



Socialist International Women

**SIXTY SIXTH COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN,
14 - 25 MARCH 2022**

VISION STATEMENT

**ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY AND THE
EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND GIRLS
IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE,
ENVIRONMENTAL AND DISASTER RISK
REDUCTION POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES**

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The Socialist International Women (SIW) is extremely pleased to be participating in the 66th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66) and reiterates its wholehearted support and appreciation of the iconic and vital role this annual event has as a globally influential platform to promote gender equality and the emancipation, security and empowerment of women and girls worldwide. SIW firmly intends to contribute effectively and continues to stand in strong solidarity with all participants to push forward on our shared vision of the achievement of all of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and particularly to create a global society where meaningful gender equality and the full realisation of women's rights and freedoms has become 'business as usual'.

The real power of CSW66 is in the opportunities for the UN, governments and NGOs to share their challenges, experiences and solutions on a wide range of gender equality issues. With so many highly knowledgeable parties brought together we can also create a more accurate overall picture of what is really happening for women right now around the world, particularly following the devastation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is critically important in the context of our current chaotic, fragile and volatile international environment, including the global threat of extreme weather events resulting from climate change. This year's priority theme of *"Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes"* highlights the inescapable fact that our climate is producing extreme weather conditions that are threatening both individual lives and livelihoods with increasing frequency. In recent years there have been several natural disasters that can be directly attributed to climate change, including widespread wildfires across Australia, Siberia and California and storms such as Storm Ana in January 2022 which caused extensive flooding and destruction of property and agricultural land across southern Africa and Madagascar. The speed of change of our weather patterns and the level of un-predictability mean many regions are entirely un-prepared resulting in devastated communities and significant suffering, particularly in areas which were already economically fragile. Also evident are more gradual changes which are beginning to affect high value crops such as coffee as well as food staples such as wheat and rice due to changes in overall temperature and rainfall. These urgent issues will have long term effects on livelihoods and communities if they are not addressed in the immediate future and it vital that women and men work together to find solutions for the benefit of all.

Women and girls generally suffer much more significantly than men as a result of climate change. For example, women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die during a climate disaster¹ and 80 per cent of people displaced by climate change are women and their children². There are many reasons for this, which are all connected to the socioeconomic and political status of women within society in general and particularly their roles within family homes. Overall, women are generally poorer than men as they often have lower levels of education and skills and are therefore less likely to have savings to help support themselves through disasters (and this is currently worse than usual due to the huge job losses experienced by low income workers, the majority being women, due to the COVID-19 pandemic). In rural areas women generally have unequal access to natural resources and public services and yet are more dependent on these for their income, so are therefore more vulnerable than men in an environmental crisis³. Women often have gender-diminished rights and freedoms too, partly due to child and wider family care commitments, but also from gendered oppression, such as restricted freedom of movement, which affects their ability to flee danger, and damaging patriarchal cultural norms which won't allow women the authority to make quick decisions which could save their lives. Many also don't have any money of their own resulting in only limited access to items such as mobile phones, radios and computers. As a direct consequence, even the simplest protections, such as early warnings of climate disasters spread by mobile phone messages, are simply not accessible to millions of economically inactive, powerless and voiceless women and girls.

The increased stress and frustration that the damaging effects of climate change can leave behind is also one of the many triggers for increased levels of violence against women both within domestic settings and as a result of women having to travel further away from home to find food and water. In extreme cases some may become climate change refugees travelling vast distances, exposing them to potential violence and exploitation. Women and girls are also more likely to be taken out of school, trafficked and sold into sexual or domestic slavery as economic hardship caused by climate change increases⁴.

Although there is much agreement that 'dirty' fuels such as coal and oil are major contributors to climate change the use of these fuels is still widespread as it is often the cheapest fuel available. It is within the power of international governments to pour more resources into clean energy projects and push forward with cheaper sustainable options, but to date there is simply not enough interest to push at the accelerated rate needed right now. This issue is desperately urgent, as in addition to the climate, women suffer from the use of such fuels at a disproportionate rate. Every year 3.8 million people, mostly women and children, are being killed by air pollution from within their own homes created by toxic energy sources used for heating and cooking⁵. These being the very same energy sources that are contributing to climate change. This is an appalling and preventable example of the very worst impacts of gender inequality affecting priorities which must be urgently addressed as a critical issue.

Overall, given that women are predominantly blameless in the creation of the factors which intensify climate change it is heinous and grossly unfair that they suffer the detrimental social and economic effects more acutely and in significantly larger numbers than men.

SIW strongly asserts that it is vital that all members of the international women's movement stand together in solidarity to push gender equality and the rights and urgent issues of women and girls within our current climate emergency back to the top of the priority list for all governments and communities.

The overall vision of SIW is of a social democratic society which honours, respects and supports women as equally valuable and entitled to all freedoms and protection as men, in alignment with SDG5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Therefore, addressing the urgent issues surrounding climate change and gender inequality is of critical concern. Ensuring that women are included in high-level conversations and decision making regarding climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes is fundamental to promote and sustain our gender equality goals. To this end, SIW strongly advocates that gender equal political participation is essential to the creation of sustainable communities which nurture meaningful gender equality, meaning improving the day-to-day lives of women and girls and fully enabling achievement of their full potential, human rights and freedoms.

Encouraging new ways of thinking about climate change from a gender equality perspective is a grassroots necessity and women are perfectly placed to contribute new insights. For example, in rural areas many women work in agriculture, care for animals and are responsible for collecting water. This gives them a unique and detailed picture of the local land, animals and crops. Together local women will have a hugely valuable and highly detailed knowledge of both subtle and extreme climate changes which are specific to their regions. Millions of women are also still the primary care givers within the home, meaning they have a thorough knowledge of fluctuations in availability of foods, both gathered wild and bought, which also contributes to the overall picture of the environmental health of a region. This knowledge can provide an early warning of the need to perhaps look at alternative crops, or even alternative livelihoods, as climate change begins to impact on the suitability of land for particular types of activity. This invaluable knowledge can contribute to better disaster risk reduction and the creation of more effective mitigating programmes and initiatives. It has also been shown time and again that women tend to consider the longer term

impacts of all decisions, including environmental decisions, than men. This is possibly because they are more attuned to the idea that they want to leave behind a healthy thriving planet as a sustainable legacy for their children.

Using technologies and processes which can support disaster risk reduction are also a critical area where gender inclusiveness is vital. This is not difficult to implement, but it is often simply not thought of by patriarchal governing powers. For example, some rural communities have introduced female emergency response leaders who are empowered to make the decisions needed to protect their communities in a climate emergency event. Even the most simple of initiatives, such as having a dedicated emergency mobile phone which is shared by a community, can be lifesaving and ensure that as many people as possible are connected to support if a crisis occurs.

At government level it is vital that budgetary allocations reflect the need for gender sensitive responses to climate change and are sufficient to fund initiatives that create tangible, lasting change. To ensure climate emergency responses are actually workable for women and fit for purpose in practice, this must include funding for appropriate research and sex disaggregated data collection which records and assesses the particular needs, opinions and recommendations of women and girls. This has long been talked about, but progress on this vital point has been extremely slow. Ideally women's contributions should actively influence and meaningfully shape both policy and funding decisions to ensure the best possible support. After all, women continue to be roughly 50 per cent of the total population. In a perfect future world, women will always be present at the top table and representing themselves and their concerns in person. However, it would still be a huge win to actually have sufficient gender relevant data from each region on which to base potentially life-saving climate change risk reduction and mitigation responses.

The fact is that climate emergencies are here to stay – at least for the foreseeable future – so women and men need to work together to ensure that we all achieve the best possible outcomes. Including women within the climate change conversation can be achieved in a number of ways which contribute to the overall sustainability and safety of our communities, with the starting point being supporting women in speaking up and enabling them to join in with decision making political processes in their regions. It is vital that women take their rightful place at the decision-making table to help ensure the safety of our planet and entire global family. In the end, we are always stronger standing together: locally, nationally and globally.

SIW warmly applauds all women and girls worldwide who are taking a stand against gender inequality and contributing to the narrative of women's knowledge, wisdom, strength and power. As always, millions of women continue to strive for equality while raising families and contributing as best they can within the confines of the situations and hierarchies they may be experiencing.

SIW continues to stand in solidarity with all of our sisters who are currently silenced and subjugated and vows to continue to fight for emancipation and empowerment for all women and girls everywhere.

SIW reasserts the urgent need for governments to commit to taking rapid action on increasing the participation of women in decision-making processes at all levels of governance to help ensure gender sensitivity and inclusiveness on the issues associate with climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.

The Socialist International Women urgently calls upon all Member States, the UN, state structures NGOs and like-minded affiliates to take action to ensure that we all work together to ensure that gender equality is prioritised within all policies, process and procedures regarding climate change risk reduction and mitigation in their regions and nations and to ensure solutions and programmes are appropriately gender sensitive and inclusive.

Socialist International Women reiterates its call for support for the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, with particular emphasis on expediting action on imperative issues associated with climate change by:

- *Ensuring* local and national political party agendas include specific policies which support and promote gender equality and gender sensitivity in all areas of public and private life, and particularly responses to climate change and climate change disasters and disaster risk mitigation.
- *Emphasising* the principles of gender equality and women's human rights to promote gender equal participation in decision making at all levels on all issues and in particular on climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.
- *Challenging* cultural attitudes which oppress marginalise or exclude women and girls from high-level decision making processes, including specifically on issues relating to climate change mitigation.
- *Motivating* the political will to initiate and support sex-disaggregated data gathering in general and in particular respect of climate change issues to ensure disaster risk reduction programmes recognise and are responsive to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls.
- *Sustaining* a consistent gender equality narrative that continuously informs and educates all women and men on the invaluable contribution of women and their human right to equal participation in all decision-making processes on all issues, including climate change.

References:

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2. UNDP: Gender and Climate Change - page 5:

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3. UN Women Feminist Plan – key messages page.2:

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4. Action Aid: Climate change and gender:

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5. UN Women Feminist Plan – key messages page.2:

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