



## Why Climate Justice is a Gender Justice issue – and what action is needed

Women and girls are bearing the burden of the climate crisis. Within communities, women already disadvantaged are bearing the brunt of worsening droughts, floods, fires, and storms. Climate change is exacerbating unequal relations between women and men that have existed for generations.

Women must be a central part of the response to the climate crisis. But they are under-represented at every level when it comes to responding. Governments need to take urgent action to support women as leaders and frontline responders. As host of the COP26 UN climate talks in November 2020 in Glasgow, the UK Government has an influential and critical role to play in accelerating global ambition to stop the climate crisis, and securing commitments that put women first.

### Key statistics

- Climate change is exacerbating food shortages and hunger: it has been estimated that 60% of chronically hungry people in the world are women and girls.<sup>1</sup>
- Of the estimated 26 million people who flee their homes every year as a result of climate change,<sup>2</sup> 20 million are women and girls.<sup>3</sup>
- Women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster.<sup>4</sup>
- A study covering 141 countries found that in countries where gender inequality is greater, women were more likely to die in natural disasters than men.<sup>5</sup>
- The average representation of women in national and global climate negotiating bodies in 2015 was below 30%.<sup>6</sup>

### The problem

Climate change increases the intensity and frequency of extreme weather and climate events such as tropical cyclones, floods, heatwaves and drought. When these climate events strike, women are particularly vulnerable. Research by UN Women and the World Bank indicates that women are more likely to live in poverty than men,<sup>7</sup> so are less likely to be able to escape the impact of major disasters and find it harder to recover from them. Those facing intersecting, multiple barriers to equality, for example due to discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or disability, are even more adversely affected.

In large parts of the world, including sub-Saharan Africa, women do most of the subsistence farming and are the primary providers of food, water, and fuel for their families. They are also the primary carers of children and elderly relatives. These roles mean that they are disproportionately impacted by drought, flooding, cyclones, and other climate-related events. Since they often do not have the economic resources to install irrigation systems, for example, women farmers are dependent on rain. If there is no rain and crops fail, families have less food, less money, and go hungry. Moreover, women tend to eat the least in order to save more food for their children.

With increased water scarcity linked to climate change, women are having to travel greater distances to collect water too. One knock-on effect is that children, predominantly girls, are often kept out of education to help with the increasingly onerous domestic tasks. Additional pressures in the home resulting from crop failures and food shortages can also heighten the risks of domestic violence and child marriage. The increase in child marriage across Southern Africa, for example, as a consequence of recent droughts and floods, is well-documented.<sup>8</sup> When a family's income from farming plummets, the parents can no longer pay school fees and opt to marry off their girls early so that there's one less mouth to feed.

*Growing crops is very hard. My whole body aches when I am working on my land.*

*Last year, I only harvested three 50kg bags of maize. From that harvest, I have nothing left. If we don't get enough rain, I will not expect to harvest anything this year and I will have to survive on handouts from other people.*

*Sometimes I go for a day or two without food so that my child can eat. The food we have is not enough and most of the time my stomach aches.*

*My crops failed twice this year. In my whole plot of maize, only one plant survived. It really pained me to see this as I don't know where to get more seeds.*

**18-year-old Rachel**, who lives alone with her 2-year-old daughter in the drought-stricken Zaka district of Zimbabwe. She is five months pregnant. Her husband is a migrant worker in South Africa.

If climate change makes it impossible to live and work in a certain area, people are forced to migrate. If men migrate alone, it leads to additional pressures for women left behind to provide for their children alone. If women (and their children) have to migrate too, they are exposed to risks such as sexual exploitation, rape, and human trafficking.<sup>9</sup>

There is a tendency for women's responses to climate and humanitarian crises to be seen as innate women's work, linked to their unpaid work as carers. At the same time, women's organisations and community groups led by women on the frontline of the response are frequently marginalised and under-funded. Women are under-represented at all levels of climate negotiations – from national to global. The average representation of women in national and global climate negotiating bodies in 2015 was below 30%.<sup>10</sup>

## The solutions

### **Participation**

Since women and girls are disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis, they must play an integral, leading part in designing and advocating for policies and action to address the crisis, and in policy implementation. Their participation and leadership will ensure that resulting policies both reduce climate-related risks, and at the same time reduce barriers to full equality, thereby enabling greater recovery and

resilience for affected populations. Nationally and globally, women's participation in climate negotiations and decision-making needs to increase, both through representation in government delegations and through women's rights organisations.

### **Gender-sensitive climate policies**

If climate and humanitarian action is not gender-sensitive and based on rigorous gender analysis, there is a high risk that policy responses will be inadequate techno-fixes that maintain or even strengthen existing gender inequalities and other forms of social exclusion.

### **Funding and resources**

Effective responses to the climate and humanitarian crises must be localised, with resources and decision-making power flowing directly to civil society organisations at the local level. Localisation involves sharing not just funds but also power, resources, and voice in climate and humanitarian advocacy, policy, and programming. Women-led and women's rights organisations have a central role to play in local crisis response. It is therefore critical that they receive the resources required to play this role.

## **CARE's recommendations to the UK Government**

### **Raise ambition and NDC action**

As host of the COP26 UN climate talks, the UK must use every diplomatic effort to encourage countries to close the gap between existing Paris Agreement pledges (nationally determined contributions – NDCs) and those needed to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5°C. UK leadership necessitates announcing a new high-ambition UK NDC for 2030 and a long-term economic strategy that puts the UK on track to net-zero.

### **Support communities on the frontline of the climate crisis**

The UK must show global leadership to ensure there is urgent and significant scale-up of financial support to poor and vulnerable countries and communities on the frontline of the climate crisis. It must maintain its commitment to allocating 50% of UK climate finance to adaptation to the climate crisis and build support for other countries to commit to the same, and champion a new global adaptation finance goal. The UK must ensure that UK climate finance recognises women's importance in delivering climate adaptation and plans and is responsive to the needs and rights of women and girls. At least 85% of adaptation finance should support gender equality outcomes.

### **Make sure women's, women's rights and feminist organisations can access finance and resources**

– so that they can lead on the design and delivery of climate adaptation and mitigation plans and policies and in a way that addresses gender inequalities.

### **Push for increased participation and representation of women**

– in all global climate negotiations and negotiating bodies and include women's groups and young people, including girls, in the design of national climate plans. Ensure that COP26 is inclusive and transparent, and provides platforms for women most affected by climate change to meaningfully participate.

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*The government needs to listen to those who are most affected by climate change and take advantage of our knowledge.*

**Kien Quang Thi**, agricultural advisor, Vietnam

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> World Food Programme *Gender Policy and Strategy*, quoted by UN Women 'Facts and Figures'  
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/commission-on-the-status-of-women-2012/facts-and-figures>
- <sup>2</sup> B. Kamal 'Climate migrants might reach One Billion by 2050' on ReliefWeb, 21 August 2017  
<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/climate-migrants-might-reach-one-billion-2050>
- <sup>3</sup> M. Halton 'Climate change impacts women more than men' on BBC, 15 July 2019  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-43294221>
- <sup>4</sup> UNDP (2013) *Gender and disaster risk reduction*  
<https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/Gender%20and%20Environment/PB3-AP-Gender-and-disaster-risk-reduction.pdf>
- <sup>5</sup> E. Neumayer and T. Plumperw (2007) 'The gendered nature of natural disasters: The impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981–2002' *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97(3), 2007, pp. 551–566  
[http://www.lse.ac.uk/website-archive/GeographyAndEnvironment/neumayer/pdf/Article%20in%20Annals%20\(natural%20disasters\).pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/website-archive/GeographyAndEnvironment/neumayer/pdf/Article%20in%20Annals%20(natural%20disasters).pdf)
- <sup>6</sup> Figure quoted in European Parliament (2015) *The gender dimension of climate justice*  
[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/536478/IPOL\\_IDA\(2015\)536478\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2015/536478/IPOL_IDA(2015)536478_EN.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> UN Women 'UN Women and the World Bank unveil new data analysis on women and poverty', 9 November 2017  
<https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/11/news-un-women-and-the-world-bank-unveil-new-data-analysis-on-women-and-poverty>
- <sup>8</sup> European Journalism Centre (2017) *Brides of the sun: An investigation into how climate change is creating a generation of child brides*  
<https://www.bridesofthesun.com/>
- <sup>9</sup> Nellemann, C., Verma, R., and Hislop, L. (eds). (2011) *Women at the frontline of climate change: Gender risks and hopes. A Rapid Response Assessment*. United Nations Environment Programme, GRID-Arendal  
<https://www.grida.no/publications/198>
- <sup>10</sup> See reference 6 above