
Empowering Change: The Critical Role of Women and Youth in Climate Leadership

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Abstract:

The global climate crisis necessitates a multi-sectoral response, with women and young people playing a crucial role in shaping climate leadership. This study aims to assess the current involvement of women and young people in climate leadership, identifying successful case studies that have led to significant environmental benefits. It also proposes practical strategies to empower these groups by addressing the challenges and barriers they face in climate governance. The research adopts a qualitative approach, analyzing case studies, in-depth interviews with climate leaders, and reviewing existing literature on gender and youth participation in climate action. It also examines intersectional factors influencing their participation, such as socioeconomic status, geographical location, and cultural norms. The results provide a critical evaluation of current policies and frameworks, highlighting both successes and shortcomings in integrating women and youth into climate leadership. Key findings indicate that institutional barriers such as limited access to financial resources, lack of mentorship, and exclusion from decision-making processes remain significant challenges. The study also identifies research gaps, particularly in understanding the long-term impacts of youth and gender-inclusive climate policies. It raises important questions about the intersectionality of climate leadership, particularly how marginalized groups within these populations can be better supported in climate governance. Finally, the research emphasizes the strategic importance of engaging women and youth in climate leadership for a more resilient and sustainable future. It recommends the development of inclusive policies, targeted financial mechanisms, and education and mentorship programs to strengthen their role in climate decision-making.

Keywords: climate leadership, women empowerment, youth involvement, sustainable development, gender equality, environmental action, inclusive policies, global climate strategy, mentorship and education, resilient future.

Introduction:

One of the most urgent problems confronting humanity now is the climate issue. The symptoms of this pervasive environmental issue include loss of biodiversity, severe weather events, rising global temperatures, and ecosystem degradation. Globally, governments, organisations, and people all understand how vital it is to take action, yet things are still moving slowly. A significant barrier to meaningful climate action is the lack of inclusive, diversified leadership, particularly from groups disproportionately affected by climate change, namely, women and youth. Women and young people, who represent over half of the global population, are at the forefront of climate vulnerability. Despite their exposure to environmental risks, they remain marginalised in climate decision-making processes. However, these groups also hold the key to innovative, sustainable, and community-driven solutions to climate change. Their unique experiences, perspectives, and skills make them powerful agents of change in the quest for environmental resilience and justice. This article explores the critical role that women and youth play in climate leadership, emphasising their potential to drive systemic change. We will examine how these groups contribute to mitigation and adaptation strategies, the barriers they face, and the transformative impact they can have on shaping a sustainable future. By empowering women and youth to take leadership roles, the global community can move closer to achieving comprehensive, effective climate action. (Kakade et al., 2024)

Climate change disproportionately affects women, especially in developing countries where they often depend on natural resources for their livelihoods. Women are more likely to be responsible for water, food, and energy in rural households, making them more vulnerable to changes in weather patterns, water scarcity, and agricultural disruptions. In addition, women are more susceptible to climate-related health risks, such as malnutrition and infectious diseases, particularly during pregnancy. Despite these risks, women possess invaluable knowledge about local ecosystems, sustainable agricultural practices, and water management, which are critical for developing effective climate adaptation strategies. Empowering women to lead on climate issues allows for more inclusive, holistic solutions that address not only environmental sustainability but also social and economic resilience. (Goryunova & Madsen, 2024)

Youth activism has become a driving force in the global fight against climate change. The rise of movements such as 'Fridays for Future' led by young climate activist Greta Thunberg, illustrates the power of youth voices in shaping the climate agenda. Young people are often more aware of the long-term impacts of climate change, as they will face the consequences of today's environmental policies for decades to come. However, youth participation in climate governance is often limited to symbolic roles, and their contributions are frequently overlooked. Young people offer fresh perspectives, technological expertise, and a deep sense of urgency that can galvanise climate action. They are not only activists but also innovators, leading the way in developing sustainable technologies, advocating for green policies, and educating communities about climate risks. (Memon, 2020)

No doubt, women and young people play a critical role in climate leadership, but they encounter many obstacles to getting involved. Patriarchal systems, unequal educational opportunities, income inequality, and a lack of political participation are some of these obstacles. Women are under-represented in leadership roles across many global domains, including those about climate change such as energy, politics, and environmental research.

Similar to this, age-based discrimination and a lack of institutional support frequently make it difficult for young people to get a place at decision-making tables. Furthermore, there are overlapping obstacles that prevent women and young people from marginalised communities such as people of colour, low-income groups, and Indigenous populations from participating fully in climate governance. In addition to perpetuating inequality, the absence of these voices from climate leadership reduces the efficacy of climate policies and initiatives. (Lesko et al., 2024)

Enacting youth-inclusive and gender-responsive policies is crucial to solving the climate catastrophe. These regulations recognise the many ways that different groups are impacted by climate change and make sure that solutions are customised to meet their unique requirements. For example, gender-responsive climate policies might include providing women with access to land ownership, financial resources, and education in sustainable practices. Youth-inclusive policies might involve creating platforms for young people to participate in climate decision-making at all levels, from local governments to international organizations. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has recognized the importance of including women and youth in climate action. Initiatives such as the Gender Action Plan and the Youth Constituency (YOUNGO) under the UNFCCC framework aim to promote the involvement of these groups in global climate governance. However, more work is needed to translate these commitments into meaningful action at the national and local levels. (Lecoutere et al., 2024)

Similarly, young people and women are spearheading creative global climate projects that provide insightful insights for more comprehensive climate governance. For instance, women's cooperatives are leading the way in sustainable agricultural and forestry initiatives in nations like Kenya and India, which not only reduce carbon emissions but also provide economic empowerment to the local populations. Female business owners in Nepal are pushing for green energy alternatives that lessen deforestation and enhance public health, including solar-powered cooking stoves. In addition, youth-led groups like the 'Sunrise Movement' and the 'Global Youth Biodiversity Network' are making great progress in promoting environmental preservation and climate justice. These organisations are enlisting youth to participate in reforestation projects, advocate for more robust climate policy, and inform local populations about the value of biodiversity. (Seeberg et al., 2017)

In reality, climate leadership is not just about addressing environmental issues; it is also about advancing social justice. Women and youth are often at the intersection of multiple forms of oppression, including gender inequality, racial discrimination, and economic marginalization. By empowering these groups to take leadership roles, we can create more equitable climate solutions that address the root causes of both environmental degradation and social injustice. For example, climate change exacerbates existing inequalities, such as access to clean water, healthcare, and education. Women and youth, particularly from marginalized communities, are disproportionately affected by these issues. By centring their voices on climate leadership, we can develop solutions that prioritize human rights, equity, and justice alongside environmental sustainability. (Lammers et al., 2024)

For a better future, several tactics must be used to adequately utilise women and youth in climate leadership. Developing capacity includes teaching and educating people in climate

science, policy, and leadership techniques. Inclusive governance guarantees the participation of women and young people in bodies that make decisions on climate change. Grants, loans, and investments in sustainability and resilience projects should all be made to promote youth- and women-led climate efforts. Media campaigns, educational initiatives, and collaborations with civil society organisations should all be used to increase advocacy and awareness. Advocating for legal and policy reforms that uphold gender equality, youth empowerment, and climate justice while safeguarding the rights of women and youth in the context of climate change is imperative. (Vogel et al., 2022)

Why are youth voices important in climate leadership?

Youth voices are crucial in climate leadership because young people will bear the long-term impacts of today's environmental decisions. Their fresh perspectives, creativity, and technological expertise bring innovative solutions to the climate crisis. Youth-led movements, such as Fridays for Future, have mobilized millions, raising global awareness and pressuring governments for stronger climate action. Additionally, young people bring a sense of urgency and moral clarity to the debate, advocating for sustainable policies that protect future generations. Their involvement ensures that climate strategies are forward-thinking and inclusive, addressing the needs of the present and future. (Ng, 2021)

How is the impact of climate change on women and men different?

Gender inequality in climate change affects women more than men, especially in underdeveloped nations. Women are more reliant on natural resources, particularly in rural areas, which are responsible for farming, fuel gathering, and water collection. Climate change disrupts ecosystems, leading to droughts, floods, and crop failures, increasing food insecurity and water scarcity. Women often have limited access to land ownership, financial resources, and education, limiting their ability to adapt to climate-related challenges. During disasters, women, particularly pregnant, elderly, or caring for children, are less mobile and more vulnerable to displacement and health risks. Climate change can exacerbate existing social inequalities, increasing the risk of gender-based violence during resource conflicts or after disasters. Despite these vulnerabilities, women are crucial to climate resilience due to their unique knowledge of local ecosystems and resource management. (Baby, 2024)

What barriers do women face in climate leadership?

Women face several barriers in climate leadership, including gender inequality, limited access to education, and underrepresentation in decision-making roles. In many regions, patriarchal structures restrict women's participation in leadership, especially in environmental sectors. Economic disparities, such as unequal access to financial resources and land ownership, further limit their ability to influence climate policies. Cultural norms often place women in caregiving roles, reducing their time and opportunities for public leadership. Additionally, intersectional factors like race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status compound these challenges, making it harder for women, especially from marginalized communities, to engage in climate governance. (Lesko et al., 2024)

How can gender-responsive policies improve climate action?

Gender-responsive policies improve climate action by addressing the unique needs and contributions of women, particularly in vulnerable communities. These policies ensure women have equal access to resources like education, land, and financial support, empowering them to adopt sustainable practices. By involving women in decision-making, policies become more

inclusive and reflective of diverse perspectives, leading to more effective and equitable climate solutions. Gender-responsive strategies also promote resilience by recognizing women's roles in agriculture, water management, and disaster response, enabling communities to better adapt to climate impacts and reducing inequalities exacerbated by environmental changes. (John)

What are some examples of youth-led climate initiatives?

Movements like Greta Thunberg's Fridays for Future, which mobilises millions of youth globally to urge more climate action from governments, are examples of youth-led climate initiatives. In the United States, the Sunrise Movement promotes legislative measures to combat climate change, emphasising the 'Green New Deal.' Through campaigning and education, the Global Youth Biodiversity Network encourages youth to safeguard biodiversity. Furthermore, programs such as 'Plant for the Planet' enable youth to fight deforestation through tree planting and environmental sustainability awareness-raising. These programs show how young people can drive policy change and climate solutions. (Imran et al., 2021)

The climate crisis necessitates inclusive leadership, especially from women and youth. Women, especially in developing regions, face vulnerabilities due to dependence on natural resources and limited access to education, financial resources, and land ownership. Despite these challenges, their knowledge of local ecosystems and sustainable practices makes them vital agents in climate resilience. Youth movements like Fridays for Future and the Sunrise Movement demonstrate their power in shaping climate policy. Implementing gender-responsive and youth-inclusive policies can empower these groups to contribute meaningfully to climate action.. (Dobrich, 2024)

Literature review:

The climate crisis, which impacts social, political, and economic systems in addition to environmental stability, is one of the most important global challenges of the twenty-first century. The discourse surrounding climate action has evolved significantly over time as governments, organisations, and civil society have realised how critical it is to offer comprehensive and timely answers. The need for more inclusive, diversified leadership is highlighted by the slow pace of actual growth. In particular, women and youth are critical to accomplishing climate action, even if their voices remain underrepresented in decision-making processes. Through the use of research that emphasises their particular vulnerabilities and strengths, this review of the literature seeks to investigate the historical and current roles that women and young people have played in climate leadership. To give a thorough knowledge of how these groups may promote systemic change in the fight against climate change, this study will look at the confluence of gender, age, and climate governance. (ESCAP, 2024)

Environmental studies have shown interest in the connection between gender and environmental deterioration. Because they relied on natural resources for their livelihoods, women have been disproportionately affected by environmental changes, especially in rural and developing areas. The current 'ecofeminist movement' was sparked by feminist thinkers like Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, who contended in the 1970s that capitalism's economics and patriarchal structures had abused both women and the environment. According to ecofeminism, women are frequently the first to suffer the negative consequences of environmental deterioration since they are the primary caretakers and managers of natural

resources. In developing nations, where women are more likely to be disadvantaged and lack access to financial resources, education, and property ownership, this vulnerability is more evident. Patriarchal systems that value male leadership and competence in fields like environmental research, policy, and resource management have historically kept women out of the decision-making process related to the environment, despite these vulnerabilities. Agarwal's (1997) research emphasises how gendered environmental governance with women's expertise in regional ecosystems and sustainable farming methods is frequently disregarded in favour of male-dominated technology solutions. In a similar vein, young people have been excluded from climate leadership and frequently just play symbolic roles. (Domínguez et al., 2024)

Similarly, women's expertise in regional ecosystems, sustainable farming methods, and water management make them important in attempts to mitigate the effects of climate change and adapt to it. According to research, women have taken the lead in community-based adaptation projects in rural Asia and Africa, such as forestry efforts and drought-tolerant crops, which not only lower carbon emissions but also improve food security and economic resilience. Given that nations with greater rates of female political representation are more likely to enact environmental protection laws, women's involvement in climate leadership can result in more comprehensive and inclusive solutions.

This suggests that women's involvement in governance leads to a greater emphasis on long-term sustainability and social equity, as they are more attuned to the interconnectedness of environmental, social, and economic issues. Theoretical frameworks such as intersectionality and feminist political ecology further illuminate the complexities of women's experiences with climate change, particularly in marginalized communities like Indigenous populations and low-income groups. Empowering women in climate leadership is essential for achieving environmental sustainability and social justice. (Haq et al., 2020)

Youth activism has become a significant force in the global fight against climate change, with movements like Fridays for Future and the Sunrise Movement leading the charge. These movements demand stronger climate policies, driven by their awareness of the long-term impacts of environmental decisions. Research by O'Brien et al. (2018) highlights the role of youth as catalysts for social change, characterized by urgency and a willingness to challenge established norms. The Fridays for Future campaign, which Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg started in 2018, is a well-known illustration of youth-led climate activism. The intergenerational unfairness of climate inaction is highlighted in Thunberg's statements at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP), where she argues that young people stand to lose the most from the failure to address climate change. Youth are also innovators in the field of climate solutions, such as the Plant-for-the-Planet initiative, founded by German activist Felix Finkbeiner, which plants millions of trees worldwide to combat deforestation and promote carbon sequestration. The Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) engages young people in biodiversity conservation efforts, advocating for the protection of ecosystems crucial for climate resilience. (Gul)

The role of women and youth in climate leadership is crucial, but they face significant barriers to participation. These include patriarchal structures, unequal access to education, economic disparities, and lack of political representation. Women are underrepresented in leadership

positions in climate-related fields, and young people struggle to gain a seat at decision-making tables due to age-based discrimination and a lack of institutional support. Research by the United Nations (2019) highlights intersectional challenges faced by women and youth from marginalized communities, such as Indigenous women and youth from low-income backgrounds. The historical and contemporary exclusion of women and youth from climate leadership perpetuates inequality and hinders the effectiveness of climate action. Empowering women and youth to take leadership roles requires systemic changes, including gender-responsive and youth-inclusive policies, financial resource allocation, and platforms for meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Addressing these barriers can help harness the full potential of women and youth in the fight against climate change, achieving environmental resilience and justice for all. (Gill et al., 2019)

Methodology:

This research looks at the experiences, challenges, and contributions that women and young people have made to climate action as well as their position in climate leadership. The project uses semi-structured interviews, focus groups, participant observations, and other qualitative research methods to collect data from marginalised populations, including low-income people, Indigenous people, and those living in rural regions. The roles that women and teenagers play in climate action are examined using thematic analysis techniques to find recurrent themes and patterns. Participants are required to uphold confidentiality and anonymity as well as give informed consent. The research provides a thorough knowledge of the interaction of these groups and climate leadership, with an emphasis on the transformative potential of women and youth in advancing successful climate action. (Qais et al., 2023)

Results and Discussions:

This study highlights the significant role of women and youth in climate leadership and the systemic barriers they face. Women, especially in rural and developing regions, are disproportionately affected by climate change due to their reliance on natural resources for livelihoods. Their responsibilities, such as farming, water collection, and fuel gathering, make them more susceptible to food and water insecurity. This leads to increased workloads and pressure to secure food and water, exacerbated by climate variability. These challenges also lead to heightened health risks, particularly during pregnancy, and concern over malnutrition and infectious diseases linked to climate change. Despite these vulnerabilities, women possess valuable local knowledge and skills essential for effective climate adaptation. They often have deeper insights into sustainable agricultural practices and local ecosystems, which are crucial for developing adaptation strategies. (Ediae et al., 2024)

Women's traditional ecological knowledge (TEK), which incorporates indigenous traditions robust to climatic fluctuation, can enhance climate solutions in the real world. However, because of structural obstacles, women's contributions are frequently disregarded throughout decision-making processes. Young people have become essential change agents in the climate catastrophe because of their feeling of urgency. Youth-led movements like Fridays for Future have mobilized global awareness and advocacy for stronger climate action. However, many participants expressed frustration over limited avenues for meaningful participation in climate governance, often focusing on tokenism rather than substantive engagement. Youth possess

unique perspectives and innovative ideas, often incorporating technological solutions into climate strategies. They want to be recognized as equal partners in climate discussions and urge policymakers to create platforms for their voices to be heard. The analysis reveals several barriers to women and youth's inclusion in climate leadership roles, including patriarchal structures, cultural norms, gender-based discrimination, age-based discrimination, and economic disparities. Women face barriers in accessing education, financial resources, and leadership opportunities, while youth face challenges from age-based discrimination, often feeling dismissed in climate policy discussions. This generational divide further excludes valuable perspectives. Economic disparities also limit participation, as women and youth from low-income backgrounds often lack the resources to engage in climate initiatives, exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, and hinder their contribution to climate solutions. (Md et al., 2022)

The study highlights the need for gender-responsive and youth-inclusive policies in climate governance. It suggests that policies that involve women's and youth's voices and expertise lead to more inclusive and holistic climate action. Countries that prioritize women's political representation are more likely to implement robust environmental policies. The qualitative data shows that women in leadership roles have championed initiatives that benefit their communities, showcasing the transformative potential of inclusive governance. Youth-led initiatives have proven effective in mobilizing public support and pushing for policy changes. Strategies to empower women and youth in climate leadership include capacity-building programs, educational opportunities focused on climate science, policy advocacy, and leadership skills tailored to these groups. Incorporating multiple viewpoints into climate strategies and fostering intergenerational understanding need inclusive government. Since many women's and youth-led organisations struggle with inadequate financial resources, funding and resource distribution are critical. Promoting gender equality in climate governance through advocacy campaigns is crucial to changing public opinion and motivating decision-makers to take more inclusive stances. Despite obstacles to participation, women and young people are vital in tackling the climate issue. It is imperative to implement gender-responsive and youth-inclusive policies that acknowledge the multifaceted effects of climate change and enable these groups to assume leadership roles. In light of the climate catastrophe, promoting an inclusive framework for climate governance can help to advance social justice and environmental sustainability by utilising the capabilities of women and young people. (Chow et al., 2024)

Conclusion:

Pakistan is confronted with intricate and diverse obstacles when establishing a comprehensive framework for climate leadership, particularly with the responsibilities of women and youth. This study has shown how much potential both groups have to make a significant impact on revolutionary climate action. Nonetheless, deeply ingrained structural obstacles that impede their involvement include economic inequality, patriarchal norms, and restricted access to platforms used for decision-making. The findings demonstrate that, despite being disproportionately impacted by climate change due to their engagement in Pakistani agriculture and resource management, especially in rural regions, women are still typically excluded from the process of creating and putting into effect policies. Similarly, in spite of their size and zeal for climate action, Pakistan's youth face systemic barriers that restrict their influence in official administration. Among these barriers include discrimination based on age, a lack of resources, and a lack of platforms for meaningful engagement with decision-makers.

(Domínguez et al., 2024)

Pakistan's climate change framework is criticized for lacking policies that consider youth and gender, despite their potential for innovative solutions and ecological expertise. Economic inequality further hinders their participation in climate discussions. The report suggests solutions to address these issues, including quotas for women's representation in decision-making bodies and gender-sensitive policies acknowledging women's contributions in resource management and agriculture. Educational initiatives aimed at enhancing women's and youth's skills in climate science, environmental management, and leadership are also suggested. These measures aim to maximize the leadership potential of women and young people in the climate sector. (Kwauk & Casey, 2022)

Furthermore, creating inclusive forums for intergenerational discussion can encourage cooperation between youthful and seasoned leaders, guaranteeing that the viewpoints of youth are included in climate policy. Enabling women's and youth-led climate projects to get targeted financial assistance is essential in addressing economic inequality and facilitating their active involvement in governance. In the end, this research finds that it is both strategically and morally necessary to remove the institutional obstacles that women and young people in Pakistan's climate governance must overcome. Achieving social justice and creating fair, sustainable, and practical climate solutions depend on their active participation. Pakistan can set an exemplary example in the global climate change movement by implementing the suggested policies and investments. This would enable the country to build a resilient future that is propelled by the inventive and revolutionary potential of its women and youth. (Bryan et al., 2024)

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