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**INTERSECTION OF CLIMATE AND GENDER: A STUDY ON
DISCRIMINATORY CLIMATE CHANGE**

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INTRODUCTION

Adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals or “The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, are goals or challenges to secure a peace and prosperity for the current and future generations of the planet. The 17 inter-connected goals are an array of topics that range from no poverty and hunger to clean water and sanitation and responsible consumption and production. Covering almost all aspects of life, social, geographical and mental, these goals and subgoals under them make a thorough blueprint to make our planet sustainable and peaceful. Two of these goals are SDG 5 – Gender Equality and SDG 13 – Climate Action.

While we know, that most of the goals are interdependent, the link between gender and climate has been a shock to most if not merely a far-fetched theory. The effects of climate change and the actions taken to curb the effects of climate change have been discriminatory against women. It has been observed over the course of time how natural disasters, climate change and related phenomenon such as large-scale migration, drought and more have had an unproportional effect on women and their well-being. Such incidences increase the gender gap and further the divide of men and women and reduce their chances of taking up opportunities that can lead to empowerment.

With statistics already predicting that with the current rate of empowerment, even 80% fulfillment of the goal of gender equality is as far as 2050. With climate change and global warming already being an alerting phenomenon that cannot be compromised on, it is a sensible course of action to discuss how these two goals are inter-related and how our limited approach to one is causing harm to the progress we make with another goal. This intersectionality of climate and gender is thus one of the most important topics of contemporary times that is often

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unrecognized or ignored. Thus, it is with the goal of making sense of this atypical theory that the author presents this paper on “Intersection of Climate and Gender: A Study on Discriminatory Climate Change.”

IMPORTANCE AND PURPOSE

1 in every 4 households lacks access to safely managed drinking water within households. In light of droughts and reduction of ground water levels, the work of a woman increases in covering long-distances for water and carrying it back to their homes. This burden often falls on women of the house and they are left with weaker physique and no education as this becomes a highly time-consuming job. This is the case in Uganda as women have to walk 14 hours for water.²

In the context of extensive migration prompted by adversity, climatic phenomena, or natural disasters, the incidence of sexual assaults against women and gender-based violence is known to escalate. The imperative to prioritize caregiving responsibilities for dependents, encompassing the elderly and children, invariably constrains women's ability to venture beyond the domestic sphere and seize opportunities for empowerment. Traditional caregiving roles impose a significant hindrance, preventing women from prioritizing their own well-being even in calamitous situations. This limitation not only jeopardizes their health but elevates the risk of contracting diseases that can easily transmit to the families they tend to.

Moreover, exposure to toxins and harmful substances not only exacerbates the maternal and neonatal health of women but also amplifies the likelihood of menstrual health conditions such as PCOD and PCOS in young females, extending the impact across generations.

If these reasons fail to underscore the imperative of integrating gender into climate action, then the author contends that there are few matters of greater significance. To some degree, one may assert that climate change exhibits a certain degree of "sexism" in its differential impact on women. However, it is crucial to recognize that the discrimination propagated by climate change

² Kamei, Akito. 2022. *Who Walks for Water? Water Consumption and Labor Supply Response to Rainfall Scarcity in Uganda*.

extends beyond women, affecting all marginalized groups, with particular severity at the intersection of multiple marginalization. Individuals within these intersecting groups, such as impoverished women, disabled individuals, or disabled women, face the heightened risk of disproportionate adversity.

The irony lies in the fact that these marginalized groups are often an afterthought in the realm of climate diplomacy and action, despite being the ones most severely affected.

The pursuit of climate action and gender equality as distinct objectives appears increasingly arduous and protracted, with an estimated minimum timeframe of two decades for attainment. Yet, a shift towards a more integrated and comprehensive approach, wherein resources are harmoniously aligned, holds the promise of concurrently advancing both objectives—a strategy akin to addressing two challenges with a single deft stroke.

This paper endeavors to underscore the pressing necessity for a diversified and innovative solution characterized by its holistic and equitable nature. Such an approach aims not only to redress the adverse impact on those affected but also to yield overarching benefits. It envisions the role of a welfare state operating in a democratic and just manner. The confluence of gender inequality and climate action stands out as two of the most conspicuous and formidable challenges confronting contemporary society. The intrinsic connection between these challenges merits dedicated exploration, constituting a topic of study in its own right—a facet this paper seeks to illuminate, fostering heightened awareness.

INTERSECTIONALITY OF CLIMATE AND GENDER

Before we understand the intersection between climate and gender, it is essential to understand what intersectionality means. Intersectionality is defined as “the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized groups.”³ It is a conceptual framework designed for analysing how the diverse social and political identities of individuals lead to distinctive blends of both discrimination and privilege.

³ ‘Intersectionality’ *Merriam Webster Dictionary*.

Climate change poses a universal threat, yet its effects are not distributed evenly among all individuals. The consequences of climate change exacerbate and amplify existing structural inequalities, including those based on gender. The climate crisis, akin to nearly every other challenge in the realms of humanitarianism and development, disproportionately affects women.

Explicit and implicit social norms, have assigned distinct powers, roles, and responsibilities to both women and men across various facets of life. Particularly, girls and women, especially those residing in the Global South, shoulder an uneven burden in securing essential resources such as food, water, and energy. They also take on the responsibility of caring for the young and elderly, exposing them to heightened risks associated with adverse climate impacts. When extreme events like heatwaves, droughts, or severe storms occur, girls and women, often situated in disaster-prone areas, are disproportionately affected. They endure physical and mental health challenges, endure the added strain of traveling longer distances to gather scarce resources, and are compelled to stay behind to care for the vulnerable.

In the wake of disasters, women face a higher likelihood of not surviving and sustaining injuries, a consequence of enduring gender inequalities that have fostered discrepancies in information access, mobility, decision-making authority, and resource and training availability. Subsequently, women and girls encounter challenges in accessing relief and assistance post-disaster, amplifying threats to their livelihoods, well-being, and recovery. This establishes a destructive cycle of increased vulnerability to subsequent disasters. The impact of climate change and disasters on women's and girls' health is further pronounced, impeding their access to services and healthcare while elevating risks associated with maternal and child health. Studies indicate a rise in stillbirth rates due to extreme heat, and the expanding reach of vector-borne diseases like malaria, dengue fever, and Zika virus, linked to adverse maternal and neonatal outcomes, contributes to the perilous scenario.

Furthermore, girls and women have encountered barriers hindering their full and equitable engagement in the global climate action movement. They face specific gender-based violence and harassment due to their involvement in climate activism, remain underrepresented in international climate negotiations, and their proposed solutions receive inadequate resources.

It has become evident that environmentalism has consistently emerged as a women's issue. Thus, proving the intersectionality between the two goals. This intersectionality can be seen in 5 prominent ways.

- a. **Barriers to leaving areas prone to climate change and natural disaster-** A 2021 World Bank Report (Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration)⁴ found that climate change may compel a potential 216 million individuals to relocate within their respective countries by the year 2050. The process of deciding to migrate in response to climate-related risks is influenced by gender roles and responsibilities. Women frequently encounter heightened obstacles when contemplating leaving areas prone to disasters, primarily due to their caregiving commitments, insufficient financial resources, and restricted rights to land and property. Even when they succeed in relocating, girls and women are confronted with elevated risks of unemployment, early marriage, human trafficking, and gender-based violence.
- b. **Being prone to health risks disproportionately-** Climate change poses a risk to reproductive and maternal health. The rise in temperature, rainfall, and humidity establishes conducive environments for the spread of vector-borne diseases like malaria, dengue fever, and Zika virus, contributing to miscarriages, premature births, and anaemia among pregnant women. Additionally, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report from February 2022⁵ highlights that girls and women face a greater vulnerability to food insecurity compared to boys and men. They are also more susceptible to fatalities in extreme weather events and are prone to experiencing mental health impacts resulting from climate change.
- c. **Threat to female environment leaders-** A 2020 IUCN Report⁶ states that female environment defenders' female environmental defenders consistently face

⁴ Clement, V., Rigaud, K.K., de Sherbinin, A., Jones, B., Adamo, S., Schewe, J., Sadiq, N. and Shabahat, E. (2021). Groundswell Part 2.

⁵ IPCC (2022). *AR6 Climate Change 2021: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability* — IPCC.

⁶ Jamie (2020). *Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders: Facing gender-based violence in defense of land, natural resources and human rights*. [online] IUCN..

disproportionately elevated levels of gender-based violence due to their activism. These attacks encompass various forms, from verbal abuse and sex-based harassment to intimidation, exclusion, sexual abuse, and rape. The objective is to undermine their voice and leadership within these movements. This has been consistently occurring across generations where women have exhibited resilience and leadership in safeguarding their communities, land, livelihoods, and natural resources.

- d. **Exclusion of women from decision-making and climate diplomacy**⁷- Despite the undeniable importance of women's involvement in climate movements and their track record as environmental defenders, men currently occupy 67% of roles related to climate decision-making. Moreover, women's representation in both national and global climate negotiation bodies falls below the 30% mark. Ensuring women's leadership and complete engagement in the climate movement is crucial for crafting solutions and responses to the climate emergency that specifically address the distinct needs of women and safeguard their rights.
- e. **Insufficient funding for Female led groups**- The Generation Equality Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice⁸ discovered that a mere 3% of philanthropic environmental funding is directed towards supporting the environmental activism of girls and women. Furthermore, female-led organizations, typically smaller in scale, encounter challenges in accessing funding from climate finance providers, who predominantly invest in large-scale projects, beginning at \$10 million. Despite these obstacles, girls and women, due to their societal caregiving roles, possess profound understanding and extensive knowledge of their natural environment and resources. It is imperative to finance their vision and support their ideas for sustainability to ensure successful climate change adaptation and mitigation, irrespective of the monetary value of their projects.

⁷ Claiming women's space in leadership. (2021). *UN Women*. [online] 1 Mar.

⁸<https://forum.generationequality.org/sites/default/files/202110/Feminist%20Action%20for%20Climate%20Justice%20Action%20Coalition%20-%20Collective%20Commitments.pdf>

CHALLENGES IN INTEGRATING CLIMATE AND GENDER ACTION

The Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC's) as required by the Paris Agreement to combat climate change only vaguely addressed gender equality without any substantial comment, plan or policy. At this point, it was abundantly clear that it was a challenge for the countries to amalgamate gender action or even consideration of gender equality within the realms of climate change and climate policy. The absence of any concrete data or evidence to show that climate disproportionately affects men and women can partially be blamed for this oversight.

Furthermore, the restricted involvement of women's groups and other civil society organizations in climate change policy processes has resulted in non-gender-responsive climate action planning. To rectify this, incorporating women's organizations in planning and decision-making is crucial to guarantee gender responsiveness in climate action. This entails implementing targeted measures to address the specific needs and vulnerabilities of both women and men.

The absence of gender dimensions in the initial generation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) underscores the imperative to assist countries in translating their intentions for gender equality into tangible actions and policies. In response to these challenges, the UNDP's Climate Promise adopted a comprehensive approach, concentrating on strengthening gender-responsive climate action in three key areas: 1) effective governance, 2) inclusive planning, and 3) integrated policy frameworks. Additionally, the Climate Promise advocated for the utilization of in-depth gender analyses as a tool to comprehend the roles of women and men in priority NDC sectors, identify structural inequalities faced by women in climate action, and pinpoint opportunities to enhance women's involvement in climate solutions.

This strategy expanded upon existing initiatives to systematically integrate gender considerations within the five-year cycle of NDC revisions, resulting in a significant enhancement in the quality of NDCs from 2015 to 2020-2021. Now, 95 percent of NDCs include a reference to gender compared to 47 percent in 2015, and 52 percent of revised NDCs incorporate gender-responsive adaptation measures compared to just 11 percent in 2015.

Despite these achievements, the progress in gender equality remains susceptible to shifts in political, economic, and social contexts. To expedite the gender-responsive implementation of

NDCs and prevent regression in development gains, various barriers related to policy, governance, and finance must be addressed. This necessitates improved coordination mechanisms among ministries with a focus on building institutional capacities for gender-responsive climate action.

The forthcoming challenge lies in assisting governments in transforming systems and power structures that perpetuate gender inequalities while concurrently reinforcing efforts in climate mitigation and adaptation. Furthermore, while the rationale for directing climate finance towards gender-responsive climate action is evident, it requires broader recognition and understanding. Inequalities impose developmental costs on society as a whole, especially as people grapple with the impacts of climate change.

Without achieving gender equality, the prospect of effecting the necessary transformations to address climate change and ensure a sustainable and equitable future for all remains bleak.

COUNTRIES AND THEIR ACTIONS

Enhancing the capacity of women is imperative for their meaningful inclusion in shaping new climate policies and bridging the gender gap in climate decision-making. An illustrative case is Bhutan, which has strategically trained Gender Focal Points within various ministries and women's organizations. This training equips them to effectively coordinate and execute initiatives related to gender equality and climate change.

To address the prevalent barriers and inequalities faced by women in resource access, credit, technology, employment, and economic opportunities, innovative financing mechanisms can empower women to contribute significantly to climate action. For instance, Zimbabwe is in the process of establishing a renewable energy fund designed to generate specific entrepreneurship opportunities for women. In Uzbekistan, the implementation of a pilot green mortgage scheme facilitated rural households in five regions to access affordable, low-carbon energy technologies. Remarkably, due to the scheme's gender-responsive criteria and targeting, 67 percent of mortgages were acquired by households led by women. Enhancing the gender-responsiveness of climate finance presents a dual advantage by augmenting the effectiveness, efficiency, and

sustainability of investments while concurrently bolstering women's empowerment and resilience.

Countries must also uphold accountability for gender equality progress and outcomes for both women and men. This entails evaluating the gender responsiveness of their climate interventions. A notable example is Uruguay, which has established a comprehensive gender-responsive monitoring, reporting, and verification system to scrutinize how its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) programming aligns with gender equality and women's empowerment. The system underwent enhancements and was relaunched in 2021.

National ministries tasked with supporting gender equality must actively engage in coordination efforts related to NDC implementation and participate in decision-making concerning climate impacts and actions on a broader scale.

Countries like Chile, Uganda, Lebanon, Cambodia, and Georgia are advancing in the systematic integration of gender considerations within their climate action frameworks, particularly in the context of delivering their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Chile, in recent years, has undertaken significant efforts to enhance the integration of gender dimensions during the revision and implementation phases of its NDC. A noteworthy outcome is the establishment of the Gender and Climate Change Roundtable, which formulated a checklist for embedding gender issues in climate change instruments. Simultaneously, the Ministry of Finance in Chile is actively engaged in developing a novel methodology to evaluate public budgets with a focus on climate change expenditures through a gender lens.

Both Uganda and Lebanon have conducted gender analyses while revising their NDCs to gain a nuanced understanding of how climate change affects women and men differently. These analyses aim to assess gender gaps in the execution of mitigation and adaptation actions across pivotal sectors. Cambodia's NDC takes a pivotal step by incorporating gender as a key criterion for prioritizing mitigation and adaptation actions, resulting in targeted actions with specified participation targets for women ranging from 15 to 70 percent. Moreover, the NDC provides gender-responsive approaches facilitating women's meaningful engagement in specific climate measures, along with indicators for measuring this change.

In the realm of NDC implementation, Georgia has developed a comprehensive guide on mainstreaming gender in climate change interventions, which is accessible to all civil servants involved in environmental issues. This guide elucidates the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls, offering gender-responsive activities applicable to key sectors affected by climate change, including agriculture, forestry, energy, transport, construction, and industry.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

We live on Earth, the Earth is round, and so is the cycle of our problems.

As inhabitants of the Earth, we find ourselves caught in a cyclical pattern of challenges, much like the spherical nature of our planet. At the forefront of global discussions, climate change and gender equality stand out as two of the most pressing and contemporary issues affecting individuals worldwide. These concerns significantly impact the lives of all individuals.

Unlocking the key to women's empowerment involves three critical factors: providing access and awareness to programs and benefits, implementing legal and institutional reforms that safeguard women's rights, and involving not just women but also their partners and families in these initiatives. Similarly, addressing climate change requires a three-pronged approach encompassing accountability, equitable efforts, and the recognition of insufficient endeavors.

What ties these issues together is the obliviousness and indifference of the privileged group to the challenges faced by the vulnerable and marginalized. In the pursuit of gender equality, the current patriarchal society risks laying the groundwork for another feminist movement by perpetuating discrimination against women in the face of another critical global issue. Similarly, in the battle against climate change, developed countries, including past colonizers, form the privileged group. Having financed their industrialization by exploiting developing nations, they now resist acknowledging their role in preventing these countries from bearing an equal burden in international treaties and agreements.

The commonality between the two issues can be metaphorically depicted as a powerful group suppressing a weaker one in the past. Now, facing a shared challenge, both groups must

collaborate, with the stronger group expressing disappointment at the weaker one's limited contribution in adversity. This situation resembles a choir striving for harmony, where some voices struggle to be heard, echoing the suppression faced by a muted group in the past.

Crucially, it is the weaker group that should be prioritized, challenging the conventional approach of considering them as an afterthought. This shift in perspective is essential for the ideals of a "welfare state" or "international cooperation" to translate into meaningful actions. Paradoxically, this presents an opportunity for the privileged group to redress past wrongs by shouldering the burden and uplifting the weaker group.

CONCLUSION

In the vast array of words spoken and the countless more awaiting expressions, it ultimately distills to a singular essence – intention and action. The drive to instigate change and the tangible steps taken toward that change. The imperative now is a collective willingness and cooperation, essential for transforming the world into a genuinely better and more harmonious place in the face of adversity. However, this solution appears elusive for privileged groups, constituting a seemingly insurmountable challenge.

It is crucial to acknowledge that while the impact may be disproportionate, the effects of climate change and gender inequality touch everyone. Whether for the sake of reparations or their self-interest, it is time for the privileged groups to bear the additional burden and integrate climate and gender action, contributing to the betterment of our planet.