



## UNCSW 66 – AI Council Report Spring 2022

Being part of the Mothers' Union delegation to the *United Nations Commission on the Status of Women* for a second year has been an enjoyable, heart breaking and enlightening.

This year's priority theme for CSW 66 was:

***Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.***

### **What has this to do with Mothers' Union?**

Through our Christian calling we are called upon to be kind, compassionate, fair and just, sharing God's love wherever we are (Micah 6:8). We are a global, women-led, volunteer Anglican movement with 4 million members in 84 countries, working through prayer and action to create a peaceful and safe environment for all, advocate for gender justice and build individuals' self-reliance. The climate crisis is a major threat to the lives and wellbeing of communities across the globe. Over the years, climate-related disasters have become increasingly frequent and severe.

### **Why are women more likely than men to be affected by climate change?**

***Women living in the poorest and most marginalised communities in the world face higher risks and greater burdens as a result of climate change.***

***They have contributed LEAST to the problem yet are hit hardest by this devastation.***

*Disasters do not affect all people equally. 80% of people displaced by climate change are women (UN). Their roles as primary caregivers and providers of food and fuel make them more vulnerable when natural disasters like storms, flooding and drought occur.*

Thus, *climate change disproportionately affects women and girls*. Real lived stories told by CSW participants from the global south and the affluent north provide much food for thought:



More women drown in the aftermath of natural disasters e.g. in Madagascar and Bangladesh. Women are not allowed to learn how to swim, as that would be exposing their bodies.

In the wake of the 2004 tsunami, an Oxfam report found that *surviving men outnumbered women by almost 3:1* in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and India.

**Nomadic indigenous women are particularly at risk.** Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by climate-induced migration, As Lake Chad's shoreline recedes, women and girls have to walk much further to collect water. This leaves them at a greater risk of rape, violence and of human trafficking. Due to longer distances girls may have to drop out of school or be unable to do homework as fetching lifesaving water is the priority.



**Food security:** A young indigenous woman in India spoke of the effect on the family due to lack of food and climate issues. The men like to eat first, the women get to eat what is left over. In the dry season, men go to the towns... leaving women to look after the community. They have no access to financial loans, do not own their land and in most cases are not permitted to make decisions regarding property. This can further drive them into poverty. *In general men are better fed and educated, have better employment, can own land, and hold bank accounts.*

In Zimbabwe we heard how women are not allowed to decide to move to higher land in a crisis, only men can make that decision.

**Youth worldwide are responding with energy and enthusiasm.** *They are the future. It is vital they are included around climate justice discussion tables and are involved at every level.*

Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, African American women were among the worst affected by flooding in Louisiana. As sea levels rise, low-lying cities like New Orleans are at risk. Recently in Arizona a 1,000 families were displaced as a result of extreme winds and bush fires.

**COVID-19 has further amplified the effects of the climate crisis for women and girls**, with the 'shadow pandemic' of increasing domestic abuse, and greater hunger due to loss of income. Daughters are being sold into child marriage on the premise of their being one less mouth to feed, and FGM has increased as health and training programmes were put on hold. More men have died than women, consequently widowhood has increased.



**WAR:** Roseline, widowed by war in Kenya at age 32, was visited by a group of men after her husband's death to sexually cleanse her. *We were encouraged to create spaces to educate and inform on the challenges of widowhood at home and in a worldwide context e.g.*

*stigma, ostracization, harmful sexual practices* etc. Recently, a UN General Assembly endorsed a resolution relating to the special position of widows. **Widows now constitute a vulnerable group in their own right** and provision should follow in future funding, legislation, plans etc.

### Half the world

The UN has highlighted the need for gender sensitive responses to the impacts of climate change, yet the average representation of women in national and global climate negotiating bodies is below 30%.

Whilst being the most strongly affected by the climate crisis, women are also uniquely placed to identify and implement practical and sustainable solutions for the whole community. However, women are often not involved in the decisions made about the responses to climate change, so the money ends up going to the men rather than the women. **As women and girls are half the world. It's important they fully participate alongside men and boys in all major decisions.** Each brings a valuable voice to the climate table.

**Greater commitment from all actors to increasing women's participation in decision and changing making to address climate change is urgently needed.** Prioritising women's participation in the community strengthens women's leadership, building the leadership skills of the facilitators themselves, as well as inspiring other women to take up leadership positions for the first time.

### How can Mothers' Union ACT?

Mothers' Union have a strong track record of working through members to influence social norms and practices, build resilience and ensure locally appropriate solutions to mitigate disasters.

For example, in Madagascar, women identified that the planting of Vetiver could both minimise erosion and provide a source of food, and Mothers' Union led a programme to implement this.





In Toliara, in Madagascar, members chose to work together to dig a pipeline. By the end of the official project the pipeline had not yet reached its intended destination, but the community had been given so much hope and encouragement that everyone continued to work without payment. They completed the pipeline that is bringing water to an area that has been devastated by drought for the past 10 years. Having this new irrigation system has allowed the

community to grow sweet potatoes for the first time in a decade.

This way of working within communities, where community members are enabled to take ownership of solutions, is empowering for women and enabled by organisations of faith like Mothers' Union, which are embedded in the community.

**To be effective, climate change solutions need to be locally-led and sufficiently resourced, including through local faith actors.** There is a strong need to address the structural, systematic, and systemic inequalities that put women at greater risk of the impacts of climate change, supporting women's leadership and collective actions in doing so, and working to shift negative gender norms and policies that constrain women's access to and control over resources

Mothers' Union are a local grassroots organisation with the power to challenge, to tackle and to inform local communities of the effects of climate change on women and girls. Mothers' Union are also present in some of the most marginalised communities worldwide, including those most at risk of the climate disasters. Mothers' Union know the needs, how to respond, and are respected and listened to.

Following CSW66 it is important that Mothers' Union take the resolutions, bring them to the attention of our politicians and find out what Ireland and Northern Ireland are doing to ensure UN resolutions are being implemented. *Every UN resolution is a beginning not an end and it is how it is implemented in the important things that will matter.*

***'We can each be a ripple and use our knowledge and skills to help each other and others.'***

***'God has given us dominion over the earth, and we have a duty to care not to destroy.'***

***'Climate change is not a fight for power, it is a fight for survival.'***

(Voices of participants from UK, Papua New Guinea and Central Africa)

### **Prayer**

*Lord of heaven and earth, who created the world to provide for all its people, we pray for those in desperate situations brought about by natural hazards and environmental change.*

*Where natural conditions have led to disasters, where changes in weather have led to famine, we pray for your mercy, O Lord of creation.*

*Throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out your blessing on those who are suffering a drought of hope and a famine of faith, as they battle with their extremities of hardship.*

*And show us the part we can play in being your solution to the needs of our sisters and brothers.*

*May our plans and prayers be guided by you. Amen* (MU website)

***'The worse the crisis, the more the light of Mothers' Union shines. Your work is essential, and you have shown for many decades your capacity to adapt and evolve.***

***May God be with you and encourage you to flourish.'***

The Most Revd And Right Hon Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby