

Climate change destroying livelihoods and traditions of Mugal women in Nepal

In the remotest parts of the mountains of Northern Nepal, the existence of the Indigenous Mugal women and their communities is being threatened by climate change day after day. The women work 18-hour days tending to household chores, taking care of children, collecting food, water and wood, and planting and tending crops. The impacts of climate change, such as changing weather patterns and temperatures, have already had major effects on every aspect of the women's traditional means of life and threaten their survival.

Mugal women are the main providers of food for the family. In recent years, erratic weather and rain has changed food growing patterns, which resulted in crop failures. Landslides and flooding continuously sweep away their fertile land. Recent landslides have destroyed many of the already limited walking paths available to the women. Distances that used to take 30 minutes can now take more than 2 hours, and distances to the water mills where they grind flour have increased to up to 4 hours. As one woman describes, "the walking trail is really, really dangerous, because there are threats of dry landslides, stones falling off the hills. Already so much has been damaged by landslides. We have to keep to a very narrow trail. And if you fall, you fall into one of the biggest rivers in Nepal." The women have to make these trips often in order to collect enough water for their families and for watering the crops. This makes for work that is both time-consuming and extremely hard on their bodies.

Reduced snowfall and warmer temperatures have caused economic insecurity and a series of food crises. The women are constantly afraid of not being able to feed their families. The harvests of the traditional agricultural cycle from March to late October used to provide food that could sustain the family year-round. Now, these food supplies only last six months. Too much rain in recent years has hurt the production of many cash crops such as chilies, beans, and potatoes. The women must keep their children home to forage for cash crops or herbs to be sold

in local markets, and they suffer under the stress of not being able to send their children to school.

For many years the precious herb yarshagumba has been a reliable source of year round income for the women. In summer, the women and children go north into the Himalayas to collect the herb. They later give it to their husbands to be sold in local markets. However, recent changing temperatures have decreased the abundance of yarshagumba. The women report spending whole days scouring the mountainside to find not even one plant. Glacial and ice-cap melting has also greatly increased the threat of landslides in summer, making the summer collection extremely dangerous work.

The women fear that the increase in climate-related insecurity will leave them with a choice- to starve or to migrate. In the future, Mugal women will have no choice but to migrate into insecure and exploitable employment, like many Nepali women are already forced to do.

As the most vulnerable members of a nation with an average greenhouse gas emission rate of 0.027%, Mugal women contribute the least to global warming, yet are the most burdened by climate change. Every aspect of their lives and livelihood are threatened by climate change, and Mugal women deserve and demand a voice in global climate discussions and policies.



International Recommendations

- Commit to a radical and urgent transition from extractive, profit based economies to people centered models that are just, equitable, gender-sensitive and locally driven;
- Commit to a comprehensive, ambitious and binding new climate agreement which aims to limit global warming below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels;
- **Mitigation:** the new agreement should target the elimination of all fossil fuels and the use of 100% renewable energy by 2030 for developed countries and 2050 for others;
- **Mitigation** should not include commercializing of the climate through mechanisms that have failed to reduce emissions including REDD, REDD+, and "climate-smart" agriculture, among others;
- **Adaptation:** Developing countries needs (particularly LDCs and SIDS) should be addressed as a priority in the new agreement. Developed countries must recognize their historical responsibilities and fulfill their obligation to support adaption measures for developing countries, including through finance, technology transfer, capacity building and the removal of patent and intellectual property restrictions;
- **Loss and damage** must address long term and slow onset loss and damage as well as immediate disaster related damage;
- **Support small-scale**, locally owned and developed ecological responses ensuring food sovereignty and traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous and rural women are retained and promoted;
- **Decision-making processes at the local, national and international levels:** Should be led by those most affected by the impacts of climate change, particularly women;
- **Disaster Risk Reduction:** A gender-responsive approach should be integrated in all disaster risk reduction strategies, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction policies and measures;
- **Accountability mechanism:** A strong and effective compliance mechanism to the agreement should be established to ensure the fulfillment of Parties' obligations.

National recommendations

- The Nepalese government should identify the most vulnerable communities in regards to climate change and prioritize them, including women;
- **Gender specific policies** that provide the most affected women with alternative, sustainable and locally owned livelihood options and recognize the risks of migration, trafficking and loss of land should be collaboratively developed;
- Funding of local women's projects and their networks should be prioritized in budget allocations;
- **Indigenous peoples**, including women, should be included in all decision-making policies and measures on climate change affecting them;
- **Information about climate change**, its impact, adaptation, disaster risk reduction and supports should be provided in Indigenous languages and through means that do not require literacy.

Nepal Country Info

Population: 27 Million

Human Development Index Ranking: Ranked 145 on Human Development Index of 187

Nearly 30% of population living below poverty line on less than \$1.25 a day

Greenhouse Gas Global Emission: In 2013 Nepal contributed 0.027% of global greenhouse gas emissions and in 2014 has a per capita emission rate of 0.13 metric tons (as compared to 17.5 metric tons for the US, and 6.18 metric tons for China).

Climate Change Vulnerability: Nepal is the 4th most vulnerable country in the world. Nepal's varied topography and social vulnerability make the country particularly susceptible to geological and climate-related disasters (Climate Change Vulnerability Index 2011). An increase in soil erosion, landslides, flash floods, and droughts has been already reported.

Costs of climate change: Current climate variability and extreme events are already causing major impacts and economic costs in Nepal, estimated to be equivalent to an annual cost of 1.5 to 2% of GDP. The future economic costs of climate change in Nepal are estimated to be very large, equivalent to an additional 2 to 3% of current GDP/year by mid-century.

Climate Change loss and damages:

- Expected to cost Nepal 10% of its GDP by 2100 (Assessing the Costs of Climate Change and Adaptation in South Asia, ADB);
- Total glacier area and ice reserves in Nepal shrank by almost a third in the last three decades (International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development);
- Up to 3.4 million people are estimated to require food assistance in Nepal as a result of climate change.

Community Info

- Mugal communities are those indigenous to the Mugu District in northern Nepal.
- Mugu District one of the remotest and least developed in Nepal, about 350 km away from Kathmandu.
- Average literacy rate of less than 20% for women.
- Mugu District is one of the poorest districts of Nepal, lacking health facilities, education, or transportation infrastructure.
- Takes as long as 4 days to reach nearest town by a road which operates seasonally. Travel is made even longer by rough, mountainous terrain.
- Nepal's mountainous areas have the lowest Human Development Index scores. In 2011, Mugu District had the 7th lowest Human Development Index scores of all Nepal's 75 districts.

Organization Info

Mugal Indigenous Womens Upliftment Institute (MIWUI) is leading research on the impacts of climate change on the lives of women of the Mugal Community in Northern Nepal. Through education and training, MIWUI aims to give the women the knowledge and skills to claim inclusion in climate change decision making at the village, national, regional, and international levels. They demand gender-sensitive climate policies and funding. Alina Saba, one of MIWUI's young women researchers, was selected as one of four civil society speakers in the UN Climate Summit in September, 2014.

“Indigenous women in the remotest parts of Nepal produce close to zero carbon emissions yet they are paying the highest price for other countries' consumption. Are their lives to be continually surrendered to fulfill insatiable needs for consumption and profit?”
–Alina Saba, MWUI Researcher

Climate Justice is a Feminist Issue

APWLD is Asia Pacific's leading feminist, membership driven network. We hold consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Our 180 members represent groups of diverse women from 25 countries in the region. For 25 years APWLD has been empowering women to use law as a instrument of change for equality, justice, peace and development. We use research, training, advocacy and activism to claim and strengthen women's human rights.

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