



DEVELOPING RADIO PARTNERS

## Focus: Climate Change and Pregnant Women

Climate change affects people differently.

The focus of this bulletin is to discuss the effects of climate change on pregnant women.

The increased intensity and frequency of weather extremes has brought with it increased damages to infrastructure and more diseases and deaths. Climate change has also created food shortages – which is especially difficult for children and pregnant women -- who need to be eating healthy foods to make sure their unborn babies are getting proper nutrition.

Climate change can also affect their livelihoods.

Pregnant women in rural areas whose crops are dependent on rainfall may not get the crop yields they need – leading to shortages of food for their families and to sell to make a living.

Low crop yields and food shortages are difficult for all, but for pregnant women – it means the health of their babies is affected – and children, of course, are the country's future generation.

# The Weekly Information Resource Bulletin

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- Bring listeners in the project area the latest information on natural resources, the environment and agriculture
- Focus on solutions, what works and what people can do
- Encourage listeners to share both their questions and solutions (African solutions for African problems)
- Raise awareness of issues that need to be discussed to affect public policy.
- Bring the latest solutions and practices that have relevance to this region from around the world
- Identify and link other NGOs working in the region share the project interests and goals
- Give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on these issues

## The Problem: Climate Change and Pregnant Women

When severe weather strikes, it is pregnant women across Zambia who are often most affected, particularly in rural areas. That's because access to health clinics is mostly cut off as a result of heavy rains. The cost of transport and distance from a clinic is one of the most critical barriers for women seeking prenatal care and even the delivery of their babies in a health care facility.

A World Health Organization study in Gambia found that a rise in temperatures increases the risk of transmission of malaria, which already causes 300 million acute illnesses and kills one million people every year

Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable to malaria as they are twice as 'appealing' to malaria-

-carrying mosquitoes as non-pregnant women, since their immune systems are weaker.

Pregnant women are also subjected to long walks to the nearest wells or to collect bundles of firewood for their cook stoves. In each case, they are forced to carry heavy pots of water – or large bundles of firewood.

This is something they shouldn't be doing while pregnant as it can harm them and their unborn baby.

With a rapidly changing climate, women may have to carry water or wood during extremely hot weather.

If they don't drink enough water or are exposed to extreme heat, for even a short period of time, it can lead to dehydration – or even heat stroke --which can put the mother and the unborn child at risk.

## Activities for Journalists

Pregnant women are affected by climate change in various ways. One of the areas that can be cited is the area of sanitation -- particularly related to toilets and drinking water. When pregnant women are not given proper sanitation they may acquire diseases such as diarrhea that may lead to loss of their unborn child.

Water is a resource that is affected by environmental degradation. Shallow wells are often contaminated with sewage waste since many of them are dug near toilets. Drinking contaminated water can lead to all sorts of health issues -- including diarrhea -- and pregnant women are particularly vulnerable -- threatening the life of the mother and her baby.

In order to reduce the effects of climate change on pregnant women there is need to make them aware, before they are pregnant, of the dangers some of their activities have on the environment. For instance, most women are involved in the collection of firewood. Deforestation can lead to severe flooding or drought.

They and their community should consider alternatives -- such as low cost energy efficient braziers that don't consume a lot of charcoal.

There should be partnerships with the local health providers to educate pregnant women on developing awareness and information campaigns about climate change and its effects especially in the rural areas.

There is also a need to build proper drainage systems. When the rains come -- and there is improper drainage -- human and animal fecal matter can easily flow into the drinking water supply -- creating a health hazard.

Communities should launch hand washing campaigns that encourage everyone to wash their hands after using the toilet or when preparing food so as to avoid diseases. Washing hands with soap reduces the risk of getting diseases.

Encourage listeners, especially men, to escort their wives to antenatal visits and learn what is taught during the sessions. Your station could do a program featuring women who have gone to their local clinic for an antenatal exam and share with your listeners what they were taught about hygiene.

Interview an environmental expert on the impact that climate change is having on women. Are there fuel alternatives available in your community? How have women throughout the community been affected by climate change?

Interview a health expert about the health risks pregnant women are exposed to when forced to carry water over long distances. Why should women who are pregnant not be carrying heavy buckets? How do they put their baby at risk?

### Useful Links

Mr. Emmanuel Mutamba, Green Living Movement, 0977891826

Mr. ChilesheMusonda, Zambia Climate Change Network, 0977226277

Dr. Benson Zulu, University teaching hospital, 0972229682

<http://www.who.int/phe/en/>

[http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/zambia\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/zambia_statistics.html)

[http://www.healthpartners-int.co.uk/our\\_projects/documents/MAMaZBRIEFINGN\\_OTE041111Final.pdf](http://www.healthpartners-int.co.uk/our_projects/documents/MAMaZBRIEFINGN_OTE041111Final.pdf)

[http://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/reports/gender\\_climate\\_change/en/](http://www.who.int/globalchange/publications/reports/gender_climate_change/en/)