

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING AS A RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The goal of this work is to analyze and show the importance of the role of women in decision-making regarding climate change. Women are recognized both nationally and globally as important bearers of important roles and changes when it comes to sustainable energy sources, climate change and other issues related to sustainable development.

Design/Methods/Approach: We have singled out recent research that clearly proves that the role of women is really very important when deciding on measures to mitigate climate change... It should be pointed out that in poor areas, women are still exclusively assigned housewives as primary jobs.

Findings: Although there are still men's and women's jobs, it is important to point out that this division is slowly being neutralized. Available data indicate that more and more women are involved in the decision-making and management process when dealing with issues of sustainable energy, climate change and the environment.

Originality/Value: There are clear observations that the role of women in decision-making is a little more favorable than it was in the past two decades. Women still encounter obstacles in their advancement, but research shows that a number of initiatives and projects are being implemented that strengthen the role and position of women in society.

Keywords: gender equality, climate change, security, sustainable development.

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INTRODUCTION

Climate change is undoubtedly a provocative topic both in the world and in our country. The dangers and risks that climate change brings with it have become an integral part of everyday life. The disruption of balanced conditions in the environment as well as the unity of natural and social components is expressed in the threat to the stable functioning of both the biosphere and society, calling into question the existence of man as a natural and social being. (Blagojević et al., 2011: 544)

Although climate change affects everyone, women and men, due to their different positions in society, may experience the consequences of climate change differently, with women often being more severely affected by the consequences of these changes. Climate change negatively affects the lives of men and women, and generally speaking, it has a greater impact on poor women, due to their limited access to resources, recovery, rehabilitation, etc. (Dimitrov, 2019)

Human health and safety are at risk due to the negative effects caused by climate change, such as the lack of access to food, water, healthcare, and energy. Climate change and its consequences affect everyone, regardless of gender, race, religion, or ethnicity, but we can still conclude that there are some differences in the impact on social communities and individuals. (Arora-Jonsson, 2011:748)

In the future, it is to be expected, bearing in mind the enormous pollution and climate change, that the threshold of tolerance for pollution and the damage it causes to the environment, and therefore to people, as an integral part of the same environment, as well as to their property, will be getting lower and lower. (Galić, 2025:133)

One of the most important ways to protect the environment from all negative impacts that disrupt its quality and sustainable development itself is timely and complete information about its condition, which is a civil right protected by the constitution, but at the same time an obligation of competent authorities and institutions to make information of environmental importance available to the entire public. (Galić 2025:164)

Recent literature has focused on exploring why women are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and why there are gender differences in mitigation behaviors and attitudes. As Arora Johnson (Arora-Jonsson, 2011:747) points out, women's decision-making ability as a virtue has increased their responsibility but without increasing their power.

Environmental disasters represent serious situations that are large in scale and dangerous for the entire living world, humans, plants and animals. Unfortunately, disasters are most often the result of the action of the human factor. Environmental disasters are accompanied by incalculable economic losses, but also a large number of human victims, as well as far-reaching consequences for the health



of the population. Even the healthiest economies are not ready to deal with all the challenges that such crises bring with them.

Society should understand its place in the natural space and its very important role in maintaining the natural balance. Ecological culture as a part of general culture is based on environmental education and improvement by developing ecological awareness. Preserving and maintaining the unity and maximum productivity of nature and society promotes the preservation and sustainable use of the biosphere as a whole.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

Equal access to decision-making is a significant step towards achieving gender equality. Climate change affects all population groups and each individual, whose vulnerability depends on a number of factors. Among the extremely negative direct consequences is certainly the increase in temperatures, the changes of which affect the health and life of people, but also agricultural and energy production, the occurrence of forest fires, etc. On the other hand, extreme precipitation, which results in the occurrence of floods, landslides and rockfalls, directly threaten human lives and property, as well as the security of supply and availability of food, water, and energy.

The impacts of climate change affect women and men differently. Vulnerability is not only related to environmental factors, but social conditions also play a major role. Due to their low adaptive capacity, the poor are the most vulnerable group. Given that women make up a disproportionately large percentage of the world's poor, they are among the most vulnerable groups. Women and men have different relationships with the environment and its resources. It is common to hear that women are more often than men responsible for household chores, as well as caring for children and family members. Such gender relations affect social roles and power structures and are present in every society. This is precisely what leads to gender differences, which are reflected in inequality and the uneven distribution of resources necessary for everyday life. (Scholastica, Olanrewaju, 2022:54)

The poor and marginalized segments of many societies (women, the elderly, immigrants, indigenous groups, etc.) are vulnerable groups. Climate change affects men and women differently largely because of their gendered distribution of power, roles and responsibilities at the household and community levels. Women tend to be overburdened with household chores and childcare. For example, during the 2004 Asian tsunami (70% of victims were women), many women and children were trapped in their homes, while most men were engaged in work outside the household. Differences in economic opportunities and access to productive resources also make women more vulnerable to climate change because they are often poorer, less educated and not included in political, community and household decision-making processes that affect their lives. (УНДП, 2016)

In many studies, women's greater vulnerability to climate change is attributed to their lack of resources. Studies have provided evidence that people with fewer available resources are generally more affected by climate change. People with lower incomes tend to work in agriculture, which is the sector most affected by climate change. People in low-income households are also more vulnerable to external factors because they work in unstable jobs with high levels of income insecurity. Women, compared to men, often have limited access to resources, less access to justice, limited mobility, and a limited voice in decision-making and policy-making. (Schwerhoff, Konte, 2020)

The most famous study (Neumayer, Plümper, 2007) on gender and disasters found, based on data from 141 countries, that more women than men die in disasters, predominantly younger women, especially



in poor communities, due to gender-based discrimination to which they are exposed. This means that the vulnerability of women in emergency situations is higher, while the capacities (information channels, physical strength and skills, tools and equipment, etc.) are lower. Additionally, women's vulnerability is gendered, which means that it is caused by gender norms and roles. These inequalities are based on the position of men and women at the structural level, but are also visible at the individual level in emergency situations.

Theoretical assumptions and observations that poverty and low social and economic status are important causes of crime have been verified in a large number of empirical studies conducted in European countries and America during the last three decades. (Radović-Stojanović, Tomić, 2019:51).

Achieving gender equality is one of the Global Goals of Sustainable Development, and it is also defined in European Union and United Nations documents, some of which (such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - CEDAW²) are legally binding for signatory countries.

The technical document of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) from 2016 defines the introduction of a gender perspective (gender mainstreaming) as a process of assessing the impact on women and men of any planned action, including laws, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for including the priorities and experiences of both women and men in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and social spheres, so that both women and men benefit equally from them and do not treat them unequally. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

Interest in introducing a gender perspective began to develop within the United Nations, together with the formation of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)¹ in 1947. The turning point, however, came only in 1980, when the Second World Conference on Women was held in Copenhagen. On that occasion, it was pointed out that women did not benefit from previous development programs and that there was a need to look at development problems from the perspective of women in order to achieve greater equality between women and men. Five years later, at the Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi (1985), the topics of peace and conflict were included for the first time in discussions about women. At the conference, the connection between sustainable development, economic empowerment of women and the application of the principles of gender equality and equal opportunities was established, which was also incorporated into the strategic document in which the causal relationship between women and the protection and preservation of the environment was clearly highlighted. (UNITED NATIONS, 1986)

Another important date and event is the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where the position was unequivocally agreed that women pay the highest price for damaging the environment, but also that they have the greatest potential for finding solutions to crises and problems of sustainable development.

At the fourth United Nations World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, the text of the Declaration defines the environment as one of the twelve critical areas for women. In the Beijing Platform for Action, in the section on women and the environment, it is stated that the role of women is crucial in the processes of sustainable development and environmental protection.

The Paris Agreement on climate, adopted in 2015, represents an important moment in the history of the inclusion of gender issues in the field of decision-making. The Paris Agreement, as a major step for international engagement in the field of climate change, integrated gender equality. There is no doubt that climate change is a common concern of all humanity, so parties should, when taking measures to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their obligations related to human rights,



the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and persons in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, women's empowerment and intergenerational equality.

CLIMATE CHANGES AND GENDER EQUALITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

During the last decades, the Republic of Serbia has faced new risks to human health which are directly or indirectly related to climate changes. (Mićović, 2017:103). The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia guarantees equality between women and men, prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and other personal characteristics, and stipulates the obligation of the state to pursue a policy of equal opportunities. The legal basis for regulating equal rights and achieving gender equality in Serbia is found in the Law on Gender Equality, which was adopted in 2021 and is aligned with the EU acquis. It is also worth mentioning the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, which represents the legal basis for sanctioning and eliminating all forms of discrimination, including discrimination on the basis of gender and gender identity. A number of special laws regulate the conditions for achieving gender equality in specific areas (labor and employment, social and health protection, protection against violence, access to property, etc.).

Improving the capacity of women's civil society organizations and promoting gender equality and banning discrimination in the process of reducing the risk of disasters in the work of responsible entities has become an urgent issue in the Republic of Serbia. The recognition of the component of gender sensitivity and its definition by normative-legal regulation in the activities of protection and rescue entities in the Republic of Serbia is a significant fact, but it is still necessary to emphasize that it is to be more visible in the future. In the Report on floods from 2014, there is information that in some of the threatened local governments, the component of the gender perspective was not visible and that the persons in charge of these issues were inactive.² (Radović, 2015:26)

The Republic of Serbia is a signatory to several important and binding international documents that guarantee equality between women and men and prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender. Among these documents, the most important are those of the United Nations (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women — CEDAW), the Council of Europe (European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, European Social Charter and Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence) and the European Union (Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union), etc.

It should also be noted that a solid legal framework has been established in Serbia today in the field of environmental protection and climate change, which is still being harmonized with the legal acquis of the European Union. In addition to this, Serbia has ratified all relevant international agreements in the field of climate change, such as the Kyoto Protocol, UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, etc. In 2015, in accordance with the Paris Agreement, Serbia prepared and adopted a Nationally determined contribution to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (GHG).

Analyses of the practice of local self-governments in the management of emergency situations that followed the floods in 2014 showed that the population, especially women, were not sufficiently included

² Radović V., ANALIZA RODNE PERSPEKTIVE U PROCESU SMANJENJA RIZIKA U IZABRANIM LOKALNIM SAMOUPRAVAMA, RODNA RAVNOPRAVNOST I SMANJENJE RIZIKA OD KATASTROFA, Pokrajinski zaštitnik građana – ombudsman, Novi Sad, 2015:26



in the prevention and management of emergency situations, especially not in a formal and systematic way, as well as that emergency situations are not considered sufficiently from the point of view of the local community, as much as from the national level, through the procedures established in the Department for Emergency Situations within the Ministry of Internal Affairs. This is of course justified considering the procedures, competences of various authorities and the complexity of emergency management, as well as the role of security services (MIA - emergency sector, firefighters, rescue units), but the advantages of an approach that would recognize local circumstances, specific risks, resources and the vulnerability of the population to a greater extent have also been noted. (Baćanović, 2014)

Within the framework of the document "Serbia and Agenda 2030", which refers to climate change, it can be concluded that Serbia has prepared legal regulations, but implementation is in the initial phase. The key documents submitted by Serbia in relation to the implementation of this goal are: "Programme for Adaptation to Changing Climate Conditions for the Period from 2023 to 2030", "Strategy for Low-Carbon Development of the Republic of Serbia for the Period from 2023 to 2030 with Projections to 2050", "Programme for Air Protection in the Republic of Serbia for the Period from 2022 to 2030 with Action Plan" (Седлак М., ет ал, 2025:303).

During 2021, the Strategy for Gender Equality for the period from 2021 to 2030 was adopted. As stated, the vision of the strategy is a gender-equal Serbia, in which women and men, girls and boys, as well as persons of different gender identities, are equal, have equal rights and equal opportunities for personal development, provide an equal contribution to the sustainable development of society, enjoy equal benefits from the development of society, participate equally in decision-making about the development of society and assume equal responsibility for the future (Beker, Janjić, 2023)

According to research by the Center for the Promotion of Sustainable Development (CPOR), women in Serbia are very interested in energy efficiency and renewable energy sources (as many as 72 percent of the respondents), while half of the women pointed out that their household has already invested in improving energy efficiency, citing money saving and environmental protection as the reason. The research also showed that it is extremely important for women in Serbia that their work is in accordance with the principles of sustainable development and that they support the state in adopting policies in the field of energy and climate change, which promote sustainable energy development based on the application of green technologies.

In July 2007, the maximum daily temperatures in almost the entire territory of the country exceeded 35°C for nine consecutive days between July 16 and 24. In Smederevska Palanka and Podunavski District on July 24, the highest temperature in Serbia was recorded at 44.9°C. During this heat wave in Serbia, there were a total of 167 excessive deaths; in 151 cases (90%) these involved people older than 75 years. The increase in mortality among the elderly was 76% compared to the initial mortality. Excess female mortality was more than twice as high as male excess mortality. The greatest increase in mortality was from diabetes mellitus, chronic kidney disease, respiratory system disease and nervous system disease. Mortality from cardiovascular and malignant neoplasms represents the largest absolute number of excess deaths. (Bogdanović et al., 2013: 141)

The United Nations Agency for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment - UN Women Serbia, in cooperation with UNDP, through projects financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), supports the initiatives and activities of the Ministry of Environmental Protection in the field of including a gender perspective in the fight against climate change. UN Women organized a series of local educational events throughout Serbia, with the aim of supporting the development of gender-sensitive criteria within the call for project proposals in the areas of open data and innovative solutions. These calls are part of the project "Local development resistant to climate change", which was jointly announced



by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia.³

Improving the capacities of women's civil society organizations and promoting gender equality and the prohibition of discrimination in the process of disaster risk reduction in the work of responsible entities has become an urgent issue in the Republic of Serbia. Recognizing the gender sensitivity component and defining it through normative and legal regulations in the activities of protection and rescue entities in the Republic of Serbia is an important fact, but it is still important to emphasize that it is necessary to make it more visible in the future. The 2014 Flood Report contains information that in some of the affected local governments the gender perspective component was not visible and that the persons responsible for these issues were inactive. Although women are disproportionately affected by disasters and rapid changes in the environment, they have contributed to reducing the impact of climate change.

Women's knowledge and responsibilities in managing natural resources have proven crucial to community survival. As evidenced by the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch in 1998, La Masica, Honduras, surprisingly reported no deaths. The disaster agency had provided community education on early warning systems and hazard management six months in advance, with gender-sensitive interventions. Women took over the task of continuously monitoring the early warning system that had been abandoned by men. As a result, the municipality was able to evacuate the area quickly when Hurricane Mitch hit. (Agilera, 2004)

It is very important to mention the project implemented by the Civil Society Organization Center for the Promotion of Sustainable Development in partnership with the Swiss Cooperation Office (SECO). The project was supported by the Ministry of Environmental Protection of the Republic of Serbia, the Ministry of Mining and Energy of the Republic of Serbia, the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the Energy Community. The target group included women professionally involved in sustainable energy, climate change and environmental protection and women energy users (consumers).

Eight hundred women participated in this research, and the data of the Republic Office of Statistics from the 2011 population census were used as a source for creating the research sample. The sample was set according to the size of the target group, namely women between the ages of 25 and 55 within each of the four statistical regions and both types of settlements. The research was conducted in January 2018. (WISE SEE, 2018)

Women employed in international organizations are very actively involved in projects in the field of sustainable energy, climate change and environmental protection. The projects were managed by 75% of the respondents, and 70% of the projects they mentioned also contain a gender equality component, which is increasingly a standard request of donors. The introduction of a gender perspective in projects is promoted by the OSCE Mission in Serbia, UNDP projects in the field of climate change and environmental protection with the support of UN Women and cooperation with the Women's Architectural Society, the Swedish Development Agency SIDA, and especially two regional projects GIZ Open Regional Fund for Southeastern Europe - Energy Efficiency and Open Regional Fund for Southeastern Europe - Biodiversity. (WISE SEE, 2018)

The general impression is that women in Serbia are very interested in energy efficiency and renewable energy sources - as many as 72% know or would like to know more about measures to improve energy efficiency, and among those who want to be educated, the youngest respondents (ages 25 to 34) are the most numerous. The fact that only 3% are not interested in this topic is particularly encouraging. Half of the surveyed women point out that their household has already invested in improving energy effi-

³ <https://inovacije.klimatskepromene.rs/>



ciency. A large number of those who have not yet done so (42%) state that the reason is of a financial nature, and only 7% do not even think about it.

Research conducted on a nationally representative sample of women in Serbia (women professionally engaged in sustainable energy, climate change and environmental protection and women in the household) showed that women support the state in adopting policies in the field of energy and climate change, which promote sustainable energy development based on the application of green technologies, smart and advanced solutions. Also, it is very important for women that their work is in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. (WISE SEE, 2018)

CONCLUSION

Environmental security threats arise as a result of ignorance or poor management of natural resources, as a result of intentionally caused damage or as a result of a combination of natural and human factors. Climate change is a human rights crisis because it threatens our right to a healthy life.

With their skills, knowledge, creativity and innovation, women show a strong potential in the fight against climate change. Although there is a noticeable positive trend in the representation of women in sustainable energy, climate change and environmental protection in Serbia, their number in public institutions and companies continues to decrease as one moves towards the top of the hierarchical ladder. They are aware that they are not completely equal to men, but they rarely recognize gender inequality. Women still believe that career progress and women's position depend to the greatest extent on themselves, on their efforts and commitment, despite the fact that they face problems and obstacles because of being women.

Additional barriers include gender discrimination, harassment, male-dominated hiring and promotion boards, and working conditions that are not adapted to family and parental responsibilities.

Women in households in Serbia show a high level of information about energy efficiency. Lack of money is the most common reason for not implementing improvement measures. Women in households are not at all familiar with the activities of their local self-governments when it comes to incentive measures in the area of improving energy efficiency and activities related to climate change, although they show great interest in being informed about these topics. Gender aspects of international or domestic civil society organizations are increasingly becoming binding in projects on climate change and environmental protection, and most often represent a requirement, given that gender equality is globally recognized as a prerequisite for sustainable development. Women in the general population show an orientation towards sustainable solutions. They support the state in adopting policies that promote sustainable energy development. They are also positive about buying an electric vehicle if a subsidy is provided.

The recommendation is to improve the representation of women at the decision-making level in public institutions and public enterprises in the sectors of climate change and environmental protection. Women also have the primary responsibility for the care of children, the elderly and the infirm, as well as housework. That is why they are the first responders in disasters, but also after them, caring for those who are injured, helping the community, providing support and help when needed.



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