

The Impact of Climate Change on Women

As primary caregivers, women around the world provide basic needs for survival, health, and well-being. This includes building networks of supportive relationships that strengthen our communities.

The climate crisis and other environmental destruction directly and disproportionately impact women and the essential work that we do. For example, they threaten sources of food and water and throw into chaos the supportive networks we build.

As women we have less socioeconomic status and power than men. Therefore a climate disaster leaves us in worse conditions with bigger challenges and less support with which to recover. Women who face multiple oppressions—Indigenous women, women in the Global South, women of color, poor women, women with disabilities, young women—are hit the hardest.

Climate change creates societal instability in which rape and other forms of sexual violence against women increase. And in North America, the building of new gas pipelines (for example, the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines) also increases sexual violence against women, many of whom are Native women living in territories through which the pipelines are built.

According to the United Nations, eighty percent of the people displaced by climate change are women. Yet women's representation is less than thirty percent in national and global climate negotiating bodies. With our brilliance, how we understand the importance of human relationships, and our knowledge of how to create rather than destroy, women should be at the center of climate solutions. Sexism and male domination are debilitating obstacles to addressing climate change. They also destroy the lives of both women and men.

The practices of *Sustaining All Life*—listening to each other without interruption, and supporting each other's natural healing processes (laughing, crying, talking, and shaking)—allow both women and men to heal from the damage done by sexism and male domination. This helps us transform the power dynamics between women and men so that women's voices are central in all decision-making, and women and men are allies in ending climate change.



The Work of Sustaining All Life and United to End Racism

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some big changes are needed if this is to happen. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on people targeted by these particular oppressions. Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people within nations, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness among the populations of many countries, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the environmental crisis, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of capitalism. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these issues and others.

The role of oppression

Our societies are based on exploitation and oppression demanding growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the Earth. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we are pulled to act out on others the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though humans are vulnerable to acting out oppression, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a human has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

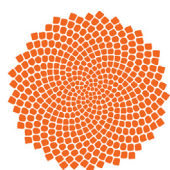
The importance of healing personal damage

The emotional harm done to us in our societies by oppression interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the environmental crisis. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist it or we may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage we carry and by assuming that we will never be free of it.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.

Sustaining All Life (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end climate change within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) is a group of people of all ages and backgrounds, in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved.



Sustaining All Life

For more information, see:
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