

Climate Change and Gender Inequality

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Abstract

In an effort to help address one of the major issues the world is facing today, this paper attempts to find climate change mitigation strategies which we can develop to limit climate change and reduce our carbon footprint, through addressing gender inequality, another prominent global issue. Factors such as excessive carbon emission, inadequate management of natural resources, and limited utilization of renewable energy significantly contribute to the exacerbation of climate change, which can lead to multiple impacts including but not limited to droughts, floods, and deforestation. These repercussions not only extend to the economic sphere leading to job losses, reduced income, and scarcity of natural resources but has huge hidden effects on our society in multiple ways, such as sexual violence, human trafficking, child marriage, and most importantly gender inequality. Accordingly, addressing gender inequality can have the potential of benefiting the society as a whole by, for example, improving women's education, economically empowering them while increasing their decision making sphere, and allowing for greater policy influence. This in turn can lead to significant reduction in climate change through enabling educated women to gain increased awareness of the importance of addressing the climate catastrophe, become more attuned to the importance of protecting natural resources, and utilize influential roles that can shape strategies for combating climate change. In essence, findings prove that by comprehending the consequences of climate change on gender disparities and recognizing the potential of reducing gender inequality to combat climate change, we can be able to gain insights into effective strategies for addressing these intertwined challenges as each of these significant global issues becomes vital in helping us effectively address the other.

Introduction

Gender and Climate Change, two topics originally thought not to be related to each other, whereas they are extremely interconnected. The world has been playing an active and prominent role towards addressing gender inequality and climate change, but there have been very few points

of convergence between the two issues. Unfortunately, each challenge is being viewed independently with no regards that they are both correlated. However, this paper will argue that indeed, we can't fight climate change without simultaneously fighting for gender equality. In fact, gender equality can help us in overcoming many pressing challenges, most urgently, those concerning climate change—a serious and an intimidating global challenge. Hence, aside from the basic solutions, such as controlling emissions, plastic use and disposal and other such changes, climate change can be most effectively controlled and reduced from a new perspective, a gender related perspective, which can have the potential to open our eyes to solutions that would end our fear of climate change and many other environmental problems.

According to Jamie L. Gloor, “a real progress on environmental sustainability requires solutions that also incorporate social sustainability, and in particular, gender equity” (2022). Gender justice can, thus, play a major role in helping us find climate change mitigation strategies through empowering women and gender non-conforming individuals—socially, economically, politically, and psychologically—to contribute their talents to global prosperity. In addition, it will enable women's voices regarding Climate Change to be heard and respected, as women are one of the most affected and underserved groups during this crisis of climate change. Women are increasingly perceived as being more susceptible to the effects of climate change than males, primarily because women represent the majority of the world's impoverished and are proportionately more reliant on imperiled natural resources (UN Women, 2022). Hence, by looking into climate change from a gender related perspective, we will be able to identify the importance of involving women in playing a role and acting against this crisis. To this end, in order to be able to tackle this environmental problem, we need to approach it from the social perspective of gender, which will enable us to address two of the most important issues the world is facing today: Gender Inequality and Climate Change.

Overview of the correlation between climate change and gender inequality – Hidden Effects

To begin, we must first have a thorough understanding of the relationship between gender and the climate catastrophe and how it particularly impacts women. Due to the discrepancy and gender gap between males and females, climate change has been causing disproportionate effects on women. For instance, women in low and lower-middle income countries depend more on, yet have less access to, natural resources and agriculture labor. In these countries, agriculture has been mostly feminized in the sense that it is the most important employment sector for women as they work hard to secure income and resources for their families (UN Women, 2022). Women are, therefore, more affected by the effects of climate change, such as drought and erratic rainfall, due to their greater reliance

on agriculture for their resources. As a result, gender-based violence is becoming more prevalent globally due to environmental deterioration and increased competition for scarce resources (UN Women, 2022). Hence, as climate change drives conflict across the world, women become the ones who face increased vulnerabilities to all forms of gender-based violence, including but not limited to conflict-related to sexual violence, human trafficking, child marriage, and more, which comprise some of the main hidden effects of climate change. Accordingly, gender-based violence and discrimination is used to seize control over natural resources and to diminish the efforts of women who are attempting to work towards a safe and healthy environment. “Women are criminalized and silenced. They are threatened and stigmatized. They are at additional risk of gender-based violence. And many are even killed,” (Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights). Hence, gender-based violence emerges as a highly overlooked consequence of climate change due to the fact that these two challenges are commonly perceived as uncorrelated. According to UN Women (2022), these climate risks are even more severe for underrepresented and minor groups, such as indigenous and Afro-descendent women and girls, older women, LGBTIQ+ people, women and girls with disabilities, migrant women, and those living in rural, remote, conflict and disaster-prone areas. Thus, it becomes crucial to realize and acknowledge these hidden effects of climate change in order to effectively prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls and to ensure that no one is being left behind or marginalized in our efforts of addressing this climate catastrophe. Therefore, considerations of gender and environment become crucial to our ability to achieve a just and sustainable future, as gender inequalities, such as weak rights to own land and reduced access to energy, water, and sanitation facilities for women can have severe negative impacts on the environment and our sustainable development. For instance, without access and control over natural resources, women are less resilient to climate shocks and become compelled to adopt unsustainable coping strategies which can exacerbate the negative impacts of climate change. Consequently, integrating gender into the global environmental agenda becomes significantly essential to strive for a healthier planet for all.

To this end, on average, women typically have smaller carbon footprints than men, more responsible attitudes towards climate change, and greater interest in protecting the environment (Kennedy et al, 2013). Despite of this, they are not given a chance to contribute their efforts to the wellbeing of the environment, even though they can be capable of making significant contributions as change-makers in adaptation, mitigation, and response to the numerous challenges brought on by climate change. Hence, while women are considered among the most susceptible groups to the climate change effects due to socio-economic disparities, their presence and leadership can significantly strengthen the worlds action towards climate change. Therefore, ensuring the

sustainability of the future requires eliminating constraints to participation while expanding opportunities for women to contribute in addressing this climate catastrophe. According to Kwauk et al (2019), research demonstrates how gender equality, especially through the achievement of universal girls' education and girls' rights, can be a powerful force against further environmental damage and climate change.

Gender Related Solutions to Climate Change

Gender inequality has been evident in every aspect including but not limited to education, workplace, social life/relationships, marriage, and more. It's clearly evident how men are being prioritized in every single way, how men are dominating, and how women and young girls tend to struggle on an everyday basis as a result of climate change even though they might not be contributing to the current levels of greenhouse gases as men do. According to Daggett (2018), manhood is inextricably more linked to the consumption and control of fossil fuels, as opposed to womanhood. Yet and despite of this, patriarchal masculinity which encompasses those ideas and practices that emphasize the superiority of masculinity over femininity and the authority of men over women is still being clearly practiced in today's attitude towards combating climate change. Hegemonic masculinity has been the idealized form in our world today, in which toughness, competitiveness, and subordination of women's rights are being praised.

In light of this, education stands out as a prominent domain in which gender inequality persists while it holds the potential to serve as a key solution in addressing climate change. Many girls nowadays do not enjoy their rights of engaging with nor participating in education as their place is confined to being solely at home. According to Kwauk et al (2019), gender roles and responsibilities confine women's activities and mobility within the domestic sphere; traditions and laws limit women's access to natural, financial, and social capital, thereby impeding their ability to cope with climate shocks and adapt to climate change; and societal norms inhibit women's abilities to access information, knowledge, skills, and opportunities for building resilience which could be vital for survival during and after weather-related disasters.

Consequently, for a long time now, young women have been consistently deprived of equal educational opportunities that have been available to men. Even though the gender gap in education has narrowed recently, significant disparities still persist across levels of education. For instance, the proportion of children who never enrolled in any type of education has remained substantial, impacting more females than males. According to UNICEF (2020), "Worldwide, 129 million girls are out of school." Hence, these large discrepancies in females' access to schooling could in fact lead to several negative impacts, not only on women but also the whole world. According to Bertocchi and Bozzano (2020), the

limitations imposed on female education contribute to a substantial increase in female illiteracy, which can have wide-ranging implications for the world and the environment. For instance, high rates of female illiteracy significantly reduce climate change literacy, leading to female citizens being unable to make informed and responsible decisions with regards to actions that can have a significant impact on climate conditions. Hence, gender inequality mainly in the form of uneven access to education can cause several detrimental implications and catastrophic impacts on climate change in the long run and vice-versa. Therefore, ensuring equal access to education for young girls becomes of utmost importance as to enable them to acquire a developed and conscious understanding of climate change in order to have the capability of effectively acting towards tackling this pressing global crisis.

Accordingly, equitable access to education can equip women with the information, skills and resources to lead climate action at multiple levels: protecting themselves and their families; fostering climate-smart farms and businesses; and bringing their powerful voices to decision making at national and international levels. According to Kwauk and Braga (2017), “For every additional year of schooling a girl receives on average, her country’s resilience to climate disasters can be expected to improve by 3.2 points.” Hence, educational equity becomes the key for women’s equal participation in male dominated green sector jobs, which can significantly enhance their green innovation and enable for effective policymaking. This clearly demonstrates the direct connection between education and female unemployment, which in turn can be associated with climate change, presenting another substantial gendered solution pertaining to employment in the context of addressing climate change. The rise in female unemployment rates is, in fact, a major significant drawback as a result of gender inequality and unequal access to education. Being discriminated against as a young girl in school would undoubtedly lead to a significant disadvantage as an adult woman. For instance, the enormous disadvantage that school-age girls encounter in pursuing their education hinders their ability as adult women to pursue careers in the workforce, often leading them to end up working in low-skilled and degrading occupations, such as fruit pickers, etc. As a result, uneducated females would certainly be denied the opportunity to demonstrate and apply their talents and skills towards climate change mitigation strategies. These barriers women face are being further exacerbated through the uncertainty and instability brought on by climate change. Moreover, workplace regulations and practices such as unpaid care/work burdens, gender segregated occupations, wage gaps and gender-based violence generate

and aggravate additional barriers to women’s economic empowerment.

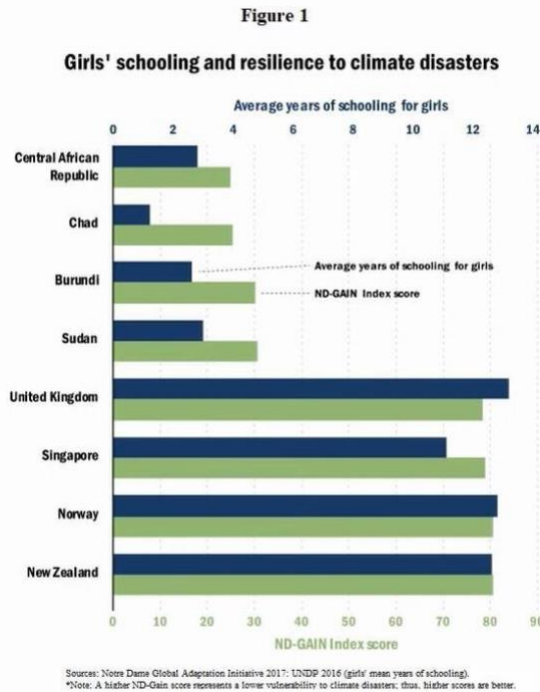


FIGURE 1.

According to Livingstone and Jenkins (2021), evidence suggests that addressing these gender-specific barriers and facilitators to women’s economic empowerment, as well as increasing women's access to and control over adequate employment opportunities and financial resources, can improve our climatic and environmental outcomes in diverse ways. For instance, it has been proven that women’s leadership and participation in decision-making increases the effectiveness and efficiency of climate funding, strengthens climate innovation, and produces stronger climate, environmental and business outcomes (Biegel and Lambin, 2021). Additionally, women’s leadership and representation in parliaments has been shown to result in lower carbon dioxide emissions as they implement stronger climate change policies (Livingstone and Jenkins, 2021). Further, companies with more gender balanced leadership had improved performance and embraced more environmentally friendly and sustainable business practices (Biegel and Lambin, 2021). Thus, reducing gender discrepancy will significantly benefit industries by allowing them to have a larger female employment share relative to other industries. According to Bertay (2020), a sample of industry-employment statistics reveals that 21 high-female-share industries grow considerably quicker in nations with stronger gender equality.

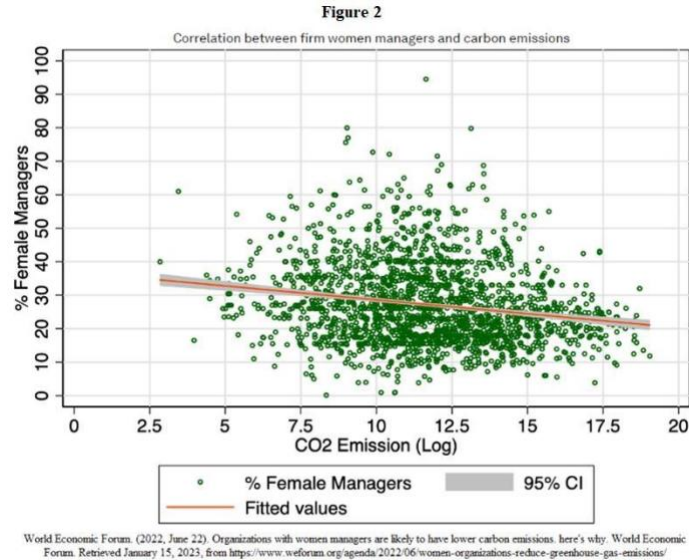


FIGURE 2.

Despite of these benefits, women's reduced involvement in work still persists till this day, which can, thus, have a profoundly adverse impact on our global climatic conditions. It has further been causing an unbalanced environment in the sense that men are the only ones in charge of shaping the agenda and taking climate actions, while women are being left behind. According to Nagel and Lies (2022), historically and at present, men have dominated commerce, science, and politics which represent three realms of climate change: cause, comprehension, and control." However, we need to promote equality in the workplace, as higher gender equality will boost our ability of combating climate change mainly through enabling for better allocation of a valuable and vital resource: female labor.

In addition, early marriage represents another indirect adverse impact on climate change as a result of gender inequality. In compliance with UNFPA (2021), "Many of the areas with the highest current rates of child marriage are also those facing the greatest effects of climate change and other environmental crises." Hence, it becomes crucial to comprehend this kind of correlation and its potential in providing us with a valuable solution to the climate catastrophe. According to Kwauk et al (2019), girls are at risk of being married off early in an effort by households to handle the financial burdens and/or female safety concerns imposed by the environmental challenges and aftermath of weather-related disasters. Early marriage, thus, becomes a highly complicated issue in the context of climate change. It is rooted in gender inequality and the belief that women are inferior to men. It is exacerbated by factors of poverty, lack of education, harmful social norms and practices, and insecurity. Hence, child marriage can further deprive girls of their education, which denies them one of their main opportunities in life. This practice can also isolate

young girls and exclude them from engaging with their communities, leading to detrimental effects on the community’s well being.

Accordingly, since child marriage impacts a girl’s health, future and family, it imposes substantial costs on the climate, too, with major implications for development and prosperity. For instance, according to UNICEF (2022), early marriage is greatly interconnected with high fertility rates, contributing to a significant population increase. This can, thus, have an adverse implications on our climate conditions in the sense that population growth and increase in consumption frequently lead to elevated emissions of greenhouse gasses, contributing to climate change, (Evans & Larsen, 2021). Consequently, rapid population increase exacerbates the effects of climate change by straining resources and increasing exposure to climate-related dangers, especially in low-resource areas. Accordingly, this demonstrates the substantial correlation between child marriage and climate change, emphasizing the importance and cruciality of intervening in child marriage as a means of mitigating and preventing its occurrence.

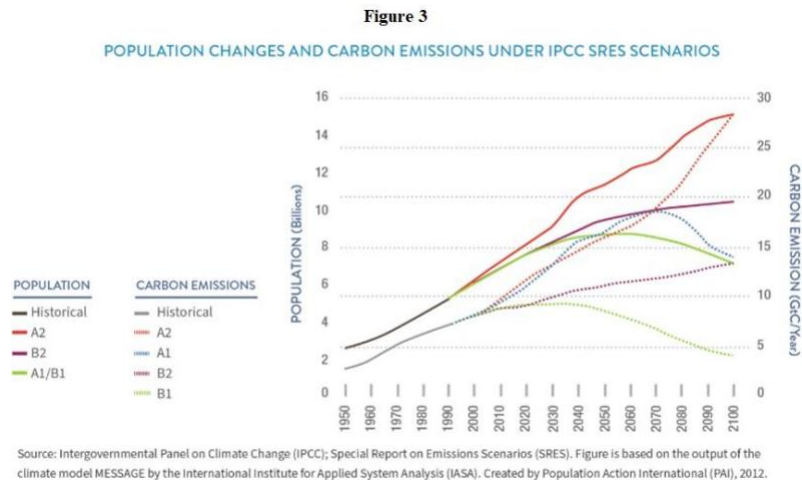


FIGURE 3.

Finally, gender inequality mainly in terms of lack of access to education and low levels of employment can ultimately lead to very high poverty rates, which could be detrimental to the state of our climate. For instance, when women are denied education and employment opportunities, they are more likely to face economic hardships and limited resources, which perpetuates a cycle of poverty. Consequently, high poverty rates frequently lead to individuals exerting significant environmental pressure in a variety of ways, including but not limited to increased strain on land usage, excessive soil exploitation, and deforestation, among other things, putting a lot of strain on the ecosystem due to their direct rely on the environment for survival (“Poverty & the

Environment,” n.d.). As a result, since forests and trees store carbon, when they are damaged or removed entirely, the carbon they have stored in their tissues will potentially be released back into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide and play a substantial role in accelerating climate change. Therefore, poverty leads the most impoverished individuals worldwide to contribute to the deterioration of our climate conditions rather than actively addressing climate change.

Hence, focusing on addressing gender inequality would naturally prompt us to tackle the issue of high poverty rates, thereby offering an additional hidden solution to combating climate change through poverty alleviation. For example, when women become more educated, they can be capable of making decisions that can have a cascading positive impact and can help break the cycle of generational poverty. Women with greater levels of education tend to be healthier, participate more in the formal labor market, earn higher incomes, have fewer children, marry at a later age, and enable better health care and education for their children, which can all be beneficiary to the state of our environment in multiple ways, (World Bank, 2022). Hence, it becomes crucial to grasp the linkage between gender inequality, poverty, and climate change in order to be able to address the climate catastrophe through the right track.

According to what is stated above, gender inequality in all forms and types have the potential to undermine communal cooperation and solidarity, as it can diminish women's engagement in society and limit women's voices to be heard in the community. Hence, by advocating for gender equality across all aspects, we will be investing in the next generation of females to gain effective and diverse leadership skills to shape policy solutions. Women's leadership is correlated with positive environmental action, as well as increased adaptation and resilience to climate disasters. For instance, according to Livingstone and Jenkin (2021), women's political leadership is associated with more stringent climate regulations policies and results in lower CO₂ emissions. Educated women become also better equipped to innovate and promote green technologies and lead on a national and worldwide level in the pursuit of sustainable growth.

Therefore, gender equity will be critical to the world's progress, as females' equal rights is a crucial foundation and without it, many female youngsters will be unable to reach their full potential as adults and positively contribute to the wellbeing of the world.

Opportunities and actions for women's empowerment as a response to climate change

To this end, despite experiencing higher rates of mortality from climate and environmental disasters, facing increased domestic abuse and added stress from caregiving responsibilities during and after climate-related catastrophes, enduring greater income loss and slower economic recovery

from climatic hardships, and being more likely to experience interrupted schooling and forced early marriages due to climate-related disruptions, women are still denied the rights and opportunities to engage and participate in climate-related actions and decision-making.

Hence, in light of what has been stated so far, addressing and tackling gender inequality emerges as a vital component in combating climate change. Therefore, it is imperative that we comprehend the means of advancing gender equality and how we can contribute to endorsing solutions developed by and for women. Strategies for empowering women throughout the world can have several consequent positive impacts on the community and the whole world. Thus, it's necessary to ensure that women are equipped with the knowledge and skills – as well as the means and motivation – to access opportunities that would aid them in contributing to climate change mitigation.

As a result, it is essential to comprehend whether existing climate change policies integrate the inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable and marginalized groups, such as women, and to identify ways to actively contribute to the promotion of gender equality in addressing climate change. Unfortunately, research demonstrates clear evidence that women are being utterly disregarded in today's strategies for combating climate change, despite their potential vital contributions to our ability in addressing this global catastrophe. According to the US Department of State (2022), “less than 2% of climate strategies mention girls.” One of the primary reasons behind this is that promoting for females' equal rights is not considered a crucial aspect in climate change mitigation strategies. For instance, according to Kwauk et al (2019), many nations' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) overlook the importance of women and girls' rights in their plans of combatting climate change. This significantly prioritizes men in taking climate-related actions while inadvertently neglecting women who are inherently more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to their limited leadership opportunities and decision-making capacity.

Accordingly, in order for us to effectively address this critical environmental challenge, women should be taken into account in each and every element, in each and every conversation/discussion, and in each and every conference we conduct in an effort of addressing climate change. Their needs should be satisfied, their contributions should be valued, and their equality should be sought for in order to be able to live in a safe and secure environment. Investing in young girls and women becomes, thus, vital in helping us tackle climate change.

Hence, we should work towards offering opportunities that can ensure girls and women are able to claim their roles in all efforts to conserve the environment and tackle climate change. Several opportunities and strategies include but not limited to ensuring inclusion of women in all climate-related actions and policies, improving and enforcing land rights, promoting and funding women-based solutions and initiatives, engaging

women's organizations in climate processes, building women's resilience to climate shocks, securing jobs in green sectors for women, and enhancing women's education and skills. Further, while we must invest in girls' education, we must also help transform the educational system. In a time of such climate emergency, providing high quality gender-responsive climate education becomes extremely essential. In other words, education should witness a major change in the curriculum to be more inclusive of climate-related topics. This would ensure that the next generation becomes well aware of this climate crisis and equipped with the necessary knowledge to actively contribute to the effective mitigation of climate change.

Conversely, the fight against climate change can significantly contribute to the promotion of gender equality. In essence, these two global issues are strongly interconnected and should be tackled simultaneously, as progress in one area can lead to advancements in the other. It becomes evident that just as gender equality efforts contribute to combating climate change, the reverse is also true. By addressing climate change, we can limit gender inequality and empower women through various means. For instance, developing climate change solutions can provide opportunities for equal education and employment, reduce instances of sexual and gender-based violence, and improve the lives of those disproportionately affected by climate change, namely women, as highlighted in this paper. Hence, it becomes clear that addressing each of these issues is crucial for effectively addressing the other.

Conclusion

Therefore, recognizing the comprehensive and interconnected nature of these challenges and their solutions will be a transformative factor. This paper has demonstrated powerful linkages between providing girls with quality education, ensuring the fulfillment of their rights, and fostering the necessary societal changes needed to reverse global warming trends. Yet, existing climate strategies tend to overlook this evidence and fail to recognize and prioritize the significant potential of gender equality in addressing the climate crisis.

Therefore, gender inequality, particularly in education and employment, becomes one of the most pressing and critical concerns confronting the world today, with significant implications on the environment. The wide educational disparity between men and women can have various repercussions. Additionally, the enormous workplace discrimination against women in our society may lead to a number of environmental setbacks. This inequality primarily hinders female youth from growing up understanding the concept of freedom, equality, and the ability to lead and take positive climate actions. Therefore, gender equality is vital and should be prioritized on politicians' agendas. Policies aimed at ensuring a level playing field for women, such as improving women's

legal rights, women's health, access to education, financial services, and technology, are not only a matter of human rights, equity, and social justice, but also relevant policy levers to help mitigate climate change, benefiting the world as a whole.

In conclusion, advocating for gender equity will enable the world to address the destruction of habitats, the environment, animals, and finally, humanity itself through embracing diverse and innovative solutions to climate change and other environmental issues. Global challenges cannot be tackled without the participation and cooperation of everyone on Earth. Only through such collective efforts can we create a world characterized by prosperity, freedom, and equality.

Biography

Omar Basyouny is a current undergraduate student at The American University in Cairo (AUC) majoring in Mechanical Engineering with intended concentrations in Design and Mechatronics as well as a planned minor in Psychology. Omar is a current Tomorrow's Leaders Gender Scholar and a former Green Environment Scholar at AUC. In addition, his international exposure and equipment with diverse cultural backgrounds earned him the title of being a Cultural Scholar at AUC. Omar's diverse areas of interest include Mechanics, Aerospace, Astrophysics, Psychology, and Gender. He has a strong passion for sustainability and green technologies which makes him willing to make a significant positive impact through his career not only as an engineer but also as a social scientist.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Dina Makram-Ebeid, one of the best and most knowledgeable professors in the Department of Sociology, Egyptology and Anthropology at the American University in Cairo (AUC), for her efforts and valuable time in reviewing and providing constructive feedback on my Research Paper.

Further, taking the "Gender & Sexuality" course with Dr. Dina at AUC has been deeply inspiring and enriching in multiple ways and enabled me to truly gain a developed sense of awareness regarding all the gender-related aspects tackled in this paper.

Last but not least, as a Tomorrow's Leaders Gender Scholar, I would like to extend a very special thanks to this exceptional scholarship team, particularly Ms. Hind Alhelou, the program officer, for the consistent support throughout this research process.

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