



Championing a sustainable, gender–equal world

Zonta Says NOW is creating a gender-equal, sustainable world by

- educating girls
- advocating for women’s rights and
- inspiring more female leaders.

1. Introduction

Understanding climate change as a human rights issue is central to the fight against climate change and creating a sustainable, gender-equal future.

Zonta Says NOW to gender-equal climate action empowers Zontians to advocate for women and girls in a future disrupted by extreme weather events.

United Nations scientists have shown that global temperature rises must be less than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels to prevent runaway global warming. Currently, we have reached 1.2° C. Time is running out.

Globally, we are seeing once-in-a-century events becoming more frequent. Record-breaking summers, droughts and bushfires and rising sea levels, floods and storms are all featured in our daily news feeds.

These events have already led to the displacement of millions of people, disruption of societies, more unemployment, stress, and violence. The climate crisis disproportionately impacts women and girls—yet women hold the key to creating a just climate response for all.

As a Zonta Says NOW Champion, you will actively stand up for women and girls in this decisive decade for humanity.

2. The Problems

- Human activity has altered almost 75 per cent of the earth’s surface, and around 1 million animal and plant species are threatened with extinction.
- The global impacts of climate change such as intense heat, drought, bushfires, floods, storms and conflicts displaced over 100 million people globally in 2022.
- Estimates show that, without increased action on climate change, around a billion people may be displaced by 2050.
- Two-thirds of the world’s poor, illiterate and chronically hungry are women.
- Women are more likely to be injured and 14 times more likely to die in extreme weather events.
- In some cultures, girls are not taught to swim or climb trees and women are not permitted to leave their homes without a male relative, making it difficult to escape or seek help in a disaster.
- During times of scarcity, some women face difficult choices to survive—do they prostitute themselves or marry off their children to get money for food?
- Women are often in casual labour. They are the first to lose their jobs and, with fewer savings, are less likely to recover financially.
- In Australia, the average gender pay gap is 14 per cent, and women have two-thirds of the superannuation savings of men—homelessness is rising for older women.
- As we have seen during the COVID pandemic, domestic violence increases in times of social disruption and uncertainty.
- Globally, one quarter of parliamentarians are women, and fewer than 30 per cent of climate negotiators are women, making it difficult to hear women’s voices equally on the world stage.

3. The Solutions

- Girls with 12 years of education have more life choices, can build more resilient communities, and have fewer children than girls with no education.
- About 218 million women in lower and middle-income countries have an unmet need for modern contraception—closing this gap could lead to 30 million fewer unplanned births.
- Globally women have around three-quarters of the legal rights of men. Addressing this will enable women to legally access credit, sign a contract, register a business and open a bank account—making it easier to obtain and improve land or start businesses to support their families.
- Ending violence against women will enable more women to participate at their full potential.
- Science, technology and innovation are central to reaching the targets of the Paris Agreement, yet in Australia, women made up less than a quarter of students studying STEM in 2019. Advocating for more women and girls in STEM will ensure more diverse thought and gendered climate and technology solutions.
- Countries led by women and with more women in their parliaments adopt more stringent climate policies.
- Include more women in shaping disaster risk reduction policies and plans.
- Inspiring more women into leadership positions in their communities, workplaces, councils, and parliaments and, wherever they can be involved in planning and policy-making, is crucial to tackling climate change effectively.

4. What can YOU do?

1. Get the facts

- Read books, watch videos, read articles and listen to podcasts from reputable sources e.g. United Nations, Climate Council, TED Countdown, David Attenborough, Jane Goodall, Christiana Figueres.
- Learn about the Sustainable Development Goals.

2. Lead by example

- Reduce, reuse, recycle, rethink, and repair.
- Set a sustainability challenge e.g. eliminate plastic, walk and use public transport, demonstrate recycling practices, invest in sustainable companies
- Use the 1 Million Women phone app.

3. Add our voice

- Develop climate/gender equality elevator speeches or lists of key facts to use as conversation starters with family, co-workers and friends. Practice saying them.
- Join and host local events to raise awareness.

4. Advocate

- Write to and meet with local councillors.
- Contact State and Federal MPs and urge them to integrate gender sensitive climate responses into their climate policies.

5. Collaborate

- Work with Zonta clubs to magnify your voice, and raise awareness of local issues relating to gender equality, climate action and ending violence against women.
- Work smarter not harder. Collaborate with like-minded organisations e.g. UN Women, 1 Million Women, Plastic Free July, and the Climate Council.

5. Final thoughts

The climate crisis offers wonderful opportunities for women—but only if we rise to the challenge. Imagine a gender-equal, sustainable world where:

- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is replaced with a well-being budget (as happens in New Zealand) and we are stewards not abusers of our environment
- the wisdom of traditional owners of the land is valued and shared to benefit future generations
- through Zonta clubs and the Zonta Foundation for Women, we:
 - keep girls in school and end child marriage
 - educate women and girls about climate change and its consequences
 - put an end to coercive control and other forms of violence
 - advocate for gender-equal climate policies and disaster plans
 - enable women to have the same legal rights as men and close the gender pay gap
 - support more women and girls in STEM and the new science and technology-based industries
 - inspire more women to step up and take a leading role in our clubs, communities, workplaces, councils, and parliaments.

Through our gender-equal climate action, we can build a better world for everyone

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