Where We Stand Position Paper: Climate Change

Revised March 2024

Position Summary:

- Global climate change is causing increasingly extreme and unpredictable weather events, in which women and girls are disproportionately impacted;
- The intersections of poverty, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, or other identities result in additional multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion regarding dealing with the climate crisis, putting all women and girls at increased risk;
- Empowering all women and girls to take a central role in developing innovative solutions and voicing their needs is crucial to improving community and global responses to the climate crisis.

Where Things Stand:

Climate change is exacerbating many existing social, economic, and political challenges faced by acutely impacted countries. The impact of climate change around the world has become impossible to ignore, especially for acutely impacted disaster-prone countries, which continue to face some of the most severe humanitarian crises driven by climate change and seismic activity. This type of adverse climate activity includes, but is not limited to, increased droughts, elevated air pollution levels and temperatures, more frequent and intense forest fires, dust storms, inland flooding, and rising sea levels. These countries also include regions which are approaching potentially devastating ecological and economic tipping points. Such areas are expected to experience temperature increases 1.5 times greater than the global average.

The adverse effects of climate change are inextricably linked to human rights and gender inequality. Scientifically backed reviews and studies identify and describe the risks that climate change poses to the human rights to water, food security, highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, life and physical integrity, adequate housing, sanitation, self-determination, and sustainable development. The rights of all women and girls are especially threatened by the adverse effects of climate change. The intersections of poverty, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, and other identities result in additional multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion regarding dealing with the challenges of the climate crisis. In addition, in climate-affected settings, women and girls face accentuated risks of gender-based violence, trafficking, and

child, early and forced marriage and unions, placing them in particularly vulnerable situations.

Research has highlighted that unless climate change is curbed, it will drive up to 130 million more people into poverty in the next decade and displace up to 3 billion people by the end of the century. Climate migrants face heightened barriers to accessing basic healthcare, safe water and sanitation, education, food security, and shelter.

The achievements of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are currently in peril, with major challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate and biodiversity crises, ever growing economic inequality and armed conflict. Climate change is now severely affecting and undermining hard-won development gains, poverty reduction efforts, and the accumulation of human capital as recurrent shocks in acutely impacted States are increasingly intense. These dire environmental threats expose women and girls to greater risks, impacts and inequalities, leading to the denial of the enjoyment of a full range of economic, social and cultural rights of all women and children. This can result in higher levels of mortality and morbidity, poverty, food insecurity, water insecurity, inadequate housing, limited access to health services and education, and less participation in climate change and disaster risk reduction issues. This holds especially true if they are heads of their households in rural areas, elderly women or widows. The climate crisis also negatively impacts the health of all women and girls by exposing them to contaminated water, diseases, pollution, and dehydration, all of which can also affect a woman's ability to avoid poverty.

Where things need to go...

Empowering all women and girls to take a central role in developing innovative solutions is crucial to improving community responses to the climate crisis. This can be done by enhancing their participation, decision-making and leadership in climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies. Gender sensitive humanitarian relief is vital to ensure the wellbeing and dignity of all women and girls during and post-disaster.

Fundamental Action:

Instead of perpetuating the current state of inaction, many key actors within the global community must comply with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon's 2015 directive to enter and participate in a "new era of global cooperation on one of the most complex issues ever to confront humanity... Every country in the world must follow through with its pledge to curb emissions, strengthen resilience and join in a common cause to take common climate action." - UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-Moon, 12 December 2015.

Soroptimist International calls upon States, the private sector (including businesses), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and other stakeholders to:

- Fulfill legally binding commitments agreed upon in the 2015 Paris Agreement to prevent global temperatures from rising, and compromising a vast range of human rights;
- Halt all new investments in fossil fuels with immediate effect, and begin a swift, just transition to implementing clean, renewable energies;
- Sign, ratify and implement the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration which holds at its core respect for the rule of law, due process and universal access to justice;
- Commit to fully implementing all other international agreements that protect the rights of migrants;
- Place a higher priority on increasing the participation, decision-making and leadership of all women and girls in climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction;
- Take necessary measures to respect, protect and fulfill the rights of all women and girls, and empower them to be leaders, experts and agents of change;
- Provide for effective remedies to climate-related violations of human rights;
- Consistently assess and publish quality data about the effects of climate change to allow climate-related decisions to be made with the participation of an informed public;
- Adopt a legal and institutional framework that assists those within its jurisdiction to adapt to, or mitigate the unavoidable adverse effects of climate change; and
- Protect the rights of freedom of expression and association as well as decrying the violence inflicted on human rights defenders in relation to all climate actions, even when the rights are being exercised in opposition to projects supported by government entities.

Additional Action:

States, NGOs, civil society, the private sector (including businesses), and other institutions and individuals who interact with women and girls must act in the following areas toward mitigation of and adaptation to climate change:

- **Raise awareness of climate change:** No woman or girl is immune to the reach of the effects of climate change, no matter how subtle or dramatic the environmental shift may be. Educational programs and capacity-building initiatives aimed at women and girls play a crucial role in enhancing climate literacy. By providing knowledge and skills for climate mitigation and adaptation, these efforts empower all women and girls to understand and respond effectively to challenges resulting from climate change. This not only improves their own lives but also contributes to global efforts for a sustainable future. Raising awareness amongst all women and girls - especially at the grassroots level in rural communities - is crucial to enable the transfer of knowledge regarding sustained practices, particularly in the agricultural sector.

- **Conduct research and monitoring; collect and use disaggregated data:** Systems to collect accurate and reliable qualitative and quantitative data that are disaggregated by place, gender, age, ethnicity, language, marital status - and other descriptors that are relevant to monitoring inequalities experienced by women and girls - must be developed and uniformly implemented to assist the development of climate-change related policies, laws, and plans. Such systems must also be utilised when designing, monitoring, and evaluating projects that provide aid and services to women and girls during 'normal times' as well as in times of a humanitarian crisis.

- **Provide education and access to decent work:** The climate crisis and natural disasters disproportionately lower the earnings and employment opportunities of women – livelihoods can be lost in a single disaster or climate related event. However, the alarming increase of temperature, precipitation, or sea level can present circumstances that may now quickly eliminate employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Educational programmes including digital technology and climate literacy should equip all women and girls with the knowledge, skills and flexibility to move to new/different employment or entrepreneurial opportunities as circumstances change.

Where Soroptimist International Stands:

Soroptimist International recognises that climate change is now not only severely affecting and undermining the efforts made by the global community, but it is also continuing to exacerbate existing pressures on States, communities, and individuals worldwide. Soroptimist International believes that immediate and integrated responses to climate change, including strategies to protect the interests of all women and girls, are necessary to ensure sustainable development. By submitting country-specific reports, Soroptimist International can critically engage with the reporting and monitoring processes of the UN Framework Convention on Climate

Change (UNFCCC), UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, thus ensuring the voices of all women and girls are heard and inducing governments to act.

Soroptimist International supports the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development through its Federations, Unions, Regions and Clubs, by working on the ground with partner organisations and UN agencies to Educate, Empower and Enable all women and girls around the world.

Sources:

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