

Reading: The Global Water Crisis and Gender Inequality

Women and girls are currently bearing the **brunt** of global water shortages. According to a recent United Nations report, the lack of access to clean water and safe **sanitation** is not just an environmental issue; it is a major barrier to the economic and social development of many countries.

In more than 70% of rural households without access to piped water, women are responsible for collection. Globally, women and girls spend a staggering 250 million hours every single day fetching water. This massive time commitment prevents many from attending school or earning an income, trapping families in a cycle of poverty.

The Role of Climate Change

The climate crisis is significantly **exacerbating** these existing inequalities. UN data shows that a 1°C rise in temperature reduces the income of female-headed households by 34% more than those headed by men. Furthermore, as water sources dry up, women must travel further, increasing their weekly labor by nearly an hour compared to men.

Khaled El-Enany, Director General of UNESCO, emphasizes that improving water **governance**—the way water resources are managed—is essential for progress. "Ensuring women's participation in water management is a key driver for **sustainable development**," he stated. "When women have equal access to water, everyone benefits."

Health and Education

A lack of proper facilities **disproportionately** affects young women. In a survey of 40 lower-income countries, approximately 10 million adolescent girls missed school or work because they lacked access to private toilets. Furthermore, poor hygiene in medical clinics leads to unnecessary deaths during childbirth. Beyond health, the physical journey to collect water exposes women to the risk of gender-based violence.

Economic Barriers and Land Rights

Economic inequality is also tied to land **tenure**—the legal right to own or use land. In many regions, water rights are linked to land ownership. Because men often own twice as much land as women, women are frequently excluded from decisions regarding water use in agriculture. Additionally, women are under-represented in the workforce; fewer than one in five employees at water **utilities** are female.

A Path Forward

When communities recognize these challenges, the results can be transformative. In rural Kenya, for example, a project that involved women in drilling wells and managing water committees led to healthier children and the creation of small businesses. By valuing the time women invest in securing water and including them in decision-making, society can begin to solve this global injustice.

Source: Adapted from "Women and girls bearing brunt of water shortages globally, UN warns," The Guardian (2026).

Vocabulary

1) Using your dictionary, provide the definitions of the words in bold. Write the part of speech, the definition and an example of your own:

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

d) _____

e) _____

f) _____

g) _____

h) _____

2) Complete the following sentences using the vocabulary words from exercise 1. Change the word form (e.g., plural or tense) if necessary.

a) The lack of modern _____ in rural clinics often leads to the spread of preventable diseases.

b) Rising sea levels will likely _____ the existing housing crisis in coastal cities.

c) Because they rely on subsistence farming, women often bear the _____ of sudden droughts.

d) Secure land _____ is vital for farmers who want to invest in long-term irrigation systems.

e) The local water _____ is responsible for maintaining the pipes and ensuring water quality.