Gender vulnerability in climate change

Extreme climate change events have been taking place on a rising trend affecting some 262 million people annually from 2000 to 2004 in 326 climate disasters which is considered more than double the level of the first half of the 1980s. Many local climate disasters go unreported or under-reported and many more do not figure at all, since they do not meet the basic conditions for a humanitarian disaster.

When climate disasters take place, they affect the whole community, but women often bear the brunt. When floods occur, they claim far more female victims since mobility is restricted and they do not know how to swim. During the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone and floods, the death rate was reportedly five times higher among women. Social scientists have pointed out that women face restriction on legal rights to land and property particularly in developing countries. Hence, in the absence of land rights, women do not have access to credit which is essentially needed for their recovery after the disaster. Research reports have observed gender bias in the impact of climate disasters and many of them remain unreported and under-reported.

The inability of poor women to cope with climate disasters is reflected in the immediate human impacts and in increasing poverty in developing countries. Droughts provide ample examples. Women and further reported that gender inequality and climate change are linked and the climate change slows down progress towards gender equality impeding efforts to achieve wider goals such as poverty reduction and sustainable development. Women face direct and indirect risks in climate change affecting their livelihood opportunities, time availability, well being and over all life expectancy. An increase in climate related disease outbreak will have quite different impact on women than on men. Out of 25 million living in malaria epidemic Africa, an estimated two hundred thousand women and their infants die as a result of malaria infection. People's vulnerability play a crucial role in forest preservation strategies and increasing carbon sinks through reforestation and afforestation. In Kenya, the Green Belt Movement Organization and the World Bank's Community Development Carbon Fund Project have signed an emissions reduction agreement to reforest two mountain areas.

As women are considered powerful agents of change, they can help or hinder strategies related to domestic energy use, deforestation, science and technology, population growth and economic development. Therefore, in any planning process meant for adaptation for climate change, women's participation is essential.