

Climate Change Impacts on Women and Children in Mbandaka

Climate change is an undeniable reality today and places humanity before the greatest challenge ever experienced. It has increased the frequency and magnitude of extreme weather events in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This has led to the loss of lives, diminished livelihoods, reduced crops and livestock production, and damaged infrastructure, among other adverse impacts.

Climate change Impact in DRC

The DRC, formerly known as Zaire, is located in Central Africa. To the north, it is bordered by the Central African Republic and Sudan; to the east, by Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, and Tanzania; and to the south by Zambia and Angola. The capital city, Kinshasa, is located in the far western area of the country. DRC covers about 905,000 square miles and has a population of 102,262,808 people.

DRC is frequently affected by weather-related disasters, particularly droughts, which have a profound impact on DRC's economy and people's well-being. Flooding can occur across the country with years of above-normal rainfall and heavy rainfall storms.

Climate change is causing an increase in average global temperatures, and rising rivers levels, causing significant environmental and economic disruption. Heat, drought and floods are impacting Congolese, and human health is increasingly at risk.

The amount of greenhouse gases (GHG) that humans release has increased every year since the Industrial Revolution and is now at record levels. As carbon dioxide and other GHGs build up in the atmosphere, they trap heat causing climate change. In 2020, the concentration of GHGs in the atmosphere had risen to 48% above pre-industrial levels (before 1750). Other greenhouse gases such as methane and ozone, emitted by human activities, also contribute to global warming but to a lesser extent.

Causes of climate change in DRC

- a. Deforestation : DRC has one of the highest deforestation rates in the world. It holds the second largest area of primary forest destroyed in 2020, following Brazil.
- b. Poaching: Illegal hunting of wildlife contributes to the disruption of ecosystems and biodiversity loss, which can indirectly affect the climate.

- c. Pollution of water ways and sanitation: Pollution of rivers and inadequate sanitation practices harm aquatic ecosystems.

Mbandaka's Equatorial location :

Mbandaka's position directly under the equator results in nearly equal lengths of day and night throughout the year. This equatorial location means that traditional seasonal changes, like distinct dry and wet seasons, are not as pronounced as they are in regions further from the Equator. Instead, Mbandaka experiences consistent rainfall throughout the year, with variations in the intensity of rain. Mbandaka's unique geographical location under the equator, surrounded by dense equatorial forest, brings both opportunities and challenges. While it attracts forestry and logging companies due to its rich biodiversity, it also faces environmental degradation and climate change.

How climate change affects maternal Health

Climate change can affect maternal and pregnancy health due to the lack of food, clean water and adequate sanitation; the increased frequency of extreme weather events; migrations; changes in morbidity and morbidity patterns; and direct exposure to heat. It has negative repercussions on the outcome of pregnancy.

Women are vulnerable to climate change. Their role as primary caregivers and providers of food and fuel makes them more vulnerable when flooding and drought occur. Drought affects girls and women's hygiene as limited access and availability of water is used for drinking and cooking. It also has a negative effect on women's time management in the household. When nearby wells and water sources run dry, women have to travel long distances to search for water. Longer dry seasons mean that women work harder to feed and care for their families. In both urban and rural areas, women have multiple demands in the home, workplace and community that leave less time for political involvement and active participation in decisionmaking processes. Women in traditional communities may be subject to cultural beliefs that deny equal opportunities and rights. Women are more likely to experience poverty, less likely to own land and have less socioeconomic power than men. This makes it difficult to recover from climate disasters that affect infrastructure, jobs and housing.

These challenges are interdependent, a problem which may be the cause or consequence of another problem. The first two challenges, deforestation and land degradation, relate to changes in the

vegetation cover of rural lands and their quality. These two challenges overlap because the wooded areas are generally gradually converted to agricultural land, which is then degraded due to bad farming practices. Air pollution inside the home because of household use of "dirty" fuel for cooking food is a serious problem. It causes the death of many Congolese every year and increases demand for firewood, mainly because of household cutting of trees. Activities related to agriculture are also a major cause of water pollution and inadequate sanitation infrastructure, which also leads to source contamination of freshwater from Mbandaka. If a natural disaster is by definition a natural phenomenon, the extent of the damage is aggravated by a resilience of the environment.

Exposure to natural disasters related to climate and weather can have mental health consequences, such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress. A significant proportion of people affected by these events present with chronic psychological dysfunction. Among them are children, pregnant and postpartum women, people with pre-existing mental illnesses, economically disadvantaged people, the homeless and disaster first aid.

Solution

There are various measures to mitigate the effects of climate change on the environment, nutrition and food security, and public health, including: planting non-fruit trees to conserve the environment and fruit trees to relieve the hunger of disadvantaged populations. Children should be vaccinated against mumps, measles and rubella, polio and pneumonia. To address these concerns head on, individuals can share information about what is happening, what is already being done on the ground, and how they can help mitigate climate change at the individual level.

Our health and well-being are so linked to our environment. Nature is our first mother, the source of air, water and food on which we depend on every day. Every child, every person has the right to breathe clean air, to drink clean water, to have access to nutritious food and to a safe place to play. Every child has the right to live in a world without harmful pollution. The health and future of our children are very much dependent on the measures we are currently taking to reduce climate pollution. So we must dry our clothes online, avoid air conditioning when possible, and mainly eat a balanced diet.

As parents, we teach, nurture, encourage, collaborate, set boundaries, encourage and strategize. And now, we must do all of these things for one of the biggest challenges our children face: climate change. Our voices are necessary in this fight. Parents can teach their own children to be caretakers and aware of climate change and the negative impact of overconsumption, tree felling and the use of single-use plastics.

Conclusion

Because climate change is rapidly sinking into a global crisis, it is necessary to safeguard the DRC, for it possesses the key to combat climate change within its borders. With its vast reserves of natural wealth, including its lush forests, vital mangroves, precious peatlands, abundant freshwater resources, and invaluable strategic minerals, the DRC stands as a beacon of hope in our global. As your partner, we implore you to join hands in protecting this nation and its invaluable resources, for they hold power to shape a sustainable future for our planet.

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