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Vulnerable Victims or Stalwart Saviors: Debating Women and Climate Change:

Climate change is widely referred to as one of the greatest global challenges faced by the international community. Reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicate that climate change is currently resulting in a host of negative impacts for both humans and ecosystems, and these impacts are predicted to worsen into the future. Although climate change affects a variety of human communities, its impacts are most heavily felt by marginalized populations. In countries around the world, women have tended to fall disproportionately into the category of marginalized due to social constructed ideas about the appropriate and acceptable roles that men and women ought to play in society. While it is accurate to say that there are regularized gendered patterns of experience in the realm of environmental change, it is inaccurate to assert that we always understand and discuss these patterns in meaningful or helpful ways. This project examines the concept of vulnerability as it has been used in scholarly and policy debates about gender and climate change. Drawing on discourse analysis of global climate change debates, and interviews with climate change activists and academics, it explores what it means to think of women as “vulnerable” to climate change and how this intersects with struggles over agency, livelihood security, physical well-being, and procedural justice. Initial findings suggest that women are overwhelmingly depicted by scholars, policymakers, the media, and other actors as vulnerable- either directly or indirectly. At the same time, interviews with women working on climate change issues suggest that while they may see gendered marginalization leading to uneven experiences of climate change impacts, they do not see themselves as necessarily vulnerable beings. The project seeks to explore what roles women are expected to play in climate change, and how might this differ from their own understanding of gender and climate change connections?