

# Weathering Change: Stories about climate and family from women around the world.

*Weathering Change* takes us to Ethiopia, Nepal and Peru to hear the stories of women as they struggle to care for their families, while enduring crop failures and water scarcity. The film shows how women and families are already adapting to the climate change challenges that threaten their health and their livelihoods.



*Weathering Change* documents how family planning, girls' education, sustainable agriculture and environmental conservation are part of the solution. As the world's population hits 7 billion in 2011, the film calls for expanding access to contraception and empowering women to help families and communities adapt to the effects of climate change.

"A woman's life is hard, and climate change is making it harder," says Aregash Ayele, an Ethiopian woman featured in the film. Aregash is 32 years old and lives with her six children in a small farming community in the Gedeo Zone of Ethiopia.



"Because of changing rainfall patterns, crop yields are suffering, and the family doesn't have enough food for everybody. My father used to get 500 to 600 kilos per harvest, but now we can barely get 100. Even though the land is green, it's not fruitful. It has never been like this."

As a result, Aregash's husband is forced to work other land hours away from home. Aregash is left to manage the house, look after the children, and farm the existing land on her own. "The only way we can raise our kids is from the land. If the land fails to produce, there isn't enough to feed them," she says.



Aregash spends some of her time volunteering at the local health clinic, where she distributes food aid and teaches other mothers about how to prevent pregnancy.

"I feed hungry children and teach family planning to their parents," she says. "When they use contraception and space births every three to five years, the mothers get stronger. And their children also grow up with the needed strength and care.

Due to the change in our climate, mothers have understood that spacing their children is in their own best interest."

## Women and Climate Change

Aregash's story is not unusual. Women living in poverty bear a disproportionate burden of climate change consequences. In many countries, disparities resulting from women's roles within family and community structures are aggravated by the effects of climate change. Unequal access to education, economic opportunities, land ownership, and health care can undermine women's well-being and the prospects for a better future for their children and communities.

And yet, women are important agents of change in addressing climate change challenges. In their roles as providers of food, water and fuel, women are instrumental in determining a family's ability

## NEPAL FACTS: Current population: 29 million Projected population in 2050: 46 million

4 million of Nepal's 27 million people are undernourished, with children and women suffering the greatest hunger.

Increases in temperature and water stress are expected to lead to a 30 percent decrease in crop yields in Central and South Asia by the mid-21st century.

Households in the highlands of Nepal cannot rely on food production alone. In these regions, 75 percent of families have at least one male family member who migrates for work to support the family income. While the men are away, women and children struggle through coping mechanisms such as eating less and removal of children from school due to poverty and food insecurity.

Percent of married women who want to delay pregnancy, but lack modern contraception: 25 percent.

**ETHIOPIA FACTS: Current population: 82 million, Projected population in 2050: 145 million**

Ethiopia's population has doubled in the last 25 years, increasing demand for agricultural and grazing land, as well as wood for fuel and construction purposes.

In Ethiopia, women have on average about 4.5 children each. Fertility rates are highest among women living in rural areas, those with no education, and the poorest.

Percent of married women who want to delay pregnancy, but lack modern contraception: 34 percent



to survive and effectively cope with the impacts of climate change. Many women play important roles as community leaders, natural resource managers, and caregivers. They possess knowledge and experience that are critical in designing effective climate change adaptation strategies.

**Adapting to Climate Change**

Climate change has historically been driven by a build-up of greenhouse gases generated mostly by the industrialized world. The consequences of unabated climate change affect everyone, though some are more affected and less able to cope with the effects than others.



In many of the poorest areas of the world, shifting temperature and precipitation patterns are already affecting agricultural production and making scarce water supplies even more difficult to manage. The impacts of climate change contribute to decisions to migrate as people seek safer, more stable living conditions. The world's growing population, which will surpass 7 billion people on October 31, 2011, is likely to magnify these challenges. The majority of expected global population growth will occur in some of the world's poorest and most vulnerable countries.

Adapting to the impacts of climate change requires a variety of responses. These include enacting policies to improve management of climate-related risks,

enhancing individuals' and communities' ability to cope with a changing environment, and easing pressure on resources.

**Reproductive Health and Resilience**

Access to quality reproductive health and family planning services strengthens women's capacity to adapt to climate change and serve as leaders in their communities. Giving women and men the tools to determine family size can improve the socio-economic and health status of women and their families.

A woman's ability to choose to delay, limit, and space pregnancies increases her prospects for completing school, and accessing greater economic opportunities. Meeting the existing global demand for family planning will also reduce unintended pregnancies. This will save women's lives, enhance the well-being of families, and reduce pressures related to rapidly growing population—all of which are essential to increasing resilience in the face of a changing climate. Currently, more than 200 million women in developing countries want to avoid pregnancy, but lack modern contraception. In a number of nations, one-third or more of married women have a need for these critical services.

**PERU FACTS: Current population: 29 million  
Projected population in 2050: 38 million**

Since the early 1980s, Peruvian glaciers have lost about 22 percent of glacier surface, (500 Km<sup>2</sup>) equivalent to 7 billion cubic meters of water.

The population of Lima has grown 23 percent in the last decade, adding more than 1.6 million people.

Changes in water supplies are compounding the challenges by placing millions of already vulnerable populations, including women, at further risk of inadequate potable water.

Percent of married women who want to delay pregnancy, but lack modern contraception: 7 percent

**Call to Action**

The U.S. government should support:

- Increased investment in international reproductive health and family planning to improve the health and well-being of women and families around the world, while also reducing vulnerability to climate change impacts.
- Robust funding for international climate change efforts, including a strong emphasis on adaptation.
- An international climate adaptation strategy that integrates the health and development needs and priorities of most vulnerable populations, including women, and promotes access to reproductive health and family planning, girls' education, and women's empowerment.