



General Assembly

Distr.: General
25 June 2020

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-fourth session

15 June–3 July 2020

Agenda items 2 and 3

Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General

Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by Les femmes, la force du changement, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is
circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[01 June 2020]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.

GE.20-08381(E)



* 2 0 0 8 3 8 1 *

Please recycle A small graphic of a recycling symbol, consisting of three chasing arrows forming a triangle.



How COVID-19 crisis impacts women in areas affected by climate change

To say that the world is having a difficult time dealing with the current COVID-19 pandemic is a huge understatement. But when coupled with systemic issues present in society, it becomes rather obvious that not all of us are experiencing this global crisis equally.

More specifically, women are still being disproportionately affected by this cruel pandemic that has already claimed the lives of almost 300,000 people worldwide and has afflicted over 4 million more. Women from developing countries, women living on or below the poverty line, and women who work on the frontlines are just some of the groups of women who are most burdened by the pandemic.

There's also another group of women who are just as vulnerable, and yet hardly get any attention. That is, women who live in areas experiencing climate change. But how exactly does climate change affect women's experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic? In this statement, we'll show you exactly how.

COVID-19 and climate change

With over 200 affected countries, COVID-19 has certainly evolved into a global pandemic that still has no end in sight. But do you know what else the world has been having trouble with in recent times? Climate change.

The threat of climate change may have been momentarily forgotten due to the pandemic, but its effects are still continuously felt worldwide. The biggest effect is global warming, caused by carbon emissions from fossil fuels like natural gas and crude oil. Global warming is credited as the culprit for the melting ice caps in the Arctic as well as the worsening wildfires in the continental United States of America (US).

What many people don't realize, however, is that just like COVID-19, climate change isn't affecting everyone equally either. United Nations (UN) Special Envoy for Climate Change, Mary Robinson, says, "The human cost of global warming has a name: climate injustice." The term refers to the unequal distribution of benefits and damages experienced due to extreme weather changes. And sadly, like with most things in society, it's mostly women who are on the receiving end of the damages associated with climate change.

Why women are more affected by climate change

It may seem hard to believe, but the truth is that women have always been more affected by climate change than men.

One of the reasons for this is that climate change tends to disproportionately affect the poor, and women currently make up a big percentage of the world's poor population. This means that more women are susceptible to natural disasters caused by climate change.

For instance, while the rain may bring temporary relief to the rich, in areas experiencing climate change, too much rain can cause flooding, which is a major hazard to poorer communities. In other words, we can say that climate change affects more women because the majority of poor people are women.

The second reason has to do with how women are generally treated worldwide. Despite all the technological and societal advancements we've undergone throughout the centuries, it's undeniable that women, in general, are still not enjoying the same level of privilege as men. In fact, in many countries around the world, women are still viewed as second-class citizens.

India, for instance, has been dubbed as "the most dangerous country for women" due to its staggering number of gender-based crimes. Experts say that a woman gets raped or molested in India every 16 minutes. Indian parents also view female children as a burden because of the dowry system. If they were "unlucky" enough to bore a female child, parents would rather make her cook for the family or work in the field instead of going to school. With all the risks

caused by climate change, such as the increasing number of heatstroke cases in the last decade, this means that female children are at a great disadvantage when it comes to their male peers.

Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, women still don't hold the same rights as men, despite the law saying otherwise. A large number of women in Afghanistan are uneducated, unemployed, malnourished. Only 17% of Afghan women own their own homes while only 10% are landowners. The majority aren't educated enough to understand their own legal rights. In addition to this, 80% of women and 72% of men believe that husbands are allowed to hit their own wives. We could dedicate an entire article to all the injustices experienced by Afghan women and it still won't be enough. These injustices are further exacerbated by the decades-long war and the climate change that they're currently experiencing.

How women are affected negatively in climate change countries

The current pandemic has revealed not only holes in already failing healthcare systems, but it has also further displayed just how much women are more negatively affected by issues like climate change.

A 72-page report published by Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security revealed some of the following results with regards to women and climate change:

- Rising sea levels caused by global warming can lead to floods, which destroy crops and hinder women's responsibility to gather food for their families.
- Rising sea levels in countries like Benin can also increase the risk of endemic tropical diseases, which disproportionately affects pregnant and elderly women.
- In a study conducted in Bangladesh, 61% of women lost their homes due to flooding, while 89% got sick because they had no adequate clothing to replace their wet clothes. 35% of women were also abused or harassed by male acquaintances or even relatives after instances of floods, due to higher tension and stress levels.
- Deforestation and ocean acidification lessen the amount of food that women can gather for their families, making their burden much heavier than it already is.
- Deforestation also affects women, typically from local indigenous populations, who are uneducated and poor, thus unable to purchase legal land rights.

To make it worse, the list of places that are most affected by climate change includes some of the worst countries for women to live, such as the Middle East, Central Asia, and North Africa, among many other specific countries.

As mentioned above, many of these places still view women as secondary to men. In these countries, women are typically responsible for gathering or collecting food for the family, finding water sources, and getting fuel for cooking. Because of climate change, however, women are more susceptible to increased hazards caused by extreme weather conditions. And now, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they've become even more vulnerable, with their risk of catching the virus far greater than their male counterparts.

India is a good example of how the COVID-19 pandemic is making things worse for women in these areas. Currently, the country is employing around 900,000 female health workers to assist in COVID-19 operations. These women are getting paid only 1000 INR or roughly 13 USD per month. This is despite the fact that they're performing such a crucial role in India's fight against the global pandemic.

Reassessing policies for women in society

Sadly, although women bear the greater negative impacts of climate change, they rarely have a say when it comes to decision-making or policy-making in their countries. After all, women are still not equally represented in government, as men still heavily dominate this field.

In addition to this, women also tend to have more limited resources than men, be it financial or material resources. This, in addition to the pandemic we're currently facing, further worsen situations for women in areas affected by climate change.

That said, women are not mere victims of climate change or even COVID-19. Despite their vulnerability, women are highly resilient and can easily adapt to any situation. In countries where the effects of climate change are more noticeable, it's easy to see that more women are stepping up to take charge of their dependents despite the limited resources available to them.

So, what can we do in order to help mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic on women living in areas affected by climate change? First of all, we can raise awareness regarding the long history of systematic oppression currently experienced by women in society. Don't be scared to reveal the truth about underpaid COVID-19 frontliners. Don't hesitate to speak about starving women and children in poorer countries due to the lack of available resources during this pandemic. By shining a light on all the injustices experienced by women, we can open other people's eyes to the reality that women today are currently facing.

Second, we have to hold our governments accountable for everything they do while in their positions of power. Governments must make sure to implement new regulations that will accurately reflect the status of women in current times and will help improve all marginalized women's lives for the better, not just for those women living with the effects of climate change.
