



IN OUR WORDS:

Voices of Women of African Descent for Reproductive and Climate Justice



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Queen Mary
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***Voices of Women of African
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Climate, racial and gender justice are interlinked and interdependent. Climate change is a crisis undermining progress in nearly every area of human development.

The climate crisis poses substantial risks to health, food production, water supplies, ecosystems, energy security and infrastructure.¹ Although climate affects the whole planet, it disproportionately affects those who are socially, economically and politically furthest behind.² It exacerbates existing inequalities and exclusions resulting from intersecting histories of racism, oppression and discrimination.³ The result is a reduced ability to realize health, well-being and rights and to respond to the shocks and impacts of the climate crisis.

Owing to legacies of slavery, colonialism and racial discrimination, people of African descent (PAD) continue to be marginalized and left behind. Using a human rights-based approach, the United Nations

Population Fund (UNFPA) developed a people of African descent initiative that seeks to advance rights, justice and development for Afrodescendants through four main pillars: (1) programmes, (2) advocacy and communications, (3) data and evidence generation, and (4) partnerships. This initiative is aligned with the objectives of the programme of activities of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Montevideo Consensus, the 2030 Agenda principle of leaving no one behind, and the International Decade for People of African Descent.

UNFPA has committed to three transformative results by 2030:

by 2030



Ending preventable maternal deaths



Ending unmet need for family planning



Ending gender-based violence and harmful practices

UNFPA has developed a multipronged programme of action to build climate resilience and achieve the promise of the International Conference on Population and Development, with a focus on developing healthy, empowered populations, including women, girls and young people. The Paris Agreement describes how parties "should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of Indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity".⁴

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development focuses on climate change (Sustainable Development Goal [SDG] 13) and gender equality (SDG 5) and includes targets on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) (SDG 3), calling for a strengthening of adaptation measures and resilience-building in the face of the climate crisis. UNFPA is working to develop climate-resilient health, protection and education systems; reduce risks; and strengthen emergency preparedness. Gathering better population, health and gender data and evidence is also an important goal for understanding, guiding and evaluating progress.

The *Operational Guidelines on the Inclusion of People of African Descent in the 2030 Agenda* describe the importance of visibility through data for PAD, including

the lack of quantitative data on PAD experiences. In the absence of such data, the guidelines encourage the use of "innovative approaches for data collection and analysis", including the promotion of qualitative data, "as well as the recording of communities-lived experiences through story-telling and other means", emphasizing how PAD "should drive data processes as subjects and not as mere objects of study".⁵



Globally, women between 25 and 34 years of age are **25 per cent** more likely than men to live in extreme poverty.⁶

This advocacy brief amplifies the voices of Afrodescendent activists, practitioners and advocates in climate and reproductive health, rights and justice and presents key concepts and insights from relevant literature. It highlights the expertise of leaders on the front lines, demonstrating how women of African descent are leading and inspiring action in their communities. As we move through it, the brief highlights the pervasiveness of discrimination, and how it manifests in complex intersecting ways to impact Afrodescendent women and girls' physical

environments, agency, health, access to services and more. It brings visibility to the ways that climate change, environmental injustices, racial inequity and SRHR are intersecting and affecting Afrodescendent communities. Through highlighting how these factors interact and exacerbate vulnerability and marginalization, the brief proposes concrete actions

which can address the complexity of the challenges being faced. Better recognizing how climate change is shaping the lived realities of racialized communities is one step towards enabling greater justice and equality in responding to the climate crisis and ensuring SRHR for all.



Key concept

- **Leaving no one behind** is the central, transformative accelerator for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs. Leaving no one behind commits to ending poverty in all forms, putting the furthest behind first and ensuring human rights, well-being and dignity for all. Barriers to accessing dignified and culturally appropriate services, resources and equal opportunities are a major cause of people being left behind. These barriers are not simply accidents of fate or a lack of availability of resources, but the result of discriminatory laws, policies and social practices that leave individuals, families and whole communities marginalized and excluded.⁷





An intersectional crisis

“An intersectional lens is essential when addressing climate change because it does not affect us in a bubble, it assaults all our intersecting identities. There must be an analysis of power and privilege. Our racial, gender and economic experiences also affect our ability to combat climate change.” (Dr. Joia Crear-Perry)

The climate crisis is an unjust and intersectional crisis for PAD. A recognition of the disproportionate impacts of climate change on the health, rights and well-being of racially, ethnically and nationally marginalized groups is growing.⁸ At the same time, the impact of climate change on SRHR and justice is being increasingly established and understood. Afrodescendent communities are some of the least responsible for climate change, yet they are facing some of the most severe impacts and are often the most affected people living in the most affected areas (MAPA).⁹

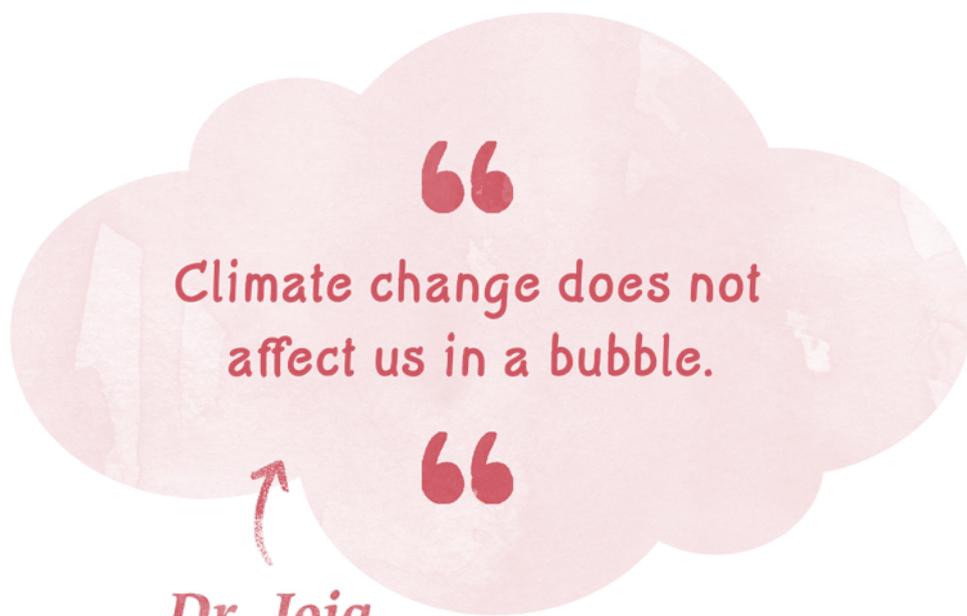
Discrimination is at the heart of the disproportionate effects of climate change on PAD. According to the authors of the OHCHR Capstone Report on the impacts of climate change on Afrodescendants, these forms of discrimination are cumulative and “have profound historical roots and are embedded in the structures and institutions of the societies we examined”.¹¹ Likewise, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance noted that “there can be no meaningful mitigation or resolution of the global ecological crisis without specific action to address systemic racism, in particular the historic and contemporary racial legacies of colonialism and slavery”.¹²

*“Disasters make folks more vulnerable.”
Jacqueline Patterson – founder and executive director of the Chisholm Legacy Project: A Resource Hub for Black Frontline Climate Justice Leadership*

The percentage of Afrodescendants with unmet basic needs may be **three times higher** than the percentage of non-Afrodescendants in five Latin American countries with available data disaggregated by ethnicity.¹⁰



Many Afrodescendent communities live in regions experiencing an increased frequency of extreme weather events, putting many PAD at greater risk of adverse impacts from disasters as climate change intensifies.¹³ Factors related to marginalization (such as insecure housing, lack of mobility and lower levels of preparedness), as well as long-standing issues (such as a lack of long-term assistance or reinvestment in the community) can make particular communities more vulnerable.¹⁴ In these scenarios, accessing sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services can be extremely challenging, and contraception, sexually transmitted infection testing, safe abortion care, HIV medication and other essential services can become unreachable.



“Climate change does not affect us in a bubble.”

Dr. Joia Crear-Perry

Photo credit: UNFPA HAITI/Maxence Bradley

Jacqueline Patterson

“Climate justice looks like having an economy and society that centres the caring for the sacred, meaning us as people and the planet.”

Jeffthanie Mathurin, midwife, Haiti

I have been a midwife since 2018. Climate change has a direct impact on the population and community where I serve. Last year, the earthquake, closely followed by a hurricane in the south (Haiti) affected many women and girls. In the association of midwives, we noticed that this catastrophe increased the risk of more women getting pregnant unintentionally due to the stockpiles of contraception that were held up on the roads. The poorest people in the country face the worst consequences of climate change, such as rural women. Haitian women have not been able to enact their bodily autonomy.

Since I was a child, Haiti has been facing deforestation. Until now, people are still cutting trees to make charcoal as a means of survival. There is no national programme to reforest the country. Any little mist of rain and the country is flooded. After these floods or landslides, communities are left to fend for themselves. We live in a country that cannot take one or two days of rain without turning into a catastrophe. I want to live in a society that respects the lives of everyone. A society that respects women's lives, my life and my body.

“(After the hurricane) adolescent girls were highly exposed to the risk of abuse and sexual and gender-based violence.” – Jeffthanie Mathurin

Emergencies, natural disasters and squeezed resources exacerbate existing inequalities related to gender and sexuality, leading to greater risks of sexual and gender-based violence, including rape, domestic and sexual violence, female genital mutilation and trafficking.¹⁵ Some researchers have also noted that more data are needed on the gender-based violence (GBV) faced by people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions in order to determine the impact of specific threats and risks faced by PAD of all genders and sexualities and to contribute towards an intersectional analysis of environmental and reproductive injustice.¹⁶

The compound impact of existing forms of discrimination, including institutional racism, hinders people's ability to seek and achieve justice, including in the context of sexual and gender-based violence and environmental crimes. The abuse and murder of environmental defenders can be another example of the gendered and racialized dimensions of environment-related violence. Research on violence against environmental defenders often mentions the effect of violence on Indigenous women.¹⁷ The most recent United Nations General Assembly Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent describes how Afrodescendants have faced

threats, violence and intimidation while defending environments and campaigning for their rights.¹⁸

An intersectional approach also considers how people with disabilities, who comprise approximately 15 per cent of the global population, also experience climate impacts differently and more severely.¹⁹ During extreme weather events people living with disabilities can lose access to life saving services and health care and be unsupported to access safety. In Latin America and the Caribbean, where data is available, there is evidence that Afrodescendent women have a higher prevalence of disability than Afrodescendent men and non-Afrodescendent women.²⁰ Data also show how in many places women and girls with disabilities are more likely to experience sexual violence, including during climate disasters.²¹ People of African descent who are living with disabilities are further disadvantaged, making the importance of inclusive planning that takes into consideration intersecting forms of discrimination, as well as enhanced social protections and the strengthening of resilience measures, including access to SRHR, particularly critical for Afrodescendants living with disabilities.



Jacqueline Patterson, founder and executive director of the Chisholm Legacy Project: A Resource Hub for Black Frontline Climate Justice Leadership

It started when I was volunteering and doing relief after Hurricane Katrina, that's when I started seeing the intersection with gender justice and climate change. I was looking at issues of public health and access to reproductive health services, and domestic violence. In the aftermath I started to hear stories of people who experienced domestic violence during the insecurity following Hurricane Katrina. I also started to read more about the increase in domestic violence, and I realized that it was a pattern.

There are other intersectionalities. For example, the shelter system is not fit for gender nonconforming and nonbinary persons, and this might mean that they're not going to have a place to stay and may be out on the street and even more vulnerable. People who are undocumented don't even come to the recovery centre. So, being undocumented hampers any kind of help-seeking behaviour.

The fossil fuel industry impacts reproductive health, but it also impacts health in general; when we talk about less days of school for kids and the moms who must stay home with sick children, that has economic impacts, and it also has impacts in terms of their ability to be promoted in their workplace and so their professional advancement. There are mental health impacts as well when you care for a sick child. I mean, if we talk about Black children, a Black child is three to five times more likely to go into the hospital from an asthma attack and two to three times more likely to die of an asthma attack from pollution.

The communities on the front lines are also the folks who are least likely to cause climate change. The vision for what justice looks like is rooted in a just transition and shifting away from the extractive economy that has caused the vulnerability of certain communities. Climate justice looks like having an economy and society that centres the caring for the sacred, meaning us as people and the planet.





Key concepts

- While there are various definitions and descriptions of PAD, the United Nations Working Group of Experts on **People of African Descent** proposes a definition for this group as “descendants of the African victims of the transatlantic and Mediterranean Sea slave trade”.²² It suggests that a complete definition must also include Africans and their descendants who, after their countries’ independence, emigrated to or went to work in Europe, Canada and the Middle East, where they also experienced, and continue to experience, racial discrimination.
- The acronym **MAPA** stands for the “most affected people and areas” and aims to make those who are most impacted by the climate crisis more visible.²³ The term MAPA not only takes into account geographical vulnerability to climate change, but also social, economic and other kinds of vulnerability. MAPA helps add nuance to the discussion of climate impacts by enabling greater recognition of the intersectional dimensions of the climate crisis.
- **Intersectionality** describes the ways that systems and structures of power and oppression interact with social categories and axes of identity to produce particular social realities for people. An intersectional approach considers how categories such as gender, class, sexuality, ability, race and so on come together, overlap and can result in privilege or oppression. Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw first coined the term in 1989.²⁴



*Environmental
racism and
disproportionate
impact*

“The facilities that drive climate change, such as coal fired plants, gas facilities and so forth are hurting people. Due to toxins and environmental exposures coming out of these facilities, which are disproportionately located in Black communities, we are seeing higher rates of low birthweight, impacts on infant health and more, and we know that it compromises birth outcomes, not to mention just harming the health of women.” – Jacqueline Patterson

The ecological, biodiversity and climate crises are linked, and are faced by communities simultaneously. Environmental racism describes one of the most acute intersections between racism and climate and environmental concerns. It includes, for example, the “use of racist practices in determining which communities receive health-protective infrastructure, such as green space, and which receive health-harming highways and industrial complexes”.²⁵

Living in areas that experience extreme heat, are heavily polluted and are not protected, recognized or prioritized by local authorities makes for ill health.²⁶ PAD often experience environmental racism and live in “fenceline” or “sacrifice zone” settings, nearer to sites of high pollution and toxicity as a result of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination.²⁷ These areas are often harder hit by climate change and accessing acceptable and high-quality SRH services is difficult in such unjust environments, compounding the harm.

“Front-line communities are experts of their own experience and know best what strategies and solutions will resolve the crises where they live. Black people, Indigenous people and other minoritized and racialized groups in general have consistently been at the forefront in advocating for clean air, for cleaner water sources.” – Kwolanne Felix

Jacqueline Patterson

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The facilities that drive climate change ... are disproportionately located in Black communities.
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Akilah Jaramogi, environmental consultant, Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation Project, co-founder and CEO, Trinidad and Tobago

In our community, the climate crisis has been experienced largely in terms of the impact of changes in weather patterns, inconsistent rainfall, stronger winds and hotter temperatures, which make us prone to bush and forest fires during the dry season. We see an increase in respiratory conditions, including higher levels of respiratory illnesses for young children due to the smoke from fires and Saharan dust. It also heightens the burden of care for most mothers and, in a time of COVID-19, means more days at home for many children because schools have become very sensitive around children exhibiting flu-like symptoms.

The challenge in communities like ours is that if children are required to stay home very often, so are mothers, which results in them losing out on income earning and career development opportunities. The increased frequency and intensity of bush and forest fires within our community has required more women to be first responders, forgoing their household duties in order to mobilize suppression activities, fight fires encroaching on property and protect livestock and crops.

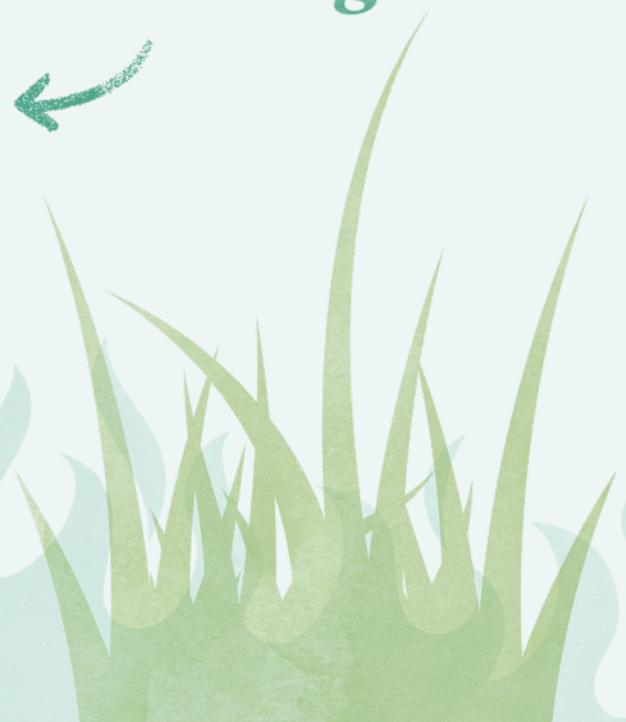
We also experience the climate crisis in terms of extreme weather conditions. When it is wet it is very wet, it floods; and when it is dry, it is extremely dry. This impacts water supply issues and once the water supply is compromised, so is reproductive health. In poorer communities, it often means that women spend more time accessing and collecting water. This is an extreme physical challenge that can impact the health care of expecting mothers and the capacity of young mothers to effectively take care of babies. Ultimately, the impact of climate change is such that the most economically vulnerable will feel the climate-related shifts most harshly. For us nationally, and with the impact of COVID-19, women are the most vulnerable. This vulnerability often results in a reduced ability to pivot after climate-related events, whether they be floods, fires or droughts, increased pests, increased diseases, etc.

**Akilah
Jaramogi**

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The increased frequency and intensity of bush and forest fires within our community has required more women to be first responders.

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According to a recent report by the Environmental Protection Agency, "Black and African American individuals are 40 per cent more likely than non-Black and non-African American individuals to currently live in areas with the highest projected increases in mortality rates due to climate-driven changes in extreme temperatures".²⁸ The Environmental Protection Agency study also refers to the fact that Black individuals, in particular, are at increased risk of health effects due to disparities in exposure to climate hazards.²⁹ The United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment has described the toll on health, including mental health, of living in such conditions: "The people who inhabit sacrifice zones are exploited, traumatized and stigmatized. They are treated as disposable, their voices ignored, their presence excluded from decision-making processes and their dignity and human rights trampled upon".³⁰

"Where I grew up, I had heat, but I also had trees and bugs, and sky and dirt; it kind of summarizes some of the differences sometimes in the geography in the United States, and how people can be Black and have climate impact them very differently depending upon if they are in a more urban setting or a more rural setting. You will go to cities in the United States where you cannot find a tree, you cannot find any shade, there is no protection and this lack of protection disproportionately affects people of African descent ... We also do not have a robust public transportation system in the US." – Dr. Joia Crear-Perry

**Karina Penha, mobilization coordinator,
NOSSAS Organization, Brazil**

Environmental racism has been present throughout my whole life. During childhood there were times when I couldn't go to school because the rain flooded the street, it flooded everything. The street was made of red dirt so when it rained it became red mud, and when I went to church or to other places I was ashamed to be covered in red mud, I felt I was always very dirty. My neighbourhood is very neglected by the government, we don't have infrastructure, we don't have basic sanitation, and that is a reality all over Brazil, especially in the north-east. Having basic sanitation is a dream. We don't have a sewage system; we don't have a water treatment system.

The water we use here is from a well built by the local community and was later appropriated by a company who started charging to distribute water. Many people could not pay and so could not access water. Today I see that this was violence, because the well was built by the community but [they] could not access it and had to take the risk to go into private properties to get water.

What links environmental racism to climate change is the lack of commitment by the government. In my neighbourhood there aren't any natural spaces. There is a lack of commitment in looking at these spaces and offering leisure, offering mobility. There is only one bus line to my neighbourhood, all my life this has been a source of suffering, lots of people have been robbed at the bus stop, the bus takes a really long time to come. Before the street was paved there was no bus line so many times I couldn't get to school. It took three hours to go and three hours to come back from university. This caused me to reflect about climate issues related to mobility: I couldn't wrap my head around the level of injustice, I couldn't wrap my head around my neighbourhood being so precarious. So nowadays, I relate all of that to the issue of environmental racism, and to the inequality which is influenced by climate change.



Key concepts

- **Environmental racism** is a term coined by African American civil rights leader Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr. It describes “institutionalized discrimination involving ‘environmental policies, practices or directives that differentially affect or disadvantage (whether intentionally or unintentionally) individuals, groups or communities based on race or colour’”.³¹ This includes the effects of racial discrimination on environmental policy, such as disproportionately targeting racialized communities for toxic waste dumping, polluting industries and the removal or degradation of natural habitats, as well as the exclusion of people of colour from environmental leadership.³²
- **Climate justice** recognizes how climate change is more than an environmental crisis; it is also a social, economic and political crisis whose impacts are not felt evenly. Climate justice “recognizes humanity’s responsibility for the impacts of greenhouse gas emissions on the poorest and most vulnerable people in society by critically addressing inequality and promoting transformative approaches to address the root causes of climate change”.³³



Achieving SRHR relies on the ability to access high-quality services that are available, affordable, culturally appropriate and acceptable for the local community. There has been a growing body of evidence on the impact of heat and air pollution on pregnancy and pregnancy outcomes, painting a compelling picture of the negative effects of environmental exposures on maternal and perinatal health.³⁴ One example of an early study of 37.1 million births in the United States found that “exposure to extreme hot temperatures during pregnancy leads to lower birth weight”.³⁵ Other studies in California have found that high ambient temperature was significantly associated with preterm birth and that this was especially the case for Black women.³⁶ High temperatures are also associated with pre-eclampsia and disturbed sleep, which are both risk factors for adverse pregnancy outcomes.³⁷ Evidence presented by Bekkar et al. describes the disproportionate impact on women of African descent, which will worsen with increased climate

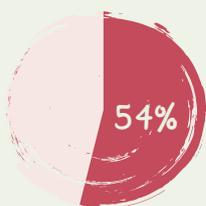
change and pollution, making this a pressing matter of environmental and reproductive justice: “Among racial/ethnic groups, our findings suggest that Black mothers are at greater risk for preterm birth and low birth weight. Social determinants of health, including residence in urban areas with higher exposure to air pollutants and long-term high levels of stress, are known to contribute to adverse obstetrical outcomes”.³⁸



Only **6 per cent** of all scientific articles covering climate change and health in 2020 considered gender, and only 6 of the 44 indicators in the 2021 report of the Lancet Countdown provide data by sex or gender.³⁹

Dr. Joia Crear-Perry, founder and president, National Birth Equity Collaborative

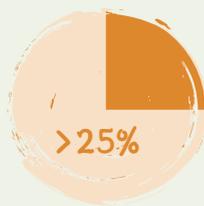
I am from New Orleans, Louisiana, what we like to call the most African city in the United States. As an OB-GYN [obstetrician-gynaecologist] practising in New Orleans, one continuation of the harm is patients that don't have access to transportation. Women were 54 per cent of the population during Hurricane Katrina yet encompassed about 80 per cent of the people left behind. At this time, more than 25 per cent of women living in New Orleans and 15 per cent of all families lived below the poverty line, compared to 14.5 per cent nationally. The median household income for Black women during this time was just \$19,951 per year.⁴⁰



The population of women during Hurricane Katrina



The percentage of people left behind who were women



The percentage of women living in New Orleans below the poverty line

\$19,951

Median household income for Black women during Hurricane Katrina

With the aforementioned statistics alone, you can see the impact of having the already limited social support, community support and infrastructure stripped away as they are during natural disasters – especially since the hurricane hit at the end of the month. So, if you are pregnant and must stand outside in the 110-degree heat, waiting for a bus to come with no tree cover, waiting for a bus that is not on schedule, and then you take two or three buses to come to see me, your doctor, you can pass out. We have had patients that tried to catch a bus in labour So, we have lots of preterm labour, lots of infant loss, lots of maternal loss linked to climate change.



Black and African American individuals are **40 per cent** more likely than non-

Black and non-African American individuals to currently live in areas with the highest projected increases in mortality rates due to climate-driven changes in extreme temperatures.⁴¹

“There are SRHR needs at various levels: service delivery needs, access needs and associated service needs. While conducting a gender inequality of risk study in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, for example, one post-disaster needs assessment highlighted impacts to maternity and paediatric wards from intense flooding in 2013, which meant that women either waiting to give birth or recently having given birth had to be moved.⁴² This must have been fairly traumatic for them, with implications that service quality may not be the same and that there may also be issues of limited energy, clean water and the potential for new safety issues for patients and medical personnel.”
– Leisa Perch, SAEDI Consulting Barbados Inc.

“I read an article talking about how the climate crisis affects Black women and their pregnancies specifically. It shocked me because it made me think about the number of struggles that we face. Like I told you before: the lives of many Black kids from my generation, especially boys, were lost due to violence and now Black babies are also at risk due to the climate crisis.” – Karina Penha

Vector-borne disease patterns are changing as a result of the climate crisis, with implications for SRHR. For example, malaria, dengue and the Zika virus negatively impact pregnancies. Analysis from Brazil has demonstrated how Black women were more affected by the Zika virus outbreak due to unequal exposure as a result of structural racism and multiple forms of discrimination, and were more likely than white women to have a child with congenital Zika syndrome.⁴³ Studies on SRH in relation to extractive industries in Latin America and the Caribbean show that the environmental, social and health impacts of the mining boom, which include the increased risk of infectious diseases (including sexually transmitted infections), sexual violence and exploitation, seem to particularly affect vulnerable populations, including Indigenous and Afrodescendent groups across the region.⁴⁴

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The climate crisis affects Black women and their pregnancies.

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Karina Penha

**Kwolanne Felix, SRHR and climate justice
Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), Haiti/United States**

When I lived in Florida, we had Katrina, that was kind of a big moment where we saw early signs of the gravity of the climate crisis. A tree crushed the house next to me. I remember many days without electricity and water. In Florida, hurricanes are becoming more common. We would take days off from school because of hurricane threats once every few years, now it is a yearly event.

Environmental racism was a big part of my childhood. Poor neighbourhoods are being pushed closer to the coast, and to areas with lower elevations. People might not see this as a problem, but the more affluent neighbourhoods are moving inland and to higher grounds. Little Haiti is being shipped away to gentrification; people are displaced because it has a higher elevation. So we are being pushed to areas that are more vulnerable to rising sea levels.

As I started getting a better understanding of the climate crisis, my biggest concern was that I am not a scientist, I felt there is no place for me in this movement, that only people that have PhDs can be active in it. But if anything, these climate spaces are saturated with scientists, they need more community organizers; regular folks have a role in the climate movement because we are all a part of re-imagining the world.

My experience trying to access SRH as a teenager, as a low-income person in Florida, made me realize it is not only monetarily inaccessible, [it] is also physically inaccessible Florida has a horrible public transportation structure. It is always hot in Florida and I remember having to walk for miles in the hot sun just to get to the nearest clinic. I imagine trying to access a planned parenthood in Florida if I don't have a car, and that's even without a climate crisis, that's just every day, those are everyday environmental barriers.

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One thing that has been interesting in working in SRHR and climate justice is to realize how these issues are very intimately linked. When there are hurricanes in Florida, everything shuts down. There are no centres, there are no pharmacies to get anything, there is no neonatal care, depending on how bad the flooding is you cannot leave your home.

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**Kwolanne
Felix**



Key concept

- The **Reproductive Justice Movement** is not only defined as being about the
- right to safe abortion and contraception, but also the right to have children and
- to parent children in healthy environments.⁴⁵ Reproductive justice distinguishes
- itself from reproductive rights by being more focused on access and social justice
- than choice or legal rights. Reproductive justice is a response to the long history of
- racist oppression of Black women, Indigenous women, racialized women and trans
- and nonbinary people, particularly in relation to experiences of forced sterilization,
- population control and lack of access to adequate sexual and maternal health care.
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- **Environmental reproductive justice** was coined by Mohawk midwife Katsi Cook.⁴⁶
- Cook was concerned about the downstream effects of polychlorinated biphenyl
- (PCB) contamination of water and land on the food chain and Indigenous people's
- ability to breastfeed their children safely. Environmental reproductive justice
- combines the principles of environmental justice and reproductive justice, urging
- attention to the ways in which environmental injustice and reproductive injustice
- intersect.⁴⁷
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Photo credit: UNFPA HAITI/Maxence Bradley





Take action

1.

Challenge false solutions, recognize the role of racism in creating and sustaining climate change and inequality, and commit to climate solutions that build equity and justice. Scrutinize and challenge climate policy and action that places the burden or responsibility for mitigating and adapting to climate change on the communities least responsible for the crisis. High consumption countries must increase ambition and financial commitments to support front-line communities, including through increasing funding for adaptation and resilience-building. Consistent, flexible funding that addresses concerns prioritized by local communities is more likely to support grass-roots organizations that are responsive to local needs and to build local capacity for responding to the climate crisis.

“The climate space deeply impacts the ways that people are accessing SRHR. We hear that to solve the climate crisis we need to have population control ... Who are they talking about when talking about population control? We are talking mostly about women of colour, women in developing countries, Black and Indigenous women, putting the onus on them, that somehow the reason we are in this climate mess is because there is overpopulation. They are scapegoating women; they are scapegoating poor women; they are scapegoating Black and Brown women when we direct the climate conversation in that way.”
– Kwolanne Felix

2.

Afrodescendent leadership and expertise need to be amplified and uplifted. Recognize and represent the voices, innovation, action and challenges faced by PAD, including at the intersection of climate change with SRHR, GBV and harmful practices (HP). Strengthen support for the innovative action and solutions developed in front-line communities through funding; inclusion in research, evidence and policy; and formal recognition, such as naming and citing contributions.

Implement minimum standards of participation for PAD and other disproportionately impacted communities at all levels of climate policy and action, including support through appropriate funding, training and consideration of accessibility. Ensure that approaches are intersectional and impacts on SRHR are reflected in existing climate policy, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Gender Action Plan, nationally determined contributions, national adaptation plans and other related climate policy.

“I believe in climate policies which will understand the people and talk to them in a language that they will understand. Get close to the people on the ground and listen to them. Whenever someone is formulating a climate policy, they should be committed to actively listening to those that are directly affected.” – Karina Penha

“We cannot have conversations about climate change without Black women. I’m advocating for Black women to go to COP. Most of them never went to a conference with 20,000 people. But women, including Black women, are the most affected by climate change. These women are responsible for creating solutions on how to deal with climate change in the territories and for their communities. They have been creating local solutions especially for adaptation.” – Marina Marçal, climate policy coordinator, Institute for Climate and Society, Brazil

3.

Strengthen and increase research, data and evidence on the impacts of climate change on Afrodescendent communities, including impacts on SRHR, GBV and HP, through strengthening and amplifying locally led, participatory and community-driven research. Increase the collection of disaggregated data and ensure the inclusion of SRHR, GBV and HP indicators in climate action, including vulnerability assessments, gender action plans, national climate policies and other related climate, health and gender action.

“This is also why data is so important; we need the numbers, we need to know who is collecting the data and how the data is being analysed. We also need to know who and how people are being affected and what is being done about it. People of African descent understand the urgency of dealing with the climate crisis, we are diverse and can contribute in many ways.” – Marina Marçal

4.

Enforce environmental protections and fulfil climate commitments equally and effectively for all populations. Enforce standards and uphold commitments for environmental and climate protection and action equally and robustly, with attention to communities often left behind. Enforcing environmental standards and climate commitments protects SRHR and the right to be free from violence.

“These weeks, I’m hearing people around me say it looks like the sun is getting closer to Haiti, the heat is unbearable. Yet, we know that the sun stays in its place, it is shade and living in a clean environment [that] becomes a privilege.” – Jeffthanie, Haiti

5.

Recognize the disproportionate impact of climate change, including extreme weather events, on PAD, particularly women and girls, and strengthen commitments to support front-line communities, including by tackling structural drivers of inequality. Strengthen commitments and accountability measures for anticipatory action and climate adaptation planning, with emphasis on communities facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that create vulnerability. This includes increasing commitments, outreach and financial support for adaptation and humanitarian response that includes the core components of SRHR and the right to be free from violence.

“After disasters you often see a deprioritization of reproductive health services. The mental health impacts are also severe and [there is] very little support for that. Then there is the displacement, which again disproportionately impacts Black women because we are more likely to be housing insecure. There are other reproductive justice impacts too, coming from the ensuing financial hardship: can you even afford what you need, can you afford services, even things like menstrual health and reproductive health supplies?” – Jacqueline Patterson



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