



Webinar Report

UNTOLD TALES OF WOMEN CHAMPIONS IN CLIMATE CHANGE

Background

Climate change impacts are already disrupting livelihoods in many parts of the world, particularly those that are dependent on predictable temperature and rainfall, clean water availability, and arable land. Sea level rise will also increasingly affect coastal communities by exacerbating erosion and leading to loss of land and coastal industries. A notable issue for Bangladesh.

Women and girls in Bangladesh are highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change that also act to exacerbate existing gender-based disparities. However, many women have now stepped forward and taken the initiative to change from being 'victims' to climate change adapters. In fighting back against the negative effects of climate change, reducing disaster risks and in building community resilience, more stories of women's success to be shared.

In this vein, UN Women, in partnership with ICCAD, organized a virtual webinar session on gender and climate change entitled "Untold Tales of Women Champions in Climate Change". This virtual session was organized on 23 January 2021

as one of the events of 7th Annual Global Gobeshona that takes place each year with an objective to create a network among the researchers, policy makers, development practitioners, and community people at local, national, regional, and global level.

6 videos were showcased on various initiatives undertaken by grassroots women in Bangladesh to deal with several issues, which amongst others were related to climate justice and violence against women, the fight against poverty and marginalization, rehabilitation and development of marginalized communities, empowerment of women via the introduction of innovative technologies, the reporting of child and gender discrimination, and humanitarian assistance in disaster situations. The webinar focused on:

- bringing together women leaders from rural to urban, local to national and regional and global levels in the fight against climate change in order to discuss and to learn from each other's inspirational stories and to encourage youth women with potential, to carry forward the legacy laid down by previous generations.

Discussion Highlights

Hurdles Faced by the Women Climate Champions

Stories of male champions are often heard but their stories are not the only ones that need to be heard. It is also important to hear about women's struggles and achievements and in particular, of the struggles and achievements of women with disabilities.

In future, more men must attend this type of webinar, not to speak -- but to listen to the inspiring stories of women champions. It is the responsibility of all who work on Climate Change Adaptation to work in a just and gender responsive way.

Women have become extremely vulnerable as they are the primary care givers of their families and they need to ensure access to food security. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is women who must feed their families. Men do not have much work and so women could not provide food. The pandemic is also a reason for increasing levels of domestic violence.



"It is very difficult for the girls and women with disabilities to receive support from society and stand beside each other. Also, female students with disabilities are facing different challenges in numerous levels of their study, which I have already faced."

Ms. Ashrafunnahar Misti
Women with Disabilities Development Foundation

"Development cannot occur without women. Development cannot be only having income and having money so that GDP and GNP increases. Development is us having food on our table, us having proper health care, us having children going to school."



Ms. Khushi Kabir
social activist, feminist, and environmentalist

Bangladesh is a country which faces frequent disasters. The resources and support are not being distributed equally, also, women are facing sexual abuse when they try to access relief. Financing for adaptation action remains low and a very small fraction reaches the local level.

Many barriers are faced, such as accessibility, finance/funding, social custom and family issues, and these hurdles need to be removed to allow greater participation of women. By participating and sharing their stories at a global level, real challenges and issues faced by women can be put forth for them to be resolved accordingly.

Approaches/strategies Employed



Women joining a larger platform enables their voices to be amplified and women's influence extended and strengthened but going forward, women must ensure to protect their right to leadership roles in their communities.

Women need to continue to influence and encourage youth and girls to create opportunity because they are the fire which needs to burn. No matter where you live, what your social status is, and who you are, as a woman, you have to face them.

Women, especially young girls, require role models to encourage them to share their stories and be inspired to face their challenges and strengthen their roles in society.

Women are driven by their mental strength and indomitable spirit to support their communities, specifically vulnerable people who are at risk to disasters. The more struggles, criticisms and discriminations women are faced with, the more eager they are to play their part in society.

More inspiring and real stories will need to be showcased, and women leaders and pathbreakers should be given a voice to speak at national and global forums to say what they have done and what more needs to be done.



“Many women suffer from “Imposter syndrome” meaning one downplays one’s own capabilities. But I think full recognition of leadership must be given to the work women are doing silently in the background and their inspiring stories must be heard by all.”

Dr Maureen Fordham
Professor of Gender and Disaster Resilience and
Centre Director, IRDR Centre for Gender and
Disaster

Achievements

During the COVID-19 pandemic, all have seen how women have come out so strongly to face the situation. They always prove that they are resilient and adapt to this pandemic.

Women are also the front-liners during disaster situations and climate crisis such as cyclones and other natural disasters. These women have inspired other women to join them and play their roles to be at par if not better than the men, in providing immediate and necessary assistance to those in dire need during emergency situations.

Disadvantaged people have also been given support whilst at the same time educating them how to protect the environment, and these can be observed via the implementation of eco-friendly projects such as the mobile stove and the storing of rainwater underground for use during dry seasons.

Recommendations

- Women must be included in forums and in practical initiatives undertaken at local and federal levels on climate change resilience.
- To effectively adapt to the escalating impacts of climate change, support for locally led climate action is needed.
- Launch the Gobeshona Network Locally-led Adaptation (LLA) and Resilience and hold the Gobeshona conference on LLA every January from now on as a virtual global event
- Make each annual Gobeshona conference into a review of progress on the ten year journey to promote and enhance LLA around the world.
- Instead of planning taking place among non-local actors in international organizations and multilateral climate funds, it should take place among local actors, and these local actors should lead adaptation.
- Devolving decision-making to the lowest appropriate level empowers those worst impacted to lead more adaptation.
- Decentralisation is ideal for facilitating resilience building.
- Women and girls must be supported by society in their efforts to mitigate against climate change’s effects on livelihoods and security.