



*Illustrations by Élodie Chardon*

# Rising Tides, Rising Inequality:

## How Climate Change Amplifies the Gender Gap

By Jane Doe

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Women make up a significant portion of the most vulnerable populations globally. The division of labor based on gender often forces them to depend on natural resources for their survival, whether through farming, fishing, or forestry. When these resources are endangered by droughts, floods, or extreme weather conditions, their food security and livelihoods are greatly affected. Moreover, in numerous areas, women face challenges in obtaining land rights and financial support, which hinders their ability to implement effective climate change adaptation strategies, like investing in resilient technologies or diversifying their income sources. Consequently, they frequently find themselves stuck in a cycle of poverty and heightened vulnerability.

This observation is echoed in the political declarations and official documents of numerous nations. For instance, in the 2023 IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report, we can find multiple mentions where women are identified as particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate change:



This example of a compound heat wave and a drought event striking an agricultural region shows how multiple risks are interconnected and lead to cascading biophysical, economic, and societal impacts even in distant regions, with vulnerable groups such as smallholder farmers, children and pregnant women particularly impacted.

Interlaken, IPCC, 2023

However, this vulnerability is not simply a consequence of poverty. Discussions surrounding women and climate change often echo older debates on women, the environment, and development. It is often observed that women in so-called «Southern» regions are perceived to be more affected by climate change than men in these same regions, while in «Northern» regions, men are often seen as the primary polluters compared to their female counterparts. This North-South division reinforces existing biases and unfortunately oversimplifies the complexities of women's experiences with climate change. Indeed, while women play a crucial role in the fight against climate change due to their involvement (particularly concerning natural resources) and specific expertise, they also remain the most vulnerable and paradoxically excluded from decision-making processes in this regard. However, it is also recognized that the majority of advocacy and investments in environmental protection are made by women. Motivated by the necessity to protect their own survival and that of their families, women have been engaged in defending certain resources since the 1970s. The Chipko movement exemplifies this commitment, with female populations bravely standing between loggers and trees slated for felling to protest

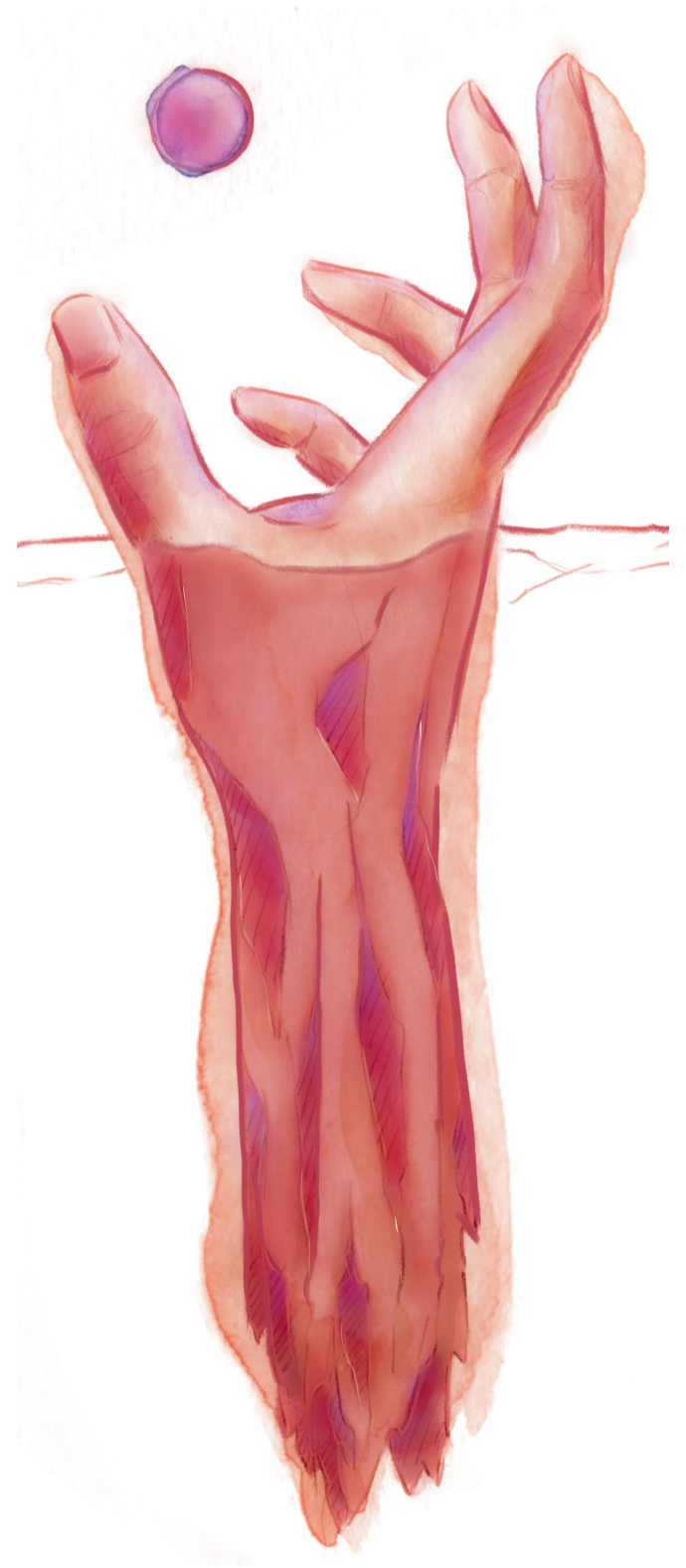
against India's deforestation policy in the Himalayan region. Such struggles also highlight a common dynamic of dominance, one where society seeks to subdue nature and, by extension, a patriarchal society based on the domination of one gender over another.

In so-called «Northern» regions, it is evident that women are more involved in environmental causes, as shown, for instance, by their voting preferences. This predominance of women in ecological engagement can be explained by what is known as «gendered socialization.» Women mainly take on caregiving roles and handle household duties, which encourages them to lean towards altruism more than men (even in their interactions with the environment). Moreover, gender stereotypes link ecology with a certain «femininity.» These disparities persist when considering women's vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change.

On a global level, while not able to list exhaustively all factors contributing to this vulnerability, let us emphasize their heightened reliance on natural resources. Women often shoulder «the burden of family responsibilities» like water supply, fuel gathering, and food security. Additionally, the physically demanding, primarily agricultural labor they perform, coupled with limited mobility due to social and cultural factors, makes them more susceptible. Furthermore, forced displacement exposes them to higher risks of insecurity, including sexual violence. Lastly, the impoverished are more vulnerable to climate change; however, 70% of the impoverished are women.

However, it is also established that women can play a crucial role in adapting to climate change. Due to the roles they traditionally occupy worldwide, particularly in so-called «Southern» regions, they possess vital skills for adaptation strategies such as sustainable farming practices, food preservation methods, and knowledge of local environments. However, in ecology as in other fields, women are largely excluded from decision-making processes. For instance, in 2016, women made up less than 15% of the boards of the Green Climate Fund and the Global Environment Facility. As for the COP 21 conference in Paris in 2015, where only 8 out of 150 heads of state were women. Finally, they have

very limited access to credit for climate change adaptation (for example, in Africa, 70% of funding is dedicated to large-scale technological projects predominantly led by men). Faced with such inequalities, questions related to inclusivity arise more than ever, especially regarding access to funding for climate change adaptation among the most vulnerable and disadvantaged populations. However, this focus on vulnerability should not divert attention from a broader problem affecting both the North and the South: the gender and power inequalities in decision-making within environmental management.



## References

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