RETHINKING THE PLANET: CLIMATE AS A GENDER ISSUE

Kim Campbell, Former Prime Minister of Canada and Member, Club de Madrid Claudia Chalwicz, Founder and CEO, DemocracyNext
Shivi Dwivedi, Youth Engagement Strategy Lead, United Nations Climate Change High-Level Champions

Moderated by Liz Alderman, Chief European Business Correspondent, The New York Times

Overview

This session looked at climate change through a feminist lens.

The importance of women's participation in decision-making processes, such as women playing significant roles in the fields of peace and security, was emphasized by the panelists. However, climate change and gender inequalities continue to be among the most intransigent problems internationally, and a consensus was reached that not enough has been done to resolve these issues.

In every aspect of our lives, there are culturally embedded gender values, and people must keep this in mind if there is to be any hope of alleviating gender inequalities. Climate change is exacerbating gender inequalities, which is a structural problem that needs to be tackled at its roots.

Women in different countries do not have access to equal opportunities. Greta Thunberg had the opportunity to start a movement in Sweden, but Shivi Dwivedi did not have the same opportunity in India and struggled to find a platform to talk about climate change. It is crucial to empower women by giving them access to spaces where they can express concerns and share their ideas.

Session Proposals

After discussing the seriousness of gender inequalities imposed by climate change and its strong correlation to the lack of political opportunities women have, the panelists offered a set of suggestions and policy reforms.

Kim Campbell emphasized the importance of involving women in climate deliberation and treating the issue from the perspective of international cooperation. A significant component of this is sharing gender-related mechanisms within countries that enforce effective climate policies and have progressive gender-related approaches and legislation. Ms. Campbell added that the global north ought to bear its fair share of responsibility for the climate catastrophe and work with the global south to find solutions not from a position of power, but from a position of mutual understanding and support. To that end, the global north should be aware of the conditions and capacity of the global south and should not set unrealistic goals that ignore the realities of the global south. A solution suggested by Ms.Campbell was for women to remain persistent and deliver their message. She stated that there are men who are among the strongest allies of women and that it was not men versus women but rather, men and women who want to make a change versus those men and women who do not understand the problem and will not act.

Shivi Dwivedi described the dreadful conditions of women who are oppressed by patriarchal systems and who experienced the effects of climate change more intensely than men. She expressed the need for an agenda that would provide women with the necessary space and

resources to challenge the status quo, allowing them to have agency and be decision-makers of their future. Ms. Dwivedi also suggested that climate education become part of the standard curriculum, or at least make it more accessible to women and society at large.

Ms. Chwalisz argued for the use of deliberate democratic methods to make structural changes since she believed that the plight of women was primarily caused by structural problems that are exacerbated by climate change. She also suggested that randomly selected student councils be formed to give youth practice with making decisions, taking responsibility, and being accountable; instilling these habits of mind from a young age. This would provide young citizens with experience in working with and within governments and institutions and, as a result, have a larger impact on our public life.

Action Points Proposed by Global Liberal Arts Alliance Students

The panelists understood what women are experiencing. Their suggestions for what to do were good but lacked specificity. Two promising ideas were Ms. Chwalisz's suggestions to create randomly selected student councils and Ms. Campbell's insistence on including men and seeing them as allies in the process. We believe that the "Student Council" approach could be beneficial in engaging youth in national and global climate action. In addition, mechanisms to ensure that such an organization doesn't encounter the structural problems large-scale organizations often have, namely a heavy bureaucracy and corruption, should accompany the creation of such a council. Finally, the suggestion to create spaces for women, while a good one, hasn't been operationalized in a way that can be realized just yet. These promising ideas need development before they can become actionable.

We believe climate change is a man-made problem that has a feminist solution. With this understanding, we suggest the following set of solutions with the hope of furthering the inclusion of women in the global dialogue on climate change. Our solutions focus on two themes; making structural changes in government and inclusion in dialogue and practice.

Structural changes in the government

The inclusion of women in designing governmental projects intended to reduce CO_2 emissions and limit the repercussions of climate change is crucial to ensure women's political participation and promote more female role models. By observing the achievements of women in decision-making roles as experts, scientists, environmentalists and more, young girls will be aware that they can, and should, get involved in politics and make their voices heard. Promoting these successful women and including them in education and social life will be a way to give them a voice and agency to express their opinions regarding critical issues, related to climate and environmental policy. One desirable consequence will be the enrichment of the labor force mobilized for such climate-driven projects.

Additionally, since women constitute more than 80% of consumers, they can drive structural change in how companies produce their products. This can be done by pushing companies to associate a Carbon Footprint Label with the products and services they sell. This would enable women to influence corporate behavior, pressuring companies to reevaluate the climate impact of their production processes. Women would be able to influence which businesses prosper, and by extension, exert more power in the climate conversation.

Including women in dialogue and practice

To include women in the dialogue on climate change, we believe that a documentary series on women who are on the frontlines of climate change is the fastest and most effective way of publicizing the problem. Women in affected areas should be asked to talk about the way that climate change has impacted their lives, making the case that women and girls often bear the brunt of climate change. Streaming platforms have a global reach. Netflix, the current top streaming site, has more than 225 million subscribers worldwide, including many of the current world leaders. Targeting these streaming services would ensure that much of the Western world, including world leaders, would hear directly from these women, making them an integral part of the dialogue on climate change.

Empowering women globally is not enough. They also need to be empowered in their local environments. Governments and NGOs should extend the climate conversation beyond elitist circles to rural dwellers and particularly women. This can be done by having gatherings between public sectors, local businesses, and citizens to study the issue, focused on their area, to make the conversation more approachable and transparent for everyone and empower them. During these gatherings, emphasis will be placed on farmer empowerment through specific environmentally friendly solutions such as farmer-managed natural regeneration.

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