

ActionTalks Speech

(The leadership role of women during the climate crisis, emergencies, and conflict)

“The failure to ensure equal representation and women’s participation in efforts to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss is short-sighted, at best, and potentially reckless” – Yvonne Aki-Sawyer

Good afternoon, ladies, gentlemen, and fellow citizens of Ireland. My name is Chucks Kpaduwa, and I am a senior student at Dundalk Grammar School, and it is a pleasure to stand here before you today. Using this time, I plan on highlighting to you the treacherous conditions of the woman in society and her right to the fullest life, in relation to today’s climate crisis as well as the undermining of her ability to lead during conflict.

To begin, I will touch on the history of women’s involvement with the alleviation of climate change, which saw its early beginnings in 1856, when Eunice Newton Foote provided further evidence of the existence of climate change, with her home demonstration of the greenhouse effect. This groundbreaking discovery unlocked a greater understanding of the effects of excess levels of carbon dioxide and its effects on our atmosphere. Despite this, Eunice is not commonly regarded as the “mother of the greenhouse effect” and is widely forgotten for her stark contribution to the evidence of climate change. Although there is a “father of the greenhouse effect” in contrast, and he is none other than her male counterpart, Irish scientist John Tyndall. Now, I, for one, like the next citizen, am always proud to witness the illustrious achievements of the Irish, but it goes without being said that a woman was more worthy of receiving that recognition than Tyndall. Eunice beat Tyndall to the punch by roughly 3 years, so tell me why it took 155-odd years to figure that out?

The erasure of Eunice’s impactful presence on the education of climate change is resonant with that of the female leaders in today’s climate action and the unfair ratio they are faced with. This is evident in current day, with only 8 out of a staggering 78 world leaders being female at the COP29 summit, and while the conference of parties may pride itself on its inclusivity, the 10% of female leaders sitting at its negotiation table would strongly beg to differ. The number of women affected by the tumultuous effects of climate change is disproportionate to that of men. According to UNICEF, countries within the Global South, such as Afghanistan, South Sudan, and Chad, see women and girls from varying ages being responsible for retrieving water in 80% of households that require water collection, and this is a task that has become even more strenuous due to the subsequent water scarcity caused by climate change, resulting in women having to travel farther distances to collect water, compromising their education in exchange for this unpaid care work.

One would think that logically, it would be a woman’s prerogative to uphold a considerable position in power and decision-making linked to climate change, as they are the demographic worst affected by it, but the shrewd state of our patriarchal system has disproven such logic time and time again.

Once in control, the women at the forefront instead chose not to try and combat climate change, but to survive living through it. They did so by promoting ideas such as using underground water tanks, where possible, to collect water and decrease evaporation, producing more honey using agroecological practices, and using canvases to collect rainwater for fish production and household-level agriculture.

Despite all the positives, the negative barriers to the equal leadership of women in the climate crisis are still being fiercely neglected, and in the wise words of Mary Robinson, “If we took away the barriers to women’s leadership, we would solve the climate change problem a lot faster.”

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