

Saint Peter's University High School Model United Nations

Commission on the Status of Women

Topic A: Encouraging the Participation of Women in Planning for Climate Change

Introduction

Global climate change affects everybody, but its impacts fall disproportionately on women. Women face greater health and safety risks as natural systems are compromised – often having to travel farther and farther to collect needed energy, food, and water resources.¹ In addition, more expensive necessities mean more pressure for women to work longer hours to supplement family income – often causing them to leave school or other vocational programs.² In the wake of extreme weather events, women and girls are often the last to eat or be rescued.³ One estimate states that 75-90% of fatalities in villages affected by the 2004 tsunami were women.⁴ “During natural disasters, more women die (compared to men) because they are not adequately warned, cannot swim well, or cannot leave the house alone.”⁵ To the extent that climate-related disasters cause displacement, women are at greater risk of exploitation and violence.⁶ All of this points to the need of better understanding and addressing women and climate change.

At the same time, women’s household roles and connections to local environments can serve as important components for mitigation and adaptation strategies related to climate change.

“Through their experiences as early adopters of many new agricultural techniques, first responders in crises, entrepreneurs of green energy, and decision-makers at home, women offer valuable insights and solutions into better managing the climate and its risks. Yet, their contribution is often overlooked in humanitarian and climate action, their practical needs forgotten.”⁷

For example, indigenous women are often the first ones aware of changes in a region’s biodiversity due to climate change and can serve an important role in early warning and adaptation strategies as stewards of natural resources.⁸ In many developing regions women are primarily responsible for gathering energy supplies (often wood, charcoal, and agricultural waste), and working with them can help with the planning and adoption of greener alternatives.⁹

¹ United Nations. “Women bear the brunt of the climate crisis, COP26 highlights” UN News. 9 November 2021. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/11/1105322> Accessed 16 January 2022.

² Osman-Elasha, Balgis. “Women in the Shadow of Climate Change” *UN Chronicle* 17 April 2012, <https://doi.org/10.18356/5d941c92-en> Accessed 17 January 2022., p. 54

³ UN Women. “Climate Change and the Environment.” <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/intergovernmental-support/climate-change-and-the-environment> Accessed 16 January 2022.

⁴ Osman-Elasha, p.55

⁵ Ibid, p. 55

⁶ “Fact Sheet: Gender, Displacement and Climate Change.” July 2020. UNHCR/ Potsdam Institute for Climate Research.

⁷ UN Women. “Climate Change and the Environment.”

⁸ “Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change: Fact Sheet.” WomenWatch.

https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/factsheet.html Accessed 16 January 2022

⁹ Ibid.

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Yet, more need to be done to incorporate women's views into the discussion and to provide the resources necessary for women to play a more active role in the response to climate change.

Current Situation

The CSW has partnered with many UN organizations to raise awareness of both the impacts of climate change on women and the need to better include women in planning for climate change, including the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).¹⁰ Research indicates that women's participation is hampered most by access to funding and technology.¹¹ Much of the work CSW has sponsored in recent years has been case studies or pilot projects to try to find the most effective strategies. One example is a pilot project with UNEP to promote women's entrepreneurship in sustainable energy.¹² Another example is promoting climate resiliency by training women in disaster preparedness.¹³ A UN Women program in the Balkans assists women in promoting gender-responsive budgeting initiatives to help better prepare and respond to climate events.¹⁴

Most of these projects show positive results, but the problem remains scaling them up to have a bigger impact. UN Women has used the Climate Change Conference of Parties (COP) meetings to help focus attention on issues of women and climate issues. As part of COP26, UN Women spearheaded a "Women's Day".¹⁵ The day produced tangible commitments from many member states to advance gender equality in climate action.¹⁶ Still, there is more work to be done. In particular, the UN system needs to do more to ensure gender-inclusivity in every step of the planning of adaptation and mitigation strategies.¹⁷

Questions to Address

- What more can CSW do to encourage gender-inclusivity in climate change planning?
- How can CSW scale up pilot projects into global strategies?
- What can CSW do to get more resource support for investing in women-centered climate change strategies?

¹⁰ Picard, Mary. *Beyond Vulnerability to Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction: Critical Actions for the United Nations System* 2021. UN Women: New York

¹¹ "Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change: Fact Sheet."

¹² UN Women. "In Focus: Climate action by, and for, women." <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/climate-change#stories>. Accessed 16 January 2022.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ UN Women. "Across the Western Balkans, rural women are influencing local budgets and shaping progress" 13 October 2017. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/10/feature-western-balkans-rural-women-influencing-local-budgets>. Accessed 16 January 2022.

¹⁵ United Nations. "Women bear the brunt of the climate crisis, COP26 highlights"

¹⁶ UN Women: "Press release: Bold, new commitments from around the world to put gender equality at the forefront of climate action at COP26" 9 November 2021. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/press-release/2021/11/press-release-bold-new-commitments-from-around-the-world-to-put-gender-equality-at-the-forefront-of-climate-action-at-cop26> Accessed 16 January 2022.

¹⁷ Picard, p. 62

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Topic B: Challenges to the Reproductive Rights of Women

In 1994, the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) reached a consensus on reproductive rights that was subsequently adopted by the General Assembly. The action plan calls for member states:

- “(a) To ensure that comprehensive and factual information and a full range of reproductive health-care services, including family planning, are accessible, affordable, acceptable and convenient to all users;
- (b) To enable and support responsible voluntary decisions about child-bearing and methods of family planning of their choice, as well as other methods of their choice for regulation of fertility which are not against the law and to have the information, education and means to do so;
- (c) To meet changing reproductive health needs over the life cycle and to do so in ways sensitive to the diversity of circumstances of local communities.”¹⁸

Reproductive rights were further enshrined in the CSW's Beijing Declaration (1995) which states that individuals

“have the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when and how often to do so. Implicit in this last condition are the right of men and women to be informed and to have access to safe, effective, affordable and acceptable methods of family planning of their choice”¹⁹

The past decade has seen steady challenges to and erosion of the reproductive rights of women in many countries.²⁰ When the topic of reproductive rights is mentioned, many assume it narrowly applies only to access to legal abortion. In reality, reproductive rights are much broader and touch upon such issues as access to contraceptives, gynecological health, pre- and post-natal care, education, and access to menstrual products.²¹ While the CSW has not reached a consensus to adopt a position on abortion, the current backlash against the procedure has been accompanied by a more general attack on women's reproductive health and decision-making.²²

Current Situation

Access to reproductive information, products, and services has been hampered recently both by attacks on family planning from ideological or religious groups as well as the isolation and disruption caused by COVID-19. Religious fundamentalists and their political allies have been

¹⁸ *Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population Development: 20th Anniversary Edition*. United Nations Population Fund. 2014, p. 61

¹⁹ CSW. *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. 1995. (Reprinted in 2014), p. 57.

²⁰ Human Rights Council. *Women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health rights in crisis*. 28 April 2021 A/HRC/47/38

²¹ Human Rights Council. *Reproductive Rights are Human Rights: A Handbook for National Human Rights Institutions* 2014. HR/PUB/14/6

²² Human Rights Council. *Women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health rights in crisis*.

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quite successful at chipping away at abortion rights, access to contraception, and sex education by invoking “religious freedom” and “traditional values”.²³ These attempts are well-funded and coordinated across jurisdictions – often using identical language in new legislation.²⁴ Such attempts – while seemingly aimed primarily at abortion – have the much broader aim of “keeping women in their place” and forcing them to assume a more traditional role in both the household and society.²⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic has also limited access to reproductive services. Mandatory stay-at-home orders, large number of healthcare providers sick or overwhelmed, and government-imposed cancellations or suspensions of reproductive services all have led to a multi-year period where women have had difficulty getting access to family planning and reproductive health.²⁶

In the face of these trends, advocates for women have been trying to accelerate the wider adoption of the ICPD action plan and the Beijing Declaration. In 2019 the ICPD meeting in Nairobi reiterated the commitment to reproductive rights and called on member states to accelerate efforts to implement the plan of action and called for “Zero unmet need for family planning information and services, and universal availability of quality, accessible, affordable and safe modern contraceptives.”²⁷ The CSW endorsed this report and committed to “Drive critical partnerships such as with civil society, including religious leaders, which promote sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in a comprehensive manner.”²⁸ One strategy CSW has implemented has been the creation of a program guide for promoting gender equality in reproductive health, designed to provide tools for promoting better outcomes.²⁹ CSW has also used its “Generation Equality” media campaign to highlight the issue of access to reproductive health services.³⁰ With the backlash against women’s access to reproductive rights continuing, and despite its lack of consensus on abortion rights, CSW needs to ensure decision-makers don’t lose momentum in realizing the promise of the Beijing Declaration.

Questions to Address

- Can the CSW take a stronger stand on reproductive rights?
- How can the CSW better convince decision makers that reproductive rights are human rights?

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 14

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ “Restore sexual, reproductive health rights lost during COVID, rights expert urges” UN News. 20 October 2021. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1103562> Accessed 17 January 2022.

²⁷ Butler, Jennifer et al. *Accelerating the Promise: Report on The Nairobi Summit on ICPD25. 2020*. United Nations Population Fund, p. 56

²⁸ UN Women. “Commitment statement by UN Women at the ICPD@25 Nairobi Summit (12-14 November 2019)” 14 November 2019. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/11/statement-un-women-icpd25-nairobi-summit> Accessed 17 January 2022.

²⁹ *Promoting gender equality in sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn, child and adolescent health: Programming guide*. June 2019. UN Women: New York.

³⁰ UN Women. “I am Generation Equality: Abel Koka, champion for youth and reproductive rights” 18 February 2020. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/2/i-am-generation-equality-abel-koka-youth-and-reproductive-rights> Accessed 17 January 2022.