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Addressing gender inequality in climate response

There is a way to combat climate change and invest in programmes that empower women at the same time: taxing the ultra-rich

'We've lost everything', says Ana, facing her sister Rosa's hopeless gaze. Both women are over 70 years old and live in Valparaíso, Chile, a region devastated by the deadliest forest fires in history last February. At least 133 people died, and many are still missing.

These sisters are domestic workers and lost the house they inherited from their parents. In a matter of minutes, the efforts of two generations vanished, consumed by the flames. Like many women without access to the formal financial system, they also lost their life savings, which they kept in cash.

Climate change and gender

Record-breaking heatwaves, droughts, floods and devastating wildfires have disproportionately affected women like Rosa and Ana all around the world. In the past year, we have seen the news of catastrophic fires in the United States, Greece, Nepal, Colombia and Spain, to name just a few. Fierce fires were also reported in Venezuela, Ecuador and Colombia. In Brazil, vast areas of tropical forest have been consumed. In Africa, from Equatorial Guinea to the coastal cities of South Africa, forest fires are forcing the evacuation of many areas.

In February, bushfires in Australia killed livestock, destroyed property and forced 2 000 people to flee towns near Melbourne. It was a reminder of the 'Black Summer' fires of 2019/2020, which devastated an area the size of Turkey, killing 33 people as well as three billion animals.

Every aspect of a disaster is marked by gender differences.

Everywhere, the worsening climate crisis, environmental degradation and extreme weather events – coupled with poor planning

and inadequate adaptation measures – are alarmingly intensifying the number of disasters and their victims. Their unequal effects are heavily marked by gender.

Due to structural discrimination and traditional roles, women are disproportionately impacted, facing specific, interrelated risks. From obstacles to evacuation due to domestic and care work to the limited capacity for recovery, every aspect of a disaster is marked by gender differences. Women's unequal access to economic resources, lower decision-making power within their families and communities, and reduced experience in political participation often result in limited access to assistance and support to rebuild their lives after disasters.

To increase women's resilience in the face of rising disasters caused by climate change, it is essential to invest in efforts to close the gender gap. Unfortunately, as the United Nations warns, an alarming funding gap exists in achieving gender equality goals. The gap is staggering: $360 bn is needed annually to fulfil the commitments made by countries under the Agenda 2030 for Development.

Taxing the ultra-rich

At a time when many countries in the Global South are struggling with empty coffers, the financing needed to end structural inequality requires greater international cooperation. Today, only 4 per cent of all bilateral aid is allocated to gender equality as its primary objective. However, this is not the only alternative.

As a member of the Independent Commission for the Reform of the International Corporate Taxation System (ICRICT), we argue that all countries, especially developing countries, can increase their fiscal space by taxing those with the most wealth: corporations and super millionaires.

A key proposal is to establish a global 2 per cent minimum tax on the wealth of the super-rich. My colleague at ICRICT, renowned economist Gabriel Zucman, presented this programme to the finance ministers of the G20, who gathered in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in February. Inspired by the global minimum tax on corporations, this measure would apply to less than 3 000 individuals and raise about $250 bn annually.

Amid the myriad of crises, wars, high inflation rates

Taxing the ultra-rich, who currently pay almost no taxes, could make a huge difference. If the global minimum tax for multinational

and heavy debts, investing in gender equality has ceased to be a priority for many governments.

corporations were added, the additional $500 bn needed to combat climate change and invest in programmes that close the gender gap and empower women could be achieved.

Like thousands of women living in disaster-stricken areas, the fires have left Ana and Rosa without material possessions. As older women without an adequate pension or social protection benefits, their home was what kept them out of poverty. Despite that, they have been more fortunate than others who did not survive the tragedy, trapped by poor building conditions and narrow streets, or those in other countries of the region, who have also lost their crops and all means of subsistence.

Amid the myriad of crises, wars, high inflation rates and heavy debts, investing in gender equality has ceased to be a priority for many governments. Therefore, as we commemorate International Women's Day this March, we must remember that social progress cannot be achieved without gender equality. Recognising women as critical players in development strategies is the path towards a more just, inclusive and sustainable society. Making the super-rich, many of whom have benefited from crises, foot the bill is a tool within the reach of our governments that can have a tremendous impact on social justice.



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