

Climate Change

The New Obstacle to Women's Empowerment



By Yanal
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limate change has rapidly become the major challenge that confronts the entire world and that is gaining more and more attention every day. Rapid development in climate has affected all gender groups, sectors, and living organisms. The context of climate change differs from one country to another depending on the country's leading sectors and various affecting elements. In the Palestinian context, architecture and construction are among the top contributors to the consequences of climate change, responsible for over 40 percent of CO₂ and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This is especially alarming as Palestine is characterized by high biophysical and socioeconomic vulnerability, and is not prepared to combat current and future complications. The common envelope for buildings in Palestine, a practice implemented unchanged for decades, lacks the ability to separate the macroclimate and microclimate, resulting in a continuous transfer of heat

between both entities. The result is the constant dependence on external factors, such as heating and cooling machinery and equipment, to enhance the microclimate.

The effects of climate change have impacted several sectors in Palestine, including the health, agriculture, water, and energy sectors, with observed and expected low precipitation levels and shorter and harsher winter periods. These consequences are bound to affect men and women differently, as their social and cultural roles dictate their expected responsibilities. For men, the expected challenges are on an economic level because social norms define them as the breadwinners and providers for families, which increases men's mental health and psychological pressures.

Women are expected to act as homemakers and caretakers, regardless of whether or not they have a professional career. They are expected to tend to the needs of family members, including the

elderly and children. In addition, women are responsible for households and their management, and even though they are generally not responsible for the payment of electricity bills, they are the ones responsible for electricity usage at home. The increased earth temperature of over 1°C, accompanied by heatwaves and harsh storms, has created unbearable macroclimate conditions. Because the architecture and construction practices fail to shield from such weather conditions and are not designed to mitigate climate change implications, the microclimates of homes are continuously affected. This results in an increased need for heating and cooling to bring temperatures inside houses near occupants' comfort levels. However, not all women in Palestinian households are able to access the electricity required for such purposes: although heating and cooling are not a luxury per se, they are not available to everyone, and their usage is limited for

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many. In such cases, women are responsible for finding alternatives to alleviate the implications. Moreover, they are expected to care for their family members before attending to themselves, which creates a new layer of psychological and physical health implications. This is further exacerbated by the different ways in which women's and men's bodies react to climate change implications, resulting in different needs under circumstances that include extreme temperatures, increased atmospheric

pressures, high humidity levels, and more. Even though women are more vulnerable and prone to illness, having a higher tendency for physical consequences, their needs are not discussed or even clear with regard to climate change, nor are they taken into consideration in policies and regulations concerning this sector. Through different studies, women's lack of knowledge has become apparent when it comes to climate change and how it affects them. They also lack awareness regarding

their needs in such situations, and they are generally not knowledgeable of ways to mitigate the effects. The lack of control and awareness negatively affects women's social roles, which results in a perceived decrease of their value as women in the eyes of their families as well as in their own eyes.

Women's and men's social roles are also strongly impacted by their expected lack of ability to provide for their families. Food insecurity has become alarming, as climate change has impacted crops both in terms of quantity and quality. In the local Palestinian context, the production of olives, grapes, stone fruits, citrus, and livestock is endangered due to climate conditions and diminishing water levels, which results in increased food prices and prices of local and imported goods. Women's roles are impacted as well by their impaired ability to tend to the health needs of family members because unknown illnesses are expected to emerge as a result of continuous climatic changes. The inability to provide medical care or home remedies will create a disturbance in women's cultural roles and responsibilities towards their families, leaving them vulnerable to mental and psychological issues.

The devaluation of women does not stop here. With the increasing usage of electricity, men are pressured continuously to perform their social roles as breadwinners and financial supporters to their families. Their inability to meet the demands while struggling to maintain their social image has caused some men to resort to domestic violence. They are acting partly to alleviate their own pressures while also blaming women for the increased usage in electricity at home, even if the increased use

of electricity for such purposes occurred with the approval of male figures within the household. The result is a new spectrum of gender-based violence victims in Palestine and the creation of a new form of oppression of women caused by climate change.

The continuous population growth is leading to new architecture and construction practices that pave the way for inconsiderate urbanization. The effects thereof will negatively impact the environmental conditions and exacerbate the ongoing increase of the earth's temperature, affecting living organisms and further destroying biodiversity. These changes will bring more implications for humans to mitigate – summers will be warmer, heatwaves will become more frequent and impactful, and winters will be shorter with less-than-usual precipitation levels. These consequences will continue to affect food security, disease control, domestic water levels, and the availability of water suitable for domestic usage. These factors will differentially create further pressure on men and women as they strive to fulfil their duties towards their families and in society, resulting in a further deterioration in women's health and safety.

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