



Women, Peace and Security in the Context of Climate Change

Climate change has led to an increase in the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, natural resource scarcity, and environmental degradation, which in many contexts has contributed to the exacerbation of conflict, particularly in areas with weak institutions, political instability, and high rates of poverty. Potential security implications include an increase in regional water stress, disruption in patterns of migration, and damage to agricultural productivity. These factors can undermine conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives and challenge existing adaptation and mitigation strategies. The women, peace and security agenda provides a useful framework to further explore the linkages between climate change and conflict and the differential impact on women and children.

In the developing world, women – who constitute 70% of the world's poor, are the most susceptible to the impact of climate change. In these areas, women tend to have limited access to resources and income, and oftentimes restricted rights and political voice. This increases women's vulnerability to the security implications of climate change in a number of ways. For example, women are often responsible for food production and water procurement as well as for collecting energy sources, such as firewood. As climate change decreases the availability of natural resources women and girls are forced to travel longer distances and the risks of sexual and gender-based violence can increase; this risk is further heightened in situations of conflict.

Similarly, climate change will continue to increase the intensity of natural disasters, thus increasing the severity of the impacts on women and children. Women tend to have less access to early warning systems and disaster preparedness training and information, negatively affecting their resilience to the impacts of climate change. Post-disaster, women lack access to shelters, food, health care, and livelihoods. Emergency humanitarian relief needs to include a gender perspective to ensure that the specific needs of women and girls are identified and addressed. As part of this, women's organizations and women leaders, including those from socially and/or economically excluded groups of women, should be consulted.

The impact of climate change on women is exacerbated by a lack of robust decision-making power within local communities. This often impedes the ability of women to participate in community-based adaptation and mitigation strategies. Yet, it is important to recognize the role of women in creating an environment of climate stability. As climate change makes it more difficult to sustain livelihoods, women remain acutely aware of tactics and strategies to adapt to changing circumstances, and they are well positioned to provide solutions. For example, women share their knowledge of food preservation and understanding of natural resources, which helps to lower vulnerability to climate risks.

At the policy-making level, women remain under-represented in leadership and decision-making processes. Yet, women must be important players in climate change policy because they tend to have specific knowledge about certain processes, such as managing water resources. Within the UN system, numerous mandates require that a gender perspective be taken into account and integrated into all



spheres of human rights, development, and environmental programming. Yet, the gender perspective and women's active participation in these processes is often missing in national and international climate change policies. It is crucial that gender be mainstreamed across all climate change mitigation and management efforts including by promoting and prioritizing women's agency, leadership, and participation across all decision making, planning, and implementation levels.

As climate change and its potential security implications make it more difficult to sustain livelihoods, the need to include women in adaptation and mitigation strategies becomes increasingly important. United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) recognizes the vital role that women play as leaders and decision-makers. The principles of this resolution create a platform for women's participation, where women are well positioned to provide solutions to increase resilience to climate change and conflict. If responses to climate change are to be truly effective, they must be inclusive and respond to the different needs, capacities, and vulnerabilities of all.

The following questions will guide the discussion:

- How can the women, peace and security agenda help to ensure that an understanding of the gendered impacts of climate change and conflict are integrated into international climate frameworks, and adaptation and mitigation strategies at the local level?
- How can we ensure that a gender perspective is taken into account during the creation and implementation of climate mitigation and adaptation strategies, and not as an add-on policy?
- How can the UN system encourage the active and meaningful participation of women at the local, national and regional levels in climate negotiations?
- What are some approaches that can encourage women's participation in adaptation and mitigation strategies at the local level?