

Gender, climate change and health: how can we do better for women and girls?

Recommendations from
Commonwealth Civil Society



RECOMMENDATION 1

Acknowledge that the impacts of the climate crisis are not gender neutral

An effective and equitable response demands an explicit recognition of the strong links between gender, climate change and health. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change, most especially in relation to issues affecting their health and wellbeing. Where gender intersects with other marginalised identities, vulnerabilities are exacerbated. This reality must be explicitly acknowledged by the Commonwealth and its Member States and appropriately reflected in laws, policies, strategies and plans to address climate change.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Recognise that empowering women through gender-responsive climate policies and actions will lead to better environmental outcomes

Gender equality is fundamental to effective action on climate change. Integrating this principle into every facet of climate action will contribute to the development of robust law, policies, strategies and plans that are gender-responsive in ways that place women and girls at the heart of the response, and that does not leave men, boys and gendered minorities behind. The Commonwealth must be at the forefront of acknowledging the distinct vulnerabilities and contributions of women and girls in tackling climate issues, and in urging Member States to further empower women to become dynamic participants in forging climate resilience.



Cover image: A young girl and her grandmother attending a special ceremony awarding student achievement in Alofi, Niue.



RECOMMENDATION 3

Improve access to education and training for women and girls

Women and girls face unequal access to education and training, compromising their ability to respond to climate related challenges in ways that support and advance their well-being. By addressing the financial and institutional barriers that perpetuate such inequalities, governments can help empower women and girls to: (i) make informed decisions, most especially around their health in the face of climate-related challenges; and (ii) actively participate in the development and implementation of climate policies and actions.

The Commonwealth should push for more equitable access to education and training, including in science, technology, engineering and maths, where women continue to be underrepresented. Commonwealth countries should commit to using educational systems more strategically to promote environmental stewardship including through use of traditional and indigenous knowledge; and to improve understanding of the gendered impacts of climate change.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Increase climate finance

Inadequate climate finance, especially for adaptation, is preventing effective responses and having a disproportionate effect on women and girls. Women struggle to access funding, financial services and institutions which aggravates gender and social inequalities in the face of increasing climate challenges.

The international community must work to ensure the availability of sufficient levels of finance, investment and smart economics that will support a rapid escalation of adaptation strategies that recognise the needs of women and girls. The Commonwealth has a key role to play in pushing for increases in climate finance for the effective implementation of gender-responsive policies and actions, most especially within its small and vulnerable frontline Member States.



RECOMMENDATION 5

Bring women forward as leaders and participants in policy formation and decision-making

The voices of women, in all their diversity, must be heard in relation to matters that directly impact their lives and livelihoods.

The international community and governments should proactively promote women's leadership, representation and participation in decision-making so that they are at the centre of discussions and systems to advance gender responsive climate policies and actions.

The Commonwealth has an important role to play in championing inclusive environments, platforms, procedural mechanisms and resource flows that recognise the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls and bring them to the centre of action for change.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Value and promote women and girls as adaptation educators and agents of change

An inclusive approach to the development of adaptation and mitigation strategies will recognise women as agents of change, not just vulnerable victims. In many traditional societies, women often have unique roles and responsibilities that make them keystakeholders in climate adaptation. As the primary providers of food, water, and energy for their families, women bring distinct knowledge and understanding of the local environments, which can be essential in developing effective, localised climate strategies.

The Commonwealth should champion women and girls as agents of change, encouraging Member States to see investments in women and girls through capacity building and provision of resources as a strategic pathway towards stronger climate and health outcomes.



Farmer working in the Kirkvine Community Council Greenhouses in Manchester, Jamaica. Photo Credit: World Bank



Nurses reviewing medical records at Bweyale Medical Centre, Uganda.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Measure better to target better

Gender-sensitive assessment tools will enhance results: improving health equity and contributing to more effective climate responses.

Governments should encourage and support gender-sensitive research, including collection and analysis of information around the intersections of gender, climate change and health. This should be done with the explicit purpose of improving our understanding of differentiated impacts and advancing evidence-based policy development and decision-making.

The Commonwealth and its institutions should lead on fostering collaboration between Member States to: (i) develop stronger data collection and monitoring systems that will help track progress; and (ii) share knowledge and emerging good practices.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Promote gender equality in access to healthcare

Climate change is exacerbating existing healthcare inequalities leading to disproportionate impacts on the physical and mental health of women and girls. Sociological and biological factors both make women disproportionately vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change: from greater heat stress on pregnant women to increased risk of water-borne and vector-borne diseases relating to their role as providers of food and water.

Policies and strategies must explicitly acknowledge and address the gender specific and life course health impacts of climate change; seeking to ensure that women, in all their diversity, have equal access to healthcare services, including access to sexual and reproductive health services, family planning and maternal healthcare.

The Commonwealth should actively encourage its Member States to take a proactive approach to safeguarding the health of women and their access to adequate and appropriate health care.



Trade worker receiving training in solar home system installation and servicing in Bogra, Bangladesh. Photo Credit: Alan Dow / ILO Asia Pacific

RECOMMENDATION 9

Act to reduce all forms of gender-based violence

There is growing evidence that climate-related disasters increase the risk of gender-based violence, directly impacting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of women and girls. The Commonwealth includes many of the countries at the frontline of the climate crisis and Governments have an obligation to take practical and comprehensive steps to reduce gender-based violence and to respond to it effectively, including through the provision of adequate support services that empower survivors.

Commonwealth institutions and Member States should be actively encouraging disaster preparedness and response plans that address the specific needs of women and girls, such as ensuring access to safe shelters and hygiene facilities and adopting measures that will protect women and girls from gender-based violence during and after climate-related disasters.

RECOMMENDATION 10

Enhance women's economic empowerment

Greater financial power protects women from the disproportionate impacts of climate change and facilitates their involvement in effective climate responses. By enabling women to participate fully in economic activities, we can harness their potential as agents of change and contributors to post-disaster recovery efforts. Governments should work to improve women's access to financial resources training and capacity building programmes and actively support women-led initiatives and businesses that focus on climate change adaptation, clean energy and sustainable agriculture.

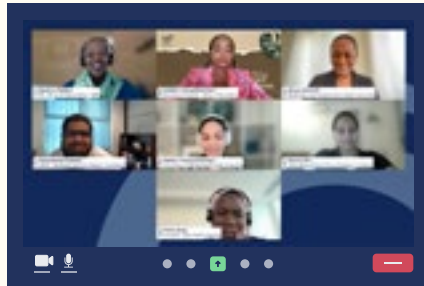
The Commonwealth has an important role to play in affirming the link between women's economic empowerment and more effective climate change responses. Commonwealth institutions and Member States should be at the forefront of championing policies and actions that create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs to flourish and that enhance women's resilience in the face of climate change.

HOW CIVIL SOCIETY FORMULATED THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Civil society from across the Commonwealth worked together in August 2023 to develop gender-responsive recommendations to address health inequality and climate change.



The Commonwealth Foundation convenes an online roundtable with policy and civil society experts on 'Gender, climate change and health'.



Over 400 gender equality and climate experts along with civil society leaders from across the Commonwealth gathered online to reflect on progress and barriers to climate action and health equity, using a gender lens.

KEY POLICY ASKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



The Commonwealth Foundation develops a set of 10 recommendations from the roundtable, post-event working sessions, and the participant survey.



The recommendations are shared with Ministers and Senior Officials at the 13th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministerial Meeting, which will later influence the 2024 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Samoa.

About the Commonwealth Foundation

The Commonwealth Foundation is an intergovernmental organisation, mandated by its Member States to advance the interests of Commonwealth civil society. Upholding a firm commitment to the principles and ideals of the Commonwealth, the Foundation seeks to nurture the growth of vibrant and free societies: championing the active and constructive participation of people in all aspects of governance.

Continue the conversation online

**Let's continue the conversation
about health justice, climate
justice, and gender equality.**



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group of civil society and be part of
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building a Commonwealth for all.

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