

Muslim Women and Climate Justice in the Global South

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Abstract: Women are more likely than men to be affected by environmental problems due to their social roles and more impoverished status in many countries. Coping with the effects of ecological crisis and climate change and the damage from extreme weather events such as storms, floods, and cyclones tends to fall on women who hold together families and households. Women are more vulnerable than men to the impacts of climate change, mainly because they represent the majority of the world's poor and are proportionally more dependent on threatened natural resources. Thus, as valuable members of society, women deserve to participate equally in public life, where their participation generates more effective, equitable, and sustainable outcomes.

Keywords: women, Muslim, climate change, equitable, sustainable

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, it is impossible to grow up in the Global South without experiencing climate change impacts. Communities in Indonesia have suffered from climate-induced floods, droughts, or fires, similar to communities throughout Africa, Asia, and Latin America regions. Nonetheless, we have all seen multinational corporations take advantage of our natural resources, bribe our governments, and steal land from indigenous communities and small farmers. We also know first-hand that coal, oil, gas, and agribusiness expansions are always accompanied by human rights violations. Indeed, wealthy countries refuse to make good on the climate adaptation funding that they promise, including the technology transfer. The lack of action by our own governments to enforce laws that should protect local communities is unacceptable. In the face of such hardship, faith sustains our communities and give us the strength to stand up against environmental and climate injustices.

2. Women and political participation

When Greta Thunberg became well known around the world for her call to world leaders to take the climate crisis seriously, it appeared that women and girls were well represented at the top table. However, as COP26 opened in Glasgow in November 2021, the lack of women's senior leadership in climate negotiations was raised as an issue of concern by many activists. Climate negotiations at COP were driven predominantly by governments of states that need to abide by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Given the low representation of women in political positions (globally only 21% of government ministers are women), it is unsurprising that climate delegations are gender imbalanced. Over 100 heads of state came to COP26, yet there were only 8-10 female leaders among them, while the majority were male leaders. The issue of women's under-representation in climate negotiations is further worsened by the gender bias in the media. COP is one of the most important events on climate, yet we hardly hear women voices or women leaderships, let alone women faith leaders, nor women from the Global South and the intersection of those in general, women must shout louder than men to be heard, especially grassroots women in the Global South. Moreover, despite being physically present, grassroots women remained

excluded at the COP26, which only reflects the continuing neglect of women's voices in the middle of the worsening climate crisis, while the real situation experienced by women from frontline communities in the Global South due to climate change must be conveyed and heard by the world community to prevent false climate solutions and boost action to realize climate justice.

Inevitably, the environment has become a subject of interest in recent years. However, the idea of conserving the environment as it is understood today – like the conservation program – is relatively new, having emerged as a matter of concern to the human race approximately about 6-7 decades ago. It has emerged because human behavior and activities are increasingly threatening the balance of the natural world. At the same time, there is rapid population growth and vastly increased global economic activity, which sees nature exclusively as consumable resources. Furthermore, as the human race crosses a path – which we now call “progress” – it leaves in its wake a trail of destruction that threatens our own survival.

Obviously, decent life depends on nature's provision of stable resources. In many traditional communities across the globe, cultures are embedded within nature preservation and environmental education among the people, as well as how these can be emulated to inform modern environment conservation programs. Accordingly, environmental conservation in such traditional communities is guided by clearly streamlined gender roles and cultural values through the spiritual and tribal/clan system that defined the ethical relationship between human culture and the environmental nature. The challenges towards this include gender inequality and the associated stereotypes, the political climate in the country/region, and the belief systems or religions. Successful mitigations should essentially hinge on integrating traditional conservation methods in formal school curricula and undertaking sensitization and empowerment campaigns geared towards nature preservation. We can all see that progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals – for instance – has been very slow. We are confronted with economic, environmental, and social crises on a global scale during this century. On the other hand, advances in attaining gender equality have also been very slow. Nonetheless, amid these uncertainties, women are an immense force of social change because we know from history that when women are uplifted, there are immense benefits for entire communities and society overall.

On the other hand, the Faiths and Nature session at WWF Pavilion during COP26 shared the following statements:

“The role of people of faith, and faith leaders, religions, to advocate, to create a different path, to reorient humanity to face this crisis... so we might live in harmony with nature, not in struggle with nature.”

“80% people have a sense of religious belonging, discernment of a moral obligation... It is time to harness this countercultural force that religions have.”

These statements highlight the role of our spiritual and ethical resources to achieve climate justice, namely connectedness, love, sacrifice, service, and action.

3. The role of Muslim women

Widespread actions based on a deep connection between people and the Earth could also be a space of hope. In observation of what motivates Muslim women to connect with the Earth and lead environmental or climate activism, it is discovered that courage and deep conviction are the driving forces. More Muslim women are now transcending boundaries to create spaces of activism. Their efforts are acts of worship (*ibadat*) that integrate social and political

realities. Indeed, some emerging themes appear, such as finding hope amid crisis, acting with calm consistency, working to benefit future generations, individual responsibility, and recognizing one's place and deep interconnection with the Earth. Moreover, despite many challenges, Muslim women are leading change by carving spaces that acknowledge their presence and are grounded in their beliefs, such as leading Green Ramadan in their mosques. It is quite premature to say that women are more environmentally conscientious than men. However, women are more likely than men to be affected by environmental problems due to their social roles and more impoverished status in many countries. Coping with the effects of ecological crisis and climate change and the damage from extreme weather events such as storms, floods, and cyclones tends to fall on women who hold together families and households. Women are more vulnerable than men to the impacts of climate change, mainly because they represent the majority of the world's poor and are proportionally more dependent on threatened natural resources. For instance, women predominate in the world's food production yet most of them do not own arable land. With this in mind, it is important that solutions for climate change are also focused on women as those most affected by climate change, while they also have the most innovative solutions to combat it. Indeed, this is true for women rooted in strong faith traditions – including many Muslim women – as we have seen rising in many parts of the world.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, involving women in protecting the environment would help societies to develop the necessary sense of responsibility to maintain a good balance between humans and the Earth's resources. However, native/indigenous women, women from low-income communities and the Global South still bear a heavier burden from the impacts of the current ecological crisis and climate change due to the historic and continuing impacts of colonialism, racism, and inequality, and in many cases because they are more reliant upon natural resources for their survival and/or live in areas that have poor infrastructure. Nevertheless, against all odds and facing major challenges, women are demonstrating every day that they have unique and essential ideas and skills to offer at this turning point in history, including how we are living with the Earth and each other. In traditional communities around the world, women manage water, sources of fuel, and food, as well as both forests and agricultural terrain. Women in many parts of the world also act as an immense force of social change in directing family values, lifestyles, and consumption habits. When women are uplifted, there are immense benefits for entire communities and societies overall.

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