



The Impact of the Climate Emergency on Women

Women are primary caregivers. Our work makes it possible for humans to survive and flourish. We build networks of supportive relationships. We build communities.

The climate emergency and other environmental destruction directly and disproportionately impact us and the essential work that we do. They threaten sources of food and water. They throw our supportive networks into chaos.

As women we are lower in socioeconomic status and have less power than men. Sexism, and the rigid roles it imposes, limit women's access to the resources and experiences that can better prepare them to handle disasters and adapt to climate change. Women who face multiple oppressions—Indigenous women, women in the Global South, women of color, poor women, women with disabilities, young women—are hit the hardest.

Climate change creates societal instability. Rape and other forms of sexual violence increase. In North America, the construction of new fossil fuel pipelines (for example, the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines) creates large settlements in geographically isolated areas that are primarily populated by men. This leads to human trafficking and sexual violence. Many of those targeted are Native women who live in the territories through which the pipelines are built.

Many women in the Global South engage in subsistence farming. They produce between 40% and 80% of the food, as well as collect fuel and water. (Women and girls are responsible for collecting water in almost two-thirds of households in developing countries.) With increasing droughts, floods, and other erratic weather events, the burden on women increases. It is more difficult



for them to meet their families' needs for food, water, and energy. It is also harder to generate income or obtain an education.

According to the United Nations, eighty percent of the people displaced by climate change are women. Yet women are less than thirty percent of those who decide policy in national and global climate negotiating bodies; sexism limits women's leadership. Women are

brilliant. We understand the importance of human relationships. We know how to create rather than destroy. We should be central to solving the climate crisis.

In addition to damaging the lives of both women and men, sexism and male domination stand in the way of solving the climate emergency. But the practices of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*—listening to each other without interruption and supporting each other's



Sustaining All Life (SAL) is an international grassroots organization working to end the climate emergency within the context of ending all divisions among people. *United to End Racism* (UER) is a group of people of all ages and backgrounds, in many different countries, who are dedicated to eliminating racism in the world and supporting the efforts of all other groups with this goal. UER and SAL are projects of and use the tools of Re-evaluation Counseling. Re-evaluation Counseling (RC) is a well-defined theory and practice that helps people of all ages and backgrounds exchange effective help with each other in order to free themselves from the emotional scars of oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging emotional release, people can heal old hurts and become better able to think, to speak out, and to organize and lead others in building a world in which human beings and other life forms are valued and the environment is restored and preserved. Re-evaluation Counseling currently exists in 95 countries.



SustainingAllLife.org



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natural healing processes (laughing, crying, talking, and shaking)—allow both women and men to heal from the damage done by sexism and male domination. This changes the power dynamic, making it possible for women's

voices to be central in decision-making, and for women and men to be strong allies in ending climate change.





The Work of *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism*

It is possible to limit the effects of human-caused climate change and restore the environment—and some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live are needed for this to happen. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis cannot be resolved without ending racism, genocide toward Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on people targeted by these particular oppressions. Making the changes needed will require a massive movement, spanning the globe, of people of every background fighting the effects of both climate change and racism.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we believe that the barriers to building a sufficiently large and powerful movement include (1) longstanding divisions (usually caused by oppression, and especially racism and classism) between nations and between groups of people, (2) widespread feelings of discouragement and powerlessness, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the escalating damage to the earth's climate, and (4) difficulties in effectively addressing the connections between the environmental crisis and the failures of our economic system. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* work to address these and other issues.

The role of oppression

The economic and political forms of our societies demand growth and profit with little regard for people, other life forms, or the earth. This results in exploitation and oppression. Oppressions (such as racism, classism, sexism, and the oppression of young people) target everyone, inflicting tremendous injustices, limiting access to resources, and damaging the lives of billions of people. Once targeted by oppression, we tend to act toward others in ways that repeat the hurts that we have experienced. Much of the mental and emotional damage done to humans is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though humans are vulnerable to acting in oppressive ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a human has been

hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal damage

The mental and emotional harm done to us by oppression and other hurtful experiences interferes with our ability to think clearly and sets groups of people against each other. This makes it difficult for us to think about and respond effectively to the climate emergency. People would not cooperate with a society that exploits people and damages the environment if they had not first been hurt.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other damaging behavior is not quick or easy work. Many of us resist this work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the damage done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this damage.

In *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* we have learned that it is possible to free ourselves from these hurts and address barriers to effective organizing. We can heal from hurtful experiences if someone listens to us attentively and allows and encourages us to release the grief, fear, and other painful emotions. This happens by means of our natural healing processes—talking, crying, trembling, expressing anger, and laughing. By releasing distressed feelings in a supportive network, we can stay united, hopeful, thoughtful, joyful, and committed. This in turn strengthens us in building our movements to stop the effects of climate change and racism.



Sustaining All Life



For more information, see:

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