



Photo: ActionAid.

# GENDER RESPONSIVE ALTERNATIVES TO CLIMATE CHANGE

**Bringing together women's grounded knowledge with scientific knowledge, enabling women's meaningful participation and supporting women's collective action to promote gender responsive alternatives to climate change and related crises.**

Global evidence suggests that climate change is changing weather systems and driving unprecedented humanitarian disasters, presenting increasing challenges for women living in poverty and exclusion.

With limited access to decision-making, women are often invisible in policy-making. Without adequate representation of women in these discussions, the default approach is techno-centric and ignores the realities of climate change and disasters for women, which include the changing burden of unpaid work, increased prevalence of gender-based violence and food insecurity, and institutionalised marginalisation of women's voices and leadership.

This research, undertaken by *Monash University's Gender, Peace and Security Centre* in partnership with *ActionAid*,

addresses these challenges through an integrated, gender responsive framework for climate change and related crises that will transform current approaches to these issues.

## Research key findings

### **1. Low Mutual Awareness of Scientific and Women's Localised Knowledge of Climate Change, its Causes and its Consequences**

Women's localised knowledge of the environment intrinsically connects crises – climate, disaster, conflict, and food insecurity – at the community level. However, a lack of mutual recognition of different types of knowledge undermines the potential for alternative climate change responses. Women at the local level have low awareness and capacity to comprehend

prevailing technical information, while scientific and policy communities have low awareness of women's valuable everyday knowledge in addressing climate-related crises locally. Women's cumulative, customary knowledge can powerfully complement and enhance technical information by revealing how, when and where multiple risks intersect.

*"We learnt how to farm from our mothers... what to plant depending on availability of water, how to tie rice stalks and harvesting. Our community practices collective harvesting."*

Female focus group participant, Pursat, Cambodia, 29 May 2018.

#### Policy Recommendations:

- Create communities of experts at all levels of governance where women's everyday knowledge is equally valued with scientific and technical knowledge.
- Establish 'train the trainer' initiatives to enable women to be knowledge brokers in their communities.
- Promote women as local information and data gatherers of the everyday signs or risks of climate change and related crises.

### 2. Women's Participation in Crisis Response Provides the Groundwork for Sustainable Alternatives to Climate Change

Women have collectively developed customised responses to interlinked crises, with inbuilt prevention mechanisms for long-term sustainable outcomes.

Women's networks effectively link women's action between crisis response and long-term sustainable development.

For women to actively participate in community efforts, there is an urgent need to overcome the barriers to engagement. These barriers take many forms, including social and cultural norms, gendered divisions of labour (paid and unpaid), gender-based violence, and access to resources.

*"Women do all the domestic work and have no other say in the household, much less in deciding about family's coping mechanisms. When they are married off, not many have gone to school."*

Focus group participant, Tanguibe, Kenya, 17 April 2018.

#### Policy Recommendations:

- Valuing the customary knowledge of women by documenting their approaches in times of crisis and integrating existing local networks and customary mechanisms in crisis preparedness, planning and response structures.
- Identify and partner with key women's networks and organisations to develop meaningful opportunities for consultation and collaboration across policy, planning, and implementation in crisis preparedness, response, recovery and beyond.

- Address basic cultural and material barriers to women's participation, and recognise the importance of women's contributions by providing remuneration, travel and childcare expenses for attendance at meetings and workshops.

### 3. Women's Collective Action in Forging Novel Community Networks Enables Integrated Responses to Climate, Disaster and Conflict.

*"The men came to me and said, 'wow you women can do many things!' Yes, I said to them, and we need your support!"*

Focus group participant, Eton, Vanuatu, 26 September 2018.

Women's collective action and leadership enables flexible, joined-up responses to interrelated crises at the community level. While society is still largely characterised by gendered division of labour and unequal gender norms that expect women to be submissive, women's networks are proving to be training grounds for sustained participation, recognising women's authority before, during and after crisis. Women's networks can bridge government and civil society by facilitating regular and sustained participation, beginning with local decision-making.

#### Policy Recommendations:

- Support and resource pre-existing women's networks as an entry point for transforming communities and national and international governance.
- Empower women-led organisations and women's networks with training in relevant technical skills (knowledge of science, policy frameworks and design, advocacy, media etc.) to influence the formulation, design and implementation of integrated development plans and crisis response.
- Strengthen the capacity of all levels of governance (village to national to regional/global) to include women and understand and value everyday knowledge.

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