

Women, Education and Climate Change: Integration of Gender Equality is a Must

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Context and realities for Asia Pacific Region

- Climate change is the defining human development issue of our generation
- Poor women's limited access to resources, restricted rights, limited mobility and muted voice in shaping decisions make them highly vulnerable to climate change.
- The nature of that vulnerability varies widely, cautioning against generalization but climate change will magnify existing patterns of inequality, including gender inequality.



Countries face mounting environmental stress and threats of climate change that will have a serious impact on

- changing weather patterns
- rising sea levels...



Which will result to

- increased food insecurity and
- loss of livelihoods,

especially for those already poor and marginalized



Small island States and mega deltas are especially vulnerable because of their high degree of exposure to the effects of climate change and the limited capacity of the population to adapt to its consequences.



The Asia-Pacific region has an emergency profile characterized by a combination of natural disasters and civil/political unrest with pockets of conflict situations.

The Asia-Pacific region has been struck by

- several major natural disasters in recent years
- heavy floods



The situations in conflict/war-torn and politically unstable countries seem nowhere near resolution, further increasing the number of internally displaced persons and general disruption to society. In addition to the structural threats, which are intrinsic to the region, Asia-Pacific is also affected by global threat.



Impact of natural disasters on women

Globally, the region accounts for a majority of the total number of deaths caused by all types of natural disasters.

- In 2008, there were nearly 250,000 natural disaster-related deaths (many due to Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar and the earthquake in Sichuan Province, China), representing 97 per cent of fatalities worldwide.
- In the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, 70 to 80 per cent of all deaths were of women.



The UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) stated that countries in Asia and the Pacific are hit hardest with a triple whammy of food and fuel price increase, climate change, and the global economic crisis.





The triple threats can be traced to imperialist globalization that perpetually haunts Asia and the rest of the world. The disparity in disaster mortality rates links directly to cultural, social and economic factors.

Women, together with their children, receive severe blows because of their status as one of the most marginalized sectors in society.

- The International Labor Organization calculated an increase of 50-120 million in the number of Asians living under the poverty line during the period 2007 to 2009.
- Crisis means more hardship for the poorest and marginalized sectors in society.
- Approximately 70% of those who live on less than a dollar each day are women.



Women in the Asian region faced several challenges during the past couple of years.



- Economically, they were one of the hardest hit during the 2007 global economic financial crisis because of the massive retrenchment in industries that hire mostly women.
- Disaster after disaster attacked the region caused by climate change that made women and children more vulnerable.
- On top of all these, political repression and gender discrimination victimized hundreds of militant and activist women in the region.

Natural disasters may reinforce traditional gender roles too.

- women are still largely responsible for securing food as well as water and energy for cooking and heating
- They work even harder during times of droughts or floods, to secure those resources

Natural disasters may reinforce traditional gender roles too.



Women, have less time to earn income, get an education, or provide care to families.



Vulnerability of women and children, magnified in disaster situations

- women and children are 14 times more likely to die than men are during a disaster
- in 141 countries provided the definitive evidence that gender differences in deaths from natural disasters are directly linked to women's economic and social rights



The threats exacerbate the vulnerability of women, through

- (1) increased unemployment especially among those working in export-oriented countries,
- (2) aggravating exploitation in the workplace,
- (3) lower remittances to their families,
- (4) insecurity on food and other resources,
- (5) vulnerability to sex trafficking and prostitution, and
- (6) lesser opportunity for education and lesser access to health and other social services.



Challenges to surmount inequalities

- Climate change poses a serious challenge to social and economic development.
- These discrepancies are the result of existing inequalities.
- Climate change interventions that fail to address women's needs will fail to support those most affected by climate change and reinforce the disparity between men and women in their capacity to adapt to ongoing changes in the world climate.



Coping Strategies of Women

Crisis magnifies existing inequalities. Access to basic needs and services becomes a challenge.

Some even resort to anti-social strategies such as drug dealing and prostitution.



Support from others is an important factor why women can cope even with the most depressing situation. The social cost of the crisis includes increased breakdown in family relationships. In Indonesia, women who lost their jobs have faced divorce and domestic violence. They were able to survive through the social networks that support them through cash loans, provision of food and care for the children.



Tactics and Strategies

As women's involvement for social change progresses, they realize that their experiences should be consolidated through service, immersion, and education. In this way, one can learn the more appropriate solutions for the community's problems. It can also be the means to organize communities.

