**Invest in women for progress**

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The theme of International Women's Day 2024 is ‘Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress’ which is being celebrated to emphasize and highlight the importance of empowering women for development and prosperity.

According to the United Nations, “Women and girls make up 49.7 per cent of the global population, yet women and girls are often ignored in discussions on demographics, with their rights violated in population policies”.

Though women should be involved in every sector, one important area is mitigation and adaptation to climate change where the vulnerabilities of women and the significance of their participation in the decision-making process are being ignored.

Climate change is adversely impacting women all around the world and causing gender discrimination. The theme of International Women's Day, 2024 is also applicable in climate-led crises advocating investment in women to empower them to tackle climate-change-related emergencies.

During a disaster caused by climate change, relief efforts must take care of the needs of women and local cultures and traditions. In many backward and traditional societies, women cannot evacuate their places without men in their houses and relocate to other places. So, rescue workers and volunteers must be trained and aware to take care of local values and cultures in their relief work.

It can be very helpful to include female staff in the relief work due to their better understanding of gender sensitivities and making it easy for affected women to communicate with them about their needs and issues.

Similarly, in an emergency when all healthcare units, medical staff, and facilities are diverted towards relief work, women-related health issues are ignored. It’s important to dedicate some doctors and medical staff at health units to dealing with women-related health emergencies.

In addition to that, climate change disasters also negatively impact women's financial empowerment and increase the burden on them for family responsibilities. According to UN Women, “Agriculture is the most important employment sector for women in low- and lower-middle income countries, during periods of drought and erratic rainfall, women, as agricultural workers and primary procurers, work harder to secure income and resources for their families”.

In some cases, girls are forced to leave their education to support their mothers in the fields, which also widens the gap of gender inequality. In case of climate-led disasters, governments should announce insurance policies for women-owned lands and agriculture women workers to protect against any calamity and protect their financial vulnerabilities.

Similarly, during any emergency, women and girls are vulnerable to crimes. Kidnapping and abduction become common phenomena for trafficking and other unlawful activities. Incidents of gender-based violence also increase due to financial hardships and displacements. As a result of financial losses and the inability to feed many children, incidents of early child marriages of girls and child labour increase and women and girls become victims of violence in many cases.

According to a Wilson Centre report, “During periods of drought, women across East Africa travel further distances to collect water for their families. Further distances travelled into less familiar terrain heightens women's exposure to the risk of sexual and physical violence”.

It is important to sensitize and activate law-enforcement agencies during emergencies led by climate change to keep an eye on gender-based crimes. The establishment of a gender cell and a dedicated helpline number can play an important role in reducing such crimes. Normally, women and local people are not aware of remedies available to them to report and take action against such incidents. Awareness campaigns can play an important role in sensitizing women and local communities to be more vigilant against such crimes and report to the dedicated helpline.

The lack of limited research at the local level on the impacts of climate change on gender also fails to provide evidence-based policies to the legislators and policymakers. This leads to a failure to tackle gender sensitivities during a climate-led catastrophe effectively. The governments should generate scholarships and grants to support research in this area. Moreover, researchers and academicians, especially women, should be involved in the policymaking process along with other stakeholders.

It is equally important to train women from local communities directly impacted by climate change in mitigation and adaptation efforts. Women from local communities can be selected as leaders and master trainers to impart training and guidance to other women amid any emergency caused by climate change.

We need to invest in our women to tackle climate change crises, secure our future, and accelerate growth and development. Without the empowerment of women, climate-led disasters will continue to deepen the gender divide and create human rights issues. Nations must ensure to take into account gender perspective while devising policies and legislations. The theme of this year’s International Women's Day also highlights the importance of investing in our women to accelerate progress.

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