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Ladies and Gentlemen,

In times of emergency, conflict, and climate disasters, leadership plays a critical factor in determining the effectiveness of response efforts and the speed of recovery. While women are often underrepresented in formal crisis management roles, they play pivotal leadership roles in preparing for and recovering from disasters. In this speech I will highlight the essential yet often overlooked leadership that women provide in these contexts.

A study in the *Journal of European Public Policy* found that women remain underrepresented in executive leadership roles during crises. Women made up an average of 25% of national COVID-19 task forces set up by governments. Although, this seems to show us that women are not represented in leadership positions it does not, however, show us that women are not leading. They are, it is just not seen. In the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, women were pivotal in distributing aid and managing shelters. They not only care for family members but also take on the responsibility of rebuilding the community and securing resources. This shows us that women are frequently on the front lines, especially in developing regions, acting as key decision makers in the absence of formal government. But then why do these roles go unrecognized in official disaster response efforts? Why is women's involvement seen as supplementary rather than essential? Doesn't this undermine the potential of disaster preparedness and recovery efforts? This paper also concluded that having women present in crisis management task forces ensures a greater likelihood that the response to the crisis will account for gender equalities, which is essential in preparing and recovering from disasters. If inequalities are not considered, then nothing will change when the next disaster strikes.

From Syria to South Sudan, women in conflict zones have been integral in sustaining families and communities, often stepping into leadership roles in the absence of men. The *2003 Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace* is a prime example of their effective leadership in peacebuilding. Led by Leymah Gbowee, this movement used nonviolent tactics – protests and hunger strike to push for an end to civil war and the election of a democratic government. Gbowee was awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize for her role, highlighting the immense impact of women in peace processes. Studies show that peace agreements that involve women are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years. Yet, why are women's voices still marginalized in peace talks? With men still controlling the political and military discourse. If women were included in higher numbers, conflict zones would experience more sustainable peace and post-conflict recovery. By including women, the resulting agreements tend to focus more on rebuilding social and economic structures, ensuring that the benefits of peace are shared equally across all segments of society. Can we really ignore this benefit?

Climate change presents one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century, and women, especially in vulnerable regions, are disproportionately affected by climate-related disasters. Floods, droughts, and cyclones have severe impacts on women and girls because of their roles in managing household resources and caregiving. Women are often the first to feel the effects of displacement, food insecurity, and health crises related to climate change. But when it comes to climate change, women are usually the first to produce resilient strategies to reduce or slow down effects. How can this be overlooked when it is vital in recovering from climate disasters? In regions like Bangladesh and Kenya, women's leadership in climate resilience programs has shown that their strategies often outperform conventional methods. In Bangladesh, female community leaders have helped communities prepare for the impacts of

flooding by organizing local flood preparedness programs. In Kenya, women have led efforts in reforestation and soil conservation to combat desertification. These efforts are solving the immediate effects of climate change and creating long-term solutions that reduce the need for future humanitarian aid, promoting self-sufficiency. It provides solutions that address both the environmental and social dimensions of vulnerability, ensuring that local communities are equipped to face future challenges.

Kathleen Lynch's concept of "relational equality" offers me valuable insight into how gender dynamics can be restructured to ensure that women's leadership is recognized and supported. Lynch argues women should challenge the systemic inequalities that prevent them from leading and participating in decisions that affect their lives. Reforming disaster management and climate policy to be more inclusive of women's leadership would reduce vulnerability and foster more effective, community-led solutions.

Women's leadership in emergencies, conflict, and climate disasters is a powerful yet overlooked force. From natural disasters to war and the challenges of climate change, women consistently demonstrate resilience, creativity, and the ability to mobilize their communities. Acknowledging and empowering women as leaders is not just a matter of justice, it is crucial for ensuring more effective and sustainable responses to global crises. To strengthen disaster preparedness and recovery, we must dismantle the structural barriers that prevent women from leading. This includes revising disaster response protocols, increasing women's representation in policymaking, and challenging the gender norms that restrict women's roles in crisis management.

Thank you for listening

Bibliography:

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