

Climate Change and WASH

Building Climate Resilience of Women and Children

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The year 2015 marked India's commitment to the UN's 2030 Global Agenda on Sustainable Development and its reaffirmation to curb the effects of climate change in sync with the COP21 Paris Agreement. This has brought to focus the significance of the inter-linkages between the sustainable development goals. Climate change (Goal 13) influences all the other goals on multiple levels. Water (Goal 6) as a resource is the most at risk whether in excess or in scarcity and it is the biggest link to equitable and inclusive development. Prime hazards for the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) sector would be experienced through erratic weather events, increased frequency of droughts, flash floods and heat waves. The direct impact will adversely affect quality and availability of drinking water, critical infrastructure and hygiene and sanitation services.

Women, Children and Climate Change impacts

The need and access to water and sanitation is very closely linked to reducing vulnerability of women and children. Impediment of WASH would have a differential impact on women and children; therefore, it is critical to ensure that the concerns are addressed in the policy-making sphere. Moreover, women and children are systemically excluded in decision making processes on WASH when they are among the most affected across the world, according to National Network of Environments and Women's Health, 2009.

In case of climate induced disasters, the social fabric of our country might suffer adversely and affect the WASH sector. In India, women spend 150 million work days per year to collect water (UNESCO). They are often accompanied by children which impediments their education. The water collection burden will worsen due to climate change implications and population growth will add to the water scarcity.

The additional risk present during water collection in scarce supply will be the concentrated pollution. Water scarcity will also impact food production leading increased malnutrition in children and health issues for women. The primary necessity for adolescent girls and children to attend school or participate in the public sphere is the need for sanitation facilities. Girls require these facilities for specific needs, while in children good sanitation levels ensure better immunity.

TARagramYatra 2016: Building Climate Resilience in Women and Children

The solutions ahead will need to address water, sanitation and hygiene needs for women and children with a climate lens considering the increase in impacts of climate change. It will require sensitization of policy makers, and enhanced awareness among the local population. An integrated approach will also need to ensure that WASH strategies take into account the State's Action Plan on Climate Change, while incorporating additional human vulnerabilities.

Development Alternatives (DA) in collaboration with UNICEF has initiated a discussion with an objective of addressing the above highlighted pertinent issues by identifying challenges and developing solutions for building climate resilience. In this regard, a Roundtable Consultation at UNICEF, Delhi would be conducted focusing broadly on Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Rajasthan. These states have their unique set of developmental and environmental challenges and pose as a great case in perspective for such an analysis.

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The RTC participants will bring in perspectives of planning, practice and communication. The discussion will be guided by the following key questions:

- **What is the state of the existing institutions to facilitate the implementation of WASH interventions for women and children? Are they climate sensitive?**
- **What are the best practices on ground and case studies that are bringing a connection between policy and practice? What the best tools and methodologies required for participatory assessment and awareness generation for enhancing climate resilience?**
- **What are the pathways to sensitizing and enhancing climate resilience? What are the options available for communities, village panchayats and district governments?**
- **How can the issues highlighted above be mainstreamed in the major policy and planning documents of the states? Ex: The State Action Plan on Climate Change, State Water Policy, State Disaster Management Plan, Rural Sanitation and Hygiene Strategy, Policies on Women and Children?**

The insights brought forth during the roundtable discussions will be condensed into recommendations and for obtaining a situational understanding of the aforementioned issues in UP, Bihar and Rajasthan. The recommendations and imperatives will also highlight the required investments, policy interventions, capacity building initiatives and define the role of community institutions.

The outcomes of the discussion would help in better policy formulation and its respective shift towards climate sensitive development. It will be shared with decision makers and actors engaged in policy making and academia, as well as in National Missions, in local Panchayati Raj Institutions and civil society organizations working in the three states.

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