

Graduate Women International and its statement cosponsors call on Member States to fund and prioritize women's and girls' education so that they are empowered to speak climate truth and justice to power.

As the world experiences rising temperatures and unprecedented disaster-related crises, climate change has never been so alarming and addressing the consequences more critical. Climate change has already resulted in environmental degradation and apocalyptic disasters that have taken the lives of tens of thousands of people. Furthermore, multiple, evidence-based sources indicate that climate change adversely affects the world population's most vulnerable and marginalised groups, and impacts differently women and girls in particular¹. Women and girls are at 14 times greater risk of death from climate-related disasters,

Climate change, degraded environments and ensuing disasters, combined with economic factors, social structures persistent discrimination and harmful gender norms, continually put women and girls at a much higher risk for diminished health, poverty, food and water insecurity, violence, trafficking, loss of rights particularly to education.

Time is critical and action is required to protect their essential rights. Their right to education which is both a basic human right and a right necessary to achieve other human rights², is under severe threat as societies move further into the climate crisis and as decision-makers fail to recognise that widespread inclusive, equal and quality women's education is one of the most effective weapons to combat it.

Members of the civil society have been sounding the alarm for decades about the need to take concrete action to protect against the consequences of climate change. They have repeatedly emphasized the need to include women's perspectives in policy and decision-making at the local, national and international levels but these perspectives have largely been ignored.

Graduate Women International (GWI), committed to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4, education for all, and to the empowerment of all women and girls through safe access to quality education, emphatically posits that women's perspectives must be included and that there is an intrinsic link between women's education and political participation: Studies have shown that the higher the level of women's formal education, the more their tendency to participate in policy development in general.

¹ UNDP Linkages Gender and CC Policy Brief, 2016 <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/gender-and-climate-change-overview-linkages-between-gender-and-climate-change>

UNFCCC Report, Differentiated impacts of climate change on women and men; the integration of gender considerations in climate policies, plans and actions; and progress in enhancing gender balance in national climate delegations, June 2019 - https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sbi2019_inf8.pdf

² Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at the Twenty-first Session, E/C.12/1999/10, (article 13), 8 December 1999

[https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/d\)GeneralCommentNo13Therighttoeducation\(article13\)\(1999\).aspx](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/d)GeneralCommentNo13Therighttoeducation(article13)(1999).aspx)

It is equally important to include poor women engaged in subsistence farming as it is to involve women who may not be as economically challenged. When women farmers, who are arguably the first victims of climate change and natural disasters and the forerunners of climate adaptation are engaged, climate change mitigation programs and policies can be built on their experiences in crop resilience planning, innovation in scarce resource management and environmental conservation.

However, GWI cannot emphasize enough that the key to building these capacities is education for poor women and girls. For these women and girls, education has the power to not only to empower their participation in climate programs and policies, but to unleash their innately knowledgeable capacities in the accomplishment of SDG 13: "Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts".

Similarly, involving educated women in general, harnesses their core academic competencies, expertise, critical problem- solving and decision-making skills to climate change mitigation policies and programs. For, instance, the existing correlations show that having women in positions of political authority leads to lower carbon footprints, and when there is a great number of women in parliament, there is a higher ratification of environmental treaties³. It has been demonstrated that among American students, women are more concerned and aware about climate change and its emergency than men⁴, even if they represent less than a third of students enrolled in studies preparing for future green jobs worldwide⁵.

Women, regardless of economic or social background, are usually first to adapt, are first responders in community responses to natural disasters, leaders in disaster risk-reduction, and contribute to post recovery by addressing the early recovery needs of their families and strengthening community building.

When women, in general, are invited to participate in policy development, to share their practical experiences and knowledge in climate adaptation, analytical abilities, skills and innovative ideas, crucial capacities are built into all SDGs

GWI encourages governments to invest in women's education as they are powerful actors of climate action, who will ultimately strengthen community response and adaptation to climate change and to building much needed capacities into policies and programs. GWI reminds Member States that whereas education remains the most powerful foundation to develop capacities. Eleven million girls will not return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic⁶ and more evidence exists showing that both education and girls are too often the first to be sacrificed in times of crisis. Since women and girls constitute 70% of the

³ UNFCCC, Differentiated impacts of climate change on women and men; the integration of gender considerations in climate policies, plans and actions; and progress in enhancing gender balance in national climate delegations, 2019,

https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sbi2019_inf8.pdf

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Generation Equality Forum, Feminist Action For Climate Justice – Action Coalition – Visual, 2021
https://forum.generationequality.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/FACJ_FINAL_VISUAL_EN_0.pdf

⁶ UNESCO COVID-19 education response: how many students are at risk of not returning to school? Advocacy paper, 30 July 2020 <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000373992>

world's poor, rendering them uniquely vulnerable to the climate crisis⁷, years of progress and effort towards gender equality in education must not be reversed but reinforced with the provision of inclusive and equal systems of education together with tools that will facilitate girls' and women's skills and power to act against climate change.

As an organization comprised of 52 national affiliates, many in developing countries where the climate crisis severely impacts millions of women and girls, GWI calls member states to fulfil their obligation related to the protection of the rights guaranteed under the Convention on the Discrimination against Women, in particular General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change⁸. Indeed, ensuring that women's and girls' education reduces their vulnerability to the climate crisis and contributes to their perception as a resource that is needed for response and capacity building efforts.

SDG 13: Climate Action is more than just States' responsibility: it is a global compact that must meaningfully include women who comprise half the world's population without which inclusion, the world stands to lose its most valuable resources in the completion of all SDGs and falling short of the 2030 Agenda.

GWI warns that, unless women's practical learning and experiences, abilities to analyze and solve problems and make recommendations are built into all climate change mitigation efforts, climate change is on track to accelerate exponentially within a mere five years

Therefore, GWI appeals to the 66th session of the Commission on the Status of Women to urge Member States to:

- Understand the gendered dimensions of climate change and all efforts at recovery from and reduction of change.
- Support and encourage traditionally excluded populations of women and girls to share their success at climate adaptation and then replicate these models.
- Fund and prioritize women's and girls' access to education and retention up to the highest levels of learning, so that they may be empowered to speak climate truth and justice to power.
- Incentivize Member States to include women in all programs and policy development
- Include all women and their innate expertise, academic learning, analytical and critical skills to build much need capacities into the accomplishment of SDG 13 as also a means to achieve SDG 4.

⁷ International Labour Organisation (ILO), Facts on Women at Work, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/--dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_067595.pdf

⁸ CEDAW General Recommendation 37, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/1_Global/CEDAW_C_GC_37_8642_E.pdf