

# Impact of Climate Change on the Human Rights of Women in India

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**Abstract:** *In the twenty first century, climate change is one of the biggest global challenges. People who are already experiencing exclusion and discrimination go through the climate change and its impact on an extreme uneven manner. Climate change affect everyone differently and women will be the worst affected. The rural women get affected the most, as 80% of them engage in agriculture and are poor, they need to secure firewood, water and even day to day food for their families. According to United Nations, women will be subjected to more inequalities, gender-based violence and climate change increase their vulnerabilities. In this study the researcher attempts to discuss the impact of climate change on women especially the rural women in India. Further this study analyses the efforts taken by the country to address climate change effects. The crisis of Climate change and its impact need to be addressed through the lens of universal human rights.*

**Keywords:** Climate Change, health disparities, United Nations Framework Convention, National action plan

## 1. Introduction

In all developing countries, women go through gender injustice with respect to accessing basic human rights, education, and right to health, political and economic status and often exposed to abuses and violence. Rural women work as farmers seldom own land or produce from land. The biggest challenge of women to face in climate change will be aggravation of their vulnerability. Both men and women who work in sectors of natural resources like agriculture will be affected with climate change but the impact will not be the same. Women need to work in hot climate, flooded fields, have to fetch water, and come back home to look after the entire household, look after children, cook for the family, and go through economic struggles and added stress and health issues. Lack of proper health support systems lead to long term health crises. Globally, women face less access to land, opportunities, to get credit, never get a chance to make decisions like men. They often do not get a chance to learn, get trained and enhance their abilities to cope with climate changes. It is considered as a humanitarian crisis. It will affect ecosystems, health of human beings, economy of nations and lead to gender inequalities. The climate related disasters are on a rise globally which leads to heat waves and droughts, storms, erratic rainfall, flooding which not only destroy human life but also their livelihoods. In India, though women play multiple roles as household carers, leaders, workers, farmers, entrepreneurs and activists, still they face gender inequalities.

### Increased vulnerability of women

India, in spite of technological and economic progress still have gender disparities, thus lead to inequality in sustainable human development. The vulnerability of women are due to social, cultural and economic factors. As per WHO women predominate food production in the world, but they own less than 10 per cent of land. In rural India, the suffocating social norms lead to over working women and girls with no access to most facilities. The use of firewood expose women and children to indoor pollution which lead to many health issues. Many times they are unable to deal with climate changes.

Further, during extreme weather conditions, rural women and girl children tend to work in the area of household livelihoods, looking after children, travel longer to collect drinking water and often deny right to education and updating themselves like their urban counterparts.

Situations like, during conflicts, while displaced, when crops drying up, women have to manage water scarcity, still look after children, find food for the family, and face restricted mobility which shake their daily livelihoods. Heatwaves as well as floods inflict economic burdens on rural women. Further, the unequal impacts of the climate change increases the gender inequalities amongst rural population leads to domestic violence.

The increased workload, reduced income coupled with additional stress in women which can lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions. Climate change and disasters like floods cause water borne diseases. Girl children, women with disabilities in the rural areas often deny education, training and health facilities.

### Addressing the root causes:

While analysing, why people being left furthest behind, the barriers many people face in accessing services and opportunities are often not due to lack of availability, but instead the result of decisions taken and practices of societies. Most of the times, Governments are unaccountable for their obligations to protect the rights of such groups.

### Role of United Nations- 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:

The actions of Sustainable development requires to be directed to social, environment and economic areas. Further, Rio+20 agreement (UN conference on sustainable development held in Brazil, Rio Janerio) and the Rio Earth Summit (1992) which formulated these three pillars of sustainable development (economic, social and environmental).

‘Leave No One Behind’ is a commitment of the member states of the United Nations in order to eradicate poverty,

exclusion and discrimination. It is the core principle of UN Sustainable development and its sustainable development goals. If the development goals have to be achieved, the most important factor is to identify who is being left behind and its reasons. Once countries can eliminate major constraints which hinder women's empowerment, women and girls will be able to participate in social, political and economic endeavours.

### Human Rights Based Approach

The human rights impacted by climate change are Right to life, right to health, right to clean water and sanitation and right to housing. Amongst all human beings, Girls and Women belong to some of the most marginalized amongst the disadvantaged population globally. When human rights based approach is applied to climate change, all actions need to aim at prioritizing the protection of basic human rights like access to food, clean water, safe environment, and health rights of all women especially the most vulnerable women like women with disabilities, rural women, migrant women workers and indigenous women.

### Scenario in India- Government Initiatives to support women's adaptations

From time immemorial, rural women have the skills along with men to harvest water, preserve food, and managing natural resources for the unforeseen incidents. In almost all rural cultures elders share their knowledge and skills to future generations to identify warnings of climate changes. The Government of India's National Action Plan on Climate Change (2008) which promotes renewable energy and agricultural practices which are sustainable. In order to address the health concerns due to climate change, the National Action Plan on Climate and Health was launched. This plan comprises prevention strategies, National Rural Drinking water program and a national health mission and Initiatives for Water availability and quality of water are included. In order to reduce the impact from disasters, there is an urgent need to train women to be better informed and resilient about disasters and climate change.

## 2. Conclusion

There is an urgent need to address all gender specific impacts of climate change. Though women disproportionately get affected because of climate change, they can be strong agents of change. Partnership can play a huge role in advocacy. The need of the hour is partnering with women's rights organisations, International NGOs working for gender justice and climate change, along with grassroots level women's organizations who experience the actual climate change impact. In the development of planning, funding needs of women should be prioritized. Countries need more women parliamentarians, urgent need to ratify maximum international treaties related to environment. In other words, addressing climate change, gender equality, capacity building and women empowerment should be the priorities. People who live in every environment are aware and experience gradual changes in the environment and know practical solutions which are very close to nature. Thus there is a need to use indigenous and local knowledge from communities which include women as technical experts as well as active decision makers. It is highly important to involve women in

the development of technologies which are appropriate, adaptive, and sustainable.

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