

Uganda | Climate change and its implications on women

Climate change poses a huge risk to food security, livelihoods and the health of a population. As a result of the essential role rural women play in food production, they – more than men – risk being hit the hardest by this global phenomenon. Despite the consequences of climate change on rural women, this issue does not receive the attention it deserves. In its demand for world leaders' attention, the Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) not only explains why women's voices need to be heard in politics and global discussions about climate change, but why their voices count.

As reported by diverse scientific and health research organizations (including the World Health Organization), climate change poses a central and increasing threat to the health of the world's people. However, little is known about how national governments – including Uganda's – are planning for these unprecedented public health challenges.

The biggest health threat of this century

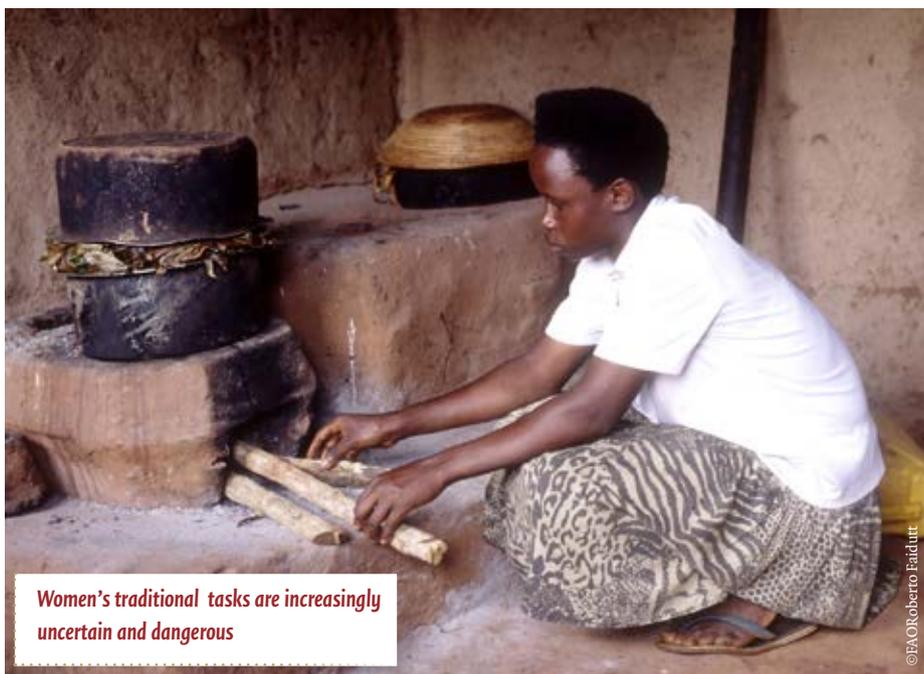
A two-degree Celsius hike in temperature may increase hunger by 90 per cent in 2050, thereby having dire consequences on the 70 per cent of poverty-stricken people living in sub-Saharan Africa, whose livelihoods depend on rain-fed agriculture.

The impacts of climate change are also risky for the global community: increases in heat-related illnesses and death; aggravated chronic illnesses; spread of infectious diseases; increases in asthma, respiratory allergies, and chronic respiratory disorders; malnutrition and child development complications; threatening of food security, etc. Population displacement, mass migration and migration due to recurrent droughts, as well as political instability and conflicts, are only a few more examples of how climate change can affect people.

The repercussions of climate change are also unevenly distributed around the globe, with the worse impacts on the most vulnerable people. Low-income families and marginalized groups – notably girls, women and the elderly – share the greater brunt of its negative consequences.

Women feed the world

Women constitute the majority of the world's poor and depend heavily on natural resources for their livelihood. They are also more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men. In Uganda for example,



Women's traditional tasks are increasingly uncertain and dangerous

women are responsible for 70-80 per cent of agriculture production (2004) and for nutrition and food security at household level. Yet, women own only 16 per cent of registered land.

The effects of climate change make all the traditional tasks of rural Ugandan women increasingly uncertain and dangerous, whether it is cultivating the fields or collecting firewood and water. Yet, the fact remains that rural women have no voice in decision-making processes on policies regarding the environment.

The Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) is deeply concerned about the threats posed by climate change and is ever more at the forefront in the fight against global warming. According to WOUGNET, the country urgently needs tools for climate change adaptation as well as specific policies that address long-term climate change and its impact on health, notably for marginalized groups.

There is a need to assess coping capacities and gaps in knowledge and public health adaptation responses. Measures to identify and protect the most exposed and most vulnerable populations at country level, such as women and youth, are also required. Public aid to enable the poorest to adapt to climate change and help build resilience for increased food security are also necessary.

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