



REPORT  
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# CLIMATE JUSTICE

## A FEMINIST FRAMEWORK FOR THE OUR COMMON AGENDA REPORT

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 Global Governance  
Innovation Network

**COALITION**  
**for the**  
**UN**  
**WE NEED**

Bahá'í  
International  
Community



# MESSAGE TO READERS

Rural women are responsible for 43 percent of agricultural work in developing countries, and in some of Asia and Africa, they reach up to 60 percent, according to FAO.

Food security, family income, knowledge development, strengthening associative production systems, and family and social cohesion largely depend on rural women. Yet, despite their contributions and their central role in eradicating poverty, rural women have less access than men to land, to credit, to the means of production, such as water, to markets, to education, and to decision-making spaces.

One of the most vulnerable groups to the effects of the climate crisis are women, and among them, those who live in rural areas.

The common elements that mark the life of rural women in the world are the overload of work due to the gender division of labor; lack of social and economic recognition of their work, and, as mentioned, economic insecurity; and low access to social protection systems.

Agriculture is the productive sector where these gender inequalities are most visible and exacerbated by climate change's effects. With approximately two-thirds of the female labor force in developing countries engaged in agricultural work but owning less than 10 percent of the land, their income and food security have become increasingly unpredictable where climate change is concerned.

This situation forces women to work harder to support the household and walk even longer distances to collect water and firewood, increasing their risk of violence or injury and leaving them less time to access training and education, develop skills, earn an income, and be financially independent.

Despite their increased vulnerability to the effects of climate change, women are responding to climate change in innovative ways, using their creativity, traditional knowledge, and forms of collective organization to address the climate crisis.

At GWL Voices, our advocacy pushes for the integration of women's voices in all spheres of society, particularly in peace and security, global governance, human



rights, gender issues, international peace and security, environmental diplomacy, global health, and sustainable development.

Hence, as a collective voice of women's leadership, backed by the support of our partners, this report reflects our stance on an issue whose time is long overdue.

The report provides an opportunity for reflection. It serves as a call to action and a timely reminder to shift from practices that hinder women's advancement in the agricultural sector.

We want to thank our partners, GGIN, C4UN, Bahá'í International, and the International Alliance of Women, whose foresight and support have enabled us to carry out this critical work.

Here's to elevating our voices for change and inclusion while advancing the issues we care about most.



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Soon-Young Yoon is Chair of the Board at the Women's Environment and Development Organization and author of "Citizen of the World: Soon-Young and the UN". In 2021, she was appointed to the Council on Gender Equality convened by H. E. Ambassador, Abdhulla Shahid, the President of the 76th UN General Assembly. During her past tenure as chair of the NGO CSW/NY, the committee launched the Cities for CEDAW campaign in the US. She was a Social Development officer for UNICEF in the Southeast Asia office as well as the Social Scientist at WHO/SEARO in New Delhi. She serves as a board member of the International Foundation for Ewha Womans University and on the Global Advisory Board of the Harvard AIDS Initiative. She is also a founding member of the Women Mayor's Network in association with the National Democratic Institute.

A former columnist for the EarthTimes newspaper, she is co-editor with Dr Jonathan Samet of the WHO monograph, "Gender, Women, and the Tobacco Epidemic." Yoon received her A.B. in French literature with honors, a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Michigan and has a certificate in computer graphics from the Pratt Institute of the Arts. She is married to Richard M. Smith, former Editor-in-Chief and President of Newsweek and current President of the Pinkerton Foundation.



# INTRODUCTION

We are all part of an interconnected global ecological system. Keeping the earth's temperature below the critical threshold of 1.5 degrees C is not possible without women's leadership on a global scale.<sup>1</sup> Fortunately, women and girls are stepping up to the challenge. Indigenous women in Latin America are leading the way to protect biodiversity and defend rain forests. In Europe, feminists are protesting to ensure healthier, greener cities for all. Young women and girls in Asian cities are marching in the streets for climate justice. And Arab women spoke up loud and clear at the climate summit held in Egypt. Even with these upward trends, much more must be done to ensure women's decision-making power in climate negotiations. For example, less than 38 percent of delegations at recent COPS were women.<sup>2</sup>

Why are feminists demanding a voice in the future of our planet? UN reports show that during natural disasters in developing countries, more women are dying than men.<sup>3</sup> Violence against women and sex trafficking increases after floods, wildfires and droughts.<sup>4</sup> Women produce up to 80 percent of the food in Africa but own less than 10 percent of the land, making it difficult for them to help adapt to droughts.<sup>5</sup> And household air pollution due to solid fuels and polluting cooking stoves, is one of the top causes of female deaths from non-communicable diseases.<sup>6</sup>

In many industrialized countries, racially marginalized women and girls often have less access to social services, health services and live in sub-standard housing. As a result, they are less resilient during and after extreme weather events like floods. Migrants and refugees who flee their climate-affected countries will face challenges as they are the first to lose their jobs during financial downturns.

Furthermore, climate-related emergencies are adding to the burden of women in the care economy. For example, women make up more than 70% of all health service providers.<sup>7</sup> Underpaid, and often overworked, this vital work force is being put under extraordinary stress during climate-related emergencies. The impact goes far beyond these women; it threatens the viability of entire health systems.

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1 This text draws from a published article by Soon-Young Yoon entitled "Gender Equality, Health and Climate Change" in *Health is a Political Choice*, WHO, October 2022.

2 <https://wedo.org/womens-participation-in-the-unfccc-2022-report/>

3 "Gender, Climate Change and Health", WHO, Geneva 2014

4 This is true, especially when associated with food insecurity and absence of social protection. See "End the disconnect, Sima Bahous, in "G7 performance on climate change", <https://www.globalgovernanceproject.org/end-the-disconnect/sima-sami-bahous/> and "Gender, Displacement and Climate Change" UNHCR, Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, July 2020.

5 IFAD <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/africa-women-are-behind-80-percent-continents-food-production>

6 "Gender inequality and restrictive gender norms: framing the challenges to health" L. Heise and others in *The Lancet*, June, 2019; 15.

7 "10 key issues in ensuring gender equity in the global health workforce" WHO, <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/10-key-issues-in-ensuring-gender-equity-in-the-global-health-workforce>

# GENDER, CLIMATE AND OUR COMMON AGENDA

The Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda Report acknowledges that gender equality and women's leadership are central to the solutions to combat climate change. However, it fails to provide a feminist framework to guide implementation—the all-important “how” policies can make a difference to environmental governance. Neither does it put gender equality and human rights at the center of its recommendations such as holding the private sector accountable for climate injustice. As the statement by the women's major group expressed:

The WMG recommends further expanding the concept of a renewed social contract to include principles of ecological and environmental justice. The UN and governments would benefit from a deepening into the notion of an eco-social contract, which combines the rights of people within planetary boundaries, with special emphasis on human rights and gender justice.<sup>8</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a feminist framework that is needed to boost the climate governance architecture as part of a renewed effort for better environmental governance. This analysis is also essential to reframe the elements needed in the Pact for the Future.<sup>9</sup> Elements should: a) be grounded in regional realities as a starting point for climate justice, b) ensure an intersectional analysis, recognizing multiple layers of gender-based discrimination such as by race, age, disability, ethnicity, religious, socio-economic, and migrant status, c) use women's human rights mandates such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) to ensure an inclusive, action-oriented climate governance architecture, and d) promote holistic solutions across the pillars of peace, equality/human rights, and sustainable development. Concerning that last point, women have called for a feminist standard to measure the success of all environment and economic policies. For example, among the demands made by African feminists at COP27, was that “countries commit to immediately halt all new investments in fossil fuels and nuclear energy, with a clear and urgent shift from a fossil fuel-based economy to a sustainable, just and feminist economy centering gender-responsive use of renewable energies.”<sup>10</sup>

8 See <https://womensmajorgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/WMG-Analysis-on-Our-Common-Agenda.pdf>

9 The Summit of the Future to be held at the UN in 2024 will result in a Pact for the Future, envisioning a renewed multilateralism and the UN for future generations.

10 Standing in our Power, African Women and Girls Demands for COP27, African feminist taskforce, Women and Gender constituency, 2022. [https://womengenderclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/WGC\\_COP27-African-Feminists-Demands\\_EN\\_final.pdf](https://womengenderclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/WGC_COP27-African-Feminists-Demands_EN_final.pdf)





# THE CASE EXAMPLE OF THE ARAB REGION<sup>11</sup>

The Arab region is experiencing the effects of climate change, including the rise in temperatures which is threatening life on earth through the increase of climate-induced crises, the scarcity of water resources, sea-level rise, river pollution, and other factors that affect societies at large, and women more specifically. Women suffer the risks and consequences of climate change, amidst already ongoing armed conflict and wars in the Arab region, and the continuation of the Israeli military occupation of the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Arab governments were delayed in addressing climate change issues and their impact on marginalized and impoverished communities in the region.

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## MORE DIFFICULTIES IN THE WAR ZONES AND CROSS-BORDER REGIONS

In the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), Israel controls 80 percent of the water from the West Bank's aquifers. In Gaza, people are denied access to 20 percent of the arable agricultural land which is in the border "buffer zone" delineated by Israel. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, 25 poorly regulated air, soil, and water caused by Israeli settlements pose more environmental threats. One hundred and eighteen (118) water and sanitation facilities were destroyed in Palestine over the period 2012-2013. Food insecurity currently affects one-third of Palestinians. It is expected to rise as 85 percent of agriculture in Palestine is rain-fed and rainfall is expected to decline by 30 percent in the Eastern Mediterranean.

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<sup>11</sup> This section draws from an article "Climate Justice from the Feminist Perspective," Transform! Europe online publication 10 November 2022, <https://www.transform-network.net/en/blog/article/climate-justice-in-the-arab-region-from-the-feminist-perspective/>

Cross-border dependencies between countries in the region complicate responses to the climate crisis. Iraq's dependence on Turkey and Iran for its steady water supply increases its vulnerability. Syria relies also on water from the Euphrates and Turkey. When Turkey built dams and restricted the flow of water to Syria during the war, the country experienced major shortages. Palestinians' dependence on water purchased from the occupying power places them in vulnerable situations. In addition, the Levant, the Maghreb, and the Gulf states need to maintain stable political relations to protect potential shared transborder electricity grids.

## FEMINISATION OF THE AGRICULTURE LABOUR

In the Arab region, most of the female workforce is in agriculture. In these countries, millions of females work on agricultural land that is not their own. This is true even though women who work in the agricultural sector are the most qualified to conserve land and water resources, as well as the environment at large.

**In many industrialized countries, racially marginalized women and girls often have less access to social services, health services and live in sub-standard housing. As a result, they are less resilient during and after extreme weather events like floods. Migrants and refugees who flee their climate-affected countries will face challenges as they are the first to lose their jobs during financial downturns.**

Rural women in the region mostly work as unpaid family workers or as paid agricultural workers with minimal and seasonal income. It is estimated that women own only 5% of the agricultural land in the Arab region. In Egypt has the oldest agricultural system women own only 5 percent of the land. In Tunisia, women own less than 14%. In Lebanon, they own 7.1%, and in Saudi Arabia women own 8%. The percentage of women in the agricultural labour force in the Arab region has risen sharply over recent decades, from about 30% in 1980 to 45% (in 2010), which is faster than in any other region of the world. In some countries of the region because of male migration and because of armed conflict, women make up more than 60% of the agricultural labour force, giving rise to what has been termed the “feminisation of agricultural labour”.

Women in the Arab region like in many other regions are responsible for the production of 60 to 80 percent of food and yet, they rarely own the agricultural land. They work with low tenure security, little decision-making power, and limited control over land use. Socially constructed gender roles, unequal access to land administration, as well as discriminatory practices further limit women's access to and control over land. This is in addition to common land-related patterns reflecting customary and religious laws and practices that emerge in the Arab world as elements that shape the way women can access to use of, and control over land.

**women and girls have a right to fully participate in efforts to achieve climate justice as equal rights holders and agents of change. If climate mitigation and adaptation and resilience building are to succeed for the society as a whole, women must have equal decision-making power to deliver effective and durable solutions to the climate crisis.**

Moreover, women's suffering increases because of unpaid care work within the domestic space as they bear the burden of providing for the needs of all their family members and managing the limited resources available to them in ensuring their safety and health. These burdens are aggravated by climate change, as well as the failures of public policies and programs that consider the needs of the most marginalized groups, including the needs of women and girls.



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***(We commit to) Facilitate women's economic inclusion, including investment in the care economy and support for women entrepreneurs.***

***(p.6, Our Common Agenda, UN, 2021)***

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## **POLICY DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations are based on the need for a) acknowledgement of the vital role women play in climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience building, b) the disproportionate impact of climate related disasters and displacement on women and girls, d) the need for a gender-sensitive climate financing architecture, and e) the positive impact of ensuring women's participation from underrepresented groups such as indigenous and rural women and those in low-income, ecologically vulnerable environments.

This section reflects many recommendations made by women's groups such as those reported in "Climate Justice and Women's Participation in the Arab region," a collective effort by the Arab States Civil Society Organizations and Feminist Networks. Statements by the Women's major group, African Feminist Taskforce and the Women's Constituency as well as the author's views are also reflected below.

### **A. Representation and Decision Making**

#### **Recommendations:**

- Climate finance organizations should improve their gender-balance and equal decision-making roles for women. This should occur in cities, counties, and regional levels as well as at national and international levels.
- Governments should commit to women's equal participation and leadership during UN climate negotiations in adaptation, mitigation and resilience building as well as

in technology, financing, implementation, and integration of the SDGs into climate policies.

- Civil society organizations—particularly feminist and women’s groups — should have timely and equal access to data and information so they can hold governments accountable to deliver on climate actions.
- As Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are revised, these should include more engagement with civil society and ensure gender-responsive approaches to climate mitigation and adaptation. Cities should be engaged in the formulation as well as implementation of NDCs, ensuring gender equality and women’s leadership at the local level.

## B. Data for Gender Justice

### Recommendations:

- Efforts must be made to make full use of existing data sources such as the Social Institutions Gender Index (SIGI),<sup>12</sup> which documents discriminatory social institutions affecting women’s and girls’ lives, the Gender Empowerment Measure,<sup>13</sup> and the Women, Peace and Security Index.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the Gender Inequality Index (GII) reflects unsecured adaptive capacity in climate-vulnerable countries.<sup>15</sup>
- Governments and civil society should also consider new indicators such as the UNEP/ IUCN proposed 18 gender-environment indicators. These highlight the right to land, natural resources, and biodiversity; access to food, energy, water, and sanitation; climate change, sustainable production and consumption, and health; and women in environmental decision-making at all levels.<sup>16</sup>
- Data from cities can be used to measure the impact of new climate and environment policies on women’s human rights. These should ensure an intersectional analysis, recognizing multiple layers of gender-based discrimination such as by race, age, disability, ethnicity, religious, socio-economic, and migrant status.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.genderindex.org/>

<sup>13</sup> The World Economic Forum. The Global Gender Gap Insight Report (2108)

<sup>14</sup> Georgetown Institute for Women Peace and Security and Peace Research Institute Oslo. *Women, Peace, and Security Index 2019/20: Tracking Sustainable Peace through Inclusion, Justice, and Security for Women*. (GIWPS and PRIO, 2019).

<sup>15</sup> At present there is no standard gender data for indicators under eight of the nine environment-related SDGs. Within the gender-related SDG framework Data is systematically available for only one of the two unique gender-environment indicators, under SDG Target 9.5. See: Climate Justice and Women’s Participation in the Arab region, Policy paper, Arab States Civil Society Organizations and Feminist Networks, June 2022.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/gender-and-environment-statistics-unlocking-information-action-and-measuring-sdgs>



## C. Adaptation and Mitigation

### Recommendations:

- Concerning land rights, governments must respect rural communities' rights to full control of their agriculture and indigenous seed and food systems, as well as traditional farmers' rights as espoused in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.<sup>17</sup>
- Adaptation and mitigation finance should address the injustices that underlie climate vulnerability related to women's limited access to capital.
- When using an intersectional lens, policies should address how gender intersects with ethnicity, economic assets, and political and social status. This demands a continuous scrutiny of inequalities, their root causes, and their contexts throughout the life cycle.

**Governments must respect rural communities' rights to full control of their agriculture and indigenous seed and food systems, as well as traditional farmers' rights as espoused in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture**

## D. Financing

### Recommendations:

- Public and private capital flows to climate outcomes need to increase their focus on gender-just mitigation, adaptation, and resilience projects.<sup>18</sup>
- Governments should work with the private sector towards zero-emission, climate-resilient, gender-just projects.

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<sup>17</sup> Standing in Our Power, 2022 ibid

<sup>18</sup> A gender analysis of budget lines across multiple sectors and financial instruments for climate change is needed to ensure gender-sensitive investments in programs for adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and capacity building across different sectors. See: Climate Justice and Women's Participation in the Arab region, Policy paper, Arab States Civil Society Organizations and Feminist Networks, June 2022.

- Multilateral climate funds should streamline accreditation and approval processes to qualify for adaptation finance.
- National governments should actively engage local communities and organizations in their National Adaptation Plans by building their capacities to collect information and acquire resources to plan and implement adaptation measures. Participatory green budgeting and planning need to be strengthened at all levels.
- Cities – that contribute more than 60 percent of green house and which influence policies for the private sector – should help localize a feminist framework based on human rights to renew local climate governance architecture and help localize a Pact for the Future.
- Civil society groups need to act collectively to obtain accreditation from multilateral funds and collaboratively share the funds and the actions that go with them.<sup>19</sup>
- For grassroots and youth groups, greater efforts need to be made to overcome barriers such as the lack of knowledge about financing source, undue complexity of the funding requirements, and a lack of enabling legislative and regulatory framework.

**A holistic approach to gender equality and climate change means that governments must address the power imbalance that shapes social norms, institutions, and laws.**

## E. Technology

### Recommendations:

- Governments must put an immediate halt to the practice of “biopiracy” or the unauthorized appropriation and commercial exploitation of indigenous knowledge and genetic resources from farming and Indigenous communities using intellectual properties. Biopiracy restricts future use of these resources while failing to compensate the communities from which they originate.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> GAGGA is supported by the government of the Netherlands. <https://gaggaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/PSENG.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Standing in Our Power, 2022. *ibid*

- There must be protection and respect for rural communities' rights to full control of their agriculture and indigenous seed and food systems, as well as traditional farmers' rights as espoused in the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture.
- Private sector investments in mitigation and technology should not be used as replacements for public investments. Maximizing monetary returns on private sector investments means that meeting public welfare needs in the face of the climate crisis is at risk of being undermined. This can result in false solutions and untested, unsustainable, and imposed technological fixes.

**Socially constructed gender roles, unequal access to land administration, as well as discriminatory practices further limit women's access to and control over land.**


## CONCLUSION

A Pact for the Future must recognize that women and girls have a right to fully participate in efforts to achieve climate justice as equal rights holders and agents of change. If climate mitigation and adaptation and resilience building are to succeed for the society as a whole, women must have equal decision-making power to deliver effective and durable solutions to the climate crisis.

However, to ensure women's rights to participate in political change, equal social, legal, and economic rights must be ensured. One of the most universal challenges facing women and girls is gender-based violence (GBV/VAW). This has devastating effects on survivors and the costs are born by the entire society as they are deprived of their freedoms—to get an education, to work where they want, and to access their political, economic, and cultural rights.<sup>21</sup> When GBV/VAW also occurs in the context of wars and conflicts, women and girls suffer even more.

**Cross-border dependencies between countries in the region complicate responses to the climate crisis.**

<sup>21</sup> IPU reports that the number of countries with no women in governments increased in 2021. However, women in politics report threats of death, rape, beatings, or abduction. IPU reports, 2019 and 2021.



A holistic approach to gender equality and climate change means that governments must address the power imbalance that shapes social norms, institutions, and laws. As the Arab States Civil Society Organization and Feminist Networks report noted, climate policies and its related institutional architecture should redirect their focus to gender justice and not just gender equity. Finance and actions must reflect representation and decision making of women on all matters and at all levels related to climate change. Gender sensitive data and assessments should be the basis of decision making. “Participation needs to ensure gender just socially sound technology choices with local communities holding their governments accountable. This must occur at local, national, regional, and international levels.”<sup>22</sup>

**Women in the Arab region like in many other regions are responsible for the production of 60 to 80 percent of food and yet, they rarely own the agricultural land.**

Important starting points are the UN policy and legally binding agreements that have set global standards that should be used together in a renewed climate governance architecture. These includes the Beijing Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Sustainable Development Goals. The UNFCCC and Convention on Biodiversity also make important provisions for gender equality and women’s leadership.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, a participatory, inclusive climate governance architecture based on women’s human rights must be localised in cities as well as regional jurisdictions. Only then can Our Common Agenda work towards gender justice for future generations and a sustainable, healthy planet for all.

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<sup>22</sup> Climate Justice and Women’s Participation in the Arab region, Ibid, June 2022

<sup>23</sup> A good summary of international agreements on gender, environment and sustainable development can be found in “Strengthening gender considerations in adaption planning and implementation in the least developed countries”, UNFCCC, LDC expert group report, 2015.



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