

Gender Inequity and Climate Change Solutions: How They're Connected

Scientists warn of dire consequences to the environment due to climate change, from devastating droughts to massive flooding—effects we're already starting to experience globally. What's more, according to a report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, we may have only 12 years to act, by slashing global emissions by 45 percent, to limit warming to 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit.¹ Even a rise of half a degree more, will significantly increase the risks of extreme drought, heat, and poverty world-wide, the panel found.

In this context, it may be particularly important to look at an aspect of the issue which has received less attention: the nexus of gender and climate change. Evidence suggests that women and girls worldwide tend to bear the brunt of global warming's impact.

That connection was the focus of "Invest in Women, Affect Climate Change", an exploration of how gender lens investing can help address global warming. Presented by Glenmede, a leading independently-owned private wealth and institutional investment management firm, and BRAVA Investments, an investment firm focused on companies creating a broad-based economic impact for women, the meeting allowed industry leaders to share their insights into ways with which investors can leverage their financial resources to raise the global standing of women and positively support the environment. Moderated by Laura LaRosa, Glenmede's Executive Director of Client Development, speakers included Dr. Katharine Wilkinson, Vice President of Communication & Engagement, Project Drawdown, a coalition of scholars, scientists, and others mapping a variety of solutions to global warming, and Nathalie Molina Niño, CEO of BRAVA Investments.

CLIMATE CHANGE IS NOT GENDER NEUTRAL

Climate change impacts women and girls the hardest, especially those in economically challenged countries, said Dr. Wilkinson. It has been reported that 80 percent of people displaced by climate change are women.²

Because women are usually the primary caregivers, as well as providers of food, water, and fuel, they are particularly vulnerable to the scarcity of those items, as well as other problems associated with being a climate refugee. For example, women and girls may have to walk further for water and firewood, making them even more susceptible to sexual assault and human trafficking. Under conditions of increasing poverty, girls also are at a greater risk of early marriage, reducing the likelihood of receiving an education that can lead to sustainable employment, she noted.

CLIMATE CHANGE SOLUTIONS ARE NOT GENDER NEUTRAL

Efforts to reach gender parity can be a critical lever to reducing the negative impacts of climate change. "In the process of lifting girls up, we reduce emissions," said Dr. Wilkinson.

Consider female smallholder farmers in developing nations. In many countries there is a significant gap between the access female and male farmers have to land rights, capital, and other resources. As a result, women tend to be less productive than men, producing smaller amounts of food on the same land footprint, according to Wilkinson. But when the gap in resources is closed, women's yield rises by 20 percent to 30 percent. With the increase in the amount of food grown on the same amount of land, deforestation can decrease, and that could have dramatic consequences for slowing down the rise of global temperatures, she pointed out.

Educating women is also a step that not only lifts up the lives of women, but could be a key solution to addressing climate change. For example, 130 million girls around the world are not in school, according to Dr. Wilkinson. At the same time, women with more education have smaller families. Ultimately, that has a significant impact on population growth—and factors leading to global warming.

¹ "Global Warming of 1.5°C". (2018) <http://www.ipcc.ch/report/sr15/>

² "Climate Change Impacts Women More than Men." (BBC 2018) <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-43294221>

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INVESTING IN WOMEN

Direct investment in companies with products and services that impact the lives of women on a large scale is another way to address the connection between women and girls and climate change, said Molina Niño. A case in point is a company developing over-the-counter birth control pills, a product that could dramatically decrease the numbers of unwanted pregnancies and overall population growth.

Gender lens investors make women's empowerment a central part of their analysis and decision-making when choosing where to put their money. The ultimate objective is to boost equality and the position of women and girls in society and, at the same time, to choose profitable investments providing significant financial returns.

Ultimately, addressing the threat of climate change requires the participation of many stakeholders, from government to nonprofits. But a sophisticated understanding of the role that boosting gender parity can play in these efforts is a critical piece in the puzzle.

Certainly, gender lens investors can follow a number of paths—and one size does not fit all. But for those seeking both financial returns and impact, investing in companies with products and services that benefit and empower women is one effective way to go.

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