



Women can lead the transition to a cleaner, sustainable environment

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Dr. Pachauri is the Chairman of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the leading body for the assessment of climate change, and is the CEO of the New Delhi-based TERI (The Energy and Resources Institute), an organization that researches and develops solutions to climate change issues.

When it comes to climate change, no one is immune. Changes wrought by a warming climate will affect everyone in every corner of the globe.

The effects will be anything but uniform. Poorer, low-lying countries will suffer disproportionately unless the global community commits to reducing and ultimately eliminating the greenhouse gases that cause climate change. And within this already disadvantaged group, women and their children in rural areas are among the most vulnerable. As the IPCC's Working Group II report pointed out in March:

"Price rises, which may be induced by climate shocks as well as other factors, have a disproportionate impact on the welfare of the poor in rural areas, such as female-headed households and those with limited access to modern agricultural inputs, infrastructure, and education."

The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amount of snow and ice has diminished, sea level has risen, and concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased – all testaments to a warming climate. However, I remain hopeful that the rapidly accumulating evidence of climate change and its deeply

troubling consequences for the future of our planet will prompt world leaders to take decisive action soon to transition to a global economy powered by clean, affordable and renewable energy. We have the technology to make the transition. We just need the political will to support its global adoption.

Women will play a critical role in this transition. Indeed, they may well lead it. After all, it was a woman, Rachel Carson, who founded the modern environmental movement with her book *Silent Spring*. And, as the World Bank has noted, women play an essential role in managing natural resources and, in my experience, are often more in touch with their natural surroundings. It is their voices that will ring the loudest in support of policies that encourage the creation of a safer environment for their children.

The transition to clean, renewable energy will have benefits for women that go well beyond averting climate change. More than 1.3 billion people around the world live without electricity – a particular hardship for women who are forced to cook over crude cook stoves that emit harmful particulates and who struggle to educate their children by kerosene or candlelight.

Through a programme called Lighting a Billion Lives administered by my institute, TERI, I have seen how the lives of women in poor, rural villages have been transformed with small, locally based solar power. With access to electricity for the first time in their lives, they and their children are able to read at night and power small businesses. Gone are the wood-fired stoves, kerosene lamps and their toxic by-products.

Let me tell you the story of Baby Devi to illustrate my point. Ms. Devi was selected to administer a solar charging station that our programme had installed at her village of Mahmuda in 2012. With the new station, villagers were able to charge solar lanterns that allowed them to start small businesses.

With her effective management of the charging station, Ms. Devi was given the opportunity to train women to make incense – something that would have been far more difficult without the solar lanterns to light their work after sunset. Today, in addition to renting out the lanterns, Ms. Devi runs an incense production facility that employs a dozen women who now earn livable incomes.

Clean and affordable energy is elementary to one's quality of life, and for ensuring socioeconomic development. Without access to affordable energy, it will be impossible to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, or even to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health.

And without access to affordable energy generated by clean, renewable sources, it will be impossible to avert the potentially devastating impacts of climate change.

So we have a choice: continue business as usual towards an ever hotter and inhospitable planet, or take steps now to create a healthier, more verdant and equitable world. The choice is abundantly clear: If we treat Mother Earth with kindness, she will return the favour.