



INTERNATIONAL ACTION NETWORK
FOR GENDER EQUITY & LAW

660 13th Street, Suite 200, Oakland, CA 94612

**WOMEN, CULTURAL RIGHTS, AND CLIMATE CHANGE:
Addendum re COVID-19 –Impacts and Opportunities**

(June 2020)

**Johanna Kanes, Bridge Fellow
Zoya Chakourski, Legal Intern
Rebecca Hooley and Nancy J. Newman, Project Supervisors
Andrea Carlise, Executive Director
www.iangel.org; info@iangel.org
© 2020 IANGEL, all rights reserved.**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON WOMEN, CULTURE, AND CLIMATE.....	1
A. COVID-19's Devastating Impact on Rights and Health	1
B. Global Impacts Present New Opportunities for Transformative Change	5
III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	8

I. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19 has changed the world. It has overwhelmed health care systems, shaken economies, and disrupted daily life for millions of people. The fear, grief, and economic upheaval wrought by the global pandemic has affected every gender, culture, country, and continent. But COVID-19 has had a particularly devastating effect on women. The virus, and measures implemented to combat it, place women's physical, emotional, and economic health at risk, deny them their cultural rights, and exacerbate the threat of climate change. These impacts have been especially harmful to vulnerable populations, such as poor, disabled, migrant, or displaced women, as well as young girls and victims of domestic abuse.

This new world requires new thinking for policy makers. For amidst the sickness, sadness, violence, and death caused by the virus, we have also seen dramatic shifts in economic, cultural, and social structures that no one could have predicted a few months ago. These changes present opportunities for lasting social transformation. In a profound way, COVID-19 has upended the social order and confirmed the ineffectiveness of the status quo. These changes compel civil society to re-envision societal structures and promote policies that are gender inclusive, egalitarian, and fact-based. By seizing this moment, we can live up to our essential goals of advancing human rights, protecting culture, and promoting a healthy and sustainable future.

II. THE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON WOMEN, CULTURE, AND CLIMATE

A. COVID-19's Devastating Impact on Rights and Health

The United Nations recognized that “the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is attacking societies at their core.”¹ Almost all governments have enacted measures to limit the spread of the disease, such as temperature checks, shelter-in-place orders, and social distancing practices.² As a result, women around the world face health risks, economic insecurity, deprivation of their cultural rights, and increased vulnerability to climate change.

COVID-19 and its health repercussions disproportionately affect women. Governments are diverting medical supplies to control COVID-19 and closing “non-essential” services, many crucial to women's health. Resulting limitations make it harder for women to get basic medical care, including gender-based violence related care, mental health care, and reproductive

¹ United Nations, *Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity: Responding to socio-economic impacts of COVID-19*, March 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-03/SG-Report-Socio-Economic-Impact-of-Covid19.pdf>.

² Max Fisher and Choe Sang-Hun, *How South Korea Flattened the Curve*, New York Times, 23 March 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/23/world/asia/coronavirus-south-korea-flatten-curve.html>.

services.³ Access to contraceptives is particularly limited.⁴ In many places, women face rules that alter birth plans, or a lack of appropriate medical attention as resources are diverted to COVID-19 care.⁵ Once exposed to COVID-19, pregnant women may have a higher risk of developing complications.⁶ Further, despite making up 70% of the healthcare workforce, women around the world lack adequate access to personal protective equipment (PPE).⁷ Insufficient PPE means women are exposed to the virus at higher rates, creating a higher risk of contracting the disease and spreading it to families and communities. In the informal healthcare sector, lack of access to PPE places working women at even greater risk of exposure.⁸ And PPE that is provided to women may not fit correctly, because it is designed for men.

Women suffer substantial economic strain in the wake of the pandemic. Job insecurity disproportionately increases for women during times of crisis, especially for poor women and those who work in volatile service-based industries.⁹ Economic sectors that employ a majority of women, such as retail, lodging, food services and manufacturing, have been hit hardest by virus containment measures.¹⁰ Women comprise a large percentage of the domestic workforce, as nannies, cooks, cleaners and caretakers. These women face the risk of contagion if they continue work, and the threat of poverty if they stop working.¹¹ It is estimated that 76.2% of all

³ Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls Globally, *COVID-19 and Gender-Based Violence Globally: U.S. Government Response Must Address Gender-based Violence*, (last visited 22 May 2020) <http://www.endgbvnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GBV-Coalition-COVID-Brief.pdf>.

⁴ Taylor Riley, et. al., *Estimates of the Potential Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Sexual and Reproductive Health in Low- and Middle-Income Countries*, Guttmacher Institute, International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health, Volume 46 2020 page 73-76, 73. <https://www.guttmacher.org/journals/ipsrh/2020/04/estimates-potential-impact-covid-19-pandemic-sexual-and-reproductive-health>

⁵ Corina Knoll, *'I'm Officially Scared': Giving Birth in a Hospital During a Pandemic*, New York Times, 5 May 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/05/nyregion/coronavirus-pregnant-birth-quarantine.html>.

⁶ Devon Cone, *Issue Brief, Gender Matters: COVID-19's Outsized Impact on Displaced Women and Girls*, Refugees International, 7 May 2020. <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/5/4/gender-matters-covid-19s-outsized-impact-on-displaced-women-and-girls>

⁷ Geeta Rao Gupta, Jeremy Farrar, *Why we need women's leadership in the COVID-19 response*, WEFORUM, 03 April 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/women-female-leadership-gender-coronavirus-covid19-response/>.

⁸ Carlie Proterfield, *A Lot of PPE Doesn't Fit Women - And in The Coronavirus Pandemic, It Puts Them in Danger*, Forbes, 29 April 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carlieporterfield/2020/04/29/a-lot-of-ppe-doesnt-fit-women-and-in-the-coronavirus-pandemic-it-puts-them-in-danger/#451480cc315a>.

⁹ Alejandra Mora Mora, *COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts*, Inter-American Commission of Women and the Organization of American States, 2020, page 12-13 (discussing economic effects of the Ebola virus quarantines and the 2008 economic crisis on women.) <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-EN.pdf>

¹⁰ Alejandra Mora Mora, *COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts*, Inter-American Commission of Women and the Organization of American States, 2020, page 14 (noting that in Latin America, women represent 54% of the tourism sector); António Guterres, *Put women and girls at the center of efforts to recover from COVID-19*, United Nations (last visited 22 May 2020), <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/put-women-and-girls-centre-efforts-recover-covid-19> (noting that 60% of women worldwide work in the informal economy).

¹¹ United Nations, Policy Brief: *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women*, 9 April 2020 (last visited 22 May 2020), <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/policy-brief-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-women-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1406>.

unpaid care work is done by women at home, triple that of men.¹² As shelter-in-place orders transfer education, child care, labor and socialization to the home, women face the additional burden of managing these domestic responsibilities.¹³ As industries move to online platforms, women who lack consistent access to the internet are unable to transition into the online workforce. Poor women, whose jobs are disproportionately impacted by the virus, are left unable to obtain safe and viable employment.

COVID-19 measures have also deprived women of their cultural rights. Most cultural institutions such as museums, religious centers, movie theaters, historical landmarks and schools are closed during the pandemic, or offer limited services.¹⁴ Community spaces like playgrounds and town squares are empty, as people are required to practice social distancing. As familial, social and religious gatherings have moved to online platforms, those without internet access are materially deprived of cultural participation. And as recession looms, women will have less time and money to spend on cultural offerings like the arts, as they face reduced incomes and increased caretaking responsibilities.

COVID-19 has also aggravated the risks that climate change poses, with special impact on women. Time and resources that would be devoted to climate crises are being diverted to address COVID-19. The pandemic is stressing already fragile communities, as they must battle COVID-19 on top of other health, security, and climate threats.¹⁵ On a global scale, COVID-19 is disrupting key climate efforts, such as international meetings and a global climate summit hosted by the UN.¹⁶

The impacts of COVID-19 are most strongly felt by vulnerable populations, such as women living in poverty, homeless, disabled, migrant or displaced women, young girls and victims of domestic abuse. The pandemic puts food supply and the worldwide availability of both short and long-term shelter at risk. While the shelter-in-place orders help protect public health, they assume that all people are housed, ignoring the plights of the homeless. These orders also overlook persons with disabilities, as “[c]ontainment measures, such as social distancing and self-isolation, may be impossible for those who rely on the support of others to

¹² Alejandra Mora Mora, *COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts*, Inter-American Commission of Women and the Organization of American States, 2020, page 10. <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-EN.pdf>

¹³ Alejandra Mora Mora, *COVID-19 in Women's Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts*, Inter-American Commission of Women and the Organization of American States, 2020, page 3. <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-EN.pdf>

¹⁴ Katherine J. Wu, Meilan Solly, *How COVID-19 is Affecting the Cultural World*, Smithsonian Magazine, 10 March 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-covid-19-has-affected-worlds-cultural-institutions-180974383/>.

¹⁵ Neena Bhandari, *How Some Pacific Women are Responding to Climate Change and Natural Disasters*, Inter Press Service, 20 April 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <http://www.ipsnews.net/2020/04/pacific-women-responding-climate-change-natural-disasters/>.

¹⁶ Luciana Téllez Chávez, Daniel Wilkinson, *How Covid-19 Could Impact the Climate Crisis*, Human Rights Watch, 16 April 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/16/how-covid-19-could-impact-climate-crisis>.

eat, dress and bathe.”¹⁷ In addition to reduced job prospects, quarantine measures cause poor women with limited online access to lose critical cultural communication and participation.

Migrant women are likewise especially vulnerable to the economic and health consequences of COVID-19.¹⁸ Migrant workers, half of whom are women, face exclusion from unemployment benefits and workplace protection, and have difficulty accessing testing and medical treatment for COVID-19.¹⁹ Displaced women (including refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people and stateless women) are also at high risk for contracting and spreading COVID-19 as many lack access to reliable healthcare systems.²⁰ Hygiene techniques used to curb COVID-19, such as frequent hand washing and social distancing measures, may be unavailable to displaced women who live in camps or in urban areas where wash facilities are shared or inaccessible.²¹

Similarly, young girls and victims of domestic abuse face greater dangers from the pandemic. During crises, young women and girls experience disruptions to their education and protective structures, increased stress from health and economic burdens, and currently, a rise in cyber violence.²² Girls may face higher rates of child marriage due to factors resulting from COVID-19, such as familial economic hardships, suspended education, and inability to access reproductive services.²³ Physical and/or sexual violence against women increases during times of crisis.²⁴ Indeed, the global pandemic and resulting shelter-in-place directives has caused a spike in domestic violence worldwide. For example, reports of domestic violence in China have tripled compared to the previous year, domestic violence in France increased 30%, and

¹⁷ United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, *Covid-19: Who is Protecting the People With Disabilities? – UN Rights Expert*, Mar. 17, 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25725&LangID=E>.

¹⁸ Alejandra Mora Mora, *COVID-19 in Women’s Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts*, Inter-American Commission of Women and the Organization of American States, 2020, page 15. <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/docs/ArgumentarioCOVID19-EN.pdf>

¹⁹ International Labour Organization, *Policy Brief: Protecting migrant workers during the COVID-19 pandemic: Recommendations for Policy-makers and Constituents*, (Geneva) April 2020. https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/labour-migration/publications/WCMS_743268/lang--en/index.htm

²⁰ Devon Cone, *Issue Brief, Gender Matters: COVID-19’s Outsized Impact on Displaced Women and Girls*, Refugees International, 7 May 2020. <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/5/4/gender-matters-covid-19s-outsized-impact-on-displaced-women-and-girls>

²¹ Devon Cone, *Issue Brief, Gender Matters: COVID-19’s Outsized Impact on Displaced Women and Girls*, Refugees International, 7 May 2020. <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/5/4/gender-matters-covid-19s-outsized-impact-on-displaced-women-and-girls>

²² Alejandra Mora Mora, *COVID-19 in Women’s Lives: Reasons to Recognize the Differential Impacts*, Inter-American Commission of Women and the Organization of American States, 2020, page 9; Plan International, *How will COVID-19 affect girls and young women?* (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://plan-international.org/emergencies/covid-19-faqs-girls-women>.

²³ Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls Globally, *COVID-19 and Gender-Based Violence Globally: U.S. Government Response Must Address Gender-based Violence*, (last visited 22 May 2020) <http://www.endgbvnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GBV-Coalition-COVID-Brief.pdf>.

²⁴ Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls Globally, *COVID-19 and Gender-Based Violence Globally: U.S. Government Response Must Address Gender-based Violence*, (last visited 22 May 2020) <http://www.endgbvnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GBV-Coalition-COVID-Brief.pdf>.

emergency calls in Columbia increased by 90%.²⁵ Quarantine measures implemented to curb COVID-19 contribute to this increase in violence – as strict restrictions on leaving the home result in women being locked in with their abusers, limiting their opportunities to seek assistance or escape.

B. Global Impacts Present New Opportunities for Transformative Change

Along with the terrible impacts, COVID-19 has created a new platform for effecting lasting change. In April of 2020, for the first time in history, the price of a barrel of oil in the U.S. went negative; the pandemic reduced the demand for oil so dramatically, that producers had to pay buyers to take it off their hands.²⁶ This circumstance was not only unprecedented, it was utterly unimaginable just a few months ago. It creates a new opportunity to reimagine a world, in which the death grip of corruption, power, and environmental disaster caused by the fossil fuel industry may finally be loosened. Indeed, positive societal changes caused by the pandemic will likely persist, as many people originally forced to work from home will continue to do after the restrictions are lifted.²⁷ Ubiquitous use of on-line meeting platforms, such as Zoom, WebEx, and Google Meet have shown that people can effectively meet without the time, expense, and carbon footprint of air travel. The pandemic has also brought people closer together, as communities engage in mutual aid to assist their most vulnerable and raise spirits.²⁸

By upending social and economic norms, the novel coronavirus has exposed weaknesses in previously unquestioned structures, and demonstrated the power of human ingenuity and care. By seeing changes that were previously unimaginable, we can now envision a new way forward. These circumstances provide an opportunity to re-work society in a way that promotes equality, justice, and protects the health and welfare of the world.

The profound injustice and instability of the status quo is highlighted in the time of the pandemic by the Black Lives Matter movement. In the aftermath of George Floyd's senseless death under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer, and the worldwide protests that followed, state and local governments in the U.S. rallied equipment, resources, personnel and policy.²⁹ Such swift action and funding have been missing from the U.S. response to the Covid-19 crisis,

²⁵ Coalition to End Violence Against Women and Girls Globally, *COVID-19 and Gender-Based Violence Globally: U.S. Government Response Must Address Gender-based Violence*, (last visited 22 May 2020) <http://www.endgbvnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/GBV-Coalition-COVID-Brief.pdf>.

²⁶ BBC NEWS, *US oil prices turn negative as demand dries up*, Business, Apr. 21, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-52350082#:~:text=The%20price%20of%20US%20oil,world%20have%20kept%20people%20inside>.

²⁷ ²⁷ NEW YORK TIMES, *Facebook Starts Planning for Permanent Remote Workers*, May 21, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/21/technology/facebook-remote-work-coronavirus.html>

²⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *'The way we get through this is together': the rise of mutual aid under the coronavirus*, The Guardian, May 14, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/14/mutual-aid-coronavirus-pandemic-rebecca-solnit>.

²⁹ Brian Barrett, *The Pentagon's Hand-Me-Downs Helped Militarize Police. Here's How*, WIRED, Jun. 2, 2020, <https://www.wired.com/story/pentagon-hand-me-downs-militarize-police-1033-program/>.

as hospitals struggle without sufficient equipment and resources.³⁰ The U.S. has focused its funding on military and security, rather than healthcare and education – with disastrous consequences.³¹ Other countries’ spending trends follow similar trajectories.³² The havoc wrought by COVID-19 demonstrates the necessity of improving infrastructure and addressing inequity in planning for future challenges.

COVID-19 has transformed the way in which humans work, meet, and communicate. Such changes have environmental effects. Decrease in commuting and travel as a result of stay-at-home orders have already improved air quality and wildlife numbers around the globe, and this decrease in travel is expected to continue.³³ While society is beginning to re-open, many employees may have the option of continuing to work from home indefinitely, permanently decreasing travel, commute, and office space rental by businesses.³⁴ These changes in the fundamental way our society and economy operate represent a cultural departure that can have lasting impact in the fight against climate change.

In light of COVID-19’s economic fallout, many global leaders are calling for a response that would combat the pandemic and climate change together.³⁵ Proposed “green new deals” aim to provide economic stimulus and relief with sustainability in mind. Switching to sustainable energy systems could increase global GDP by \$98 trillion by 2050 and would add 42 million jobs globally.³⁶ Worldwide, governments have announced \$8 trillion in economic packages to aid those affected by the pandemic.³⁷ By providing infrastructure, social programs and policies focused on sustainability, such packages could support global climate change relief and reshape cultural responses to climate change. This is especially necessary, as past environmental practices – such as deforestation and habitat destruction, which decrease the ecological buffer

³⁰ Andrew Jacobs, Matt Richtel, Mike Baker, ‘At War With No Ammo’: Doctors Say Shortage of Protective Gear is Dire, The New York Times, Mar. 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/19/health/coronavirus-masks-shortage.html>; Brian Barrett, *The Pentagon’s Hand-Me-Downs Helped Militarize Police. Here’s How*, WIRED, Jun. 2, 2020, <https://www.wired.com/story/pentagon-hand-me-downs-militarize-police-1033-program/>.

³¹ Andrew Jacobs, Matt Richtel, Mike Baker, ‘At War With No Ammo’: Doctors Say Shortage of Protective Gear is Dire, The New York Times, Mar. 19, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/03/19/health/coronavirus-masks-shortage.html>.

³² Kelly Case, Sahana Dharmapuri, Hans Hogrefe, Miki Jacevic, Jolynn Shoemaker, Moira Whelan, *Security For All: Applying the Women, Peace and Security Lens to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Response in the U.S.*, Policy Brief, ONE EARTH FUTURE, SPRING 2020, at 3. <https://oursecurefuture.org/publications/security-for-all-covid19-response>

³³ Rebecca Solnit, ‘The impossible has already happened’: what coronavirus can teach us about hope, The Guardian, Apr. 7, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/07/what-coronavirus-can-teach-us-about-hope-rebecca-solnit>.

³⁴ Erica Pandey, *Companies weigh the potential of permanent work-from-home*, Axios, Economy and Business, May 19, 2020, <https://www.axios.com/work-from-home-permanent-coronavirus-6680b1a5-6daa-40e5-a39f-665e8e73b477.html>.

³⁵ Reuters Staff, *IMF leader says pandemic stimulus must focus on battling climate crisis*, World Economic Forum, 30 April 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020), <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/imf-pandemic-coronavirus-covid19-respone-battle-climate-crisis>; UN News, *Parallel threats of COVID-19, climate change, require ‘brave, visionary and collaborative leadership’*: UN chief, 28 April 2020 (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1062752>.

³⁶ António Guterres, *A Time to Save the Sick and Rescue the Planet*, New York Times, 28 April 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/28/opinion/coronavirus-climate-antonio-guterres.html>.

³⁷ Patricia Espinosa, *Now is the Time to Build a 21st Century Energy System*, United Nations, 14 May 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://unfccc.int/news/now-is-the-time-to-build-a-21st-century-energy-system>.

between humans and disease carrying animals – likely contributed to the spread of COVID-19 and may cause future pandemics.³⁸

Global effects of the COVID-19 crisis have exposed another pertinent truth - the importance of grounding policy decisions in facts, and respecting science. Countries whose leaders respected science and listened to experts in their crisis responses have had the most success in battling both current and previous pandemics. These countries have healthier populations and swifter economic recoveries.³⁹ Countries where science is questioned, ignored, or publicly doubted lag far behind.⁴⁰ The U.N. has called for greater trust in, access to, and cooperation in finding scientific solutions to battle the pandemic and future threats.⁴¹

To build a fair and sustainable future, global responses to the pandemic must not only be climate-sensitive, but gender-inclusive as well. Women’s participation in the formation of a functional, egalitarian society is crucial. Countries with the “best” response to the pandemic – including Germany, New Zealand, and Taiwan, among others – are led by women. Although women hold only 7% of world government leadership roles, the pandemic presents an opportunity for women leaders (at the local or parliamentary level) to shape a response that includes empathy and compassion along with preparedness and collaborative decision making.⁴² Women’s participation in the community has been crucial in rebuilding from past disasters, such as the 2005 Hurricane Katrina or the 2014 Ebola crisis.⁴³ In addressing COVID-19, some

³⁸ Sigal Samuel, *Our environmental practices make pandemics like the coronavirus more likely*, Vox, 12 May 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) https://www.vox.com/platform/amp/future-perfect/2020/3/31/21199917/coronavirus-covid-19-animals-pandemic-environment-climate-biodiversity?_twitter_impression=true.

³⁹ Avivah Wittenberg-Cox, *What Do Countries With The Best Coronavirus Responses Have In Common? Women Leaders*, Forbes, Apr. 13, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/avivahwittenbergcox/2020/04/13/what-do-countries-with-the-best-coronavirus-reponses-have-in-common-women-leaders/#275249f53dec>; Peter Dizikes, *The data speak: Stronger pandemic response yields better economic recovery*, MIT NEWS, MAR. 31, 2020, <http://news.mit.edu/2020/pandemic-health-response-economic-recovery-0401>.

⁴⁰ UNITED NATIONS, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, *The COVID-19 pandemic: a wake-up call for better cooperation at the science–policy–society interface*, Policy Brief #62, Apr. 22, 2020, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-62-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-wake-up-call-for-better-cooperation-at-the-science-policy-society-interface/>.

⁴¹ UNITED NATIONS, DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS, *The COVID-19 pandemic: a wake-up call for better cooperation at the science–policy–society interface*, Policy Brief #62, Apr. 22, 2020, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-62-the-covid-19-pandemic-a-wake-up-call-for-better-cooperation-at-the-science-policy-society-interface/>.

⁴² Jennifer Hassan, Siobhán O’Grady, *Female world leaders hailed as voices of reason amid the coronavirus chaos*, The Washington Post, 20 April 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/04/20/female-world-leaders-hailed-voices-reason-amid-coronavirus-chaos/>; Tracie White, *Women leaders shine during COVID-19 pandemic*, Scope, 12 May 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://scopeblog.stanford.edu/2020/05/12/women-leaders-shine-during-covid-19-pandemic/>.

⁴³ Kelly Case, Sahana Dharmapuri, Hans Hogrefe, Miki Jacevic, Jolynn Shoemaker, Moira Whelan, *Security For All: Applying the Women, Peace and Security Lens to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Response in the U.S.*, Policy Brief, ONE EARTH FUTURE, SPRING 2020, at 3. <https://oursecurefuture.org/publications/security-for-all-covid19-response>

women leaders are also responding to climate change.⁴⁴ For example, women from the island nation of Vanuatu are taking the lead in battling not only the Covid-19 crisis, but a number of other natural and climate-related issues, including drought, scarcity of potable water, volcanic ash, acid rain and sulfur gas.⁴⁵ Vanuatu women use climate science, indigenous knowledge, communication, and community-focused mutual aid to prepare for and combat disasters in a country particularly vulnerable to climate change.⁴⁶ Involving women, and especially indigenous women, in disaster mitigation requires a huge shift in the structuring of society, but also provides an opportunity to preserve and protect many cultural practices and traditions while effectively responding to the climate crisis.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While its impacts on the world's health and economy are disastrous, changes brought about by the COVID-19 crisis provide a valuable opportunity to reshape society and enact positive change. Such change must come from a place of inclusion and understanding – the voices of women, scientists, indigenous people and marginalized populations must be at the forefront of policy development – not only for reasons of justice, but for the undeniably positive effects that inclusion of such voices brings. Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and other crises demonstrate the invaluable contributions of women leaders and indigenous activists in providing an effective and holistic response, on country-wide and community levels. Social movements, such as current protests after the murder of George Floyd, also demonstrate the inherent weakness and instability of a societies plagued by exclusion and injustice. In this way, the pandemic has brought new urgency to the task of rooting society in values of equality, health, and sustainability. We now have a unique opportunity to promote effective and systemic change. For our children, and their children, we must seize the day.

Recommendations

1. Policy change must include a gendered perspective, be grounded in science, and respect the needs of vulnerable populations.
2. Local and national disaster response efforts should promote women's leadership, respect culture, and uplift women's voices.
3. Long terms policy goals must focus on equality, justice, and sustainability.

⁴⁴ Sundaa Bridgett-Jones, Pat Mitchell, *Climate Justice in the Time of COVID-19: 5 Lessons from Women and Girls Leading the Fights*, Rockefeller Foundation, 7 April 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/blog/climate-justice-in-the-time-of-covid-19-5-lessons-from-women-and-girls-leading-the-fight/>.

⁴⁵ Neena Bhandari, How Some Pacific Women are Responding to Climate Change and Natural Disasters, Inter Press Service, 20 April 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <http://www.ipsnews.net/2020/04/pacific-women-responding-climate-change-natural-disasters/>.

⁴⁶ Neena Bhandari, How Some Pacific Women are Responding to Climate Change and Natural Disasters, Inter Press Service, 20 April 2020, (last visited 22 May 2020) <http://www.ipsnews.net/2020/04/pacific-women-responding-climate-change-natural-disasters/>.