**Women and Climate Change**

The **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC**) has indicated that the effects of our changing global climate patterns, especially that of global warming, are often felt most severely by people who live in poverty. These are the people who are exposed to extreme risk from poor housing, a lack of access to services, and inadequate infrastructure. People living in poverty are also particularly sensitive to declining crop yields, and increases in food prices – both of which are already occurring. The vast majority of the more than 1 billion people living in poverty are women – a reality which in itself leads to an inherent gender bias in vulnerability to climate change. And if women are the most vulnerable – then children are not far behind. The March 2014 IPCC report pointed out that “ Price rises, which may be induced by climate shocks as well as other factors, have a disproportionate impact on the welfare of the porr in rural areas, such as female-headed households and those with limited access to modern agricultural inputs, infrastructure and education.”

On the other hand, women’s vulnerability can obscure the fact that they are an untapped resource in efforts to cope with climate change. An example of this can be found in the South Pacific region. Most Pacific Island countries and territories are already experiencing severe weather events and ecological damage, such as increased salinity in both the soil and water. Pacific women have essential skills and knowledge regarding clean water sources, food preparation, agriculture and livelihoods. However, they are often excluded from decision-making processes around climate change adaptation and mitigation, as well as disaster risk-management. Extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, register a higher mortality rate globally for women than men. Also, in the aftermath of disasters women experience an increased risk of gender-based sexual violence, unequal access to humanitarian assistance, loss of economic opportunities and an increased   
  
  
  
  
  
  
workload. This is just one example as to why it is vitally important to incorporate a gender-perspective into climate change policies, projects and funds, so as to ensure that women contribute to, and benefit from equitable climate solutions.

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Of course this is not to say that men and boys are not at risk as well. However, their vulnerabilities are not the result of entrenched social inequalities. In this regard, global climate change and gender inequality share an important characteristic. They are both widespread, and have profound consequences on communities. Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, Chair of the IPCC, has said that “ ***Women will play a critical role in the transition to a cleaner, sustainable environment…Women play an essential role in managing natural resources, and are often much more in touch with their natural surroundings. It is their voices that will ring the loudest in support of policies that encourage the creation of a safe environment for their children***.”

Will we join our voices with theirs as well??????