



Mains Practice Question

Q. How does climate change impact the lives of women? Discuss the role of gender-sensitive policies in addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation. (250 words)

22 Apr, 2024 GS Paper 1 Indian Society

Approach

- Start the answer by introducing Climate Change.
- Evaluate the effects of climate change on the lives of women.
- Illustrate the role of gender-sensitive policies in addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Conclude suitably.

Introduction

Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. Warming temperatures from climate change are melting ice at an alarming rate, pushing sea levels higher. The climate crisis is not “gender neutral”. Women and girls experience the greatest impacts of climate change, which amplifies existing gender inequalities and poses unique threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety.

Body

Effects of climate change on the lives of women:

- **Impact of Climate Change on Women in Agriculture Sector:**
 - **Increased Food Insecurity:**
 - Women play a crucial role in food production, processing, and distribution within households and communities. Climate change impacts such as crop failures, water scarcity, and changing rainfall patterns can directly affect women's ability to ensure food security for their families.
 - Extreme weather events and subsequent changes in water cycle patterns severely impact access to safe drinking water, which increases the drudgery and reduces the time for productive work and health care of women and girls.
 - **Economic Implications:**
 - The economic implications of climate change for women in agriculture are substantial. Floods and extreme weather events can devastate crops and infrastructure, compelling women to prioritize family care and alternative income generation. Diminished crop yields due to extreme weather events translate to reduced incomes, further exacerbating existing gender inequalities.
- **Direct Relationship with Gender-Based Violence:**
 - A recent study published in JAMA Psychiatry found a link between rising temperatures and increased intimate partner violence (IPV) in South Asia.
 - India is expected to be hit the hardest, with an estimated 23.5% surge in IPV by 2090 if the average annual temperature increases by 1°C. This is significantly higher than the projected increases in Nepal (14.8%) and Pakistan (5.9%).
 - The study also found that India already experiences an 8% rise in physical violence

and a 7.3% rise in sexual violence for every 1°C temperature increase.

▪ **Increased Rates of Child Marriage:**

- Child marriage has been observed in various communities in different countries and regions as a means of coping in the event of a disaster, for example in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Kenya as a means to secure funds or assets.
- In the rural parts of Maharashtra, the lack of water has driven men to seek out 'paani bais' (water wives) where they marry more than one woman to help with collecting water for the household.

▪ **Impact of Prolonged Heat Waves and Pollution:**

- The past decade has been the hottest ever recorded in human history and countries such as India are likely to face unprecedented heatwaves. Prolonged heat is particularly dangerous for pregnant women (increasing the risk of preterm birth and eclampsia).
 - Similarly, exposure to pollutants in the air (household and outdoor) affects women's health, causing respiratory and cardiovascular disease, and also the unborn child, impairing its physical and cognitive growth.

Role of gender-sensitive policies in addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation:

- **Reducing Unequal Vulnerabilities:** Women are frequently responsible for water collection, food security, and household well-being. Climate change disrupts these areas, leading to increased workloads, malnutrition, and health risks for women.
 - According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), across the world, women carry out more than 75 percent of unpaid care work, or 3.2 times more than men.
 - Policies involving women in decision-making can help drive the adoption of climate change policies and strengthen mitigation and adaptation efforts by ensuring they benefit the needs of women.
- **Women as agents of Change:** Women possess valuable knowledge and perspectives on resource management and community resilience. Empowering them strengthens our collective ability to tackle climate challenges.
 - Bhutan has trained Gender Focal Points within different ministries as well as women's organizations to enable them to coordinate and implement gender equality and climate change initiatives.
- **Empowerment and Equity:** Gender-sensitive policies empower women, fostering greater social equity and building a more resilient society as a whole. When women thrive, communities thrive.
 - Countries such as Chile, Uganda, Lebanon, Cambodia, and Georgia are making progress on strategically integrating gender considerations in climate action in the context of delivering their Nationally determined contributions (NDCs).

Conclusion

Gender-sensitive policies are a strategic necessity for addressing climate change. By empowering women and ensuring their voices are heard, we can create a future where everyone contributes to and benefits from a sustainable and equitable world. This collaborative approach is crucial for building a future where climate action works for all.