

Involve women in countering climate change

Viewpoint



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Climate Change is one of the most pressing issues which we humans have to face today. Extreme weather and natural disasters are more common now and the results real enough for you and me to feel. Devastating floods in Asia and Africa, a deadly European heat wave, the wreckage of hurricanes in the Americas are all the obvious signs.

In spite of media coverage and raising of public awareness many governments are adopting a wait and watch attitude. Unquestionably climate change will affect everyone in the world. But strangely it is women who are, in spite of being the most vulnerable, are the best equipped

to help curb the effects. Governments have to look at mitigation measures to slow down global warming and adaptation of measures to decrease the consequences.

In every society, men and women have distinct responsibilities, knowledge and needs which are essential to addressing the effects of climate change. Women's historic disadvantages, their restricted access to resources and information and their limited power in decision making, make them the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

As the majority of the world's poor, women are disproportionately affected by swift environmental changes. Even in the rich USA, hurricane Katrina, hit poor African-American women the most. As climates change, access to basic needs and natural resources becomes a challenge. Natural disasters often reinforce traditional gender roles.

Rural women in developing countries are still

largely responsible for securing food, water and energy for cooking and heating. Drought, deforestation and erratic rainfall cause women to work even harder to secure these resources. Women therefore have less time to earn an income, get an education or provide care to their families. Girls regularly have to drop out of school to help mothers gather wood for fuel and collect water.

Vulnerable

In nearly all societies, women still have unequal access to information and capital and less power to make decisions. During natural disasters often many more women die than men because they aren't warned, can't swim, or can't leave the house alone. Women usually have fewer assets than men to recover from natural disasters, and they often don't own land that can be sold to secure income in an emergency. Women also make up the majority of the

world's agricultural labourers and rely heavily on fertile land and regular rainfall.

Climate Change fuels conflict and a shortage of natural resources will lead to conflict which magnifies gender inequalities. While men are more likely to be killed or injured in fighting, women suffer greatly from the indirect consequences of conflict.

However women can be key agents of adaptation to climate change. Their responsibilities in households, communities and as stewards of natural resources position them well to develop strategies for adapting to environmental realities. Women tend to share information related to community well being, choose less polluting energy sources and adapt more easily to environmental changes when their family's survival is at stake.

Global climate change negotiations including the UNFCCC and the Kyoto protocol have never considered this aspect at all.