Chapter 11
Being a Rural Woman During Climate Change:
An Analysis Based on the Concept of Ubuntu

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ABSTRACT

Climate change affects all living things, and especially women in rural areas. Focusing on human-environment interaction, ubuntu offers a holistic perspective to interventions to reduce the destructive effects of not only the social environment but also the physical environment. The main purpose of the present study is to evaluate the impact of climate change on the lives of rural women with a bio-psycho-social perspective, in the focus of ubuntu philosophy, and offer social work intervention suggestions.

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INTRODUCTION

Posing an increasingly serious global threat, climate change is aggravating destructive environmental crises such as drought, desertification, hurricanes, excessive precipitation, melting of glaciers, forest fires, and erosion. In addition, it causes social problems such as poverty, loss of property and life, adverse effects on agricultural activities, the spread of infectious diseases, and forced migration (Kılıç, 2009). While these problems and changes were seen as natural phenomena in the past, they are now viewed as a result of human impact, and thus related to anthropogenic factors (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2001). In particular, human efforts to dominate the nature and the resulting destructive activities affect the natural habitats of other living things and cause deterioration in biodiversity (United Nations [UN], 2021). This deterioration has now reached to the point of "climate crisis", turning into a common problem faced by all the nations (UN, 2020).

Rural areas can be defined as out-of-town areas with low population density, widespread agricultural activities, and unique social structure (Abukan & Yıldırım, 2019). Being dependent on activities based on natural resources in these regions poses a threat to food security, livelihoods, health and physical infrastructure (Akinbami, 2021). The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) underlines that the severity of this impact differs significantly according to gender and reports that men migrate to urban areas with the desire to find alternative livelihoods (FAO, 2011), which increases the burden on women in rural areas both inside and outside the home and puts them in harsher conditions than men (Meyiwa, Maseti, Ngubane et al., 2014). In recent years, these problems have been discussed in the context of climate change, regarding social work practices (Dominelli, 2013; Gray, Coates & Hetherington, 2012; Nyahunda, 2021).

Ecological injustice created by environmental degradation and unjust distribution of natural resources, together with unsustainable development models, exacerbate structural inequalities and affect low-income individuals/communities (Dominelli, 2013). The inequalities and injustices caused by these effects, especially in Africa and poor countries with similar characteristics, are at the center of the *ubuntu* philosophy. *Ubuntu* highlights many basic values and principles of social work, such as social justice, human rights, equality, ecological justice, solidarity, spirituality, social change, human dignity, and respect for all (Chigangaidze, 2021; Chigangaidze, 2022; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). In addition to these values, *ubuntu* focuses on the interaction between humans and the environment (Chibvongodze, 2016; Murphy, 1994). Thus, *ubuntu* offers a holistic perspective for practices to include groups that are socio-economically disadvantaged due to the destructive effects of their physical environment (Chigangaidze, 2021; Chigangaidze, 2022).

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