



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.

The history of women's oppression has led to women having lower economic status and less political power than men. The systemic and structural sexism built into our institutions and society, 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 the

Global Majority*, 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, Dakota Access, and

* The peoples of Africa, Asia, the Pacific Islands, the Caribbean, and Latin America, and those descended from them, and Indigenous people, are over eighty percent of the global population. These people also occupy most of the global land mass.

Using the term "Global Majority and Indigenous (GMI)" for these people acknowledges their majority status in the world and interrupts how the dominant (U.S. and European) culture assigns them a minority status.

Many Global Majority and Indigenous people living in dominant-culture countries have been assimilated into the dominant culture—by force, in order to survive, in seeking a better life for themselves and their families, or in pursuing the economic, political, or other inclusion of their communities. Calling these people "Global Majority and Indigenous" contradicts the assimilation.



Line 3 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. (In those households where

water needs to be collected, women and girls are primarily responsible.) 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



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) consists of a wide diversity of people 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 emotional harm resulting from oppression and other hurts. By taking turns listening to each other and encouraging the release of painful emotions, 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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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 everyone's lives, sexism and male domination stand in the way of solving the climate emergency. The practices of *Sustaining All Life, No Limits for Women* and *United to End Racism*—listening to each other without interruption

and supporting each other's natural healing processes (laughing, crying, talking, and shaking)—allow women to heal from the damage done by sexism and male domination. This can change 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—if we make some very large changes in our economy and the lives we live in the next decade. *Sustaining All Life* and *United to End Racism* believe the environmental crisis can be resolved only if we by simultaneously address racism, genocide of Indigenous peoples, classism, sexism, and other oppressions. The impact of environmental destruction and climate change falls most heavily on the groups targeted by these oppressions, and on other vulnerable populations (including populations of people who are elderly, disabled, and very young). 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 that it's too late and any actions will be ineffective, (3) denial of or failure to engage with the climate emergency, 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 harm we experience is the result of this passing on of hurt. Though people are vulnerable to acting in oppressive

ways, oppressive behavior is not inherent, but arises only when a person has been hurt emotionally. Oppressive societies manipulate this vulnerability to establish and maintain economic exploitation.

The importance of healing personal harm

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.

Healing from the hurts that help to hold oppression in place and lead to other harmful behavior is neither quick nor easy work. Many of us resist this personal healing work. We may have survived by numbing ourselves to the harm done to us by oppression. Some of us assume that we will never be free of this harm.

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 emotional pain 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:

www.sustainingalllife.org or www.unitedtoendracism.org
or **write:** Sustaining All Life/United to End Racism
19370 Firlands Way N, Shoreline, WA 98133-3925 USA
Email: sal@rc.org Tel: +1-206-284-0311