



Making Climate Crisis Gender-Neutral

This editorial is based on [“The climate crisis is not gender neutral”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 10/04/2024. The article elucidates the unequal impact of the climate crisis, particularly highlighting women's increased vulnerability. It further underscores that achieving effective climate action necessitates the full engagement of the entire population, emphasizing that empowering women would lead to more effective climate solutions.

For Prelims: [Climate Change](#), [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#), [Supreme Court of India](#), [Climate Conference \(COP 28\)](#), [Loss and Damage fund](#), [Gender-Based Violence](#), [National Family Health Survey \(NFHS\) 4 and 5](#), [Council on Energy, Environment and Water \(CEEW\)](#).

For Mains: Impact of Climate Change on Women, Addressing Climate Change Patterns Impacting Women.

The [climate crisis](#) is already here and does not impact everyone equally. Women and girls experience disproportionately high health risks, especially in situations of poverty, and due to existing roles, responsibilities and cultural norms. According to the [United Nations Development Programme \(UNDP\)](#), women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die in a disaster. The [Supreme Court of India](#) has just ruled that people have a right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change, and the right to a clean environment is already recognised as a fundamental right within the ambit of the right to life.

What is the Relationship of Climate Change With Women Across Various Dimensions?

- **Health:**

- Women often bear the brunt of climate-related health risks due to their roles as primary caregivers and their biological susceptibility. They may face increased health challenges from heatwaves, extreme weather events, and the spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever. [//](#)

Climate + Women

The Nexus

As Mary Robinson, Ireland's former president and the former UN commissioner for human rights, said, "People who are marginalized or poor, women, and indigenous communities are being disproportionately affected by climate impacts."

Women experience disproportionate impacts due to underlying socioeconomic, political, and legal barriers that limit their choices in the face of climate change.

BARRIERS INCLUDE



The Business Case



- Pregnant women and new mothers are particularly vulnerable, facing risks of malnutrition, complications during childbirth, and limited access to maternal healthcare services in the aftermath of climate disasters.

▪ Livelihoods and Income:

- Women, especially in rural areas of developing countries, are **disproportionately dependent on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and forestry** for their livelihoods.
- Climate change-induced factors like unpredictable weather patterns, droughts, floods, and soil degradation can disrupt agricultural productivity, leading to loss of income and food insecurity for women farmers.
 - Additionally, women are often employed in informal and low-paying jobs, which offer little job security and are highly susceptible to climate-related disruptions.

▪ Education and Literacy:

- Climate-related disasters, such as floods and storms, can disrupt children's education by damaging infrastructure and forcing school closures. In many societies, girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school during such crises, either due to safety concerns or increased caregiving responsibilities.

▪ Water and Sanitation:

- Women and girls are often responsible for water collection and management within households, particularly in rural areas. Climate change-induced water scarcity and contamination can increase the time and effort required for water fetching, limiting women's opportunities for education, income generation, and community participation.
 - Moreover, inadequate access to clean water and sanitation facilities disproportionately affects women's health and hygiene, leading to higher rates of waterborne diseases and maternal mortality.

How Does Climate Change Impact Women?

▪ **Direct Relationship with Gender Based Violence:**

- A 2021 report by the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW) revealed that 75% of Indian districts face vulnerability to hydromet disasters such as floods, droughts, and cyclones. [NEHS 5](#) data indicated that more than half of the women and children in these districts are exposed to these risks.
 - Recent studies increasingly demonstrate a direct link between these natural disasters and gender-based violence against women.
- In conflict-affected regions, which are also more prone to extreme weather events, gender-based violence is widespread.
 - For instance, in countries like Colombia, Mali, and Yemen, women and girls are particularly vulnerable to experiencing gender-based violence due to the combined effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict, as noted in the submission of the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

▪ **Impact of Prolonged Heat Waves:**

- 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.
- Emerging data from cohort studies in India show that for every 10 micrograms per cubic meter increase in PM2.5, the risk of lung cancer increases by 9%, the risk of cardiovascular deaths on the same day by 3%, and stroke by 8%. For dementia, the risk increased by 4% for 2 micrograms increase in annual PM2.5.

▪ **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 disaster, for example in Bangladesh, Ethiopia and Kenya as a means to secure funds or assets.
- Another commonly adopted coping mechanism in such communities is taking girls out of school to help in the household. Such means of coping set progress towards gender equality back decades and negatively affect the long-term resilience and adaptive capacity of the communities.

▪ **Adding Disproportionate Burdens:**

- It is noted that extreme weather events due to climate change disproportionately affect women and girls and their ability to perform their everyday tasks, which partly explains why some girls are forced to drop out of school.
- The tasks of collecting firewood and water in some countries, which traditionally fall to women and girls, are heavily affected by adverse climate change impacts, which force the women and girls to travel further from their homes to complete the tasks and provide for their families.

▪ **Impact of Rural to Urban Migration:**

- Extreme weather events have been observed to result in increased rural-to-urban migration among men in some countries, leaving women in charge of land and the household and other tasks traditionally performed by men.
- This results in an increased workload and decreased income for women, whose opportunities to earn income are limited by gender norms that affect their access to land ownership, thus increasing their current and future vulnerability to climate impacts.

▪ **Decreased Adaptive Capacity:**

- The adaptive capacity of women and men differs owing to women being less integrated into the formal economy, which in turn affects their position in decision-making processes. In Antigua and Barbuda, for example, women are more likely than men to generate income from informal tourism-related activities, which reduces their adaptive capacity in cases of extreme weather events such as hurricanes.
 - In its submission, [ILO](#) highlighted that informal employment affects access to

health and safety mechanisms at work, increasing the risks for informal employees in the event of climate-related disaster.

▪ **Intersectionality of Different Discriminatory Factors:**

- In the cases of most marginalized groups, such as the [LGBTQIA community](#) and indigenous peoples, their capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate change is lessened owing to the multi-faceted intersection of social factors, which makes them more vulnerable to such impacts. This is despite women and indigenous peoples being identified as custodians of traditional and indigenous knowledge.

▪ **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.
 - Within small and marginal landholding households, while men face social stigma due to unpaid loans (leading to migration, emotional distress, and sometimes even suicide), women experience higher domestic work burdens, worse health, and greater intimate partner violence.

◦ **Extreme Events Disrupt On-Farm Operations:**

- Changing weather patterns and extreme events deeply impact women's roles in agriculture. Variable rainfall and prolonged droughts lead to reduced crop yields, jeopardising food security for farming-dependent households.
- Women have traditionally been integral to on-farm operations and are often responsible for tending to crops and managing household food supply and consequently bear the brunt of these disruptions.

◦ **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 prioritise family care and alternative income generation. Diminished crop yields due to extreme weather events translate to reduced incomes, further exacerbating existing gender inequalities.

◦ **More Vulnerable due to Lack of Resources:**

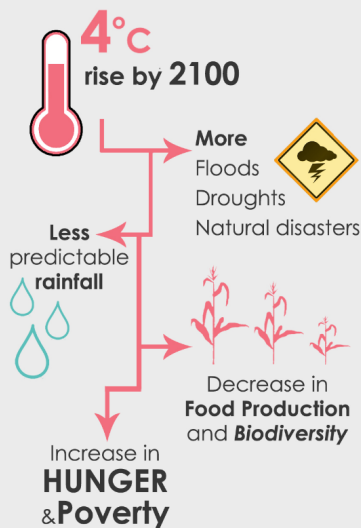
- Cultural norms and discriminatory practices hinder women's access to land ownership, a critical asset in agriculture. Women's lack of control over assets restricts their access to credit, loans, and insurance, rendering them vulnerable to climate-induced losses.
 - According to the [UN FAO](#), if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30%.
 - Extreme weather events and subsequent changes in water cycle patterns severely impact access to safe drinking water, which increases the drudgery and reduces time for productive work and health care of women and girls.

Women and Climate Change in the Ganges River Basin

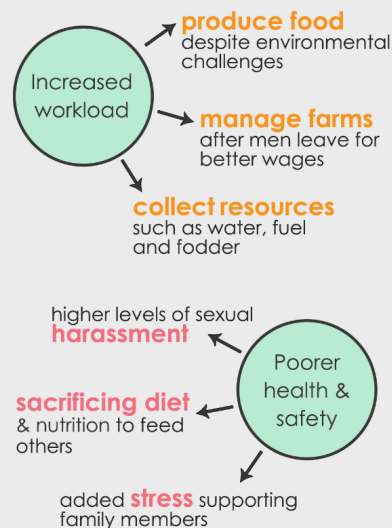
Poor women will bear the brunt in parts of India, Nepal and Bangladesh



How will climate change affect the Ganges Basin?



What does this mean for women living in poverty?



What should policymakers do?



What Steps Need to be Adopted to Make Climate Crisis Gender Neutral?

- **Promoting Multi-Dimensional Empowerment of Women:**
 - Climate action requires 100% of the population if we want to achieve the [Paris Agreement](#) goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5° C. At the same time, empowering women means better climate solutions; when provided with the same access to resources as men, women increased their agricultural yields by 20% to 30%.
- **Encouraging Local Solutions Through Self-Help Groups:**
 - Tribal and rural women, in particular, have been at the forefront of environmental conservation. Giving women and women collectives ([Self-help Groups](#) and [Farmer Producer Organisations](#)) the knowledge, tools and access to resources would encourage local solutions to emerge. Adaptation measures will necessarily be different in rural and urban areas as exposure to heat, air pollution and access to water and food will vary by context.
- **Gathering Sex-Disaggregated Data:**
 - In order to improve understanding of the role of women, in all their diversity, as agents of change, more comprehensive and generally applicable sex-disaggregated data need to be gathered. Currently, examples of the different roles of women and men as agents of change are context-specific.
 - Deriving generally applicable inferences from these data would therefore involve homogenizing women's experience and behaviour, which is problematic given the diversity of women and the multitude of culturally specific contexts influencing the role of women as agents of change.
- **Reducing the Impact of Prolonged Heat Wave:**
 - Efforts should be made to reduce the impact of prolonged heat on vulnerable groups such as outdoor workers, pregnant women, infants, young children, and the elderly. Data from several Indian cities indicate that there is an increase in deaths during heat waves, even if they are not officially recognized as such. The loss of productivity will affect both small and large businesses as well as our economy.

- Measures such as issuing heat wave warnings (based on local temperature and humidity), adjusting outdoor work and school timings, providing cooling rooms in health facilities, ensuring public drinking water facilities, and promptly treating those with heat stroke can help minimize deaths.
- **Involving Urban Local Bodies and Municipalities:**
 - [Urban local bodies, municipal corporations](#) and district authorities in all vulnerable districts need to have a plan and provide training and resources to key implementers. In addition, urban planning to improve tree cover, minimising concrete, increasing green-blue spaces and designing housing that is better able to withstand adverse effects are longer-term actions.
 - The Mahila Housing Trust in Udaipur showed that painting the roofs of low-income houses with reflective white paint reduced indoor temperatures by 3° C to 4° C and improved quality of life.
- **Mapping Key Water Resources:**
 - Water shortage is probably the biggest threat to our very existence and needs concerted societal action. Traditionally, India had one of the most advanced systems for rainwater harvesting and storage with a system of ponds and canals.
 - Work done by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in a few districts of Tamil Nadu showed that using [geographic information systems](#), the panchayat could map key water sources, identify vulnerabilities and climate hazards and develop a local plan to improve water access by directing government schemes and resources.
- **Convergence of Sectors and Services at Local Levels:**
 - Convergence of sectors and services and prioritisation of actions can happen most effectively at the village or [panchayat](#) levels. Devolution of powers and finances and investing in building the capacity of panchayat and SHG members can be India's way of demonstrating how to build resilience in a community-led and participatory way.
- **Reforming the Scope of NAPCCs and SAPCCs:**
 - A gender lens needs to be applied to all State-action plans on climate change. The [National Action Plan on Climate Change \(NAPCC\)](#) and [State Action Plan on Climate Change \(SAPCC\)](#) highlight the impacts on women, yet often default to portraying them as victims, missing deeper gender dynamics.
 - Recommendations for the ongoing revision of SAPCCs lay stress on the need to move beyond stereotypes, recognise the vulnerabilities of all genders, and implement gender-transformative strategies, ensuring a comprehensive and equitable approach to climate adaptation.

Conclusion

The impact of climate change on women is multifaceted and disproportionate, exacerbating existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities. From livelihoods to health, education, and displacement, women bear a significant burden in adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change. Addressing these gendered impacts requires holistic approaches that prioritize women's empowerment, access to resources, and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. By recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by women, we can foster resilience, promote gender equality, and build a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

Drishti Mains Question:

Discuss the impact of climate change on women's livelihoods and the role of gender-sensitive policies in addressing climate change mitigation and adaptation.

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Question:

Prelims

Q.1 Which of the following best describes/describe the aim of 'Green India Mission' of the Government of India? (2016)

1. Incorporating environmental benefits and costs into the Union and State Budgets thereby implementing the 'green accounting'.
2. Launching the second green revolution to enhance agricultural output so as to ensure food security to one and all in the future.
3. Restoring and enhancing forest cover and responding to climate change by a combination of adaptation and mitigation measures.

Select the correct answer using the code given below.

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (c)

Q.2 With reference to 'Global Climate Change Alliance', which of the following statements is/are correct? (2017)

1. It is an initiative of the European Union.
2. It provides technical and financial support to targeted developing countries to integrate climate change into their development policies and budgets.
3. It is coordinated by World Resources Institute (WRI) and World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD).

Select the correct answer using the code given below:

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 3 only
- (c) 2 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Ans: (a)

Mains

Q.1 Describe the major outcomes of the 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). What are the commitments made by India in this conference? **(2021)**

Q.2 'Climate Change' is a global problem. How will India be affected by climate change? How Himalayan and coastal states of India will be affected by climate change? **(2017)**