, when environmental degradation forces them to search farther afield for resources, women and girls become more vulnerable to injuries from carrying heavy loads long distances,⁹ and also face increased risk of sexual harassment and assault.

Biodiversity, Indigenous Women and Climate Change

Biodiversity also comes in the form of the wealth of knowledge on the environment that indigenous people and communities possess. Indigenous knowledge comprises: an understanding of wild ancestors of food, medicinal plants and domestic animals; symbiotic relations with ecosystems; an awareness of the structure of ecosystems and the functionality of specific species; as well as the geographic ranges of said species.¹⁰ In order to further preserve biodiversity and limit its degradation, indigenous people can and should play a

leading role in the global response to climate change. This should be particularly emphasised with regards to indigenous women who play a vital role as stewards of natural resources.¹¹ A greater inclusion of indigenous communities and indigenous women further validates the significance of their knowledge.

UN publications:

- Gender and Sustainable Development in Drylands: an Analysis of Field Experiences
<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/005/j0086e/j0086e00.pdf>
- Gender and Desertification: Expanding roles for women to restore drylands
http://www.ifad.org/pub/gender/desert/gender_desert.pdf
- Gender and Desertification: Making ends meet in drylands
http://www.ifad.org/pub/gender/desert/gender_desert_leaf.pdf
- Gender and Equity Issues in Liquid Biofuels Production. Minimizing the risks to maximize the opportunities
<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/ai503e/ai503e00.pdf>
- Rural Households and Sustainability: Integrating environmental and gender concerns into home economics curricula
<http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/V5406e/V5406e00.htm>
- Energy and Gender: In rural sustainable development, Rome, 2006
<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/ai021e/ai021e00.pdf>
- 2004. Gender Perspectives on the Conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Desertification. Rome, FAO
http://www.fao.org/sd/dim_pe1/pe1_041002_en.htm
- Environment and Natural Resource Management: IFAD's Growing Commitment
<http://www.ifad.org/pub/enviorn/EnvironENG.pdf>
- Adivasi Women: Engaging with Climate Change (April 2009)
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/Side_events_UNPFII08_all_revised.doc

Other resources on UN websites:

- Gender and Dryland Management: Gender roles in Transformation
<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/005/y4788E/y4788E00.pdf>
- Gender Perspectives on the Conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Desertification
http://www.fao.org/sd/dim_pe1/docs/pe1_041002d1_en.doc
- Insights into Gender and the Environment: Gender and Sustainable Land Management
http://www.unep.org/gender_env/Information_Material/SustainableLand.asp
- Sustainable Energy Services: The Gender Dimension
<http://www.undp.org/women/mainstream/SustainableEnergyServices.pdf>
- Biodiversity for Development: The Gender Dimension
<http://www.undp.org/women/mainstream/BiodiversityForDevelopment.pdf>
- People-Centred Climate Change Adaptation: Integrating Gender Issues
<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/010/a1395e/a1395e00.pdf>
- Inter-agency Support Group on Indigenous Peoples: Issues Paper on Indigenous Peoples and Climate Change English, Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Seventh session 21 April - 2 May 2008, New York, E/C.19/2008/CRP.2 7
<http://www.cbd.int/doc/meetings/tk/emccilc-01/other/emccilc-01-ipcc-en.pdf>
- Indigenous Women, Territoriality and Biodiversity in the Latin American Context (SPANISH)
www.iucn.org/dbtw-wpd/edocs/2007-009.pdf

Women, gender equality and water resources in the context of climate change

Climate change has significant impacts on fresh water sources, affecting the availability of water used for domestic and productive tasks. The consequences of the increased frequency in floods and droughts are far reaching, particularly for vulnerable groups, including women who are responsible for water management at the household level.¹²

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ The resulting health problems include: lesions, the hardening of skin, dark spots on hands and feet, swollen limbs and the loss of feeling.¹⁵ Arsenic exposure also manifests itself in the form of skin lesions that usually



Photo Credit: UNICEF / Pirozzi

have negative social repercussions for arsenic-poisoning (arsenicosis) victims—the situation is particularly worse for women who can be shunned, excluded, and stigmatised, based on physical appearance—this also impacts the ability of single women to get married, and in many cases unmarried women are more vulnerable to poverty and social exclusion.¹⁶

Given 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 publications:

- Gender and Water – Securing Water for Improved Rural Livelihoods: The multiple-uses system approach
http://www.ifad.org/gender/thematic/water/gender_water.pdf
- 2008. Climate change, water and food security. High Level Conference on World Food Security - Background Paper HLC/08/BAK/2. FAO.
<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/meeting/013/ai783e.pdf>

Other resources on UN websites:

- Towards Sustainable Food Security: Women and Water Resources
<http://www.fao.org/sd/fsdirect/fbdirect/FSP003.htm>
- Women and Water
http://www.unifem.org/attachments/stories/at_a_glance_water_rights.pdf
- Gender, Water and Sanitation
<http://www.unwater.org/downloads/unwpolbrief230606.pdf>

Women, gender equality and health in the context of climate change

For In terms of health, some potential climate change scenarios include: increased morbidity and mortality due to heat waves, floods, storms, fires and droughts. What's more, the risk of contracting serious illnesses is aggravated by environmental hazards caused by climate change. In addition to the reference provided above of climate impacting women's health through water scarcity and water contamination, an abundance of evidence links the evolution and distribution of infectious diseases to climate and weather. This entails a greater incidence of infectious diseases such as cholera, malaria, and dengue fever, due to the extension of risk seasons and wider geographic distribution of disease vectors.¹⁷

Whilst climate defines the geographical distribution of infectious diseases, weather influences the timing and severity of epidemics. Diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, for example, are particularly sensitive to variations in climate. Warmth accelerates the biting rate of mosquitoes and speeds up the maturation process of the parasites they carry. Sub-Saharan Africa is already home to the most efficient mosquito species and to the most severe forms of malaria. Rising temperatures are likely to accelerate the lifecycle of the malaria parasite and to spread malaria to new areas.¹⁸

Furthermore, floods—increasing consistently with climate change—may also increase the prevalence of water-related diseases, especially water and vector-borne diseases, which affect millions of poor people each year. In addition, an increase in prevalence of diseases will likely aggravate women's care-giving of family and community members who are ill. These diseases include malaria, onchocerciasis, schistosomiasis and diarrhoea.

UN publications:

- Women, Health and the Environment
Our Planet (Volume 15, No 12)
http://www.unep.org/ourplanet/imgversn/152/images/Our_Planet_15.2.pdf

Other resources on UN websites:

- Climate Change and Health: Preparing for unprecedented challenges
Dr Margaret Chan, Director-General of the World Health Organization
http://www.who.int/dg/speeches/2007/20071211_maryland/en/index.html?language
- EUR/5067874/15, Gender Inequities in Environmental Health
25th Session of the European Environment and Health Committee, 01 March 2008
http://www.euro.who.int/Document/EEHC/25th_EEHC_Milan_edoc15.pdf

Women, gender equality and changes in human settlements and migration patterns due to environmental degradation

Climate change adds a new complexity to the areas of human mobility and settlement by exacerbating environmental degradation. The gradual process of environmental deterioration is likely to increase the flows of both internal and cross-border human migration over the next decades.¹⁹ Increased human migration entails that a greater number of people are being displaced due to severe coastal weather events, the erosion of shorelines, coastal flooding, droughts and agricultural disruption. For example, Cyclone Nargis that



Photo Credit: UN Photo / Logan Abassi

struck the Irrawaddy Delta region in Myanmar in May 2008 severely affected 2.4 million people and led to the displacement of 800,000 people.²⁰ Similarly, desertification distressing the dryland regions of Mexico leads 600,000 to 700,000 people to migrate from these areas annually.²¹ The migratory consequences of environmental factors result in higher death rates for women in least developed countries, as a direct link to their socio-economic status, to behavioural restrictions and poor access to information.

While migration is a survival response to climate change, frequent human resettlement further exacerbates the loss of biodiversity and ecosystems.²² This is the case given that migration entails vast changes in land-use, the physical modification of rivers or water withdrawal from rivers, the loss of coral reefs, and damage to sea flows, among other things.²³

UN publications:

- Migration, Climate Change and the Environment (Policy Brief)
http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/policy_and_research/policy_documents/policy_brief.pdf
- Climate Change, Migration and Human Rights, Address by Ms. Kyung-wha Kang Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Office of the United Nations
Conference on Climate Change and Migration: Addressing Vulnerabilities and Harnessing Opportunities, 19 February 2008, Geneva
<http://www.unhcr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/BA5B630BFFAD7FC1C12573F600386398?opendocument>

Other resources on UN websites:

- Climate Change and Environmentally Induced Migration
<http://www.unep.org/conflictsanddisasters/Policy/DisasterRiskReduction/ClimateChangeAndMigration/tabid/282/language/en-US/Default.aspx>
- IOM webpage on Migration, Climate Change and Environmental Degradation
<http://www.iom.int/envmig>
- Key Messages and Related Research on Population Dynamics And Climate Change
<http://www.unfpa.org/pds/climate/messages.html>

Implications of climate change for women's human rights

Studies show that global warming and extreme weather conditions may have calamitous human rights consequences for millions of people. Global warming is one of the leading causes and greatest contributors to world hunger, malnutrition, exposure to disease, and declining access to water. Moreover it poses limitations to adequate housing, spurring the loss of livelihoods as a result of permanent displacement. Climate change affects the economic and social rights of countless individuals; this includes their rights to food, health and shelter.²⁴ As climate change will inevitably continue to affect humanity, a key UN priority is safeguarding the human rights of people whose lives are most adversely affected.²⁵

UN Resolutions and Declarations:

- Human Rights and Climate Change Resolution 7/23, March 2008
http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/climatechange/docs/Resolution_7_23.pdf

Other resources on UN websites:

- Women's poverty, empowerment must be addressed to meet development goals- press release on the general discussion of the Commission on Status of Women, 46th Session.
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/wom1322.doc.htm>
- Redressing 'power equation' between women and men, eradicating women's poverty- press release on the general discussion of the Commission on the Status of Women, 46th session.
<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2002/wom1323.doc.htm>
- Climate Change, Migration and Human Rights: Address by Ms. Kyung-wha Kang, Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights Office of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change and Migration: Addressing Vulnerabilities and Harnessing Opportunities, 19 February 2008, Geneva
<http://www.unhchr.ch/hurricane/hurricane.nsf/view01/BA5B630BFFAD7FC1C12573F600386398?opendocument>
- Climate Change and Human Rights
<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/Climate.aspx>
- Human Rights and Environment Issues in Multilateral Treaties Adopted between 1991 and 2001 - Background Paper No. 1, Joint UNEP-OHCHR Expert Seminar on Human Rights and the Environment, 14-16 January 2002, Geneva
<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/environment/envIRON/bp1.htm>

GENDER-SENSITIVE RESPONSES TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Incorporating gender perspectives and involving women as agents of change in responses

Four areas have been identified as critical building blocks in response to climate change: mitigation, adaptation, technology transfer and financing. The first two blocks are linked to manifestations of climate change; and the latter two are linked to the means for achieving development goals.²⁶ Mitigation involves a process of curbing greenhouse gas emissions from human activities, for example emissions from fossil fuels as well as deforestation, with a view to stabilizing greenhouse gas concentration at a safe level. Adaptation involves a range of activities to reduce vulnerability and build resilience in key sectors, such as water, agriculture and human settlements. New and improved technologies and financing initiatives at all levels also need to receive attention as part of collective efforts to address climate change.¹

Mitigation and adaptation efforts should systematically and effectively address gender-specific impacts of climate change in the areas of, *inter alia*, food security, agriculture and fisheries; biodiversity; water; health; human rights; and peace and security.

Financing mechanisms must be flexible enough to reflect women's priorities and needs. The active participation of women in the development of funding criteria and allocation of resources for climate change initiatives is critical, particularly at local levels. Gender analysis of all budget lines and financial instruments for climate change is needed to ensure gender-sensitive investments in programmes for adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and capacity building.¹

Technological developments related to climate change should take into account women's specific priorities, needs and roles, and make full use of their knowledge and expertise, including indigenous knowledge and traditional practices. Women's involvement in the development of new technologies can ensure that they are user-friendly, affordable, effective and sustainable. Gender inequalities in access to resources, including credit, extension services, information and technology, must be taken into account in developing activities designed to curb climate change. Women should also have equal access to training, credit and skills-development programmes to ensure their full participation in climate change initiatives.¹

Governments should thus be encouraged to incorporate gender perspectives into their national policies, action plans and other measures on sustainable development and climate change, through carrying out systematic gender analysis; collecting and utilizing sex-disaggregated data; establishing gender-sensitive benchmarks and indicators; and developing practical tools to support increased attention to gender perspectives.

The consultation and participation of women in climate change initiatives must be ensured, and the role of women's groups and networks strengthened. Currently, women are underrepresented in the decision-making process on environmental governance. They should be equally represented in decision-making structures to allow them to contribute their unique and valuable perspectives and expertise on climate change.¹ Women can make substantive contributions through their knowledge and experience on issues related to the management of natural resources. For example, women in leadership positions— at national, local and community levels—have made a visible difference in natural disaster responses, both in emergency rescue and evacuation efforts and in post-disaster reconstruction, as well as in the management of essential natural resources, such as fresh water.

Women, gender equality and energy

Energy is a particularly critical area and renewable energy is often cited as a key climate change mitigation technology. Many people question the role of women in energy issues, where energy is primarily thought of in terms of: electricity to operate appliances and equipment, gasoline and diesel fuels for motors and vehicles, and the delivery of oil for natural gas. Dealing with these different mediums (electricity and fuel) is often considered as men's work, where women are not expected to be involved with power generation and fuel distribution.²⁷ As a result of these considerations, women and men face differences in training and social expectations, where women are not usually included in discussions about energy plans and policies. This exclusion also means that women do not participate in, nor contribute to the elaboration of key strategies to mitigate climate change. However, in many developing countries, especially in the poorest areas, most energy currently comes from traditional biomass fuels such as wood, charcoal and agricultural wastes – and collecting and managing these fuels is strictly the business of women. It follows that the lack of recognition of the role of women in the energy sector, leads to 'gender-blind' (this is to say that gender is not taken into consideration) energy policies that fail to address some of the most pressing factors affecting the capacity of developing countries to adapt and mitigate climate change.

Linkages between energy supplies, gender roles and climate change are strongest in countries with low availability of basic electricity and modern fuels, as well as high dependence on biomass fuels for cooking, heating and lighting – and close to two billion people in the developing world use traditional biomass fuels as their primary source of energy.²⁸ In these countries, cultural traditions make women responsible for gathering fuel and providing food, even when this involves long hours performing heavy physical labour or travelling longer distances. With the onslaught of aggravated environmental changes, women are likely to continue spending long (perhaps even longer) hours fetching firewood, drawing water, working the land, and grinding cereal crops.

Given these numerous responsibilities and tasks, women in developing countries should be actively engaged in national energy decision-making. Women should be given greater involvement so that energy supplies can be managed more effectively and productively in the face of climate change, but also so that the dependence on biomass fuels can be quelled, raising communities out of extreme poverty.²⁹

UN Publications:

- Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change
http://content.undp.org/go/cms-service/download/asset/?asset_id=1854911
- Training Manual on Gender and Climate Change
[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/ASAZ-7SNCA9/\\$file/UNDP_Mar2009.pdf?openement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/ASAZ-7SNCA9/$file/UNDP_Mar2009.pdf?openement)
- Energy and Gender for Sustainable Development
<http://www.energyandenvironment.undp.org/undp/index.cfm?module=Library&page=Document&DocumentID=5108>

Other resources on UN websites:

- UNDP Gender and Energy site
<http://www.undp.org/energy/engmdgtop3gen.htm>

Women, gender equality and technology in adaptation responses to climate change

The word “technology” is typically known to mean simply a tool or machine. However, the term has now evolved to a broader concept that also includes knowledge, processes, activities, and socio-cultural context. As such, technology reflects the foundation of everyday life and touches upon most aspects of both women and men's lives. Moreover, most methods of adaptation to climate change involve some form of technology: this can include “soft” technologies based on insurance schemes, crop rotation patterns or traditional knowledge; it may also include “hard” technologies such as irrigation systems, drought resistant seeds or sea defences.³⁰

Technology is never gender-neutral and when coupled with the negative effects of the changing climate, it is even less gender-sensitive. In many developing countries, the access of girls and women to information and communication technology is constrained by: social and cultural bias, inadequate technological infrastructure in rural areas, women's lower education levels (especially in the fields of science and technology) and the fear of or lack of interest in technology, and women's lack of disposable income to purchase technology services.³¹

Since the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) positioned clean technologies at the centre of global responses to climate change, technology has become increasingly relevant in adapting to and mitigating climate change.³² At the same time, a number of UN mechanisms and frameworks have started to address climate change and technology. Furthermore, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) which emerged from the Kyoto Protocol enables industrialised countries to invest in projects that reduce emissions in developing countries as an alternative to more expensive emission reductions in their own countries. The problem however, is that to date, gender equality is given minimal attention and the degree of difference in the impact of climate change on women and men has been overlooked.³³ It is important to point out that equal inclusion of women and men in all aspects of climate change projects, including technology, pays off; this is especially true in the case of technologies aimed at tasks most frequently performed by women.³⁴

In order to be effective, adaptation and mitigation technologies need to reach those who are most in need –the poor and vulnerable. This means that targeted efforts must ensure firstly that it is understood that the situation of women may differ from that of men, secondly that technologies are designed in such a way as to be relevant to their circumstances and thirdly to ensure that they are given full access to knowledge, information and technologies related to adaptation.

UN Publications:

- Resource Guide on Gender and Climate Change
http://content.undp.org/go/cms-service/download/asset/?asset_id=1854911
- Training Manual on Gender and Climate Change
[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/ASAZ-7SNCA9/\\$file/UNDP_Mar2009.pdf?openement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/ASAZ-7SNCA9/$file/UNDP_Mar2009.pdf?openement)

Women, gender equality and financing of mitigation, adaptation and technology in relation to climate change

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.

Dealing successfully with the challenge of risk management, disaster preparedness and climate change-induced-weather challenges require resources beyond those that are available to meet the day-to-day needs of individuals and households. Empowering and investing in women are key to combating the effects of desertification and paving the way for poverty alleviation in the world's least developed countries.³⁶ However, under the current climate change finance regime, women do not have sufficient access to funds aimed at covering weather-related losses, nor do they have funds to service adaptation and mitigation technologies.

UN Publications:

- UNDP Paper on gender and climate change finance
(link to be provided soon)

Women, gender equality and emergency measures during natural disasters

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.

The vulnerability of women to disasters is increased for a number of reasons. Post-disaster, women are usually at higher risk of being placed in unsafe, overcrowded shelters, due to lack of assets, such as savings, property or land. In the context of cyclones, floods, and other disasters that require mobility, cultural constraints on women's movements may hinder their timely escape, access to shelter or access to health care. Exacerbating this effect, women often avoid using shelters out of fear of domestic and sexual violence, and become even less mobile as primary family care-givers.³⁸ Poor women and those in countries of higher gender inequality appear to be at the highest risk: a direct correlation has been observed between women's status in society and their likelihood of receiving adequate health care in times of disaster and environmental stress.³⁹

The UN has identified environmental degradation as a key threat to human security. All post-conflict countries face serious environmental issues that could undermine the peace building processes, if left unaddressed, and specifically affect women who are faced by a combination of hardships.⁴⁰

It is thus important to identify gender-sensitive strategies for responding to human security needs and environmental and humanitarian crises caused by climate change. These efforts should focus on: reducing women's vulnerability, in tandem with men's susceptibilities; promoting gender sensitive emergency responses; and enlisting women as key environmental actors in natural disaster management decision-making processes, alongside men, tapping on women's skills, resourcefulness and leadership in mitigation and adaptation efforts.⁴¹

UN publications:

- Gender Perspectives: Integrating Disaster Risk Reduction into Climate Change Adaptation – Good Practices and Lessons Learned
http://www.unisdr.org/eng/about_isdr/isdr-publications/17-Gender_Perspectives_Integrating_DRR_CC/Gender_Perspectives_Integrating_DRR_CC_Good%20Practices.pdf

Other resources on UN websites:

- Gender and Post-crisis Reconstruction: A Practitioner's Handbook (Draft), March 2007
http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/5500_35498_Gender%20Update%202.pdf
- Expert Group Meeting On Gender-Friendly Sustainable Cities in Asia and the Pacific: Rebuilding Communities Affected by Disaster and Conflict
25-26 June 2007, Fukuoka, Japan
http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/5371_97974_EGMProceedings2.pdf
- Insights into Gender and the Environment: Real Men Unite!
http://www.unep.org/gender_env/Information_Material/RealMenUnite.asp
- Insights into Gender and the Environment: Gender and the post-conflict environment
http://www.unep.org/gender_env/Information_Material/Conflict.asp
- Expert Group Meeting On Gender-Friendly Sustainable Cities in Asia and the Pacific: Rebuilding Communities Affected by Disaster and Conflict
25-26 June 2007, Fukuoka, Japan
http://www.unhabitat.org/downloads/docs/5371_97974_EGMProceedings2.pdf

This fact sheet is available for download at http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/

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DONATE

JANUARY 26, 2024

How climate change impacts refugees and displaced communities

CLIMATE AND NATURAL DISASTERS

ROHINGYA REFUGEE CRISIS

SAHEL CRISIS

REFUGEE CAMPS

Isabella's home was destroyed when [Cyclone Idai](#) hit her hometown in Mozambique. She still has vivid memories of that day.

"We suffered a lot. It caught us by surprise, we were eating and then the wind came. Some of the children were swept away by water. The trees were coming down, the houses were being destroyed," she explains while her eyes are fixed on the horizon.

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Isabella was able to escape the storm and found safe haven with her family in Savane settlement with 3,000 others who were also internally displaced. Two years later, she still dreams of returning home but is still too afraid to go back.

Like Isabella, nearly 32 million people were internally displaced by extreme weather events in 2022. In 2023, global temperatures reached new record highs and the year was marked by dozens of fires, floods and intense storms across the world. Climate change is the defining crisis of our time and its impacts are disproportionately experienced by people in vulnerable situations. But how does climate change impact refugees and displaced people?



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Here's What You Need to Know:

[1. What's the relation between climate change, conflict and displacements?](#)

[2. How does climate change impact refugees and displaced people?](#)

[3. How many people are displaced as a result of climate change?](#)

[4. Should we use the term "climate refugees"?](#)

[5. How is UNHCR addressing climate change and disaster displacement?](#)

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Climate change increases the risks of extreme weather events – like storms, floods, wildfires, heatwaves and droughts – making them more unpredictable, frequent and intense. At the same time, rising sea levels, droughts and drastic changes in rainfall patterns as a result of warmer temperatures can destroy crops and kill livestock, threatening livelihoods and exacerbating food insecurity - all of which can lead to massive displacement.

From Nicaragua to [South Sudan](#), vulnerable communities around the world are already experiencing shortages in food, potable water, land and natural resources due to climate change. Competition over depleted natural resources can spark conflict between communities or compound pre-existing vulnerabilities. Climate change does not itself lead to conflict, but it can magnify the impact of other factors that can spark conflict.



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USA for
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The UN Refugee Agency



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effects of climate change and natural disasters - which compromises their security and places them at risk of secondary displacement. In Bangladesh, for example, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, is helping [Rohingya refugees](#) to mitigate the effect of monsoon storms, flooding and landslides.

Climate change and natural disasters can also be a source of potential conflict between refugees and their host communities if there is competition over natural resources, food, water and land rights. In the [Sahel region](#) of Western Africa, where one of the world's fastest growing displacement crisis is taking place, temperatures are rising [1.5 times](#) faster than the global average and changing weather patterns. The rising temperatures are jeopardizing agricultural activities in places where the majority of the population lives off the land, generating tensions that may lead to new displacement.

UNHCR has identified 22 countries where the effects of climate change will be most severe between now and 2030. These countries include regions heavily impacted by both conflict and climate change, including countries in the Eastern Horn of Africa, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Ecuador, Honduras and more. Collectively, these countries host 52 percent of all internally displaced people, 24 percent of all stateless people and 28 percent of all refugees.

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How many people are displaced as a result of climate change?

Climate change can clearly be seen in the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events, such as abnormally heavy rainfall, prolonged drought, heatwaves and cyclones. Such hazards are already inducing some 23 million displacements of people from their homes each year, as an average based on data from the past decade. Most are internally displaced within their home countries, while some may also be impelled to cross borders in search of safety and protection.

According to the latest research, without dramatic action to mitigate climate change and significantly reduce the risk of climate disasters, by 2050, 200 million people will be in need of humanitarian assistance annually due to the effects of climate change.



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Should we use the term “climate refugees”?

The term “climate refugees” does not exist in international law. A [refugee](#) is “a person who crosses international borders due to a well-grounded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” ([1951 Refugee Convention](#)). The majority of people displaced by climate change typically move within the borders of their own countries.

UNHCR does not endorse the use of the term “climate refugee” and holds that “persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change” is more accurate.

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How is UNHCR addressing climate change and disaster displacement?

Since the 1990s, the UN Refugee Agency has worked to raise awareness about the consequences of climate change and on initiatives to ensure the protection of people displaced in the context of natural disasters.

UNHCR's work on climate change includes working with governments to develop legal approaches to ensure the protection of people displaced by climate change - including the protection of internally displaced people - as well as promoting policy coherence between relevant stakeholders, conducting research to fill gaps in operational and policy work and developing activities to support people during disaster displacements.

UNHCR is also working to reduce the environmental footprint of [refugee camps](#) through the use of renewable energy, reforestation activities as well as increasing access to clean fuels and technology for cooking.

This work is all part of UNHCR's strategic framework for climate action, as they hope reduce the impacts of climate change and increase protections for displaced people



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What can people do to help?

Join us in calling on all governments to take urgent and decisive action to combat climate change by [signing the USA for UNHCR climate petition today!](#)

USA for UNHCR is asking governments to urgently promote measures to combat climate change and thus prevent the increase in forced displacement and the growing vulnerabilities of those already forced to flee, in accordance with the requests of the UN Secretary General. The human cost of inaction is too great. We cannot afford to wait.



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NEWS

CLIMATE AND NATURAL DISASTERS

A year after Türkiye-Syria quakes, UNHCR warns of rising humanitarian needs

A year after the devastating earthquakes that struck Türkiye and Syria in February 2023, the plight of millions of displaced people and their hosts has deteriorated, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, warned today.

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SUDAN

DRC

ARMENIA

CLIMATE AND NATURAL DISASTERS

AFGHANISTAN

Six humanitarian crises that impacted refugees and displaced communities in 2023

Learn about six humanitarian crises that pushed displaced communities to the brink in 2023 and how UNHCR stepped in to provide lifesaving aid.

[LEARN MORE >](#)



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NEWS

CLIMATE AND NATURAL DISASTERS

Natural disasters, storms and droughts: The top climate emergencies for refugees in 2023

For refugees and displaced people, climate change is a crisis on top of a crisis. Learn about some of the top climate emergencies from 2023 and see the dangerous impacts they've had on the lives of displaced people.

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