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Morocco's women can lead the way to a green future

Investing in women is not only a matter of social justice but also a smart strategy for building a sustainable and resilient world

In Morocco, climate change impacts have increased drastically over the past few decades. This has made the country one of the hot spots for worsening droughts, water scarcity and unusually extreme weather events, the effects of which are felt disproportionally by women and children. Women are often on the front lines of climate change adaptation since their livelihoods are guaranteed by land use. This makes them key stakeholders in addressing the impacts of climate change, land use change, environmental degradation and food security challenges.

Although national policies have been reinforced to leverage more funding for climate adaptation, especially in rural areas, we still fall short of what is needed to avoid leaving women to face severe economic and social challenges due to persistent climate stressors and land degradation.

The agriculture sector is the largest employer of women in rural areas across Morocco. Women represent 45-80 per cent of the agricultural workforce in Morocco and are at the front line in the battle to sustain their environments and bear the brunt of reduced crop yields.

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The problem is exacerbated by male migration flows from rural to urban areas driven by declining agricultural productivity, continuous land degradation as a result of climate change but also the desire for employment and diversification of income. Therefore, there is less male labour available in the agriculture sector which exposes women to the necessity of sustaining themselves and providing for their families with little to no help. As gender inequalities in rural areas of Morocco prevent women from owning land on their own or

leading farming activities as men do, their situation is impeded further. Women often have limited access to opportunities such as loans, capacity-building programs and extension services.

The effects of water scarcity

This situation is made even worse by the decreasing annual water levels which are already critically low. This affects food production, groundwater reservoirs and jeopardises the local ecosystem. Women are therefore at risk of losing their livelihoods and face increased poverty, as well as social isolation and poor health outcomes.

Women living in Morocco's mountains and oases are particularly affected as they reside in the areas most exposed to climate change. Oases are often located in arid or semi-arid regions, where water is scarce and temperatures are high. Climate change is exacerbating these conditions by increasing the frequency and intensity of droughts, which can have severe impacts on water availability and agriculture. Additionally, the expansion of urbanisation and tourism in oases further increases the pressure on natural resources and ecosystems.

Mountains are also highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and ecosystem degradation. They play a crucial role in regulating regional climates and supporting biodiversity, but they are experiencing changes in precipitation patterns and the spread of invasive species. These changes can have significant implications on water availability, agriculture and biodiversity, as well as the livelihoods of local communities that depend on mountain ecosystems. The impacts of climate change and ecosystem degradation in oases and mountains have wide-ranging social and economic consequences for women, including increased poverty and food insecurity, social conflict and migration.

Addressing these inequalities and ensuring that women are given the recognition and support they deserve is therefore essential for building a more resilient and sustainable future.

Therefore, it is important to prioritise adaptation and mitigation efforts in these vulnerable ecosystems. This can include a range of measures, such as improving water management and conservation, promoting sustainable agriculture and forestry, as well as promoting biodiversity conservation. Furthermore, involving local communities, including women and other vulnerable groups, in these efforts can help ensure that adaptation measures are context-specific and gender-

responsive and that they address the needs and concerns of the most vulnerable populations.

Investing in women living in mountains and oases areas and learning from their experiences can be a crucial step towards effective adaptation policies and programs, not only in these areas but also beyond. Not to forget that women in these regions still lack equitable access to resources which limits their ability to contribute to sustainable development and adaptation efforts. Unfortunately, gender inequalities persist in many parts of Morocco, particularly in under-served and enclaved regions where women are often denied access to resources and decision-making power. Addressing these inequalities and ensuring that women are given the recognition and support they deserve is therefore essential for building a more resilient and sustainable future.

Empowering women in climate change adaptation efforts

In light of this reality, we cannot deny that women are key change makers when it comes to climate change adaptation and environmental sustainability. They are often the first to experience the effects of environmental degradation, land use change and other climate-related issues. As a result, they have developed innovative strategies for livelihoods that can help mitigate the impacts of climate change, such as the establishment of rural cooperatives that produce mushrooms, saffron, durum wheat and preserve aromatic and medicinal plants that are not only income-generating but also help reduce water consumption and create economies of scale at the community level. As such, involving women in climate change adaptation efforts is the only way to help us tap into their potential as agents of change and to promote gender equality, which is a crucial element of sustainable development. Women offer the greatest hope for the future, and investing in them is not only a matter of social justice but also a smart strategy for building a more sustainable and resilient world.

Involving rural women in national adaptation policies and programs is a precondition for achieving adaptation goals. Women are often the primary caregivers and managers of natural resources in rural areas, and they possess valuable knowledge of their local ecosystems and traditional adaptation strategies. By involving them in adaptation policies and programs, governments can tap into this knowledge and experience to develop context-specific and gender-responsive adaptation measures. Moreover, involving women in decision-making processes can help ensure that adaptation strategies address their specific needs and

concerns, such as access to resources, healthcare and education.

By providing women with access to capacity building programs, governments can further help young Moroccan women of the present and future develop the skills and knowledge needed to adapt to changing environmental.

Capacity building and financial aid programs can also play a key role in empowering rural women and promoting their participation in adaptation efforts. Women in rural areas often lack access to education and training, which can limit their ability to contribute to sustainable development and adaptation. By providing women with access to capacity building programs, governments can further help young Moroccan women of the present and future develop the skills and knowledge needed to adapt to changing environmental conditions and become more resilient.

Similarly, financial aid programs can provide women with the resources they need to invest in sustainable livelihoods and to adapt to the impacts of climate change. For example, microfinance programs can help women access credits and start small businesses, which can provide a source of income and improve their economic status.

Efforts are being made in Morocco to address these challenges and empower women in rural areas. For example, programs are being developed to provide women with access to training, technology and credit to help them improve their agricultural productivity and develop alternative livelihoods. Additionally, initiatives are being undertaken to increase women's participation in decision-making processes related to natural resource management and climate change adaptation, but this is just the tip of the iceberg as the root causes remain unseen – and thus unaddressed.



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climate change debate and to build an understanding of climate change and its impacts, particularly in the MENA—Middle East/North Africa region. The Moroccan Youth Climate Movement also aims at building capacity of local communities and environmental NGOs around climate solution and clean energy transition.