



CLIMATE CRISIS AND GENDER ISSUE - GS I AND III MAINS

Q. Climate change is a global challenge but its effects are far from “Gender Neutral”. Discuss (15 marks, 250 words)

News: *The climate crisis is not gender neutral*

What's in the news?

- The climate crisis is already here and does not impact everyone equally.
- Women and girls experience disproportionately high health risks, especially in situations of poverty, and due to existing roles, responsibilities and cultural norms.
- The Supreme Court of India has just ruled that people have a right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change, and the right to a clean environment is already recognised as a fundamental right within the ambit of the right to life.

Key takeaways:

- While climate action requires 100% involvement of the population, at the same time, empowering women would mean better climate solutions.

Relationship of Climate Change With Women Across Various Dimensions:

1. Health:

- Women’s roles as primary caregivers and their biological vulnerability often result in them facing the brunt of climate-related health risks.
- Heatwaves, extreme weather events, and the spread of diseases like malaria and dengue fever pose increased challenges to women’s health.
- Pregnant women and new mothers, in particular, are at heightened risk, encountering issues such as malnutrition, childbirth complications, and limited access to maternal healthcare services after climate disasters.

2. Livelihoods and Income:

- Women, especially those in rural areas of developing nations, heavily rely on climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and forestry for their livelihoods.
- Climate change-induced factors like unpredictable weather patterns, droughts, floods, and soil degradation disrupt agricultural productivity, leading to income loss and food insecurity among women farmers.
- Additionally, women are often engaged in informal, low-paying jobs lacking job security, making them highly vulnerable to climate-related disruptions.

3. Education and Literacy:

- Climate-related disasters such as floods and storms can disrupt children’s education by damaging infrastructure and causing school closures.



- In many societies, girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school during such crises, either due to safety concerns or increased caregiving responsibilities.

4. Water and Sanitation:

- Women and girls, particularly in rural areas, typically bear the responsibility for water collection and management within households.
- Climate change-induced water scarcity and contamination increase the time and effort required for water fetching, limiting women's opportunities for education, income generation, and community participation.
- Additionally, inadequate access to clean water and sanitation facilities disproportionately affects women's health and hygiene, contributing to higher rates of waterborne diseases and maternal mortality.

Impact of Climate Change on Women:

1. Direct Relationship with Gender-Based Violence:

- A report by the Council on Energy, Environment, and Water (CEEW) in 2021 revealed that 75% of Indian districts are vulnerable to hydromet disasters like floods, droughts, and cyclones, exposing more than half of the women and children in these districts to such risks, according to NFHS 5 data.
- For example, in countries like Colombia, Mali, and Yemen, the combined effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and conflict make women and girls particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, as noted by the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance.

2. Impact of Prolonged Heat Waves:

- The past decade has seen record-high temperatures globally, and countries like India are likely to face unprecedented heatwaves. Prolonged heat poses particular risks to pregnant women, increasing the chances of preterm birth and eclampsia.
- Cohort studies in India indicate that for every 10 micrograms per cubic meter increase in PM 2.5, the risk of lung cancer, cardiovascular deaths on the same day, stroke, and dementia increases by 9%, 3%, 8%, and 4% respectively.

3. Increased Rates of Child Marriage:

- In various communities around the world, including Bangladesh, Ethiopia, and Kenya, child marriage is observed as a coping mechanism during disasters to secure funds or assets.
- Another common coping strategy is withdrawing girls from school to assist with household tasks. These practices set back progress towards gender equality and undermine the long-term resilience and adaptive capacity of communities.

4. Adding Disproportionate Burdens:

- Extreme weather events disproportionately affect women and girls, impacting their ability to carry out daily tasks, leading to some girls dropping out of school.



- Tasks like collecting firewood and water, traditionally assigned to women and girls, are heavily affected by climate change, forcing them to travel farther from home to fulfil these duties and provide for their families.

5. Impact of Rural to Urban Migration:

- Extreme weather events can lead to increased rural-to-urban migration among men in certain countries, leaving women responsible for land and household tasks traditionally performed by men.
- This results in an increased workload and decreased income for women, whose earning opportunities are restricted by gender norms affecting their access to land ownership, thereby increasing their vulnerability to climate impacts.

6. Decreased Adaptive Capacity:

- Women and men have differing adaptive capacities due to women's lesser integration into the formal economy, affecting their involvement in decision-making processes.
- For instance, in Antigua and Barbuda, women are more likely than men to earn income from informal tourism-related activities, reducing their adaptive capacity during extreme weather events like hurricanes.
- Informal employment also affects access to health and safety mechanisms, heightening risks for informal workers during climate-related disasters, as highlighted by the International Labour Organization (ILO).

7. Intersectionality of Different Discriminatory Factors:

- Marginalised groups like the LGBTQIA community and indigenous peoples have reduced adaptive capacity to climate change impacts due to the intersecting social factors that increase their vulnerability.
- Despite being custodians of traditional and indigenous knowledge, women and indigenous peoples face heightened vulnerability to climate change impacts.

8. Increased Food Insecurity:

- Women's pivotal roles in food production, processing, and distribution are directly affected by climate change-induced factors like crop failures, water scarcity, and shifting rainfall patterns, jeopardising food security within households.
- In small landholding households, women shoulder heavier domestic burdens and face increased intimate partner violence amid social stigmas related to unpaid loans, exacerbating their challenges.

Steps Need to be Adopted to Make Climate Crisis Gender Neutral:

1. Promoting Multi-Dimensional Empowerment of Women:

- Empowering women is crucial for effective climate action, aligning with the Paris Agreement's goal.



- When provided equal resources, women increase agricultural yields by 20-30%, making their involvement vital.

2. Encouraging Local Solutions Through Self-Help Groups:

- Rural and tribal women actively contribute to environmental conservation.
- Empowering women collectives with resources and knowledge fosters local solutions, acknowledging the diverse adaptation needs across different contexts.

3. Gathering Sex-Disaggregated Data:

- Comprehensive sex-disaggregated data are essential to understand women's roles as agents of change.
- Context-specific examples highlight diverse women's experiences, necessitating nuanced insights beyond homogenised perspectives.

4. Reducing the Impact of Prolonged Heat Wave:

- Efforts to mitigate heat wave impacts should prioritise vulnerable groups and implement measures like early warnings, adjusted work timings, and cooling facilities.
- Addressing heat-related deaths is crucial for economic stability and public health.

5. Involving Urban Local Bodies and Municipalities:

- Urban planning initiatives by local authorities, including green infrastructure and heat-reducing measures, are vital for climate resilience.
- Collaborative efforts can enhance urban livability and mitigate climate risks.

6. Mapping Key Water Resources:

- Utilising geographic information systems can aid in mapping water resources and developing local plans for water access.
- By directing resources effectively, communities can address water scarcity and climate vulnerabilities.

7. Convergence of Sectors and Services at Local Levels:

- Village-level convergence of sectors and services, coupled with capacity building, fosters community resilience.
- Empowering local governance structures can lead to participatory and effective climate action.

8. Reforming the Scope of NAPCCs and SAPCCs:

- Applying a gender lens to climate action plans is essential.
- State plans must move beyond portraying women as victims and embrace gender-transformative strategies for comprehensive adaptation.

Hence, climate change disproportionately affects women, exacerbating gender inequalities across various domains. Holistic approaches that prioritise women's empowerment, resource access, and



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participation in decision-making are crucial for addressing these challenges. By recognizing and addressing women's unique vulnerabilities, we can foster resilience, promote gender equality, and build a sustainable and equitable future for all.



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