



WE CAN

Women's Earth & Climate Action Network, International

Why Women: The Crucial Role of Women at the Center of Climate Solutions

[Women](#) in all of their diversity must stand at the forefront of all action to address the global climate crisis because they are simultaneously the most adversely impacted by climate change and environmental degradation, and yet are indispensable actors and leaders of equitable and effective solutions. When we analyze root causes, it is clear that women experience climate change with disproportionate severity precisely because their basic rights continue to be denied in varying forms and intensities across the world. Gender inequality reduces women's physical and economic mobility, voice, and opportunity in many regions, making them more vulnerable to mounting environmental stresses.

Indigenous, Black and Brown women, women from low-income communities, and women from the Global South bear an even heavier burden from the impacts of climate change because of the historic and continuing impacts of colonialism, racism and inequality; and in many cases, because they are more reliant upon natural resources for their survival and/or live in areas that have poor infrastructure. Drought, flooding, and unpredictable and extreme weather patterns present life or death challenges for many women who are most often the ones [responsible for providing food, water and energy](#) for their families. In many frontline communities sexual violence against women and environmental racism is added on top of other dire impacts perpetuated by extractive industries and climate impacts.

Women Leading the Way

Yet, every day, against all odds and great challenges, women in all of their diversity are demonstrating that they have unique and essential ideas and skills to offer at this turning point in

history as humanity faces a crisis of survival and must make crucial changes and decisions about how we are living with the Earth and each other.

Studies show us that worldwide when women are uplifted, there are immense benefits to entire communities and societies overall. For instance, when women have improved agency, [sustainable and local economies grow](#) and children's health and education improve—all of which are foundations for a sustainable path forward. Actively [involving women in management and decision making](#) regarding everything from local forest protection to disaster planning and response, [leads to more successful programs and projects](#). In many countries, women get out the vote and vote more often, and lead on environmental and social legislation when elected to public office. It has also been shown that women are one of the most vital actors in [peacemaking](#).

Importantly, [studies show](#) that a one unit increase in a country's score on the Women's Political Empowerment Index is associated with an 11.51% decrease in the country's overall carbon emissions. For a full examination of the the Women's Political Empowerment Index finding, [please watch the presentation](#) of WECAN Executive Director, Osprey Orielle Lake, addressing the [Scenarios Forum](#) to discuss gender equality as a key driver of climate change solutions.

For further qualitative and quantitative data, please also see WECAN's, 'Women Speak' storytelling database to explore stories, case studies and solutions from the frontlines of climate change. This research database is designed to shift the narrative as the WECAN team collects and shares thousands of stories by and about women leading solutions for climate justice under fourteen cross-sectional themes. <https://womenspeak.wecaninternational.org/>

Unlocking the Power of Women in Climate Solutions

The following list of statistics emphasize the vital role of women on the frontlines of the climate crisis. Study after study shows that we must involve women at every level of engagement if we are to succeed in areas of climate solutions, social equality, and bold transformative change.

- Studies show that a one unit increase in a country's score on the Women's Political Empowerment Index is associated with an 11.51% decrease in the country's overall carbon emissions. [Women's Political Empowerment Index. Does women's political empowerment matter for improving the environment? A heterogeneous dynamic panel analysis.](#)
- Globally, women are responsible for half of the world's food production. In most Global South countries, women produce between 40-80% of food, and are central stewards of seeds and agricultural biodiversity. [UN Food & Agricultural Organization. Women and Sustainable Food Security.](#)

- Women's involvement in decision-making has important implications for climate change – a study of 130 countries found that countries with higher female parliamentary representation are more prone to ratify international environmental treaties. [Norgaard and York. Gender Equality and State Environmentalism: Gender and Society.](#)
- Women in the United States are more likely than men to believe in climate change science. [Scientific American. Women More Likely Than Men to Believe the Science on Global Warming.](#)
- Women and girls are responsible for collecting water in almost two-thirds of households in developing countries and hold vital knowledge of local water systems and stewardship practices. The UN has repeatedly recognized that effective sustainable water resource management depends on engaging women at all levels of decision-making and implementation. It is now recognized that the exclusion of women from the planning of water supply and sanitation schemes is a major cause of their high rate of failure. [United Nations. UN Water. Gender, Water and Sanitation: A Policy Brief.](#)
- Involving more women participants in management and decision making surrounding local forests is related to significantly greater improvements in forest conditions and conservation. [UN Food & Agricultural Organization. Women in Forestry: Challenges and Opportunities. Agarwal B. Does Women's Proportional Strength Affect their Participation? Governing Local Forests in South Asia. World Development.](#)
- When allowed to actively participate in disaster planning and response, women show a unique and vital knowledge base and set of skills for effective community rescue, support, rebuilding and conflict management. [United Nations Development Programme. Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction.](#)
- In Global North countries, women have been found to be more likely to recycle, buy organic food and eco-labeled products and place a higher value on energy-efficient transport. [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Gender and Sustainable Development: Maximizing the Economic, Social and Environmental Role of Women](#)
- Women in North America now control over half of the wealth, are behind 80 percent of all consumer purchases, and start 70 percent of new businesses in the U.S. This is power which could be leveraged into the transition to clean energy and local economies. [Female Factor. Women in the Economy.](#)

- Research in Europe attests that women express more concern about climate change than men, and are more willing to make sacrifices to reduce emissions. [European Commission. Attitudes of European Citizens Towards the Environment.](#)
- Electing women politicians in national parliaments leads countries to adopt more stringent climate change policies, which results in lower carbon dioxide emissions. [European Journal of Political Economy, Volume 56. Gender and climate change: Do female parliamentarians make difference?](#)
- 80% of remaining global biodiversity is within the lands of global Indigenous peoples who have protected them over generations. Indigenous women are at the forefront of local and global efforts to protect and defend these territories of immense socio-ecological diversity—taking action on the frontline of grassroots movements and struggles, and within international climate negotiations and political processes. Due to their close relationship with the land, Indigenous women hold unique and invaluable Traditional Ecological Knowledge, as well as spiritual and philosophical understandings critical to healing and maintenance of the Earth’s climate and cycles. [World Bank. The Role of Indigenous Peoples in Biodiversity Conservation. National Observer. Indigenous Latin American Women Craft Climate Solutions in Marrakech. Cultural Survival. Collaborative Science with Indigenous Knowledge For Climate Solutions. Native Women’s Association of Canada. Aboriginal Women and Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge. The Guardian. Indigenous Knowledge Systems Can Help Solve The Problems of Climate Change.](#)

The Disproportionate Impact of Climate Change on Women

- Women make up upwards of 80 percent of climate refugees. Studies report that women comprise 20 million of the 26 million people estimated to have been displaced by climate change. [Women’s Environmental Network. Gender and the Climate Change Agenda: The Impacts of Climate Change on Women and Public Policy.](#)
- The poor are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change, and the majority of the 1.5 billion people living on \$1 a day or less are women. [United Nations Population Fund. State of World Population 2009: Facing a Changing World. Women, Population and Climate.](#)
- In a sample of 141 countries over the period 1981–2002, it was found that gender differences in deaths from natural disasters are directly linked to women’s economic and social rights. In inequitable societies, more women than men die from disaster. [Neumayer and Plumper. The Gendered Nature of Natural Disasters: The Impact of Catastrophic](#)

Events on the Gender Gap in Life Expectancy, 1981–2002. Annals of the Association of American Geographers 97(3).

- Women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster. Women accounted for 61 percent of fatalities caused by Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, 70–80 percent in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and 91 percent in the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh. United Nations Development Programme. Gender and Disaster Risk Reduction.
- Women in Global South nations engage disproportionately in subsistence farming and fuel and water collection. As droughts, floods and other erratic weather events increase, there will be an increased burden on women holding responsibility for their families food water and energy needs. UNFPA. State of the World Population 2009: Facing a Changing World, Women, Population and Climate. InterPress Service. Women Spend 40 Billion Hours Collecting Water.
- During and after disasters, levels of sexual and gendered violence often increase. After two tropical cyclones hit Tafe Province in Vanuatu in 2011, the Tanna Women’s Counselling Centre reported a 300% increase in new domestic violence cases. Human trafficking has been found to increase 20 to 30 percent during disasters. United Nations Women. Why Is Climate Change a Gender Issue? UNEP Women at the Frontline of Climate Change – Gender Risks and Hopes.
- When extractive industries begin operating in communities, women often face sharp increases in sexual violence, human trafficking and other gender-based abuses. Indigenous women and women of color face severely disproportionate targeting and abuse. Honor the Earth. Man Camps Fact Sheet. EcoWatch. Women on the Frontlines Fighting Fracking in the Bakken Oil Shale Formations. Women’s Earth Alliance. Violence on the Land, Violence on Our Bodies.
- After climate disasters, women experience disproportionate and specific health vulnerabilities including impaired psycho-social health, increased vulnerability to insect-borne and infectious disease and other health impacts. These not only affect women’s health directly, but also increase their “burden of care” when looking after ill and injured dependents and family members. World Bank. Making Women’s Voice Count Addressing Gender Issues in Disaster Risk Management in East Asia and the Pacific.
- Women and children are generally more susceptible to the harmful effects of environmental toxins and pollutants. UNDP Environment and Energy Group. Chemicals and Gender. Live Science. How Environmental Toxins Harm Women’s Reproductive Health. Global Health Action. Climate Change and the Potential Effects on Maternal and

[Pregnancy Outcomes: An Assessment of the Most Vulnerable. Women in Europe for a Common Future. Women and Chemicals: The Impact of Hazardous Chemicals on Women.](#)

Video Examples:

[Seeding the Future: Women Protecting Forests, Climate, and Communities in the Democratic Republic of Congo.](#)

[Tlingit Women Advocate During Historic Delegation To Protect Tongass Rainforest](#)

[Women Ending the Era of Fossil Fuels & Building a Just Transition](#)

[Growing Indigenous Food Sovereignty: Okla Hina Ikhish Holo Network in Bvlbancha & the Gulf South.](#)