



**Answer to the call for input  
by the UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change:  
Promotion and protection of human rights  
in the context of mitigation, adaptation, and financial  
actions to address climate change, with particular  
emphasis on loss and damage**

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) is an international NGO that since its inception in 1947, has been advocating for the recognition and support of mothers as key actors for social and economic development. This answer to the call for input focuses on the specific impacts of climate change – notably in terms of loss and damage - on mothers and on their ability to care for and educate their children. This issue is at the heart of our work.

Our response largely draws from the lived experiences of Friendship NGO, our grassroots member in Bangladesh, according to whom: ‘climate change undermines basic human rights and amplifies difficulties in accessing the right to life, health, housing, education, water, sanitation, access to legal or financial services, and finally, for the most vulnerable communities, it increases the inability to restart life’<sup>1</sup>.

**Question 1 – What experiences and examples are you aware of that are being faced by particularly individuals and communities in vulnerable situations (as identified above) that have suffered loss and damage due to the adverse impacts of climate change?**

Women are disproportionately affected by the adverse effects of climate change, which, like most crises exacerbate existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. Because they are often confined to roles and jobs that make them more dependent on natural resources; because they face barriers to financial and technical support; because they are denied land ownership, women are hindered in their adaptation to climate change and in their ability to cope with a climate disaster.

Women and children also suffer disproportionately from loss and damage, which are not always quantifiable.

The experience of people served by Friendship, who are living in rural and remote areas of Bangladesh, provides concrete examples of the cascading consequences that climate change can have on the lives of women and their children.

- **Impact on livelihood and food security:** in Bangladesh like in many low and middle-income countries, many people earn a living in the food system - from farmers to processors, cooks, and vendors – and they are all struggling with growing climate change-driven risks of poverty, food insecurity and hunger. The majority of these workers are women, who are also often engaged in subsistence farming; climate change threatens their ability to feed themselves and their families. For those living on coastal areas, the salinization of soils, a major process of land degradation which results from climate change induced floods, means loss of fertile land for farmers and directly translates into **loss of livelihood** and increased poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> See in particular Friendship’s input to the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on Human Rights and Climate Change, presented at the 50th Session of the Human Rights Council. <https://makemothersmatter.org/friendship-ngo-at-the-forefront-of-the-fight-against-climate-change/>

- **Impact on access to clean water:** whether because of salinization or desertification, climate change threatens access to clean freshwater - the basis of life - forcing families to look elsewhere to get water. For women it means walking longer distances, losing time and opportunities. Loss of fresh water for agriculture and drinking water often forces families to relocate altogether and restart a new life from scratch, leaving everything behind.
- **Impact on nutrition and health:** the increasing food and water insecurity in turn has a direct impact on the nutrition and health not only of women, but also children and other dependents in the household. For children, malnutrition leads to stunting growth, with devastating effects on their physical, cognitive and emotional development. In other words, climate change is ruining the future of these children, a **non-quantifiable and unacceptable loss** for them but also for their community and country.
- **Impact on unpaid care work:** climate change increases the time women have to spend on unpaid family care work. The linkages between climate change and unpaid care work have been largely overlooked; but they are described in detail in a recent Oxfam report<sup>2</sup>. This foundational work is mostly done by women, and is already a cause of economic injustice and hardship for them, especially when they are mothers. Climate change only makes matters worse.

The impact of climate change on food security, access to clean water, or on health, all increase the time and effort women must put into unpaid care work. For example, climate change-induced desertification makes women walk longer distances to fetch water and cooking fuel. Rising temperature has an effect on children's health, requiring mothers to offer increasing care. Recurring floods force mothers to flee with their children and repair damages when water recedes.

The Covid-19 pandemic has already shown how crises increase the level of care work required while reducing the number of people who are able to undertake care work. Women's unpaid care work has regularly acted as a 'shock absorber' for all sorts of threats and crises, and it is not different with the Climate crisis.

Increasing women's unpaid care work translates into further **losses of opportunities for them**, including income earning and education opportunities. It exacerbates existing inequalities and unbalanced power relations with men, undermining any progress towards Gender Equality, at a **great cost for society and the economy**.

**Question 2 - What international, regional and national policies and legal approaches are necessary to protect current and future generations and achieve intergenerational justice for particularly individuals and communities, from the adverse impacts of climate change?**

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<sup>2</sup> MacGregor, Sherilyn, Arora-Jonsson, Seema and Cohen, Maeve "Caring in a changing climate: Centering care work in climate action," Oxfam Research Backgrounder series (2022):

<https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/researchpublications/caring-in-a-changing-climate/>

This report defines the unpaid work of caring as 'both direct and indirect care for people as well as for living environments', where 'direct care refers to hands-on care for people; indirect care refers to provisioning of necessary goods and services for people. By environmental care work we mean activities that take place outside the household that are necessary for provisioning and subsistence (including caring for animals, plants, and common spaces on which households depend'

Unpaid family care work is indispensable and foundational work that sustains society and the economy; it is in particular essential to raise and educate the next generation of citizens and workers<sup>3</sup>.

As highlighted above, climate change has a direct or indirect negative impact on this work, increasing the time and efforts it requires – mostly from women. In fact, it only exacerbates a pre-existing global care crisis<sup>4</sup>.

- A care-sensitive climate approach is key to redress, or at least mitigate these impacts

The Paris Agreement within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) requires that climate intervention strategies be “gender responsive” and that they contribute to supporting women as ‘agents of change’. However, in the process of designing climate actions that are responsive and sensitive to gender, governments and other actors have focused primarily on women’s economic activities and overlooked how paid and unpaid care are interconnected.

Analyzing the specific impacts that climate change has on care work, especially in systemically underserved and vulnerable areas, could help design policies and programs that can mitigate negative impacts.

These care sensitive actions could be informed by the so-called “5R framework”, which (in varying forms) has been used for at least two decades by feminist researchers and advocates to develop policies for redressing the ‘care gap’ and the resulting economic injustice for women. These ‘5R’, Recognise, Redistribute, Reduce, Represent, and Reward, provide a useful framework for policy and program formulation<sup>5</sup>.

- Empowering mothers to mitigate and adapt to climate change

While mothers are among the most affected by climate change, they must not be considered only as victims. In fact, they are best positioned to take action to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change – if only they are educated, informed and involved, both in decision making and in devising solutions.

It is crucial to **involve women in decision-making** concerning choices in policies, good practices and allocation of resources. This must be done at every level, not just at the international and national levels, but also at the local level (inside communities and villages), so that their on-the-ground knowledge, know-how and experience can be fully taken into account, and that the policy or program best serves their needs to face climate change.

Similarly, the development of new technologies should be to their benefit taking into account their specific circumstances: “**Involving women in the development of new technologies** can ensure that they are adaptive, appropriate and sustainable”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Its importance is recognised in the 2030 development agenda with a specific target in SDG 5 - Target 5.4: ‘recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate’.

<sup>4</sup> See for example: [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS\\_633115/lang-en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_633115/lang-en/index.htm)

<sup>5</sup> Examples can be found in MacGregor, Sherilyn, Arora-Jonsson, Seema and Cohen, Maeve “Caring in a changing climate: Centering care work in climate action,” Oxfam Research Backgrounder series (2022): <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/researchpublications/caring-in-a-changing-climate/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/womenin-shadow-climate-change>

- Harnessing women's knowledge, skills and experience

Indeed, women, mothers in particular, through the generations, have had the knowledge to harvest and store water, to preserve food, to ration when needed, particularly when disasters arrive<sup>7 8</sup>. They have the knowledge, skills and the determination to find new ways of farming and living.

This **capacity to adapt and innovate** is transmitted from one generation to the other. It must be used to find new ways to mitigate the impacts of Climate Change on the most vulnerable populations.

Scientific assessments by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>9</sup> and the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)<sup>10</sup> are clear: traditional stewardship and nature regeneration practices in forests, grasslands and other ecosystems managed by indigenous peoples are key assets in the fight against climate change. While indigenous peoples represent only 6.2% of the world's population, they protect 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity. And again, **indigenous women** are key actors.

**Question 8 - What actions are necessary to enhance actions by States, business enterprises, civil society and intergovernmental organisations to increase efforts to ensure that actions to adapt to the impacts of climate change contribute to reducing, and not exacerbating, the vulnerabilities of individuals and communities in vulnerable situations to the adverse impacts of climate change?**

- At every level of government and decision making: women's participation a must

The first action is to enhance the presence of women in institutions at every level, including indigenous women and those from grassroots groups. Studies have demonstrated that countries with high representation of women in parliament are more likely to ratify international environment treaties.<sup>11</sup> Women must be included in climate change negotiations and resource management.

The second is to take a participatory approach when elaborating adaptation policies and programs; to include women and women's rights grassroots organisations in all decision-making to ensure that the programs are effective, that they answer the women's specific needs and those of their children, and that they will not exacerbate inequalities and other vulnerabilities.

- At grassroots level: information, education and training

NGOs and grassroots organisations working within communities should prioritize actions to inform and educate everyone, including women and girls, about climate change, as well as its possible mitigation and adaptation strategies. And they must receive adequate funding to do so.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/womenin-shadow-climate-change>

<sup>8</sup> <https://womendeliver.org/investment/invest-women-tackle-climate-change-conserve-environment/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://ipbes.net/fr>

<sup>11</sup> <https://unfccc.int/news/5-reasons-why-climate-action-needs-women>