

## **Building grassroots women-led solutions to climate change**

***Looking at environmental challenges like droughts, flooding, erosion and deforestation, we find that in our part of the world, patriarchal traditions have increased the strain on women and girls by undermining their rights and responsibilities in natural resources stewarding. Women's restricted access to resources as well as information and decision-making opportunities makes them most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. But women are also the ones who are best positioned to drive solutions.***

In Nigeria, a lot of women are not even informed about climate change. Some women farmers do not understand why their crops are not doing well, or why the rain isn't coming. Their traditional tasks such as farm work, or collecting water and firewood, not only deprives them from engaging in productive activities that could better their lives, it is also preventing them from understanding how climate change affects their lives and how it is further worsening their economic situation. However, when climate change hits, through a flood for instance, women have responsibility for the family recovering and readjusting.

It is common for women to do the entire farm work, and yet, they are denied the right to own land. Women are also the ones who source water, but they do not have a say when interventions for safe water points are planned. They spend hours every day searching for firewood, are exposed to toxic fumes when cooking, and still they are barely considered when clean cooking stoves are designed and brought to the community. Who is better placed to be at the forefront of designing these stoves than the women who are going to use them? Who is better placed to make decisions on water management than the women who are responsible for providing water to the entire family?

When trying to bring solutions to the climate change crisis, it is key to engage women from the start. With Women's Initiative for Sustainable Environment, we position women to be initiators of solutions, decision-makers, and authors of their own future. We put resources in their hands so they can take the lead. We don't have control over laws and policies, but we have data to track women's needs to the last detail. Needs assessments and baseline studies are the foundation for what we are doing. Research focused on comparative approaches is especially interesting, as it sheds light on linkages between key issues around gender, such as gender-based violence and climate change.

All our programmes – such as the women's clean cooking training and entrepreneurship project, or the tree growing enterprise for food security and climate resilience project - are geared towards equipping women with the knowledge, information, skills, and seed capital that they need. To make sure they don't remain passive recipients of solutions that have been created without their involvement, all our projects integrate and explore women's leadership, economic development, and peer mentoring. In the future, we hope to establish a women's eco learning and resource centre that will be able to serve as many as 3,000 women annually.

The more informed women become, the more equipped they will be financially and in terms of skills, and the better society will be. The call for women's empowerment is not a contest between men and women, but a call for partnership, a call for a society where everybody's voice counts, where we know that we all need each other.

Aside from putting women and girls at the frontlines of addressing the environmental challenges that affect their lives, we should also create public awareness on women-led climate solutions, to inspire other women and facilitate more support from the government or donors.

Another key issue is insecurity, which prevents us from conducting interventions in some unsafe places. A lot needs to be done to make sure that the world is a safe space for everyone: that is the only way we can continue to solve environmental challenges and drive the gender equality agenda.

Author: Olanike Olugboji, Founder, [Women's Initiative for Sustainable Environment](#)