



Features

# Empowering Women to Combat Climate Change

Research indicates that countries with high representation of women in politics are more likely to ratify international environmental treaties and undertake stronger efforts to combat climate change.

Shivani Lakshman May 08, 2021 10:46 a.m.



Climate change is likely the most urgent crisis facing us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Rising temperatures are causing increasingly frequent and severe [natural disasters](#), more droughts and heat waves, precipitation changes, and sea level rise. Consequently, this is leading to [higher levels](#) of food insecurity, mass displacements, the spread of disease, and many other economic, and political challenges worldwide.

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Morocco is particularly vulnerable to climate change. Since the 1960s, Morocco's climate has [increased](#) by 1°C, and projections indicate an increase of 1-1.5° until 2050. This temperature increase is associated with [reductions](#) in mountain snow cover and in rainfall; projections indicate a decline of [10 to 20 percent](#) in average precipitation across the country by

Consequently, droughts are becoming more frequent. Sea level is projected to rise between [18 to 59 centimeters](#) by 2100, threatening [60 percent](#) of Morocco's population in coastal cities. Some areas of the northern coast are already eroding by [1 meter each year](#). Lastly, water resources are also under increasing pressure, with [water shortages](#) now expected by 2020 and in many southern regions.

Climate change will have devastating consequences on all sectors of the population, but women will bear the brunt. Women across the globe are highly [dependent](#) on natural resources, as they are typically tasked with collecting water, food, and fuel for cooking. As droughts and water scarcity increase, women and girls spend more time and energy [collecting](#)

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[survey](#) in 141 countries in 2012 reported that 103 nations impose legal differences on the basis of gender that hinder women's economic opportunities.

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With fewer rights and economic capacities, women are often at greatest risk when disasters strike. Disasters such as extreme droughts or floods can lead to women's [displacement](#) from their homes Some may resort to [early marriage or prostitution](#) to financial pressures caused by the loss of livelihoods.

Women are one of the most vulnerable demographics to the climate change crisis, but involvement and empowerment is also crucial to its solution. Women and girls make [percent](#) of the world's population, and their needs, perspectives, and ideas must be considered in effective, equitable, and sustainable planning to curb global warming.

For one, the climate crisis threatens the world's food systems, and the Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that we must raise food [production](#) by 70 percent by 2050 to feed the growing population.

Women comprise [43 percent](#) of the agricultural labor force in developing nations, yet they often [denied](#) loans, land ownership rights, and other resources. This in turn hinders their [ability](#) to produce maximum yields. Meanwhile, many [forests](#) are cleared each year to grow more crops, contributing significantly to climate warming. If provided with the same resources as men, women could [increase](#) their agricultural yields by 20 to 30 percent, which could reduce world hunger by 12 to 17 percent. If women's farms yielded as much as men's, about [tons](#) of carbon dioxide would be prevented from entering the atmosphere between now and 2050.

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A report by the climate research organization Project Drawdown estimates that [increasing](#) girls' education and women's access to family planning would reduce the amount of carbon that enters the atmosphere by 85 gigatons by 2050. Giving women access to high-quality reproductive healthcare allows them to [choose](#) the number of children they want to have, curbing population growth and reducing global emissions. Additionally, the more education a woman has, the [fewer](#) children she has.

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Granting women and girls the right to education also increases their economic opportunities, decreasing their vulnerability to climate change, and may also increase their influence in the political sphere. Countries with high representation of women in politics are more likely to [ratify](#) international environmental treaties and undertake stronger efforts to [combat](#) climate change. Yet a 2015 study reviewing 881 environmental sector ministries from 193 countries found that only [12 percent](#) of environmental ministers were women.

The High Atlas Foundation (HAF) is doing important work to empower women in the agricultural sector, including through the [USAID Farmer-to-Farmer Program](#), to tackle climate change in Morocco. HAF engages women in rural communities to plant organic fruit trees that



changes in their communities that promote the well-being of both people and the planet. Ultimately, empowering women empowers societies to tackle climate change, and we must engage women if we want to protect the planet and humanity.

*Shivani Lakshman is an Intern at the High Atlas Foundation and a student studying environmental sciences at the University of Virginia.*

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