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Forum Report

The COVID 19 pandemic and climate change:

impacts and perspectives from climate
justice and gender equality

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CONSEJO NACIONAL PARA LA IGUALDAD DE GÉNERO
MINISTERIO DEL AMBIENTE

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INTRODUCTION



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CARE is globally developing the “CLIMATE JUSTICE STARTS WITH HER” campaign. In April 2020, the 50th anniversary of the Earth Day declaration will be celebrated. It will be a historic month of action when the world citizens call for climate justice and for urgent measures to face the coronavirus pandemic crises; the former, climate change, a slow-building emergency, and COVID-19, one that has paralyzed economy. We can, we want, and we must solve all of these crises. Although the world was not ready for the new coronavirus, we can still prepare to avoid climate issues. If we do not demand changes to transform and address the climate crisis, our current state will become the new normal.

“We have this unique opportunity to reconsider our choices and use this pandemic crisis as a catalyst for more sustainable production and consumption, where women have the opportunity to participate in decision-making to face the effects of climate change.”

Mónica Tobar
Program Manager CARE Ecuador

For CARE and the National Technical Table on Gender and Climate Change, it is essential to address the problem of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic from a gender perspective. Land-use change, deforestation, and impacts on nature and ecosystems are the main drivers for the emergence of new diseases in humans.

The current crisis caused by COVID-19 accentuates pre-existing inequalities, directly related to traditional gender roles; thus, it is essential to create responses that take into account both the integral health of people and the overcoming of inequalities and environmental sustainability. According to the National Director of Adaptation, the Ministry of the Environment is planning a post-COVID strategy to strengthen productive

activities, since it has been shown that the greatest support to overcome the crisis comes from rural production. Therefore, there is an urgent need to ensure decent living conditions for rural producers.

“The current pandemic forces us to reflect on consumption habits, the economy, how we are going to implement new low-carbon and climate-resilient actions, how to strengthen these harmonious relationships with nature and responses that privilege social justice.”

Karina Salinas
National Director of Adaptation
Under-secretariat for Climate Change

On the other hand, it is essential to understand the current situation in Ecuador. In this country, poor populations, mostly made up of women, do not have guaranteed health coverage. Of the 28.7% of households that are female-headed at the national level, 80.8% are settled in vulnerable sectors (INEC, 2010). The measures to confront the crisis must take into account the socio-cultural conditions and the vulnerability of the Ecuadorian population, with special attention to the groups of women who, in the face of the crisis, lost their livelihood almost immediately, considering that 45.14 % of women in Ecuador are linked to the informal sector of the economy (ENEMDU, 2019).

Women need to be seen not as victims of an unjust system, but rather as agents or drivers of change. The skills and knowledge of women and marginalized groups are not yet sufficiently recognized in managing climate change¹. They have important knowledge about agricultural production for family survival, but are often marginalized in decision-making processes².

The COVID 19 pandemic and climate change Forum: impacts and perspectives from climate justice and gender equality had the following objectives:

- Reflect on the impacts of the COVID 19 pandemic concerning the challenges of climate change, from a gender perspective.
- Propose initiatives to address the health, social, and economic situation from a vision of climate justice and gender equality.

¹ CDKN. 2020. The IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Earth. What does it mean for Latin America? (Informe Especial del IPCC sobre El Cambio Climático y la Tierra ¿Qué significa para América Latina?), https://cdkn.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/WEB-IPCC-Land_Latin-America_Spanish_24March2020.pdf

² Roots for the Future: The Landscape and Way Forward on Gender and Climate Change. (2015). International Union for Conservation of Nature (<https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2015-039-Es.pdf>)

LECTURE: Discrimination and structural gender violence in the health and environmental context

• Nelly Jácome / CNIG Technical Secretariat

The discussion on climate change has been focused on economic and social aspects, without considering the gender inequalities that reproduce and negatively impact women. The situation we are now experiencing due to the health emergency caused by COVID-19 is not an isolated event; it is configured within a global climate threat emergency scenario. Disasters and health crises have a disproportionate impact on women, girls, boys, youth, and other groups in vulnerable conditions.

"The figures of the ECU 911 in March 2020 account for 8,196 calls related to Violence against Women or Members of the Family Nucleus: 64.2% occurred in the first 16 days and 35.8% from March 17 to 31 (already with the social distancing measures). Only 60% of those who survive the violence, claims against it, or tell a relative about it, and 82.4% of them do not denounce".

At the National Council for Gender Equality (CNIG for its initials in Spanish), one of our major lines of work is the Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change, which we have been building with the Ministry of the Environment, with the support of the NDC Support Program, CARE Ecuador, and with other NGOs such as the Futuro Latinoamericano Foundation, and the Knowledge Network on Climate and Development, plus others. It is a joint, coordinated, and proactive work, we have taken initiatives to have an instrument that looks at the impacts of climate change, and that proposes public policy actions in the face of specific situations posing a threat to the population. Hence the urgent need to consider women as agents of change; to apply an equity approach, a gender, inclusive, participatory approach, which helps to reduce disaster risks, plus social, economic, and psychological impact on the entire population.

The CNIG proposes:

- Incorporate a gender approach in environmental management, considering the different needs of rural women,
- Environmental management must go hand in hand with attention to gender violence and discrimination, which have been exacerbated by COVID19,
- Rural women require access to information and communication technologies to recognize, prevent, report, and receive a response to these situations,
- Ecuador's National Council for Gender Equality advocates for adequate services for rural women.



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"Vulnerability and exposure are generated economically, socially, and culturally. Therefore, they can be controlled, and they can be reduced."

Nelly Jácome

CNIG Technical Secretariat

Main Reflections

1. Women play a fundamental role in the responses to these phenomena. Incorporating a gender perspective in these circumstances and situations allows us to see that vulnerability and exposure do not respond to a natural order.
2. The home is not necessarily the safest place for women, and less in these moments of absolute confinement when a rebound in domestic violence is evident. Official figures at the national level reveal that 65% of women have experienced some type of violence throughout their lives, by their partner or by some member of the family nucleus.
3. There is a significant gap in access to information and communication technologies, especially in rural areas. Only 37.2% of households in Ecuador have Internet access. For women, this represents a risk since they have scarce means to request help and to know and adopt ways to prevent and report situations of violence.
4. We need to design and promote permanent communication campaigns to provide the greatest amount of direct and straightforward information that can be reproduced and socialized so that it can reach the highest number of women, for them to learn to identify violence and for those that require protection programs.

LECTURE: Regional vision of the pandemic in a gender key: public policy perspectives towards a low carbon economy, fair and resilient to climate change

• Marina Casas / CEPAL

The current pandemic is a global public threat that can be equated with climate change. Solutions to public ills require mobilizing global public goods, a civilizing change. The current situation is a call for a radical reformulation of North-South relations, to reach complete changes in public policy focused on economic and social issues. The case challenges States as the center of solutions, and it forces us to reformulate a social contract between the State, the market, and society.

AXIS OF REFLECTION:

- Negative impacts of the pandemic on the economic and physical autonomy of women.
- The existence of parallelism between the effects of climate change and those of COVID 19 on the lives of women.
- Decisions in geopolitics, economics, adaptation, and mitigation against climate change should all have a gender focus.

CEPAL proposes to focus actions on mitigation, on the Big Push approach to environmental action, which seeks a progressive structural change towards sustainable development with equality. Strategic investments in the energy sector are proposed, as this is a crucial area for a low carbon transition. Also, from an eco-feminist perspective, it is essential to give the value that the care economy has, promoting a change of economic paradigm and vision of development.



"CEPAL estimates that 107 million women in Latin America, including the economically active population, could be in a situation of poverty, due to loss of income."

Marina Casas
CEPAL

Main Reflections

1. All quarantine measures have had an impact on women's work, both in the labor market for social services and commerce and in the care economy. 68% of working women are concentrated in the sectors impacted by the measures.
2. The adverse effect the pandemic has had on the informal market and small businesses. We know that around 52% of women are working in precarious sectors, with lower wages, or in informal sectors of the economy, especially commerce.
3. The limited and unequal coverage of the region's health systems affects people's access to them, which results in an overload of unpaid care work in homes for women and girls. On the other hand, there are no guarantees about sexual and reproductive health during the pandemic.

"At the last COP we witnessed how successful the approval of the Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change was, which, apart from proposing a greater gender balance within the Convention, emphasizes addressing gender inequalities as part of the strategies of the plan".

4. The unfair social organization of care services has a greater impact on the poorest households of the region, particularly on girls and women, which affects their health and hinders their opportunities. The increase in domestic violence makes matters even worse.
5. The adverse impacts and effects of climate change and the current pandemic are similar, since there are many elements that coincide. Such scenarios widen inequality gaps.
6. Latin America has the opportunity to reorient its current forms of domination, production and consumption. We aim for women producers, workers, and consumers, proposing an emancipatory vision to the design of crisis responses.

LECTURE: Initiatives for the emergent gender violence management, with climate justice regionally and globally

Marina Ogier / CARE France

TOPICS UNDER DISCUSSION:

- How does climate change affect women?
- Links between COVID-19 and climate change
- Gender violence against women and children during quarantine; how to respond
- The effects of the pandemic, and the circumstances in Ecuador
- Message to governments and the international community

Between 2015 and 2019, CARE implemented more than 57 projects aimed at halting the spread of infectious disease epidemics, such as Ebola, Cholera, Zika, in more than 20 countries around the world. In other words, CARE does have experience in responding and overcoming crisis.

"Existing networks, such as women's associations, are critical to convey information on prevention of disease spread to both urban and rural communities".

Marina Ogier
CARE France

CARE has reached 100 countries and acts in favor of the populations that face greater vulnerabilities to health crises and pandemics. Our focus is working with the most vulnerable people. Furthermore, we have the necessary confidence, experience, and infrastructure to mobilize communities to work together to face the crises.

A gender-only disaggregated COVID-19 analysis may not adequately consider critical factors such as age, geography, disability, race / ethnicity, homelessness, migrant / refugee status, class and other structural conditions, including poor housing, unemployment, and political and environmental stress. An analysis that captures the experiences of different groups of women, men and gender diverse individuals is required. We must work from an intersectionality approach.

"CARE's current response in Ecuador focuses on comprehensive assistance that includes multipurpose cash transfer, and online legal advice, and psychosocial support to survivors of gender violence and to people living with COVID-19; delivery of hygiene kits, working under the leadership of women's organizations".

Main Considerations

1. Exclusion of women from decision-making also makes them more vulnerable, as their diverse needs are not met.
2. COVID -19 and climate change are borderless, and require systemic changes that address the underlying factors of poverty and inequality.
3. Addressing climate change is not something we can postpone. The COVID-19 crisis reveals how vulnerable we are. We must work together to build a more resilient world.
4. As governments prioritize COVID-19, women's critical needs and services are at risk of being sidelined. International collaboration based on solidarity is crucial in responding to both crises.
5. The responses that are given now will determine whether the gap between rich and poor will be widened, maintained or reduced. We know that access to education, adequate food and nutrition, healthcare and professional development will be greatly limited.
6. Effective mechanisms to prevent and address domestic violence against women and girls must be established, including access to legal advice, justice, sexual and reproductive health, and housing.
7. It is key to develop comprehensive responses that comprise strategic partnerships with the private sector, academia, and civil society organizations; and to strengthen ties with governments to promote social cohesion and sustainable solutions.



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LECTURE: Initiatives for the empowerment and economic autonomy of women, and communities, and for climate resilience

● Miriam Lang / Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (UASB)

TOPICS UNDER DISCUSSION:

- There are similarities between the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the climate emergency
- Crises create opportunities for the emergence of new ways of thinking, and for taking actions on economic growth and well-being
- We need to streamline production chains, better responses from public policy and North-South justice promotion

It is necessary to rethink the economy during this civilizing crisis, now that the deep interconnection and multidimensionality of factors that negatively affect women's lives are more evident than ever before.

It is risky to wait for a post-pandemic scenario to undertake the changes that we consider urgent, since the social and economic changes are already happening all around the world. Therefore, it is essential to reinvent the strategies of organized society to influence the present.

"We should broaden our vision of what a threat is, particularly to show the general population that COVID-19 is not the only emergency and threat that requires us to rethink our economy and our modes of social and economic organization".

Miriam Lang
Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar

As ECLAC and various economic experts maintain, we are before the greatest recession in history since the industrial revolution. On the other hand, when human life is in danger, very drastic changes to the way we organize ourselves socially and economically can be undertaken in a very short time. We have now seen that reducing large amounts of the consumption habits of the global North and the upper and middle classes has been possible in a very short time. If COVID-19 has made this possible, then climate change can also make it.

Main Considerations

1. Redistribution cannot be limited to monetary resources and wealth, since natural resources must also be redistributed; we must expand our schemes of social property and collective property.



2. We have become used to reading human well-being based on a global composite indicator, namely, economic growth.

3. A very effective measure to strengthen women's role in the economy is to streamline production chains and to strengthen local economies, because these are precisely the areas of the economy where women are most present.

4. Women have a very important role in small-scale agro-ecological production, and in the generation of food self-sufficiency in rural areas. Women are carriers of ecological knowledge that is fundamental and recognized, such as medicinal plants, or midwifery, attending births in the community.

5. Review and make flexible the sanitary norms framework, which usually hampers small local production under hygiene criteria of other realities.

6. A very important public policy measure to strengthen economies of proximity would be the introduction of local or regional currencies and time banks, which are electronic platforms to exchange services demonetizing the economy, where women's knowledge can also have a very important role.

CONCLUSIONS

- María Inés Rivadeneira / Gender specialist of the NDC Support Programme in Ecuador



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Addressing the health emergency and climate change require comprehensive responses on several fronts, including addressing gender-based violence, by involving men as active and primary actors to transform behaviors and habits that come from patriarchal thinking.

We need to revalue the care economy as a fundamental basis of society. The healthcare sector must be defined as essential for the economy.

Furthermore, regarding reactivation, it is essential to work from the micro to the macro, and not the other way around: from fair trade, climate justice, nationalization and regionalization

"It is very important to promote among ourselves these behavioral changes, not only regarding healthcare, but also on human relationships, based on the basic principles of feminism: collaboration, respect, solidarity and sorority".

Maria Inés Rivadeneira
Gender Specialist
NDC Support Programme - Ecuador

of production and consumption. The slogan should be: live well with less, promote a gradual reduction.

We also stress the double or triple vulnerability that affects women and the disadvantages that women suffer structurally; but we also need to address other types of inequities and affectations that people face on the grounds of age, ethnicity, migration, disability, convicted people, and other forms of vulnerabilities.

COVID-19 and Climate Change have no borders, so they need systemic changes. Therefore, science, academia, public policy and civil society must create inclusive spaces for the debate on how to face the crisis, and must listen to those who have not had a voice in our societies.

Finally, these systemic changes not only come from the State, but fundamentally from the society. Changes must be made and promoted in and from the community.

The Forum was an exchange space to discuss:

- Successful interventions proposals.
- Mechanisms to raise awareness and reduce inequality levels, including violence.
- Specific actions to ensure an inclusive process for the benefit of women.
- Instances of comprehensive support during health emergencies in the Ecuadorian context.
- The role of feminist and environmental activism regarding solutions to the health emergency.
- Plans for coordination between various sectors to define public policies that lead to equality.



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