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Title	:	Contribution to climate change by rural women: A case study from Mahaweli System H
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Background:

Climate change is one of the biggest threats to human kind today. In every society, women and men have distinct responsibilities, knowledge and needs which are essential to address the effects of climate change. Climate change magnifies existing inequalities including gender inequality among the most pervasive. Rural women in developing countries are still largely responsible for securing food, water, and energy for cooking and heating. Thus, they are more dependent for their livelihood on natural resources that are threatened by climate change. Known impacts of climate change such as drought, flood and erratic rainfall cause women to work harder to secure these resources. Women, therefore, have less time to earn income, get education or provide care to families. Some of the factors that influence the higher vulnerability of women to disasters include lack of means and assets to ensure their own safety in situations of floods, droughts, landslides and storms.

Women's restricted access to resources and information and their limited power in decision-making make them most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Therefore, awareness of rural women on climate change is essential to take adaptation or mitigation measures against climate change.

Objectives

- Assess the extent of awareness of rural women about climate change
- Assess the contribution by rural women to climate change, and
- Identify the adaptation measures taken by women to deal with the impact of climate change.

Study Area

This study was conducted in two villages in the Bulnewa unit of the Galnewa block in the Mahaweli system H to assess the awareness of rural women on climate change. The villages represent typical agricultural villages in the heart of the dry zone of Sri Lanka where seasonal fluctuation of water availability creates immense hardship to the farmers; to the women in particular.

Research Methodology

A questionnaire survey was conducted with a sample size of 25 women who were selected randomly for this purpose from each village. Since the idea of the study was to generate preliminary information on the extent of climate change awareness and adaptation no statistical means were sought to validate the information generated.

Research Findings:

Selected women belonged to different age groups that varied from 35 to 65. Forty percent of the women are educated below grade 5 which restricts their reading and writing ability and interest.

When the daily routine of both men and women are compared, men engage in farming operations, mainly paddy cultivation from 7 am – 1 pm and 3 pm – 7 pm while women engage in field works from 9 a.m to 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. In addition women engage in day to day works which actually starts from 5 a.m. and extends beyond 9 p.m. This indicates that women find hardly any time to listen to radio or view television.

Awareness of women on climate change is very less. 20% of the women are aware about the climate change. All women who studied over grade 9 showed knowledge of climate change. The awareness was through television, news papers and the Mahaweli Authority of Sri Lanka. This particular group (20% who are aware about climate change) has knowledge of some contributing factors and effects of climate change. According to their knowledge, deforestation and forest fire are the two major contributing factors.

Women don't remember the climate related hardships that they have faced. However, 60 % of the women could state that they have faced drought frequently while 40% of them felt that it is normal. All of them could remember that there were big drought incidents in 1999, 2003 and 2007 and they had to ask for water from Mahaweli Authority frequently. According to them, there were no other disaster like floods and food scarcity in this area. They considerer the droughts encountered as normal and seasonal. The only adaption measure that they have taken to face drought problem is building agro-wells. No one is aware of green house gasses and drought tolerant varieties and they haven't practiced any adaptation or mitigation measure for climate change knowingly. However they have practiced some adaptation measures unknowingly in the fields. They practice mulching, Maanvari cultivation before the regular cultivation, maintaining irrigation channels, upland cropping and intercropping with some fruit trees, such as banana and papaya and the use of groundwater for dry season farming. Farming practices like using organic and inorganic fertilizer, waste disposal methods like burning and using woods as fuel are caused to increase atmospheric CO₂. Therefore they unknowingly contribute to climate change. But it is minute.

Discussion:

Even though possible impacts of climate change on the environment and the society have already been well documented, those information has hardly reached the public. As a result, awareness of the women of the society to the climate change impacts is very less.

Since the educational levels of the mothers are lower, they could be made aware of climate change through their school going children.