

Gender vulnerability in climate change

Extrême 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 1980's. 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

young girls have to walk a long distance to collect water. When rain fails, loss of production and food shortages take place undermining employment and rural wages. To cope with this situation, women adopt strategies such as reduced nutrition and sale of assets. Those who do not have assets have turned to immoral ways to sustain their living.

Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change IV Report has observed that 2002 drought in Malawi left 5 million people in starvation. Before the food aid arrived, women resorted to extreme survival measures such as theft and prostitution. Therefore, though climate change affects everyone worldwide, its impact on women will be more particularly among poor income groups in developing countries. IPCC 2001 has

credit, decision making bodies agricultural inputs, technology and extension and training services. Thus, any climate adaptation strategy should include actions to build up women's assets. Intervention should pay special attention to the need to enhance women's capacity to manage risks with a view to reducing their vulnerability and maintaining or increasing their opportunities for development. Ways to reduce climate related risks for women include improving their access to skills education and knowledge, strengthening their ability to prepare for and manage disasters, supporting their political ability to demand access to risk management instruments and helping households to gain greater access to credits, markets and social security.

Despite the many challenges they face, women are already playing an important role in developing strategies to cope with climate change. Women contribute more labour in building anti-flood embankments, soil and water conservation measures, and off-farm employment to fight against climate risks. Women



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.