**Climate Change And Gender Equality**

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‘Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development, and building good governance.’ Kofi Annan.

Gone are the days when ‘environment’ used to be discussed only within the closed walls of the Nairobi-based United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). The discussion has since shifted from pollution, plastic bags and change in temperatures to - finally - the ills of fossil fuels like coal, gas, and oil. Fortunately, the recently concluded COP28 was able to solve at least one part of the problem when the world delegates agreed to establish a loss and damage fund to help developing countries cope with the adverse effects of climate change. At home, three days ago, the Supreme Court ordered the Federal Government to set up an Authority under the Pakistan Climate Change Act-2017 - and establish the related Fund - within a fortnight.

Whether you like it or not - climate change is the next best topic these days. The subject remains a revered occupation for several experts around the world who keep coming up with astonishing facts and figures. Hence, there is no escape from climate change as its scope has gradually encompassed almost every aspect of life - from lifestyle to agriculture to governance to finances to trade to space technology – you name it. Even the doyens of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are mindful of the fact that their inventions and activities must be climate friendly. Paradoxically, however, the fact remains that the more they talk about addressing the related issues, the more it gets convoluted as a theme.

Conversely, the lack of ‘action’ does not seem to deter the ever-enthusiastic worldwide research fellows. For instance, according to a report prepared by the Norwegian University of Science and Technology dated April 30, 2024, the US is at the top of the list of emitters when it comes to the total sum of aviation emissions for both international and domestic flights. The research has revealed that economic well-being leads to more aviation activity, hence, ‘the wealthy Norway, with just 5.5 million people, was third place overall, just behind the US and Australia, when domestic emissions were calculated on a per-capita basis.’ Would there be any reprisals for wealthy nations is an angle better overlooked as the main donors in the field happen to be the chief culprits.

Climate change experts believe that as a lower-riparian, single-basin country, Pakistan relies heavily on the water current of the river Indus for irrigated agriculture. They would wish the government to devise climate friendly policies may it be resource management, economic activity, or technological advancement. As such, Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable countries to the consequences of climatic change because of its diverse geographical and climatic features. On the other hand, instead of putting in serious efforts, Islamabad seems to have only one talking point when it desires to draw the world’s attention to the devastating floods or seek financial support for its climate change related endeavors viz Pakistan contributes only 0.9 percent to global greenhouse gas emissions but is one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of climate change.

Due to several reasons, climate change as a subject is still a far cry in Pakistan. Ask any Federal Secretary if they ever wished to be posted in the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination (CC&EC)? Read any official brief and see if it goes beyond collecting data for the international community to allocate additional funds. Official speeches delve into what needs to be done but without offering any corresponding action. Under the circumstances, it would be unfair to expect from the CC&EC to come up with some concrete proposals on how to address gender related issues especially when it comes to inequalities in governance.

Indeed, one of the neglected areas in Pakistan relates to the integration of climate change with gender equality. A USAID factsheet on climate change and gender suggests that: a) Climate change projects can be markedly more effective when gender is considered b) Women produce 60 to 80 percent of food in developing countries and climate change interventions can provide opportunities for women empowerment, and c) Women are more vulnerable to undernutrition and have less access to medical services than men - climate change can exacerbate this situation.

How boring - some of you might have remarked.

However, this subject is close to many people’s hearts. One of them is Aisha Khan, Chief Executive, Civil Society Coalition for Climate Change (CSCCC) who organized the second edition of the Gender Climate Award Ceremony in Islamabad last week. Supported by the diplomatic Missions of France, EU & UAE, Agence Française de Développement and UNDP, honor was bestowed upon three winners of the Pakistan Gender Climate Award: Qandeel Rehman, Umbreen Arif and Khalida Niaz. The Award seeks to shine light on women and recognize their dynamic contribution as equal partners in change. Once again, Aisha Khan, Tamgha-e-Imtiaz, has proved her credentials as a significant civil society leader.

In a gender-blind research environment, such initiatives need support from the government as well. Experts believe that without gender analysis, we might ‘omit key aspects of social life in a changing climate.’ It is, therefore, considered ‘vital that the gendered character of climate change is recognized and further explored in the social sciences and humanities.’ It might come as a surprise to many that gender climate change ‘impacts men and women differently due to differences in their traditional roles, societal expectations, and livelihoods. Women, who make up the majority of the developing world’s 1.4 billion poor, generally have lower incomes, less access to credit and decision-making authority, and limited control over resources, increasing their vulnerability to many climate impacts.’ The USAID would recommend involving women in vulnerability assessments, to ensure that the evaluations do not focus solely on economic sectors dominated by men. Hopefully, someone in the CC&EC is listening.

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