



Breaking the Barriers

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The impacts of climate change are increasingly obvious, with 2023 as the hottest year on record—by far.

Increasing climate change is leading to extreme heat, flooding, and droughts. Weather extremes are the main driver of hunger in 18 countries where 72 million people are facing acute climate change. In CARE's research with women, 4 out of the 5 main crisis women reported in 2023 were linked to climate and extreme weather.

The impacts of climate change are also profoundly unequal. Floods widen the income gap between the poorest people and less poor people by \$21 billion a year. Climate change causes women to work 55 more minutes a week than men, and raises the amount of time children work by 49 minutes every week—adding to women's already higher unpaid care burden. Heat stress and flooding widen the income gap between men and women by \$53 billion every year. That's an enormous amount. In 2024, 95 countries have GDP's lower than \$50 billion.

The world is investing far too little in helping people cope with climate change—with only 7.5% of global climate funding going towards adaptation, and about \$10 billion targeted to reach small scale producers. Globally, we're not investing money in the right places because we're not asking the right people about climate solutions. If we want to curb the impacts of climate change—and reduce climate change in the future—we have to look at the impacts who are already experiencing the most severe climate change effects.



Asafuzzaman Captain/CARE

Top Crises Women are Reporting:



Food insecurity



Lack of clean water



Conflict



Drought



Pests destroying crops

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What is the data telling us about climate change?

Climate impacts hit food security hard and last for years. [New research shows](#) that the impacts of **extreme weather events and disasters predict lower food security for people for up to 5 years**. That's true not just if you have experienced the shock yourself, but also if you know people who've experienced extreme weather. Shocks have impacts across whole communities, and the road to recovery is long and slow.

"My message to the world: I want to tell people to stop wasting resources and I would like to find an opportunity to teach them the importance of managing resources such as water. In as much as men and women are all affected by the drought, women are more affected.

... If [my child] comes home and says 'I am hungry' my husband will not be at home. I am the one who has to deal with the hungry children. And as women, we are the overseers. I sleep last and children and men eat first and I will eat after they have been fed....

"It's very painful to see the crops fail. After investing in crops and having nothing to harvest, it's really painful."

—Moreladies, Zimbabwe

What is severe weather for people in these surveys?

Original Data Source: World Risk Poll 2021.

People answered 2 questions

1. "How **LIKELY** do you think it is that each of the following things **COULD** cause you serious harm in the next **TWO** years? Severe weather events, such as floods or violent storms"

- Very worried
- Somewhat worried
- Not worried
- Don't Know

2. In the past 5 years, have you personally experienced a disaster, such as floods or violent storms? Please do not think of coronavirus for this question.

- Yes
- No

Systems aren't supporting women through crisis.

The [research](#) shows that being extremely worried about extreme weather events is linked with lower food security. The more worried someone is about extreme weather, the less food they have. Women are more likely than men to worry that severe weather events will cause serious harm, and women also have lower food security than men. This is because systems are not designed to help women meet their needs.

Agricultural systems: Women cannot get the same support from agricultural extension agents, education about farming best practices, or access to the right resources and tools to plan for extreme weather's impact on farming. Closing the [gender gap in agri-food systems](#) would feed 45 million more people every year.

"I'm unable to put food on the table for my children. Today I was able to get them some breakfast, but now I don't know what they will eat later. Somedays you have something to eat and somedays you don't," [Khadija](#), Somalia. The severe drought killed livestock, closed businesses, and pulled girls out of school—putting them at higher risk of child marriage.

What does [extreme weather look like in the US](#), and who does it affect?

"Harmful impacts from more frequent and severe extremes are increasing across the country—including increases in heat-related illnesses and death, costlier storm damages, longer droughts that reduce agricultural productivity and strain water systems, and larger, more severe wildfires that threaten homes and degrade air quality...**Low-income communities, communities of color, and Tribes and Indigenous Peoples experience high exposure and vulnerability to extreme events due to both their proximity to hazard-prone areas and lack of adequate infrastructure or disaster management resources.**"**

"Without water there is no life. ... we lost a lot of livestock due to theft and crocodiles in some of the distant water sources they had to travel to."

—Sheba Ngara, Zimbabwe.

Sheba and her community built new water harvesting tools to make up for the fact that their old wells had dried up with climate change's recurring droughts. This makes a huge difference in her life. "We no longer struggle as a community. Our livestock no longer have to travel over 5km in search of water. We now have good nutrition and we can sell excess vegetables and get money for our village lending and savings as well as for school fees."

Information systems: Women have [less access to climate information](#) than men do, making it difficult for women to take action to avoid or react to climate shocks. Women also have less access to [digital technology](#) that would help them access information or connect to people who can support them; only 19% of women in low income countries [used the internet in 2020](#).



Pauline Huringudo/CARE

Political systems: Only [15 of the 133 world leaders at COP28 were women](#), and women's overall representation in the climate negotiations has dropped since 2021. The lack of women's representation in all levels of leadership—global to local—translates into policies and solutions that aren't working for women.

"We are not responsible for the damages caused by climate change. I want to say to world leaders - you will take measures so that we can survive the losses that are happening." — Mamta Begum, Bangladesh. Year after year, the harsh reality of climate change and its seasonal shifts have unleashed devastating floods upon Mamata's village.

Disaster preparedness and response systems: Women are chronically underrepresented in leadership when disasters strike. To take one example, out of 30 countries that formed COVID-19 leadership committees by June of 2020, [only one was fully equal](#). On average, women made up only 24% of committees. This is true across almost all crises, from [refugee women in Uganda](#) to [women in the Nepal earthquake](#), or [women in the dry corridor of Honduras](#).

"We left everything behind, there is nothing for us back home, it is in the water. My husband was behind me, I saw him drown as we left our home, all is lost for me." —Sehat Khatoon, Pakistan

"I am worried that the well will run dry in only a few weeks. The money comes from what we harvest. If there is not enough water, the harvest is scarce and there is not enough income." [Mabel](#), Zambia. When this happens, she and her neighbors must walk ten kilometers every day to find clean drinking water.

Financial systems: There are nearly [1 billion women who don't have access to finance](#), and that's especially true after a crisis. After a shock, women have a [harder time getting financial resources](#) they need to build back better.

National disaster preparedness is directly linked to less hunger. [CARE's new research shows](#) People's confidence in national disaster preparedness correlates with lower food insecurity. The more confident they are that the national government can cope with a disaster, the less hungry they are - men and women. While disaster preparedness has long been seen as a means to save lives and reduce disaster impacts, this research highlights it is ALSO critical to ensure food security amidst climate change. This implies the need to continue supporting and funding national disaster preparedness.

Local disaster preparedness is not equally benefitting women. The [research demonstrates that men](#) who are confident that the local government can handle a disaster are less hungry; but this is not the case for women. The fact that local disaster preparedness is associated with less hunger for men is good, but it also highlights that these positive impacts are not felt by half of the population. It shows a clear need to ensure that disaster response plans actively include women all the way to the local level so that women are not left behind in local disaster preparedness.

"If there are no women involved, then there will be no successful solutions. And solutions are needed towards the future. Considering that the destruction of the earth is caused by human beings, the solution is in our hands."

—Raquel Vásquez, Guatemala

What are women doing about it?

Growing food differently. In Zambia, Buumba—a mother of seven and a small-scale farmer—faced potential food insecurity this year when severe floods destroyed nearly all her crops and displaced her and 4,000 other people in her community. As the flood water receded, only one crop survived – a stress-tolerant, vitamin-A enriched maize variety that she had tested and introduced with CARE support. To ensure she can continue to feed her family, Buumba is now expanding production of this climate-resilient and more nutritious maize variety. Elevating the voices and expertise of women like Buumba, and supporting their climate adaptation efforts, should be central to all climate response strategies.

Planning for crisis, and helping others prepare too. In the wetlands of northeast Bangladesh, Lucky Alter is now serving as a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) community leader. In this role, she facilitates anticipatory planning and disseminates early warnings for the increasingly intense monsoon season that brings flash floods to her community of 100 households. Lucky is part of a network of nearly 3000 DRR leaders (67% women) trained by CARE Bangladesh, all of whom are working to protect crops, assets, and lives that are threatened by climate change. Elevating the voices and expertise of women like Lucky, and supporting their adaptation efforts, should be central to all climate response strategies.

Reinvigorating soils. In the mountainous northern regions of Vietnam—where many of the country’s ethnic minority groups reside—women small-scale farmers are proactively implementing a variety of climate adaptation techniques. One woman shared with CARE that she has shifted to drought-resistant crops, using seeds that she accessed from other women in her village, and has started to rotate maize and peanut production to regenerate soils. She also uses Phan Xanh—leaves from indigenous plants—as compost in her fields. Elevating the voice and expertise of this small-scale farmer and other women like her, and supporting their climate adaptation efforts, should be central to all climate response strategies.

Planting trees. “We women are the ones that are involved in doing a lot of things even at household level. We plant trees and us women are the ones that are in the forefront to see that the project is successful because it is going to help us in our lives.”

Febby is a 50-year-old mother of five, living in a small village in the Southern Province of Zambia. Febby and her husband’s source of livelihood is small scale farming and gardening. Febby, her family and neighbours are already feeling the negative consequences of the climate crisis – extreme weather events are on the rise. Febby and others in the community are working together to plant and tend to drought-resistant seedlings in a tree nursery they have started so they can have long-term solutions.

Reacting to crisis when it happens.

In 2022, CARE partnered with Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSCEJ), a New Orleans-based agency that focuses on improving the lives of Gulf Coast residents affected by pollution and vulnerable to climate change. Together, we launched a partnership to address storm damage while creating much-needed employment income. CARE and DSCEJ deployed a workforce of

20 underemployed women to undertake paid resilience work in affected communities. After training and certification as mold remediation specialists, the task force completed more than 2,000 hours of remediation work. They focused on rehabilitating the facilities of community and faith-based organizations so they could re-open to provide shelter and other critically needed services. The result was

\$90,000 of direct income for the participating women and their families – reaching a total of 350 people affected by the disaster. The partnership has created sustainable employment for several women, with 30% of participants accepting full-time jobs using the skills they acquired through the program. We were able to replicate this program in Arkansas for tornado-impacted families.

“In the past it was only men who were the kings and sat in parliament, and we women had to be in the kitchen.”

–Petronella da Cruz, Timor Leste



“There are announcements and warnings before the disasters occur. Early warning. This is from our village leadership. They give warnings about things like living close to trees. And also if there are floods on the river banks. They give us these warnings so that before a disaster occurs, people can prepare their belongings, for example their documents or food. So that if a disaster occurs they can be prepared. ...now it is no longer like it was in the past. In the past, it was men that had all the rights. But now, because the issue of gender has been raised, women and men have the same rights.

In the past it was only men who were the kings and sat in parliament, and we women had to be in the kitchen. And we women couldn't have been here. We would only have been in the kitchen. But now I walk around because the matter of gender has been raised. We also now have opportunities to be able to protect ourselves, to become leaders.

I believe in myself. I want to speak. Just like other people. And I also have the hope that I want to lead women here to be like other women who are in the cities. It came from me, myself. I believe in myself. ”

–Petronella da Cruz, Timor Leste



What can we do about it?

Make it possible for people to anticipate and prepare for crisis. In the US alone, every \$1 spent on climate preparedness and resilience [saves communities \\$13 in damages](#), cleanup costs, and economic costs after an extreme weather event or other crisis. Globally, investing \$1 in resilience could [save \\$7 in responding to disaster](#).

Build better, more inclusive climate response plans at all levels. It's possible to build local disaster response that supports better food security for everyone. In Niger, by working to ensure that women had access to local leadership, [local planning processes](#), and climate information, the Hamzari project helped 77% of female food producers to use climate information to reduce risk, prepare for climate shocks, and adopt more climate-adapted agriculture. Community-based adaptation planning at the local level—when done in an inclusive way that brings together community members, women, and young people with scientists and government officials—results in [a \\$4 return for every \\$1 invested in planning for climate events](#).

Invest in people's—especially women's—ability to cope with crisis. When massive flooding hit Malawi in 2015, researchers estimated that every \$1 invested in savings groups to help people

prepare for crisis resulted in [\\$29 of returns](#) over 10 years—more than 3 times what projects that didn't invest in this were able to deliver.

Build local networks that are ready to react. Investing in resilience has a big return, but it doesn't replace fast, locally-led response. In the Philippines—one of the countries most prone to climate disasters in the whole world—investing [in Humanitarian Partnership Platforms with local organizations](#), and maintaining those investments over time, means that local partners can respond to crisis faster, and cover more areas of the country immediately when crisis hits. That's because they can get money, people, and resources to solve the crisis faster than bringing it in from the outside.

Invest in long-term resilience, preparedness, and safety nets. An extreme weather event can affect how much people eat for up to 5 years. That means we need to think about responses that last longer than the first shock or the first days and weeks of attention. Humanitarian response in the wake of disasters is critical, and it must be paired with people's ability to rebuild in the medium term and build the skills, assets, and networks they need to be ready when the next shock comes.

This brief summarizes the climate change evidence and findings of the report ["Breaking the Cycle of Hunger: Addressing Gender and Economic Inequality in the face of Climate Change"](#). Florence Santos, Yingxin Zhang, and Emily Janoch.