



WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

'We need to recognize women as change agents engaged in struggles over fossil fuel exploitation, pollution and environmental health, for food sovereignty, against privatisation of water, access to renewable energy, etc.'

Anita Nayar, *Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN)*



The state of the environment and climate change are the greatest challenges that the world faces. Men and women affect and are affected by environmental and climate change in different ways. Environmental policies impact directly on the health and living standards of individuals. In certain regions of the EU, access to safe water and sanitation is still not guaranteed.

Women's rights and climate change are interlinked: when women's rights are not protected, more women than men die from disasters, most of which, these days, are climate-related. On the other hand, the more unequal a country is, the higher its carbon emission.

While many women are present in ecological and environmental movements, they are largely absent from decision-making in this sector, including at the governmental level. For women in Europe, it is also a question of solidarity with all women on the planet, who already have to live with the consequences of climate change. Women are half of the world's population: it is obvious that we won't save the planet without women's leadership and participation.



FACTS & FIGURES IN EUROPE

Gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities in families and households, as well as gender-segregated labour market and income gap, cause differentiated vulnerabilities of women to the effects of climate change. They include more casualties among women during extreme weather events and stressful experiences of recovering from disasters. Economic disparities lead to differences in adaptive capacity. Care work may increase due to health impacts of climate change or due to natural disasters, putting additional burdens on women who are mainly responsible for caring.

According to EIGE, women, on average, generate less gas emissions than men, in particular in the transport sector. Women tend to travel in a more sustainable way than men. In Europe the overall number of women driving (40%) is smaller than the overall number of men (62,2%). In the area of nutrition, women's daily meat consumption tends to be lower, and we know that raising livestock contributes to agricultural gas emissions.

Women's capabilities to adapt to climate change are shaped by education, gender roles, division of labour in the household and income. For example, women tend to

BEIJING '95 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



- Involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels.
- Integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development.
- Strengthen or establish mechanisms at national, regional and international levels to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.

spend more time indoors as they more often have care responsibilities in the family, and thus depend to a greater extent on space heating. In terms of mobility, women depend on access to public transport to a larger degree. Owing to their lower incomes, they have greater risk of energy poverty than men. Women from discriminated groups or living in isolated areas (like homeless women or rural women) have lower access to safe water and sanitation.

In terms of attitudes towards climate change, women are more likely than men to reject nuclear power, and to be in favour of policy measures to reduce energy consumption. The proportion of women in climate change decision-making bodies at the national, European and international level is still low. The percentage of women in high-level positions dealing with climate change in national ministries competent for environment is 33.9%, for transport 20.2% and for energy 17.3%. The average percentage of women in relevant high-level positions in the European Commission is 26.9%. While in DG Climate action it is 40% and in DG Environment 37.5%, in DG Energy it is 20% and in DG Mobility and Transport 12.5%.

CLIMATE CHANGE IN EUROPE

Anthropogenic or human-induced climate change, caused by greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest challenges of our time. The expected impacts of climate change in the EU include more frequent extreme weather events, high temperatures and drought (in particular in Southern Europe), retreat of glaciers and reduced snow cover. Consequences will include increased risk of flash floods and coastal flooding, increased erosion, more frequent wildfires, extensive species loss, rise of the sea level, air pollution, reduced water availability and crop productivity. These geo-physical impacts will result in socio-economic impacts such as effects on human health and pressure on economic activities such as tourism (Source: EIGE).



WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT & THE EUROPEAN UNION



Despite the leading role of the EU in advancing the international negotiations on climate change, the gender dimension has been largely absent from policy initiatives and debates at the European and international levels. Since 2012, the issue is high on the political agenda in the EU. Firstly, in 2012, the EU Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council of Ministers (EPSCO) adopted conclusions on gender equality and climate change, highlighting that more women are needed in climate change decision-making to respond to climate change effectively. The same year, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) introduced the first indicators to measure the progress of gender equality in the area of women and the environment, showing that to develop and maintain a sustainable and effective response to climate change, a gender approach and gender-sensitive indicators must be an integral

part of all policies and actions at all levels.

The 2012 European Parliament resolution on women and climate change explains that women would be more affected by climate change, because consumption and lifestyle patterns have a significant impact on climate change, and women still have relatively more responsibility for everyday consumption choices, childcare and household activities. The Parliament highlights that women consume more sustainably than men and show greater willingness to act to preserve the environment by making sustainable consumption choices. The 2012 EP resolution on women and the green economy makes proposals to support more women in this new form of sustainable economy.

CHALLENGES

- The proportion of women at high-level positions in the sectors of Transport and Energy is still very low, both at European and national level. This situation can be explained by gender stereotypes and education that define technology and science as masculine. EIGE studies indeed show that women are less likely to choose scientific and technological fields relevant to climate change.
- EU indicators on women and the environment focus mainly on decision-making, and should include other quantitative and qualitative indicators on the direct and indirect impact of climate change on women. There is insufficient research and data collection on exposure to chemicals (for example cleaning products, pesticides, industrial and farming products, consumer products) and their impact on women's and men's health (including cancers, pregnancies, and sexual and reproductive health), access to safe water and quality sanitation (such as public or school toilets).
- Privatisation of water (despite the EU Water Framework Directive) and public services, including public transports, can threaten the access of women and men to these fundamental resources and services.
- Waste management and packaging are issues that have a great impact on women, and strict legislation should be implemented.
- In other parts of the world, women climate activists are threatened of criminalisation and pervasive forms of violence, including rape. Despite this, the action of grassroots women is making concrete change at local level. The 2014 Summit on Women and Climate Change in Bali brought together women's and environmental rights leaders.
- The current GDP system does not integrate the impact of our life styles on the environment; we need new values that prioritise the protection of the Earth and the wellbeing of people.



OUR DEMANDS **Women as agents of change for a sustainable people-centred world.**

- **Ensure the right of all women and girls to be heard on environmental issues in their regions.**
- **Systematically include a women's rights and gender equality perspective in the definition, implementation and monitoring of environmental/climate/transport/energy policies at all levels, including research activities and data collection, and in both EU external (including development) and internal policies.**
- **Secure women's political participation and decision-making roles in environmental and climate change work, at all levels (regional/national/European/international).**
- **Assess, disseminate and raise awareness on the impacts of environmental policies on women, by both public policies and the private industry.**
- **Take action towards women's higher enrolment in science and technology-related fields of education, and women's entrepreneurship in agriculture, renewable energies, environment, protection and tourism, and enhance their contribution to innovation, quality of life and preservation of land, environment and culture.**
- **Speed up the elaboration of an environment strategy based on biodiversity, sustainable development, quality of life and wellbeing, from an intergenerational and gender equality perspective.**

