

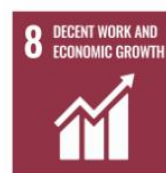
# Women's Rights, Climate Change and Environment: Materializing Climate Action on the Ground



Research Paper  
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**GENEVA CENTRE  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS  
ADVANCEMENT AND  
GLOBAL DIALOGUE**



## Table of Contents

<b><i>Introduction</i></b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.1 Climate and environmental disaster: impact on women and girls</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1.2 Defining approaches to the global challenge</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1.3 A human rights approach</b>	<b>5</b>
<b><i>Intersecting Challenges in Policy Making</i></b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.1 Identifying and understanding of vulnerability for women</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.2 Gender mainstreaming in policy making</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2.3 Women’s agency and participation in designing a just and equal transition</b>	<b>9</b>
<b><i>Implementation of Adaptation, Mitigation and other Response Plans</i></b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3.1 International cooperation and climate finance</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3.4 Labor and economic alteration</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>3.5 Technologies, education and training</b>	<b>14</b>
<b><i>Key areas of work and recommendations</i></b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.1 Obstacles on the ground</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.2 Further considerations</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4.3 Recommendations for policy-makers</b>	<b>16</b>

## Introduction

### 1.1 Climate and environmental disaster: impact on women and girls

The nexus between climate change, environmental crises and women's rights constitutes a critical human rights issue globally. On the road to Sharm-el-Sheikh where the COP27 will be held from 6 to 18 November 2022, high-level talks are in preparation with the goal of "planning for implementation"<sup>1</sup>. Today, the impact of anthropogenic climate change and human-induced environmental damage on our societies is proven to cause irreversible changes.<sup>2</sup> Urgency has become evident, and action is recognized as necessary. Thus, the progression from phases of negotiation and formulation of environmental action to their operationalization requires thorough evaluation. So far at the global level, actions have been overall lacking. The World Resources Institute reported that none of the commitments made in the Paris agreement are on track to be realized by 2030.<sup>3</sup> UN political Affairs Rosemary A. DiCarlo stated at a UN Security Council debate: "Most important, for all of us, is the recognition that deeds must follow words. Major armies and businesses have long recognized the need to prepare for climate-related risks, rightfully assessing climate change as a threat multiplier"<sup>4</sup>.

Although the political discourse and public debate place a particular emphasis on the climate, it is because only a global collective effort can give us a chance to circumvent imminent climate breakdown.<sup>5</sup> Climate change is a critical facet of a multi-dimensional ecological crisis that entails flooding, deforestation, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, water scarcity, and air pollution along with other changes. The rapid deterioration of climate, biodiversity, water and air quality manifest in all aspects of human life including agriculture, health, migration, labor, trade, and resource governance. However, groups are disproportionately affected according to their age, geographical location, socio-economic situation, and to a great extent, gender.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Clemente-Alloza, "COP27: What You Need to Know about This Year's Big UN Climate Conference." *UN News*, 28 Oct. 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129947>.

<sup>2</sup> IPCC, 2021: Climate Change 2021: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, A. Pirani, S.L. Connors, C. Péan, S. Berger, N. Caud, Y. Chen, L. Goldfarb, M.I. Gomis, M. Huang, K. Leitzell, E. Lonnoy, J.B.R. Matthews, T.K. Maycock, T. Waterfield, O. Yelekçi, R. Yu, and B. Zhou (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom and New York, NY, USA, In press, doi:10.1017/9781009157896.

<sup>3</sup> Boehm, Sophie, et al. "State of Climate Action 2022." *World Resources Institute*, 2022, doi:10.46830/wrirpt.22.00028.

<sup>4</sup> "Climate change recognized as 'threat multiplier', UN Security Council debates its impact on peace." *Www.un.org*, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/es/news/climate-change-recognized-%E2%80%98threat-multiplier%E2%80%99-un-security-council-debates-its-impact-peace>. Accessed 27 Oct. 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Gawel, Antonia, et al. "The IPCC Report and the Need for Radical Climate Action." *World Economic Forum*, 3 Mar. 2022, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/03/what-the-ipcc-report-tells-us-about-the-need-for-radical-climate-action/>.

<sup>6</sup> IPCC, 2022: Summary for Policymakers [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, M. Tignor, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem (eds.)]. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 3–33, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.001.

Environmental issues put women at greater risk of gender-based violence<sup>7</sup> and have a mutual causality with conflict.<sup>8</sup> Indigenous women, especially, often endure life-changing and catastrophic consequences related to climate change. Therefore, adopting an intersectional approach to women's rights is necessary. The IPCC reported in 2001 states that "the impact of climate change will fall disproportionately upon developing countries and the poor persons within all countries..."<sup>9</sup>. The impact on the most vulnerable will in turn affect the remainder of societies and impede the ability of communities to counter climate change. Women and girls are confronted with specifically gendered issues which come in conjuncture, and multiply, with other crises. This impact not only constitutes an unfair consequence of human activity for women and girls; it also entails far-reaching effects on societies. For instance, according to the International Labor Organization, women and girls make up more than 40 percent of the agricultural labor force.<sup>10</sup> The impact of climate change, poorer soil and water scarcity on women will have long-lasting adverse effects on mental health, household welfare and the economic sustainability, and community life.<sup>11</sup>

Together with a community-wide impact, the effect of climate change will setback women's participation in climate action. Verona Collantes, Senior Gender Specialist for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) stated that "gender inequality hampers women's capacity and potential to be actors of climate action"<sup>12</sup>. Asymmetrical outcomes cannot be perceived as a mere reflection of preexisting inequalities. Beyond that, they unveil defects in climate policies, as their purpose is to equip communities, groups or sectors to face and respond to environmental change, taking into account discrete obstacles.

## 1.2 Defining approaches to the global challenge

Tackling a global issue that manifests differently across territories and societies and capturing it at different levels of governance and across the fields of science and government implies a cooperation among actors at the highest possible level of efficiency. In order to better understand how gender-responsive action plans are realized we can identify three components which feature particular narratives, capabilities and rules: (1) implementers (states, multilateral entities, businesses or civil society), (2) their targets (local-communities, economic sectors, whole economies, or government agencies), and (3) governance level (local, municipal, regional, transnational or international). While climate actions can stem from various combinations among those three categories, they will have different direct or indirect bearings on women's rights and gender equality. Connectedly, academic literature has identified two types of responses to combat climate change: mitigation and adaptation.

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<sup>7</sup> OECD. *Gender and the Environment: Building Evidence and Policies to Achieve the SDGs*. OECD, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Alam, Mayesha, et al. *Impact and Agency in Human Rights, Security, and Economic Development Women and Climate Change Expert Advisers*. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2015.

<sup>9</sup> IPCC, 2001; Caesens and Rodríguez, *Climate change and the right to food: a comprehensive study*, 25

<sup>10</sup> International Labour Office, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, & International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations. (2007). *Agricultural workers and their contribution to sustainable agriculture and rural development*.

<sup>11</sup> World Bank, *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook*. World Bank Publications, 2009, doi:10.1596/978-0-8213-7587-7.

<sup>12</sup> McCarthy, Joe. "Understanding Why Climate Change Impacts Women More Than Men." *Global Citizen*, 5 Mar. 2020, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/how-climate-change-affects-women/>.

Mitigation refers to the reduction or stabilization of the causes of environmental disaster, while adaptation can be understood as a set of changes to adjust to new or expected future conditions.<sup>13</sup>

In order to deliver responses to eminent environmental threats, various actors have converged across time. At an individual level, communities have been developing various conservation and adaptation methods in the face of natural disasters for centuries. With the increased awareness of an impending destruction of our environment, state and non-state actors across the fields of governance, finance, humanitarian aid, science and research, and civil society have in turn set up a constellation of organizations and are operating on all fronts to tackle emerging environmental challenges. International, regional, national, municipal and private entities are more and more inclined to target-based strategies against climate change, after the impulsion of the Paris Agreement. However, depending on their ambitions, they may be solely focusing on greenhouse gas emissions, excluding any societal component or assessment of social impact. In 2014, the UNFCCC adopted the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG), crystallizing the commitment of the international community to include a gender perspective in countering climate change.<sup>14</sup>

In as much as by its all-encompassing nature, the environmental crisis calls for holistic responses, women's rights must be effectively integrated into them. As societies develop governance models to organize these influences, experts are increasingly interested in the ostensible gaps between policy and implementation. The question arises, whether there is sufficient and effective coordination between decision-makers, and implementers.

### 1.3 A human rights approach

The link between human rights and the environment might seem obvious at first. To understand why environmental actions do not always promote the enjoyment of human rights, we may consider the types of actors involved and their motivations. Businesses and states might prioritize lowering GHG reduction costs and managing market risk of insurers and investment funds, with the assumption that the benefits of GHG reduction coupled with financial stability will eventually reverberate on its citizens. In reality, some action plans have come to cause adverse effects on populations, including on women.<sup>15</sup> The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has called on all states to take a rights-based approach on environmental issues. Rights related to the environment include the right to life, the right to health, the right to development, the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, the right to an adequate standard of living, human rights to safe drinking water and sanitation, and all minority rights. The United Nations Independent Expert on human rights and environment, John Knox reiterated that "All human rights

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<sup>13</sup> NASA's Global Climate Change website. "Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation." *Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet*, <https://climate.nasa.gov/solutions/adaptation-mitigation/>. Accessed 31 Oct. 2022.

<sup>14</sup> *FCCC/CP/2014/10/Add.3*, UNFCCC

<sup>15</sup> "Understanding Human Rights and Climate Change." *Submission of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to the 21st Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change*, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/COP21.pdf>.

are vulnerable to environmental degradation”<sup>16</sup>. He additionally mentioned the right to political participation, the right to freedom of speech and assembly and the right to information.

The human rights framework enables us to work out key principles of climate justice and deliver it to individuals. Furthermore, it emphasizes the differential impact of environmental degradation by distinguishing vulnerable groups and outlining the specific measures to address these inequalities. In order to amplify the principle of human rights in policy-making, some academics recommend extending the human rights approach to reparations, i.e. loss and damage.<sup>17</sup> Negotiations on this issue were inconclusive in COP26 in Glasgow<sup>18</sup> and will be tabled again in 2022 for COP27.<sup>19</sup> This would mandate existing mechanisms to monitor, promote and support the full enjoyment of the right to reparation in the context of climate change.

## Intersecting Challenges in Policy Making

### 2.1 Identifying and understanding of vulnerability for women

The IPCC defines the concept of vulnerability as a “component of risk, but also an important focus independently, improving understanding of the differential impacts of climate change on people of different gender, race, wealth, social status and other attributes”<sup>20</sup>. One of the most determining factors of vulnerability among women and men alike is geographical location. Indigenous women and men in rural societies also experience a lot more pressure from environmental deterioration.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, pregnant women and women with disabilities are disproportionately affected by climate change.<sup>22</sup>

The concept of vulnerability is extensively used across scientific and policy domains, yet it seems to carry an array of assumptions. First, the discourse on vulnerability underscores the natural

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<sup>16</sup> “Environment and Human Rights: The Link Is There, and so Is the States’ Obligation to Protect Them – UN Expert.” OHCHR, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2013/03/environment-and-human-rights-link-there-and-so-states-obligation-protect?LangID=E&NewsID=13089>.

<sup>17</sup> Toussaint, Patrick, and Adrian Martínez Blanco. “A Human Rights-Based Approach to Loss and Damage under the Climate Change Regime.” *Climate Policy*, vol. 20, no. 6, 2020, pp. 743–757, doi:10.1080/14693062.2019.1630354.

<sup>18</sup> Clemente-Alloza, Unsplash/juanma. “COP27: What You Need to Know about This Year’s Big UN Climate Conference.” *UN News*, 28 Oct. 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129947>.

<sup>19</sup> “COP27 Agenda and Documents.” Unfccc.int, <https://unfccc.int/event/cop-27>.

<sup>20</sup> Ara Begum, R., R. Lempert, E. Ali, T.A. Benjaminsen, T. Bernauer, W. Cramer, X. Cui, K. Mach, G. Nagy, N.C. Stenseth, R. Sukumar, and P. Wester, 2022: Point of Departure and Key Concepts. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* [H.-O. Pörtner, D.C. Roberts, M. Tignor, E.S. Poloczanska, K. Mintenbeck, A. Alegría, M. Craig, S. Langsdorf, S. Löschke, V. Möller, A. Okem, B. Rama (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 121–196, doi:10.1017/9781009325844.003.

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Council, Analytical study on gender-responsive climate action for the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of women, 1 May 2019, A/HRC/41/26 <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/120/13/PDF/G1912013.pdf?OpenElement>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

consequences of climate change,<sup>23</sup> thus neglecting socio-economic factors. Populations have long been inhabiting disaster-prone areas armed with reliable tools to shield themselves and their infrastructure. Only in recent decades, the rapid escalation of anthropogenic climate change exposes a lack of resilience and preparedness stemming from inadequate adaptation policies. Such a vision of vulnerability traps language in a “victim narrative” and may encumber the space for self-advocacy.

Secondly, women in developing countries and LDCs are subjected to the fantasy of a sharp North-South divide. The “woman of the South” is perceived as poor, the head of household, the only caregiver for children and older persons, and under constant threat of aggression or harassment, with each of these characteristics inferring the other.<sup>24</sup> While intersectionality is central in understanding vulnerability, the systematic representation of all-around disenfranchised women erases the diversity of experiences, and the context-specific opportunities women possess. A case study on urban-flooding in Lagos<sup>25</sup> based on interviews, showed varying results to this mainstream portrayal by investigating the different concerns and priorities of women across diverse socio-economic backgrounds. It is worth noting that this study deals with an urban and not rural population.

Knowledge sharing and dissemination of relevant information has the potential to alleviate vulnerability. Conversely, being vulnerable makes women more vulnerable. A study targeting rural women and men in Ethiopia found that the stresses women are under limits their ability to perceive changes in climate and thus to adapt in time.<sup>26</sup> Another study by Boyd, Otto and Raju<sup>27</sup> recommends changing the way we communicate climate measurements to better reflect changes in climate. It would be more informative to assess hazards at the temporal and spatial scales that are relevant from a risk and vulnerability point of view, such as looking at heatwaves that cross a particular temperature threshold in cities, on a day or a few days, rather than estimating country scale heat extremes.

## 2.2 Gender mainstreaming in policy making

Gender responsive policies and women’s participation decrease risks of conflict and advance environmental action.<sup>28</sup> Women are indispensable to building and ensuring the success of environmental policies. The integration of gender-responsive policies into climate action has advanced quite remarkably in the last few years. Many multilateral financing mechanisms, for example, require a gender assessment for the issuance of all types of funds. This is notably the case of the most

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<sup>23</sup> Raju, Emmanuel, et al. “Stop Blaming the Climate for Disasters.” *Communications Earth & Environment*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2022, doi:10.1038/s43247-021-00332-2.

<sup>24</sup> Lama, Phu Doma. “Gender Equality, Climate Change and the Myth of Participation: The Case of the Maldives.” *Asia Dialogue*, 5 Sept. 2018, <https://theasiadialogue.com/2018/09/05/gender-equality-climate-change-and-the-myth-of-participation-the-case-of-the-maldives/>.

<sup>25</sup> Ajibade, Idowu, et al. “Urban Flooding in Lagos, Nigeria: Patterns of Vulnerability and Resilience among Women.” *Global Environmental Change: Human and Policy Dimensions*, vol. 23, no. 6, 2013, pp. 1714–1725, doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2013.08.009.

<sup>26</sup> Maja, Mengistu M., et al. “Gendered Vulnerability, Perception and Adaptation Options of Smallholder Farmers to Climate Change in Eastern Ethiopia.” *Earth Systems and Environment*, 2022, doi:10.1007/s41748-022-00324-y.

<sup>27</sup> n(23)

<sup>28</sup> n(6)

predominant mechanism yet, the Green Climate Fund. Its gender policy requires a reviewed gender-assessment, active participation of women in consultations and decision-making, and monitoring of the gender policy implementation in order to issue funding.<sup>29</sup> Some governments have replicated this conditionality in regard to local governments. However, the Fund has yet to fulfill its promise to reach the most vulnerable. High standards in terms of project assessment, monitoring and compliance with highly ambitious guidelines excludes states and non-state actors which do not have sufficient institutional capacity, often the most vulnerable.<sup>30</sup>

At a national level, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) submitted to the UNFCCC outline policy agenda regarding climate change. Out of 166 NDC submissions, 60% of parties held gender-sensitive consultations with stakeholders. 75% provided information related to gender and 52% referred to gender policies and legislation.<sup>31</sup> Many countries have made significant progress in incorporating gender in climate action. As an example, Chile included a gender perspective in all policies, programmes, climate change plans and actions according to its NDC. It is unclear, however, how strong the provisions on gender are.

Overall, we can broadly identify three shortcomings to explain the gap between policy and implementation. First, women's participation does not necessarily mean women's meaningful participation nor a shift in power relations.<sup>32</sup> The multiple disadvantages borne by women under the stresses of environmental crises leave them with little latitude as political agents. This distinction between participation and power shows that while a quantitative assessment of gender representation in decision-making can inform policy needs, a qualitative assessment is also indispensable to account for the socio-economic and health barriers that undermine women's empowerment. On the other hand, when women and men are seen as equal stakeholders at an institutional and practical level, their participation yields better outcomes in terms of mitigation and adaptation.<sup>33</sup> A study on forest conservation in India and Nepal also found that older women contributed to more successful outcomes.<sup>34</sup> The age variable may have had an impact because older women possess a thorough knowledge of their environment that has developed over generations. Second, vague policies do not provide the managerial tools and concrete framework necessary for a transformative effect. The sprouting of general norms as main safeguard for women's rights, with no

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<sup>29</sup> GCF, "Decisions of the Board – twenty-fourth meeting of the Board, 12 – 14 November 2019" GCF/B.24/17 .

<sup>30</sup> Garschagen, Matthias, and Deepal Doshi. "Does Funds-Based Adaptation Finance Reach the Most Vulnerable Countries?" *Global Environmental Change: Human and Policy Dimensions*, vol. 73, no. 102450, 2022, p. 102450, doi:10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2021.102450.

<sup>31</sup> Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement, Nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement Synthesis report by the secretariat, 26 October 2022, FCCC/PA/CMA/2022/4

<sup>32</sup> n(24)

<sup>33</sup> March, 1. "Explainer: Why Women Need to Be at the Heart of Climate Action." *UN Women – Headquarters*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/03/explainer-why-women-need-to-be-at-the-heart-of-climate-action>.

<sup>34</sup> Agarwal, Bina. "Gender and Forest Conservation: The Impact of Women's Participation in Community Forest Governance." *Ecological Economics: The Journal of the International Society for Ecological Economics*, vol. 68, no. 11, 2009, pp. 2785–2799, doi:10.1016/j.ecolecon.2009.04.025.



corresponding instruments,<sup>35 36</sup> may actually do a disservice to the cause. Third, gender mainstreaming is intended to general gender responsive practices. However, the translation of national or international norms into the local-community context is challenging,<sup>37</sup> especially in countries with weak institutions where there is a dissonance between national and local governance.

Intersecting women’s rights with Indigenous rights also contributes to more effective environmental protection. According to Ms. Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, former Special Rapporteur on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, their “knowledge increases the effectiveness of adaptation measures”<sup>38</sup>.

### 2.3 Women’s agency and participation in designing a just and equal transition

There are countless examples of women-led and gender-inclusive success stories in implementing climate action. We see that when women are involved, they advocate for sustainable measures for everyone. Even when they do not have prior managerial experience, women tend to bring invaluable insights based on their multidimensional role in society.<sup>39</sup> In Niger, for instance, the Dimitra Club invites women and men to gather on an equal footing and discuss how to improve their livelihoods. Women advocated for cheaper solar pumps in order to access solar panel-irrigation technology, leading to the setup of payment plans.<sup>40</sup>

There are doubts, however, as to how practices of gender-inclusion in certain sectors can truly spill over into other areas of life. Many environmental initiatives that place women at the heart of their operationalization will take years to become customary. There are fears that in the long-term, structural inequalities will corrupt good practices and profits will be captured by men.<sup>41</sup> An understanding of specific traditions and culture are crucial in conceptualizing efficient climate action. They shape perceptions on gender-roles. Even when women are involved in transition processes, their contribution is seen as marginal and their time is less valued.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Acosta, Mariola, et al. “Discursive Translations of Gender Mainstreaming Norms: The Case of Agricultural and Climate Change Policies in Uganda.” *Women’s Studies International Forum*, vol. 74, 2019, pp. 9–19, doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2019.02.010.

<sup>36</sup> Dankelman, Irene, and Kavita Naidu. “Introduction: Gender, Development, and the Climate Crisis.” *Gender and Development*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2020, pp. 447–457, doi:10.1080/13552074.2020.1843830.

<sup>37</sup> Hudson, Bob, et al. “Policy Failure and the Policy-Implementation Gap: Can Policy Support Programs Help?” *Policy Design and Practice*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2019, pp. 1–14, doi:10.1080/25741292.2018.1540378.

<sup>38</sup> n(17)

<sup>39</sup> n(34)

<sup>40</sup> Adisa, Olumide. “Rural Women’s Participation in Solar-Powered Irrigation in Niger: Lessons from Dimitra Clubs.” *Gender and Development*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2020, pp. 535–549, doi:10.1080/13552074.2020.1833483.

<sup>41</sup> WEDO. *Gender and Cameroon’s REDD+ Road Map*. [https://wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/cameroon\\_case\\_study.pdf](https://wedo.org/wp-content/uploads/cameroon_case_study.pdf).

<sup>42</sup> ---. “Gendered Consequences of Mobility for Adaptation in Small Island Developing States: Case Studies from Maafushi and Kudafari in the Maldives.” *Island Studies Journal*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2018, pp. 111–128, doi:10.24043/isj.64.

## Implementation of Adaptation, Mitigation and other Response Plans

### 3.1 International cooperation and climate finance

Among rapidly worsening environmental conditions, climate change stands out as a global challenge that will affect all humans.<sup>43</sup> Thus, it is almost intuitive to seek to formulate a multilateral response at the global level. Historically, climate negotiations have been hampered by unending disagreements on the fairness of any potential global climate regime, thus delaying the enactment of an international joint effort to reduce GHG emissions. In this view, 194 parties including the European Union signed the Paris Agreement and pledged to keep “the global average temperature to well below 2°C (3.6o F) above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C (2.7o F) above pre-industrial levels”<sup>44</sup> in accordance with the principle of differentiated responsibility. Parties are called to submit NDCs detailing their national action plans and carbon emission previsions and update them every 5 years at a minimum. The innovative ‘bottom-down’ approach of the Paris Agreement allows to collectively create a global climate strategy, in line with the priorities and ambitions of each party. Indeed, NDCs are subjected to a general review, which enables tracking of progress. At the time of writing, only 39 out of 193 parties have communicated new or updated NDCs since 12 October 2021.

Much of the discussion around this approach lies in whether or not voluntary NDCs led to more ambitious targets and efficient cooperation, or if it allows parties, especially the biggest polluters, to slack on their responsibilities<sup>45 46</sup>. According to the IPCC “Global GHG emissions in 2030 associated with the implementation of NDCs announced prior to COP26 would make it likely that warming will exceed 1.5°C during the 21st century”<sup>47</sup>. Article 4.3 of the Paris Agreement specifies that NDCs should “reflect its highest possible ambition,” and regular submission is put in place to ensure transparency. This may create a political incentive for parties to enhance their commitments. On the other hand, discrepancies among NDCs reveal gaps between national plans and the needed steps towards an equitable climate response. They differ in scope, coverage, and targets. Indeed, certain big polluters will exclude certain GHG from their NDC.<sup>48</sup> These omissions will exacerbate the climate stresses on everyone, including women.

The UNFCCC encourages states and all other stakeholders to take definitive action on the gender front. The Lima Work Programme of Action and its Gender Action plan define 5 priority areas to ensure

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<sup>43</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Climate Change 2014 - Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability: Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects: Global and Sectoral Aspects Volume 1: Working Group II Contribution to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Edited by Christopher B. Field et al., Cambridge University Press, 2015, doi:10.1017/cbo9781107415379.

<sup>44</sup> Paris Agreement, 2015

<sup>45</sup> Nordic Economic Policy Review

<sup>46</sup> Robert Watson, James J. McCarthy, Pablo Canziani, Nebojsa Nakicenovic, Liliana Hisas. *The Truth Behind Climate Pledges*. The Universal Ecological Fund, 2019, <https://feu-us.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/The-Truth-Behind-the-Climate-Pledges.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Global GHG emissions in 2030 associated with the implementation of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) announced prior to COP26 would make it likely that warming will exceed 1.5°C during the 21st century

<sup>48</sup> Lewis C King and Jeroen C J M van den Bergh 2019 Environ. Res. Lett. 14 084008

gender equality in climate action: (i) capacity building, knowledge management and communication, (ii) gender balance, participation and women’s leadership, (iii) coherence, (iv) gender responsive implementation and means of implementation, (v) monitoring and reporting. At COP27 the 14th of November 2022 will be a day dedicated to gender, discussing further advancements on the GAP. This emphasis on gender is streamlined across UNFCCC funding instruments. This year, the Global Environment Facility amassed 5.4 billion USD. The Green Climate Fund received a 100 billion pledge for its 2nd replenishment. Both financing institutions have adopted gender policies since 2018, requiring a reviewed gender assessment, a gender action plan, and monitoring to access funding.

Climate finance is indeed recognized as a necessary part of the climate transition. One of its main components is carbon markets. The carbon credit market is set to reach 50 billion USD in 2050,<sup>49</sup> and corporate carbon offsets grew by 170% so far this year.<sup>50</sup> These financial flows manifest into industrial projects, production, and environmental projects that have a direct effect on the lives of women and on their communities.

The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) is the main emission trading system of the United Nations, with the aim for funding climate action in developing countries. In principle, the CDM climate credits should follow environmental integrity principles, meaning the project for which they were granted truly procure net emission benefit. The CDM methodology on women and children provides a guide for implementers to properly consider the gender-dimension of their project. However, there are no mandatory guidelines on the protection or empowerment of women. Several CDM projects have been reported to worsen living-condition for host-communities.<sup>51</sup> Climate Market Watch, a non-profit NGO, published a case study on the afforestation project in Kachung Central Forest Reserve, Uganda. During the operations, villagers were denied access to the site, on which they relied for food and wood.<sup>52</sup> The project exacerbated food insecurity and poverty; two of the main drivers of vulnerability for women. Some academics propose a structuralist view on the social gaps in CDM projects:<sup>53</sup> governments, corporations and local communities entertain a relationship in which women are not given sufficient information and means to access information, and have limited control and ownership over resources.<sup>54</sup> In addition, women’s participation is boxed in traditionally female activities like forestry, and consultations are less gender-responsive in other sectors from which women would benefit but are typically excluded from.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Blaufelder, Christopher, et al. “A Blueprint for Scaling Voluntary Carbon Markets to Meet the Climate Challenge.” *Mckinsey.com*, McKinsey & Company, 29 Jan. 2021, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/sustainability/our-insights/a-blueprint-for-scaling-voluntary-carbon-markets-to-meet-the-climate-challenge>.

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.iisd.org/articles/paris-agreement-article-6-rules>

<sup>51</sup> Alboher, Stacy. *Exploring the Gender Dimensions of Climate Finance Mechanisms - UNDP*. 2010.

<sup>52</sup> Carbon Market Watch. *THE CLEAN DEVELOPMENT MECHANISM: LOCAL IMPACTS OF A GLOBAL SYSTEM*. Oct. 2018.

<sup>53</sup> Mathur, Vivek N., et al. “Experiences of Host Communities with Carbon Market Projects: Towards Multi-Level Climate Justice.” *Climate Policy*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2014, pp. 42–62, doi:10.1080/14693062.2013.861728.

<sup>54</sup> Wong, Sam. “Can Climate Finance Contribute to Gender Equity in Developing Countries?: Climate Finance on Gender Equity.” *Journal of International Development*, vol. 28, no. 3, 2016, pp. 428–444, doi:10.1002/jid.3212.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid

### 3.4 Labor and economic alteration

Environmental degradation and climate change heavily impact the world of work for women. As it has been established above, gender inequality and poverty are compound drivers of vulnerability in the face of climate change. The economic losses engendered by environmental crises affect women and families. In fact, the effects of economic struggles on men will transfer onto their partners and children. Dynamics at the household level inform women's choices. Many women work in family-owned businesses or land. Unpaid care work also plays a major role in women's welfare. As climate conditions destroy crops, more men move to cities to find work, which leaves women working longer hours in and outside of the house.<sup>56</sup> The climate also affects pay and increases the gender wage gap in some sectors. In the sector of agriculture, according to a study on South Africa,<sup>57</sup> it may close the pay gap in the short term, due to a relative increase in demand for low-skilled workers. With fewer mobility and education opportunities, women are taking jobs that require lower sets of skills. We then see the perpetuation of sectoral and occupational segregation pushing women into low skilled and low paying jobs.

In fact, sectors with a majority of female employment, like paid care work or agriculture, have worse conditions than men's not only when it comes to pay, but also regarding stability and social prestige. Sectoral segregation is often the product of cultural biases that prevent women from moving into better-paying and more climate-resilient activities.<sup>58</sup> In addition, women form the majority in sectors that have a high share of informal jobs. Not so coincidentally, these are also the most climate-sensitive jobs. Women who work in the informal sector do not receive social or legal protection, leaving them vulnerable to work harassment, job insecurity, and abuse. Working rights are also undermined by a lack of property rights enforcement<sup>59</sup> or, on the contrary, enforced policies prohibiting land-ownership by women. In cases where women successfully adapt and agricultural activities become more profitable, men may take over the crops.<sup>60</sup> In many economies, landlessness is a critical risk driver, as they are unrecognized and unaccounted for by authorities.<sup>61</sup>

Opportunities may arise, nonetheless. New initiatives at all levels have been implemented with a gender lens to address debilitating obstacles to a full transition. Sustainable agriculture programs, for

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<sup>56</sup> ILO. *Gender, Labour and a Just Transition towards Environmentally Sustainable Economies and Societies for All*.

[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed\\_protect/@protrav/@ilo\\_aids/documents/publication/wcms\\_592348.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_protect/@protrav/@ilo_aids/documents/publication/wcms_592348.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Shayegh, Soheil, and Shouro Dasgupta. "Climate Change, Labour Availability and the Future of Gender Inequality in South Africa." *Climate and Development*, 2022, pp. 1–18, doi:10.1080/17565529.2022.2074349.

<sup>58</sup> *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty: Status, Trends and Gaps*. IFAD. 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Khadiagala, L. S. 2001. The failure of popular justice in Uganda: local councils and women's property rights. *Development and Change*, 32(1): 55–76.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid

<sup>61</sup> Watts, Meriel. *Pesticides and Farming: Promoting Gender Equality and Minimizing Environmental Degradation*. UN Women Expert Group Meeting 'Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes' 11 – 14 October 2021

example, provide a way for women to improve productivity and resilience. The implementation of these new practices requires long-term funding and community engagement. Too often, programs tend to invest large amounts of resources into initiatives with no follow-up on their implementation or verification of viability under changing conditions.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, other initiatives demonstrated good practices in project implementation. Lorena Aguilar Revelo, Independent Expert on Gender and Environment, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), referenced AGRUPAR, an initiative led by the District of Quito, Ecuador. Ongoing since 2002, it involves 85.71% of women participants with the goal of mainstreaming sustainable urban agriculture, giving out regular financial assistance to maintain progress. Aguilar Revelo summarizes the project as “improving income by creating jobs, as well as helping to reduce costs related to family food bills”<sup>63</sup>.

At a larger scale, climate actions can contribute to decreasing informality in labor through the creation of jobs. At the same time, these new jobs in emerging “green” sectors must be accessible to women of all backgrounds for a chance to counter sector-segregation and foster opportunities to enter new and better sectors of work.<sup>64</sup> Currently, more than 80% of new jobs created by the decarbonization agenda will be in sectors currently dominated by men. Therefore, gender equality will not simply be realized with the flourishing of the green economy. It will take proactive steps to render new and current economic sectors more equitable.

Access to finances is also key to women’s empowerment. Many women lack the ability to take a loan independently from a national or multilateral fund or program, as these mechanisms only interact with a limited number of people, with defined scopes. Micro-financing and lending entities are lacking in areas where they are the most needed. With regard to multilateral funds, the project landscape is still dominated by government agencies and big corporations. In this sense, these mechanisms perpetuate a donor-beneficiary framework in which decision-making is concentrated at the top, although, in principle, every project should include a consultation process. To remedy this reality, the Enhanced Direct Access (EDA) of the GCF puts decision-making in the hands of national entities to channel funds directly to local agents. The idea is that national entities will have a more thorough understanding of the local context and a view of the national agenda.<sup>65</sup> As Lorena Aguilar<sup>66</sup> remarks: “Although there has been progress in establishing gender responsive climate financing mechanisms, efforts need to continue to guarantee women’s participation in decision-making on all aspects of climate financing and direct access to funding for women’s groups and organizations.”

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<sup>62</sup> Charif, Imane. *How foreign humanitarian organizations settle into communities amid informal networks of power, the case of Lebanon*. [unpublished item]

<sup>63</sup> Aguilar, Lorena. *Promising Practices Promoting Gender Equality and Women’s Autonomy in Response to Climate Change in Latin America and the Caribbean*. UN Women Expert Group Meeting’ 11 – 14 October 2021. September 2021

<sup>64</sup> n(56)

<sup>65</sup> Price, Roz. *Access to Climate Finance by Women and Marginalised Groups in the Global South*. Institute of Development Studies (IDS), 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Aguilar, Lorena. *Promising Practices Promoting Gender Equality and Women’s Autonomy in Response to Climate Change in Latin America and the Caribbean*. UN Women Expert Group Meeting’

### 3.5 Technologies, education and training

Technology and innovation are a prerequisite to attain mitigation and adaptation goals. The development of such innovations is concentrated in industrialized countries. Intellectual property rights and technology transfer have been at the heart of debate since the COVID-19 pandemic. Although no major advances have been made on that front, efforts to transfer knowledge and technologies remain contributive to combat environmental crises around the world.

At the start of the global movement against climate change, the attention was focused on technological advancements, with little consideration for social context. Still today, the introduction of new technologies, developed mostly in industrialized countries, fails to feed from women's specific expertise on the environment. Moreover, transition to new modes of environmental preservation often entails the eviction of women's knowledge and expertise.<sup>67</sup>

Technology transfer can happen through trade, professional networks, national development plans, or humanitarian or development projects. In the latter, we encounter once again an issue of specificity. The choices of technologies proposed by these plans may not respond to long-term adaptation or mitigation strategies, but rather rapidly increase quality of life with no consideration for the relevance of technologies in ever-worsening environmental situations.<sup>68</sup> This is partly due to the fact that these projects are limited in time, with the need to produce almost immediate results instead of building long-term resilience.

Through environmental action, actors influence markets and employment demands. At surface level, the creation of more green jobs and sustainable means of income should benefit all. In some cases, the technologies and practices involved represent such a stark departure from both climate inefficient and traditional adaptation methods, that they require a higher level of training and education to operate. Therefore, it induces a higher demand for educated and trained individuals. Since women possess on average lower levels of education depending on the region, they miss out on these new opportunities.<sup>69</sup>

Instead, studies<sup>70</sup> show that the most efficient technological solutions draw from existing practices and knowledge or are easily understood and applicable. Quisumbing and Pandolfelli,<sup>71</sup> as cited by the International Fund for Agricultural Development, illustrate this through the case of women in Kenya adopting soil fertility replenishment technologies. Ultimately, they got a better grasp of the technology quicker than their male counterparts. Another case study on the USAID ACCESSO project in Honduras targeted small-scale farmers and attempted to transfer a range of technologies. The study found that women expressed more interest than men in new technologies, particularly when their

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<sup>67</sup> Alston, Margaret. "Gender Mainstreaming and Climate Change." *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 47, 2014, pp. 287–294, doi:10.1016/j.wsif.2013.01.016.

<sup>68</sup> Kuhl, Laura. "Technology Transfer and Adoption for Smallholder Climate Change Adaptation: Opportunities and Challenges." *Climate and Development*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2020, pp. 353–368, doi:10.1080/17565529.2019.1630349.

<sup>69</sup> *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty : Status, Trends and Gaps*. IFAD. 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> n(69)

household had not taken prior adaptation measures. Both findings are concurrent with the widespread idea that women tend to make more sustainable choices in the context of climate change. In light of these experiences, we can suspect that prerequisites for higher education or training may sometimes be rooted in perceived notions of qualifications rather than looking at the potential for learning.

## Key areas of work and recommendations

### 4.1 Obstacles on the ground

Learning from the accounts on gender-responsive climate action across multiple regions, we can broadly identify the main challenges that lie ahead:

- A lack of political will. Environmental actions are a collaborative effort between stakeholders. Reaching consensus may lead to the least-common denominator or the disregard for a party's demands in both multilateral negotiations and community level consultations. In the former, we have seen the constitution of multilateral mechanisms such as the GEF. Staff and executive committees in these institutions may leverage their position to push more progressive guidelines and further their agenda on gender.
- Slow and fragmented legislative reforms. The transition to a more just and equitable world relies on the formulation of inclusive policies. Often too vague or unenforceable, gender-responsive policies suffer from a lack of consistency across governance levels and within legal systems.
- Lack of a holistic approach. Adaptation, mitigation and preparation and reparation are of equal importance to deliver an efficient crisis response. While each context calls for a different approach, we also know that the history of climate action and the narratives around climate goals informs decisions on the form of responses agents are willing to invest in.
- Poor impact assessment. The implementing agents in charge of climate response often fail to appropriately consider the real impact their project will have on women. Since they may have their own incentives to participate in climate action, it is possible that these institutions will overestimate the benefits of their project and conduct inadequate assessments, focused solely on the scope of the project and not its collateral impact on human rights.
- Inequalities perpetrated by an unjust international order. This is by far the most challenging obstacle, yet one that has immense bearings on the unequal distribution of climate impact. LDCs and SIDS are the most impacted by environmental and climate crises despite contributing to it the least.

### 4.2 Further considerations

Although the topic was not extensively tackled in this publication, it is relevant to further examine the impact of climate finance on human rights. Increasing women's and young people's awareness of the political economy underpinning climate action empowers them to advocate for themselves and take

more room in the negotiation processes. Public awareness can lead to more transparency as well. The first global trading system started operating in 2008 under the Kyoto Protocol. Today, there are over 25.<sup>72</sup> COP 27 will host further negotiations on the workings of climate finance; an opportunity for women and men to construct an innovative discourse on rights-based climate finance.

### 4.3 Recommendations for policy-makers

- Developing more inclusive formal financial services for women;
- Giving more space to civil society organizations in the policy-making process;
- Outlining clearer guidelines on gender mainstreaming;
- Initiating climate action in all economic sectors with respect to the human-rights implications of market changes;
- Having more geographical and gender representation in decision-making;
- Implementing technological solutions with regard to accessibility, as well as to the priorities and aspiration of women;
- Rethinking the way we set targets and assess success of environmental projects, putting more emphasis on long-term benefits, adaptation gains, and positive externalities;
- Designing gender-responsive actions in light of potential disruptive event like conflict or economic crashes;
- Coordinating climate action between all implementers;
- Designing long-term gender action plans;
- Adopting an intersectional approach.

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<sup>72</sup> ICAP. Emissions Trading Worldwide: Status Report 2022. Berlin: International Carbon Action Partnership. 2022





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