

Putting gender equality and social inclusion at the heart of climate justice

As COP26 approaches, Rebekah Martin reflects on the links between the push for gender equality, social inclusion and climate action.

The climate crisis is one of the most urgent threats facing the world today. In a [recent report](#) described as a 'code red for humanity', UN climate scientists warned that global warming is close to spiralling out of control.

Whilst the effects of the climate crisis are already being felt worldwide, these effects won't be felt equally. Women and girls, people with disabilities, young people, Indigenous peoples, people from minority ethnic and religious groups, and other groups tend to be **more exposed to impacts of climate change due to discrimination, inequality and poverty.** What's more, these groups are often left out of discussions and decision-making on climate change. Their needs are often not met and their invaluable expertise and leadership is missed.

The climate crisis has wide-ranging impacts. It threatens to reverse hard won progress towards development goals and exacerbate existing inequalities. We see this across all the areas we work on at Social Development Direct. In addition, action on climate change that does not consider the needs and rights of socially excluded groups also risks worsening inequality and causing harm.

Climate change is set to increase the number and severity of climate-related disasters. Women and socially excluded groups in low-income countries are often at greater risk due to pre-existing inequality, poverty levels, poor infrastructure and high-population density. **Disaster early-warning systems that don't take the accessibility requirements of [people with disabilities](#) into account, put them at greater risk of injury or death.** An increase in climate-related disasters also places women and socially excluded groups at higher risk of gender-based violence, as a [guidance note from the GBV AoR helpdesk found](#). Discrimination and violence can also prevent [LGBTIQ+ communities](#) from accessing emergency shelters.



Globally there are 200 million girls on the frontlines of the climate crisis, with potentially devastating impacts for their lives, as a [resource pack from the VAWG helpdesk](#) describes. In times of crisis, taking girls out of school and child marriage can become negative coping strategies, and girls and women can turn to sex work or transactional sex as survival strategies.



Inclusive climate action can contribute greatly to equality and leads to better environmental outcomes. A recent [primer from the WOW helpdesk](#) identified ten opportunity areas to accelerate action on women's economic empowerment, ensure a just transition to net zero, and create decent work and quality jobs. For example, supporting women entrepreneurs and women-led start ups can support climate innovation and women's economic empowerment.

Climate processes and policies need to incorporate the voices of women and socially excluded groups. **Women's knowledge and experiences, especially those of Indigenous women, can help design more effective policies that better meet the needs of diverse people and the planet.**

The upcoming UN climate conference, COP26, is a crucial opportunity to renew world focus on climate change and increase ambition. **To succeed, it is vital that inclusion is at the heart of the response to the climate crisis.**

Follow [Social Development Direct's Climate Justice blog series](#) for more updates on how the climate crisis has impact from a social development, gender and inclusion perspective, and how to ensure inclusive climate action.



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