WHY IT MATTERS FOR WOMEN: AN ANALYSIS OF COP31'S ACTION AGENDA

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Authors:

Louise Brilliant
Sadie Eidson
Cassandra Kise
Yanenowi Logan
Madison Malthaner
Leela Rissle-Merrite
Divine Siam

*The authors above are students from the Columbia Climate School. They contributed to the report through **HER TURN**, GWL Voices' intergenerational leadership initiative, which empowers the next generation to engage with global challenges, strengthen their leadership skills, and contribute to a more representative and inclusive multilateral system.*

Evanna Corona
Nycolas Candido

Editors:

Evanna Corona, Climate and Financing for Development Researcher, GWL Voices
Nycolas Candido, Associate Researcher, Plataforma CIPÓ

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Table of Contents

Foreword

Introduction

Action Agenda Themes

1. Zero Waste
2. Oceans and Seas
3. Food Security
4. Climate Resilient Cities
5. Finance and Institutional Change
6. Youth and Education
7. Green Industrialization
8. Clean Energy Transition
9. Synergies between the Rio Conventions
10. Dynamic and Resilient Health Systems

Call to Action

References



Foreword

It is time to translate decades of climate commitments into action. As we move from negotiations to implementation, one thing must remain central: the lived realities of women and girls worldwide.

This year, the COP31 Action Agenda sets out ten priorities to guide our implementation of voluntary climate solutions. From zero waste and the energy transition to resilient health systems, it is an incredibly comprehensive guide. At the same time, closer analysis reveals an important gap.

As of now, the COP31 Action Agenda is largely gender-blind: **women are explicitly mentioned only once.** This is despite the fact that gender interacts with every area under the Action Agenda. Gendered disparities exist in relation to food insecurity, climate finance, access to jobs in the low-carbon economy, climate-related health impacts, access to early warning systems, and decision-making power.

At GWL Voices, we believe that when shaping the solutions that define our futures, we must work with the best available evidence on women and girls' experiences and contributions.

Developed with Plataforma CIPÓ and students from Columbia Climate School, this report compiles exactly that — the latest evidence across all ten Action Agenda priorities through a gender-equality lens. Our aim is to show that climate impacts are not gender-neutral. Therefore, neither can our solutions be.

The data show we stand at a crossroads. We can either fully recognize and address the gendered reality of the climate crisis, or we can ignore it — sacrificing effectiveness and legitimacy when turning our climate commitments into action.

There can be no implementation without equality.
We call on all actors contributing to the Action Agenda to recognize and to act on this.



Susana Malcorra
President, GWL Voices

Introduction

The COP process is often dominated by — and known for — formal negotiations between Parties. However, as far-reaching, immediate, and effective climate action becomes urgent, **the multilateral climate world is shifting towards implementation**. The Paris 'Rulebook' has been finalized, and commitments are ready to become action.

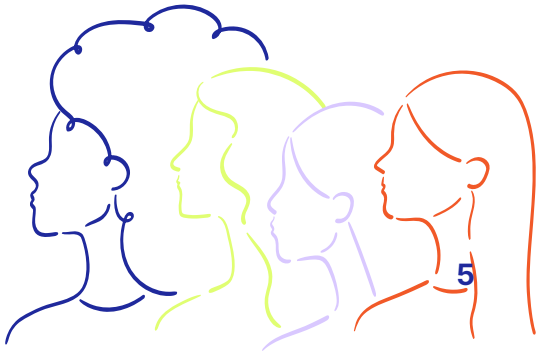
The incoming COP31 Presidency has proposed ten priority themes in this year's Action Agenda to make the "Implementation COP" of 2026 a reality:

1. Zero Waste
2. Oceans and Seas
3. Food Security
4. Climate Resilient Cities
5. Finance and Institutional Change (Climate Implementation Bridge)
6. Youth and Education
7. Green Industrialization
8. Clean Energy Transition
9. Synergies between the Rio Conventions
10. Dynamic and Resilient Health Systems

Despite the landmark adoption of the **Belém Gender Action Plan** (GAP) at COP30, which aimed to mainstream gender equality across climate processes, this year's Action Agenda fails to recognize women's crucial roles, gaps, and needs in climate action. Climate implementation without due consideration of gender inequalities, especially in the current context of increasing backlash on women's rights, can lead to hard-fought wins — such as the GAP — being lost in the translation to implementation.

Our analysis found that the COP31 Action Agenda conspicuously lacks references to gender equality across nearly all 10 priority themes. Women appear explicitly in only one isolated case, under Food Security.





This omission is not without consequences. Women and girls experience climate risks, care burdens, access to finance, climate education, climate-related health impacts, and decision-making power differently. This paper argues that COP31's ten themes cannot be treated as gender-neutral technical categories: each carries distinct gender dimensions that, if made explicit, can strengthen the work of the Action Agenda.

The 10 themes of COP 31's Action Agenda are not gender-neutral, and engaging with them as such holds back inclusive and effective climate action.

What is the Action Agenda?

The road from negotiations to implementation is the Action Agenda. This voluntary side of the COP process brings together actors, including civil society, cities, business, and academia, outside negotiation rooms to implement climate solutions on the ground.

The Action Agenda was first established at COP21, and historically, each COP Presidency defined its own shifting priorities year to year, with little continuity or accountability. In 2025, to align efforts, the COP30 and COP31 Presidencies delivered a Five-Year Vision for the Action Agenda anchored in the Global Stocktake process and the goals of the Paris Agreement. Notably, the Five-Year Vision recognized that climate action "begins and ends with people, including women and girls", in line with the Global Stocktake, which also urged inclusive and gender-responsive action. The COP31 Action Agenda is meant to build upon the Five-Year Vision.

How to read this Analysis:

For each of COP31's ten priority themes, the research:

1. **Presents the Action Agenda theme's official scope** through an **extract** of COP31's official description: "Why It Matters". We invite all readers to consult the full text of each Action Agenda theme including core focus areas at cop31.tr/action-plan

2. **Identifies the gender dimensions relevant to that theme,** or "Why it Matters to Women and Girls", by presenting an overview of the most relevant up-to-date evidence on the intersection of the theme with gender equality.

Note: Each of the ten chapters functions as a self-contained case, written by the contributing authors. As such, each author was free to consult and add their own sources. Therefore, the same issue may be supported by different references across sections.

Zero Waste

"Unlocking the climate action potential of waste management through scalable circular economy solutions."

Why it matters
as stated by the COP31 Presidency [extract]

"The waste sector is the third largest source of anthropogenic methane — responsible for 30 per cent of global warming since the Industrial Revolution. Global waste generation is projected to increase by 50 per cent by 2050. COP31 aims to scale circular economy solutions that prevent emissions at source, turning a climate problem into an implementation opportunity."



Why it matters for women and girls

The COP31 Action Agenda target of reducing waste cannot be addressed without considering the differentiated roles and barriers that women face as important actors in the waste sector.

Household waste accounts for approximately two-thirds of all discarded waste (Jamini, Javan & Arsalani, 2026). At the household level, women are disproportionately responsible for managing domestic waste, including sorting, recycling, and disposal decisions (Rocha-Meneses et al., 2026). As the Action Agenda outlines, households generate 60% of food waste, a key contributor to methane emissions (UNEP, 2024). Interventions to reduce household waste can therefore be strengthened by targeting the groups most directly involved in waste management. However, any efforts to do so must avoid exacerbating the unpaid domestic workload that managing household waste entails, which could further entrench related gender inequalities (UNEP, 2024).

Attention must be directed toward women's involvement across all stages of the waste sector, particularly that of rural women. As key actors in the processing and trading of food commodities, for example in the agriculture and fisheries sector, women are also in a prime position to ensure that less food is wasted before it is sold (Greever, 2021).

Women are an essential part of those employed in the waste sector, especially as informal waste pickers. Although providing an essential service, they often lack the social, economic, and physical protection that formal employment provides. In South Africa, women constitute a substantial share of informal waste collectors — a pattern driven by pervasive unemployment, poverty, and limited access to formal employment (Nxumalo & Musavengane, 2026). Data from Latin America estimates that women represent 44% of the labor force in the recycling sector (UNEP, 2025), but that **women waste pickers tend to have less access to quality equipment than men, resulting in lower incomes and higher health risks** (UNEP, 2020). The same gendered access to finance and materials for female waste workers was found across other contexts, including Ghana and India, and other countries (Imoro, 2026; Odonker & Gilchrist, 2021; Kariveliparambil et al., 2026).

Finally, mismanaged waste streams can have hazardous impacts on women's health. Improper household disposal practices at the household level — such as burning waste — release harmful chemicals and heavy metals, including arsenic, lead, cadmium, mercury, and chromium, into the air (Biswas & Bhattacharya, 2026). Children and pregnant women are especially exposed and vulnerable to toxic substances released by open-air burning of waste, especially if these take place close to the household (UNICEF, 2026). Menstrual waste specifically poses a significant environmental challenge, especially in South Asia, where cultural stigmas and inadequate policy lead to unsafe disposal methods. A study in Sri Lanka found that 52% of menstruators practice open burning, which releases toxic dioxins into the air, contributing to environmental pollution (Akram et al., 2026). A reduction of waste and its proper management can therefore have significant positive co-benefits for women's health, an important intersection to consider when implementing projects under the Zero Waste Action Agenda item.

A major gap in data availability on gendered patterns in the waste sector hinders systematic monitoring of women's roles, risks, and contributions (UNEP-IETC & GRID-Arenda, 2019). However, existing evidence suggests that any efforts for sustainable waste management and circular economy policies must include a gender perspective in order to be effective and sustainable.

Oceans and Seas

"Protecting marine ecosystems and unlocking blue carbon for climate resilience"

Why it matters
as stated by the COP31 Presidency [extract]

"Oceans absorb approximately 25 per cent of human-produced carbon dioxide and regulate global climate systems. Yet rising emissions are driving ocean acidification, marine heatwaves, and coastal ecosystem degradation. COP31 will strengthen ocean-climate action through enhanced observation, data sharing, and regional cooperation."



Why it matters for women and girls

The COP Presidency identifies two priorities under the Oceans and Seas theme: protecting marine ecosystems and unlocking blue carbon for climate resilience. Oceans play a vital role in regulating the global climate (NOAA, 2025). However, increasing human activities, climate change, and extreme weather events threaten marine ecosystems and the coastal communities that depend on them (Amani & Hanson, 2022). These impacts disproportionately affect women and girls whose vulnerability is often heightened by existing gender inequalities. Despite their essential contributions to coastal livelihoods, marine conservation, and environmental stewardship, women and girls continue to face barriers to resources, economic opportunities, and decision-making in these sectors (FAO, 2024).

To achieve the goals of the Action Agenda, the COP Presidency prioritizes strengthening coastal livelihoods and climate adaptation, improving ocean monitoring and data sharing, restoring marine ecosystems, and integrating blue carbon into national climate strategies. These efforts are critical since roughly 40% of the global population lives within 100 kilometers of a coastline (UNESCO, 2023). However, the lack of explicit recognition of women and girls within the Oceans and Seas agenda raises concerns about whose knowledge, needs, and priorities will guide these initiatives.

Globally, 2.9 billion women and girls live in countries highly or very highly exposed to climate and geophysical hazards, including coastal flooding and tropical cyclones

(UN Women & UN DESA, 2026). Yet, women and girls are not merely vulnerable populations; they are rights-holders, knowledge-holders, and agents of change across the ocean economy. The COP31 Agenda seeks to integrate mangroves, seagrass meadows, and salt marshes into NDCs and formal climate accounting. These ecosystems are central to women's livelihoods, traditional knowledge, and environmental stewardship. Without gender-responsive safeguards, blue carbon initiatives risk turning resources that support women's livelihoods into financial assets without ensuring equitable benefits. Research on Asia-Pacific blue carbon projects found that approximately 80% of the average carbon credit price went to project developers, while fewer than 15% of projects on the Verra Registry had adopted the Climate, Community & Biodiversity (CCB) social standard (Yadao-Evans et al., 2025). This highlights the need for transparent benefit-sharing, secure resource rights, and meaningful community participation in blue carbon initiatives.

Although the Agenda emphasizes safeguarding coastal livelihoods, women's contributions to ocean economies remain undervalued. **Women account for approximately 24% of fishers and fish farmers, 62% of workers in the post-harvest sector, and 40% of people engaged in small-scale fisheries value chains** (FAO, 2024). Yet they remain concentrated in informal, lower-paid, and less secure employment. Despite their contributions, women often face exclusion from decision-making. **Globally, less than 12.5% of ministries in charge of the ocean are led by women** (IUCN, 2024).

Women also experience limited access to financial resources. Gender-blind blue carbon interventions have been associated with increased workloads, social exclusion, and gender-based violence in documented cases (Yadao-Evans et al., 2025). Meanwhile, ocean-related official development assistance (ODA) represented only 1% of total ODA in 2022, with approximately 42% of all DAC ocean ODA identifying gender equality as an objective (OECD, 2024).

Finally, the Action Agenda prioritizes accessible ocean data to support evidence-based climate policy. However, only 66% of fisheries and aquaculture employment data are sex-disaggregated (FAO, 2024), limiting the visibility of women's contributions and needs.

These gaps demonstrate that equitable ocean-climate action requires moving beyond recognizing women's vulnerability to addressing the structural barriers that limit their participation, leadership, and access to resources. To achieve this, the Action Agenda at COP31 should build on, among others, the Women Ocean Guardians Commitment introduced at the 2025 UN Ocean Conference. Gender equality must be treated as a fundamental prerequisite for effective, inclusive, and lasting ocean-climate resilience.

Food Security

"Advancing the global transition toward sustainable and resilient food systems"

Why it matters
as stated by the COP31 Presidency [extract]



"The Food Security theme focuses on addressing the acute food insecurity faced by approximately 318 million people due to climate shocks. It also aims to transform food systems — which are responsible for one-third of global emissions yet receive only 4 per cent of climate finance. To bridge this gap, COP31 will drive transformation through [four] key priorities."

Why it matters for women and girls

The Action Agenda priority on food security is **the only time women are mentioned in the COP31 Action Agenda.** The Action Agenda theme outlines four core focus areas: the Food-Water-Climate Nexus, Finance for Women Farmers, Youth for Food & Climate, and Climate-Resilient Agriculture. The explicit mention of women farmers here is significant. The Action Agenda acknowledges that women form the backbone of global food production and face disproportionate barriers in accessing climate finance. It proposes to "champion targeted financing instruments that lower these barriers and strengthen women's resilience on the front lines of climate change."

These commitments are commendable, and rightly recognize the outsized contributions of women farmers to global food systems. Indeed, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC AR6 WGII) indicates that women comprise more than 40 percent of the agricultural labor force in low- and middle-income countries (2022). However, the siloed focus on women farmers fails to recognize that food insecurity and climate shocks are experienced along deeply embedded structures of gender inequality. Unequal land rights, restrictive social norms, disproportionate care burdens, and systemic underrepresentation in decision-making undermine food systems transformation – indicating the need for a holistic gender-responsive approach across this Action Agenda, beyond recognizing the role of women farmers alone.

Recent institutional and scientific evidence demonstrates that the food security crisis is structurally gendered. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO et al., 2026), global food insecurity consistently impacts women at higher rates than men, driven by structural inequalities embedded across agrifood value chains. The IPCC AR6 WGII report also indicates that **women in agriculture face systemic exclusion from land titles, credit, extension services, and climate information. Evidence suggests that in 43 out of 49 countries with data, men are more likely than women to own land or have secure land rights** (FAO, ILC and CIRAD, 2026). Furthermore, UNEP's *Limiting Overshoot* report highlights that these structural constraints drastically elevate women's vulnerability to extreme weather events (UNEP, 2026).

The gendered dimensions of food security should include nutrition and health outcomes, an intersection largely omitted from the Action Agenda framing. The *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2026* reveals that over one billion women and adolescent girls suffer from one or more forms of malnutrition, with iron-deficiency anemia among women aged 15 to 49 worsening globally from 27.6 percent in 2012 to 30.7 percent in 2023, and only 62.7 percent achieving minimum dietary diversity (FAO et al., 2026). Climate shocks exacerbate these nutrition disparities by intensifying agricultural losses and driving up the cost of healthy diets. As noted in the IPCC AR6 WGII report, climate change has a compounding effect on undernutrition, disproportionately endangering women and children in subsistence-reliant regions due to household food allocation inequities and heavy physical labor demands during pregnancy and lactation.

The Action Agenda also emphasizes the need for working across sectors on Food-Water-Agriculture and for scaling Climate-Resilient Agriculture. However, it is important to note that the disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work carried out by women restricts their ability to adopt climate-smart agricultural practices or participate in training initiatives. In over 80% of households with no water source on premises, women and girls are the ones responsible for collecting water (WHO & UNICEF, 2025). When water scarcity and droughts strike, exacerbated by rising temperatures, women and girls take on the labor burdens to secure water and fuel, resulting in time lost for productive farming or economic diversification.

The above shows that women in the context of food systems and climate are more than passive beneficiaries of "Finance for Women Farmers". Women are active leaders of food systems transformation whose expertise, traditional knowledge, and agency are vital for scaling a just and resilient agricultural adaptation.

Climate-Resilient Cities

"Climate-resilient cities to ensure liveable places for everyone"

Why it matters
as stated by the COP31 Presidency [extract]



"Cities generate around 70 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions while facing some of the most severe climate impacts, with nearly 15 per cent of major cities exposed to both extreme flooding and drought. In response, the Action Agenda on Climate-Resilient Cities aims to drive systemic transformation by scaling up low-carbon solutions, improving energy performance, and mobilizing investment to support resilient and future-ready urban systems."

Why it matters for women and girls

The COP31 Action Agenda's inclusion of Climate-Resilient Cities frames the tension between the cities' problematic, large carbon footprints and their vulnerabilities and exposure to climate change. Notably, it fails to capture a people-centric approach, creating a static vision of the city as property and infrastructure, rather than viewing cities as sites of people - even while urban residents account for 45% of the global population (UN DESA, 2025). While the theme's subtitle mentions that we must "ensure liveable places for everyone", it fails to acknowledge how identity, in this case gender, often shapes the experience of urban life, especially in the context of climate change.

Across regions, the built environment sector lacks gender diversity at every industry level: in corporate governance and management, and across all phases of design and construction, from sourcing and building to use and disposal (Alshdiefat et al., 2024; Edirisinghe et al., 2025; Wahab et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2025). Yet women's leadership can accelerate the transition: a higher share of women on company boards has been linked to lower institutional CO2 emissions (Martínez et al., 2022). Gender also shapes demand. Women tend to report greater climate concern and more energy-saving behavior at home, while some men resist eco-friendly construction because traditional stereotypes wrongly associate green habits with femininity, slowing market uptake (Montero et al., 2024). Female leadership can help bridge this gap: female CEOs in construction empower architects and engineers to

maintain close communication with clients, laying the groundwork for persuading consumers to adopt low-carbon, sustainable materials (Chen et al., 2026). The resulting emission reductions spill over beyond individual clients to society at large.

Whole-life building emissions also have a gender dimension, particularly in how buildings use energy once occupied. **Buildings designed without a gender lens often consume more energy than predicted. One reason is that heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning (HVAC) and insulation systems have historically been designed around the metabolic rate of the average adult man**, and rely on energy models that assume static occupancy (Parkinson et al., 2021). Yet women carry out most unpaid domestic work, which involves continuous and varied energy use at home. This pattern clashes with "eco" automation and drives up unplanned heating and cooling loads (Gu et al., 2025). Additionally, climate shocks and urban heat islands strain fragile care systems mainly upheld by women and girls, who shoulder most unpaid caregiving and community labor. Deficits in municipal infrastructure directly increase their daily burden (Grown et al., 2024).

Achieving sustainable financing for a resilient built environment requires acknowledging how access to finance is gendered. The current funding imbalance between mitigation and adaptation exacerbates gender inequities in cities since most urban climate finance targets large-scale mitigation sectors, such as energy and public transport, which are historically male-dominated. This leaves community-level adaptation, where women's work tends to concentrate, severely underfunded (Shakeel-Nagi & Bhatt, 2025). Traditional municipal green bonds and sustainable finance mechanisms frequently require formal land titles, credit histories, or corporate collateral, which systematically excludes grassroots or women-led initiatives. Additionally, cities rarely collect or track gender-disaggregated data, making it difficult to measure these imbalances (Shakeel-Nagi, H., & Bhatt, H., 2025).

The creation of Resilient Infrastructure and Standards mentioned in the Action Agenda opens space for innovation, but also risks reproducing existing inequalities. Because of these inequalities, women are more exposed and more vulnerable during disasters, and a gender-responsive approach is needed to address this (World Bank, 2024). Tools to do so already exist: Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) frameworks, supported by global coalitions such as the International Coalition for Sustainable Infrastructure (ICSI) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), embed social equity across the entire infrastructure lifecycle, from policy to operations (ICSI et al., 2025). Integrating these mechanisms into COP31's infrastructure and standards agenda from the outset would ensure that new mechanisms reduce, rather than reproduce, gender inequalities.

Finance and Institutional Change

"From commitments to implementation — bridging priorities, investment and delivery"

Why it matters
as stated by the COP31 Presidency [extract]



"The Climate Implementation Bridge (CIB), developed under the COP31 Presidency, is a country-driven initiative designed to accelerate the translation of climate commitments into tangible outcomes. While countries have established ambitious climate goals through their NDCs, NAPs and long-term strategies, implementation continues to face persistent challenges, including limited institutional capacity, fragmented investment opportunities, and insufficient alignment between policy priorities and financing solutions."

Why it matters for women and girls

This priority theme of the Action Agenda aims to translate climate commitments into results on the ground. Moving from pledges to projects, however, requires addressing the following financial and institutional gender gaps.

Access to means of implementation, notably finance, remains gendered. More recent data is unavailable, but an OECD report from 2022 estimates that 2 percent of mitigation ODA and 4 percent of adaptation ODA has gender equality as a principal objective (OECD, 2022). Women face diverse barriers to accessing finance, including unequal access to credit, assets or financial accounts, financial literacy gaps, and systematic exclusion, such as in cases where conditions for the allocation of grants fail to recognize female-headed households (Barsulai, 2025). A global architecture that favors loans over grants also reduces the fiscal space for social programs, often increasing the unpaid care burden shouldered by women and girls (Barsulai, 2025).

The importance of gender-responsive finance is increasingly recognized. Recent submissions from Parties to the UNFCCC have revealed that "gender responsiveness is seen no longer as an optional secondary objective but rather as an indispensable enabling condition for effective, equitable and sustained climate finance flows with impact" (UNFCCC, 2026a). To "scale up the volume of climate investment delivered on the ground" and delivering "measurable" outcomes, as the CIB aims to do, it is cucial to prioritize grant-based finance, direct access modalities, and targeted flows for women and girls, addressing the structural inequalities that currently limit their access.

The CIB aims to turn national priorities from NDCs and NAPs into concrete projects. It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of countries (85%) cite a commitment to gender equality in their latest NDCs. However, specific actions and targets, and dedicated budgets are often missing (GWL Voices, 2026b). This represents a significant implementation gap that the CIB can help close, and reflects the oftentimes limited national institutional capacity for working on the gendered impacts of climate change (UNFCCC, 2026b). Rightly, the CIB Priority Area mentions the need for "mechanisms for cross-institutional cooperation". This includes cooperation between environment and gender equality ministries. For example, through institutionalising, supporting, and financing dedicated gender expertise within climate and environmental authorities, including the National Gender and Climate Change Focal Point (NGCCFP) role.

For implementation to be both fair and effective, women and girls must be actively involved across all levels of decision-making. Currently, there is a structural pattern of underrepresentation of women in climate and financial decision-making. In multilateral climate governance, especially at higher levels, gender parity remains rare (GWL Voices, 2026a). Similarly, most international financial institutions have never had a woman at the helm (GWL Voices, 2026c). At the national level, the pattern persists: **only 17% of finance ministers and 27% of environment ministers worldwide today are women** (UN Women & IPU, 2026). Consultation and engagement mechanisms that allow for the meaningful participation of stakeholders most affected by climate impacts, as well as legal frameworks that integrate gender equality into all public institutions, policies and the national budget, are other tools to "strengthen countries' implementation architecture", as the CIB aims to do. The list of actors mentioned by the CIB Priority Area in its "partnership-driven approach", includes governments, international organisations, climate funds, and others. However, the full engagement of civil society groups, including women's rights organisations, can ensure that the lived realities of those on the ground are addressed, while remaining fully country-driven and demand-based, as the CIB prioritizes.

Finally, to truly make "decision-making evidence-based", the collection, analysis, use, and monitoring of gender-disaggregated data is essential. This is critical for building an evidence base and monitoring the differentiated effects of climate impacts and policies by gender, ensuring policies are informed and effective (Data2x, 2023).

The Presidency rightly identifies the challenges when moving from commitments to implementation, namely "limited institutional capacity, fragmented investment opportunities, insufficient alignment between policy priorities and financing solutions". As seen above, each of these roadblocks is amplified when working from a gender equality perspective. A gender lens is therefore crucial if the CIB is to achieve its goal of "enhancing" how the existing climate implementation ecosystem performs.

Youth and Education

"Young people as architects of climate solutions, not just inheritors of climate risks"

Why it matters
as stated by the COP31 Presidency [extract]

"With 1.8 billion people aged 10-24, youth represent the generation that will experience climate impacts longest — yet their meaningful participation in decision-making remains limited. COP31 will strengthen climate literacy, intergenerational knowledge exchange, and youth engagement in climate processes. As the COP Presidency, we aim to integrate climate change into education curricula by 2030 and build strong climate awareness across society by 2035."



Why it matters for women and girls

To achieve the two goals set forth by the COP Presidency, the Action Agenda proposes to bring youth voices to the climate conversation and to develop a framework for global climate literacy. However, there is a lack of explicit mention of the role of girls, who both suffer a disproportionate burden of climate impacts and are powerful agents of change for climate action.

Despite making up half of the world's youth (UN DESA, 2026), girls and young women are more likely to be negatively impacted by climate change. By 2050, under a worst-case climate scenario, up to 158.3 million more women and girls may live in extreme poverty globally (UN Women & UN DESA, 2025). Under higher international poverty thresholds, this figure may reach 422 million, representing up to 16.1 million more women and girls than men and boys affected by climate change (UN Women & UN DESA, 2025). However, women are not just victims. According to the IPCC's latest report, women are agents with valuable knowledge and skills, and therefore powerful leaders in the fight against climate change (IPCCC, 2022).

This potential remains largely untapped due to structural barriers that continue to undermine girls' right to education and restrict their participation in climate governance and green labor markets. Around the world, girls and women carry an unequal burden of unpaid care and domestic responsibilities, spending an average of 2.5 times more hours every day on unpaid care work than men. **Girls provide 160 million more hours of unpaid care and domestic work each day than boys** (UN Women, 2025). In rural, climate-vulnerable communities, women are the primary water collectors in households without on-premise water access (73.5%). Girls are the primary water collectors in 6.9% of households, whereas boys are so in only 2.9% of households (WHO & UNICEF, 2023). As climate-induced droughts and other extreme weather events intensify, girls are often forced to drop out of school to help their mothers manage household survival tasks, such as fetching water, securing fuel, and caring for children. Additionally, climate change and climate stress exacerbate socio-economic pressures that drive the continuation of child marriage. Though the practice of child marriage has continued to decline globally, today, one in five young women aged 20 to 24 years was married as a child (UNICEF, 2023). As climate shocks worsen, girls are far more likely than their male counterparts to have their school cut short due to forced marriage or domestic labor demands.

The negative climate-related impacts on girls' education directly undermine the Action Agenda's goal of building broad societal climate awareness. While women account for 52% to 68% of secondary and primary (respectively) school teachers around the world (UNESCO, 2023), they remain severely underrepresented in educational leadership and climate policymaking roles. Only 27% of national parliament seats are held by women globally (IPU, 2025). Furthermore, the gender gap in STEM education remains wide, with **women accounting for less than a third of STEM graduates, which in turn translates to reduced opportunities in the green job market** (Fabrizio, Jaumotte, & Tavares, 2024). Closing the gender gap in education is one of the most effective tools for climate mitigation and adaptation: expanding girls' access to high-quality secondary education could significantly reduce global carbon emissions (Project Drawdown, 2020).

Ignoring the specific role of girls and women in climate education overlooks their function as intergenerational knowledge holders. Evolutionary biological frameworks, such as the Grandmother Hypothesis, illustrate that women are uniquely adapted to facilitate intergenerational knowledge transmission by passing down critical survival, resource management, and ecological strategies across generations (Hawkes et al., 1998*). In many rural and Indigenous communities, women serve as the primary guardians of biodiversity, seed preservation, and local ecological forecasting. By framing climate literacy and youth engagement as gender-neutral goals, the COP31

Action Agenda overlooks how intergenerational exchange relies on the primary carriers of community knowledge and early childhood instruction being marginalized from formal educational and policy frameworks.

Integrating gender equality in the COP31 framework for global climate literacy by 2035 would help it achieve its stated goals. Keeping girls in school, eliminating gender-based barriers to STEM and green technical training, protecting young women from climate-induced poverty, and recognizing women as intergenerational knowledge holders, vital leaders, educators, and drivers of community resilience are key entryways. Without an intentional, gender-responsive approach embedded into the Youth and Education Action Agenda theme, COP31 risks perpetuating the inequalities that hamper inclusive and effective climate action for current and future generations.

Green Industrialization

"Low-carbon industrial pathways that support development, competitiveness, and just transition"

Why it matters
as stated by the COP31 Presidency [extract]

"Industry accounts for a significant share (25%) of global emissions, with hard-to-abate sectors facing the most complex decarbonisation pathways. Simultaneously, many developing countries require support to build green industrial foundations from the outset. COP31 will advance policy dialogue and practical mechanisms for inclusive industrial transformation."



Why it matters for women and girls

The COP31 Action Agenda aims to drive the innovation and international cooperation needed to decarbonize hard-to-abate, energy-intensive sectors, which include the production iron, steel, cement, chemicals, and plastics, among others. It also aims to strengthen investment readiness, especially in emerging markets and developing economies. Ultimately, if the gender inequalities that presently exist within industrial systems remain underaddressed as actors proceed to meet this agenda, it will represent a missed opportunity for scaled up and inclusive green industralization (Ndubuisi & Avenyo, 2026; UNIDO, 2021).

The industrial transformation associated with the energy transition can widen women's jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities, particularly in decentralized renewables, which include rooftop solar panels, small wind turbines (Ndubuisi & Avenyo, 2026). However, advancing new modes of industrialisation through traditional—male and Western—models, risks entrenching gender inequalities. Concrete language defining the mechanisms for how gender equality and women are to be meaningfully included is often left out of industrial policy: of 40 national green industry and related policies across Cambodia, Peru, Senegal and South Africa, most lacked specified gender measures and only 11 had any gender-specific targets, commitments, indicators or next steps (UNIDO, 2021). Similarly, a mapping of 14 energy policies in Ghana and South Africa found four scoring 0 on gender

criteria, with interviews pointing to missing sex-disaggregated data, a lack of targets, and thin gender expertise (Ndubuisi & Avenyo, 2026). Gender-responsive finance is nonetheless a tested route, from gender bonds, to supporting women-owned small and medium enterprises (World Bank Group, 2024). With gender equality as critical scaffolding for an energy-transitioned world, the capital mobilized toward global green industrialization can facilitate new economic pathways and knowledge transfer networks that concurrently lift women while being shaped by them.

The Action Agenda and the Antalya Green Industrialization Compact to be launched at COP31 (COP Presidency, 2026a) call for shared standards and labels, without mentioning women or gender. Examples of how gender equality can be written into industry standards exist, such as the Aluminum Stewardship Initiative. However, written commitments are not outcomes: **while non-discrimination policies are widely included, women remain only 14% of the workforce at ASI-certified facilities, and care policies are weak** (ASI, 2024). It must be recognized that certification alone is unable to deliver market access, finance or land rights (Luna & Elder, 2026), and that gender-responsive green industrialization efforts must go beyond certification. Green industrialisation should include meaningful feedback mechanisms, leadership pipelines and decision-making processes that include women, in industry and among the stakeholders designing the standards, consistent with the Presidency's principles of inclusiveness, balanced participation and shared ownership (COP Presidency, 2026b).

The Presidency's country-led initiatives for green industrialization are meant to drive localized benefits. One such initiative, to be launched at COP31, seeks to advance green industrialization in Least Developed Countries (LDCs). Therefore, who sets national priorities, and whether women hold a meaningful share of those decisions, become critical questions. However, data on LDCs show that women are only 1 in 3 delegates and about 10% of heads of delegation (Kajumba et al., 2025).

The transformation of green industrialization that should expand opportunities and economic benefits for women can also embed the structural determinants of underrepresentation of women if left uninterrogated. A gender-responsive approach reconceives these systems, so that the gains from the process of green industrialization reach women and girls, especially those in emerging markets and developing economies, and so that capital is not directed to pipelines they had little part in defining.

Clean Energy Transition

"Clean, secure, and affordable energy for all — accelerating access while ensuring reliability"

Why it matters
as stated by the COP31 Presidency [extract]

"Energy transition encompasses grid infrastructure, storage, efficiency, electrification, and access to critical technologies. Approximately 730 million people lack access to electricity while 2 billion remain dependent on polluting cooking methods — associated with 3.7 million premature deaths annually."



Why it matters for women and girls

The COP31 Action Agenda commits to making clean energy accessible to "the most vulnerable communities," and women and girls are prominent among them. With current trends, 321 million women could still lack electricity in 2030, 275 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa (UN Women & UN DESA, 2025). Gender norms typically tie women to lower incomes and longer hours of unpaid care at home, making household energy harder to afford and leaving them more exposed when prices spike or supply fails (Clancy et al., 2017; Pachauri & Rao, 2013). **Even in high-income settings, women-headed households are more likely to be energy poor in all but two EU Member States,** and the gender gap reaches 13.4 percentage points among single-parent households in Luxembourg (Alonso-Epelde et al., 2026).

Inequalities are starkest in clean cooking, which the Agenda rightly prioritizes for "the roughly 2 billion people still dependent on polluting cooking methods." **As gender norms make women primarily responsible for cooking over polluting stoves and open fires, women and children account for most premature deaths from household air pollution, and women's exposure to fine particulate matter can reach two to four times that of men** (World Bank, 2020). In Africa, women and girls spend an average of 50 hours a week fetching firewood, cooking and collecting water (Kouassi Akon, 2025), hours taken from education, paid work and rest. In Chad, 42% of households reported gender-based violence during firewood collection over six

months (World Bank, 2020). A gender lens can therefore strengthen the Agenda's "high-integrity finance models." Of the US$2.4 trillion that inaction on clean cooking costs yearly, USD $0.8 trillion stems from its disproportionate impacts on women (World Bank, 2020), whereas investing USD $8 billion a year would return 24 times its value in health, time and emission benefits (UN Women & UN DESA, 2025).

Heat makes the focus on "sustainable cooling solutions" equally relevant. Women and older people are disproportionately affected by heat (IPCC, 2022), and gender shapes workers' exposure and access to protection against rising temperatures, notably among informal workers in low- and middle-income countries (UNEP, 2026). Women also remain underrepresented in building the "modern, resilient grids" the Presidency champions, holding 32% of renewable energy jobs, far fewer in STEM than in administrative positions, and only 5% of utility board seats (IRENA, 2019; UN Women & UN DESA, 2025). Without targeted action, the transition could widen this gap, since over 80% of new decarbonization jobs in Latin America and the Caribbean are projected to fall in male-dominated sectors (ILO & IDB, 2020).

Conversely, closing gaps in energy access and affordability drives gender equality. Global evidence links lower energy poverty to more jobs for women, greater equality in education and socio-economic rights, and narrower gender gaps in health (Nguyen & Su, 2021), and tackling it builds the resilience of women and other disproportionately affected groups (IPCC, 2022). Women are also agents of change. In 66 households studied in Gdańsk (Poland), Prague (Czechia) and Thessaloniki (Greece), the female partner in mixed-sex couples usually made the daily changes to cut energy use (Petrova & Simcock, 2021), and preliminary evidence from Uganda suggests that female-headed households are less likely than male-headed ones to rely primarily on an inefficient, high-exposure stove (World Bank, 2020).

A gender-responsive approach thus fits the Action Agenda's vision of "just and realistic" transitions. Transitions without equity and justice can lead to maladaptation and entrench gender bias (IPCC, 2022). The G20 has already endorsed ending energy poverty and gender balance as principles for just energy transitions (G20, 2024), and the 2021 UN High-level Dialogue on Energy recognised that gender equality and women's empowerment can improve and accelerate access to sustainable energy (United Nations, 2021). Making women visible across clean cooking, electrification, cooling and grids would help COP31 deliver on its commitment that "no community is left behind."

Synergies between the Rio Conventions

"Integrated solutions where climate, biodiversity, and desertification converge"

Why it matters
as stated by the COP31 Presidency [extract]

"Frontline regions worldwide — particularly the Mediterranean, Africa, and the Pacific — confront a multidimensional environmental crisis where drought, water scarcity, land degradation, and wildfires reinforce one another. This reality demands integrated approaches that address climate, biodiversity, and desertification as interconnected challenges."



Why it matters for women and girls

To foster synergies among the three Rio Conventions (UNFCCC, CBD and UNCCD), the COP31 Presidency seeks "integrated solutions" to a crisis "where drought, water scarcity, land degradation, and wildfires *reinforce one another*." Environmental gender inequalities follow the same logic: each shock adds to burdens that women already carry. Drylands cover more than 40% of the Earth's land surface, and climate change is projected to make droughts there more frequent (Mirzabaev et al., 2022). Where households lack water on the premises, women and girls are the main collectors in eight out of ten cases (FAO, 2023). As with fuel for polluting cooking methods, longer journeys for water collection during droughts cut into school and paid work (UN Women, 2024a) and expose women to sexual abuse and gender-based violence (IPCC, 2022).

The "fire-resilient landscapes" the Presidency seeks to re-establish are also challenged by how care roles shape who is safe when fires strike. Women report feeling less prepared to evacuate, often citing responsibility for children, older relatives and other dependents (Baker et al., 2024). Wildfire smoke is associated with preterm birth and low birth weight, while women exposed to wildfires show higher rates of PTSD, anxiety and depression (Muñoz-Nieves et al., 2025).

Floods and landslides confirm that social context shapes mortality rates: where women's standing is lower, including in some low-income countries, disasters kill more women than men, and at younger ages (Salvati et al., 2018).

The Presidency's goal of land management that "contributes simultaneously to emission reductions and to long-term soil health" also opens space to recognise women as land stewards. Women hold much of the local and traditional knowledge in farming communities (IPCC, 2022), and are more likely than men to replant and restock, and use fewer agrochemicals (UN Women, 2024b). This makes them leading partners for the "nature-based solutions" the Presidency aims to promote. Yet despite improving the land, women rarely own it. They make up 43% of the global agricultural workforce but about 15% of landholders (Thawaney & Sarkar, 2024; IPCC, 2022). In nearly half of the countries with data, men own land at least twice as often as women (UN Women, 2024b). Without secure tenure, measures to reduce emissions and improve soil health can even add to gender inequality. In Amhara, Ethiopia, restoration reduced women's access to communal land and increased their workload, which may expose those without title to dispossession (Mponela et al., 2023). Conversely, gender-sensitive land certification in Ethiopia raised investment in soil and water conservation by 20% to 30% (Collantes et al., 2018, as cited in Mponela et al., 2023).

This proves that turning sustainable land management into "a single, mutually reinforcing line of on-the-ground action" depends on who sits at the table. So far, participation targets have not translated into seats: **men hold 60% of national focal points across the three conventions, 51 countries are represented only by men** (GWL Voices, 2026; Oluwasanya et al., 2025), and women head just 16% of environment ministries (UN Women, 2024b). Funding lags even further: about 2% of global climate finance is gender-responsive (Arreguín Prado & Rubio Giraldo, 2026). The Presidency's "shared implementation and reporting models" offer an opening for addressing this leadership issue across the three Conventions, as well as to strengthen their respective gender action plans, since implementing and monitoring them jointly could foster efficiency in financing, thematic coverage and gender-balanced implementation (UN Women, 2024a).

Dynamic and Resilient Health Systems

"Building climate-resilient, low-carbon and equity-focused health systems for the future"

Why it matters
as stated by the COP31 Presidency [extract]

"In the context of climate change, health risks are increasing across a broad spectrum — from heat-related illness and mortality to shifting patterns of infectious diseases and growing pressure on health infrastructure. Against this backdrop, health systems must undergo a structural transformation that enables them to anticipate, absorb, adapt to, and recover rapidly from climate-related shocks."



Why it matters for women and girls

The theme Dynamic and Resilient Health Systems aims to "protect public health, particularly for vulnerable populations, in the face of increasing climate uncertainty". Women and girls are disproportionately at risk of experiencing heightened short- and long-term adverse physical and mental health outcomes in the face of intensifying climate change (Boyle, 2024). **Evidence shows that extreme heat, wildfire smoke, and increased transmission of vector-borne diseases due to warming temperatures can harm women's reproductive health and raise risks of pregnancy and birth complications** (IPCC, 2022). In addition, rates of sexual assault and domestic violence rise during periods of extreme weather and water scarcity (IPCC, 2022). Women and girls are also more likely to experience food insecurity and malnutrition from climate-driven crop losses (IPCC, 2022). In coastal Bangladesh, research found that higher sodium concentrations in drinking water, which populations exposed to rising sea levels face, were associated with increased risks of pregnancy-related hypertension, including preeclampsia (Khan et al., 2014). Moreover, the responsibilities women shoulder as laborers and caregivers can amplify physical and mental health strain under environmentally distressing conditions (Boyle, 2024; IPCC, 2022). While the Presidency rightly emphasizes the need for a "structural transformation" to equip systems to address climate-related health outcomes, these efforts will ultimately fall short if the links between gender inequalities and climate health are overlooked.

A core focus area within this sector is improving multi-hazard early warning and forecasting systems that can strengthen response and decision-making. While this is critical,governments and institutions have expressed difficulties in tailoring their components and implementation to women and girls (UN Women, 2022). Gender inequalities limit women's access to mobile technology needed to receive these warnings as well as economic and physical resources needed to safely evacuate themselves and their families (Pudmenzky et al., 2024). Artificial intelligence and digital health solutions are also highlighted in the Action Agenda as ways to improve these systems, but models are seldom trained on gender-disaggregated data, which embeds gender biases and reinforces the assumption that climate-related health impacts are gender-neutral (UN Women, 2025). Funding cuts to governments and women's organizations have further limited the collection of already scarcegender-disaggregated data, which widens the gender gap in the information health systems rely on for climate and health risk assessments (IPCC, 2022).

Women and girls are already systemically underserved across all phases and sectors of healthcare. Healthcare services specific to women prioritize sexual and reproductive health, yet only 56.3% of women aged 15 to 49 who are married or in a union have full decision-making power in this area (Gupta et al., 2019; UN Women & UN DESA, 2025). Reports have also shown that women are more likely than men to have their symptoms and pain disregarded by healthcare providers, wait longer to receive care for acute pain in emergency settings, and are less likely to be prescribed medications for pain relief (Nogrady, 2024). This is compounded by the fact that although women make up 75% of the healthcare workforce, they are largely confined to caregiving positions where they have little power to influence treatment decisions and drive institutional change (Gupta et al., 2019). As climate stressors worsen and place growing demands on already vulnerable health systems, these existing gaps will only continue to widen in the climate-competent health workforce the Action Agenda aims to build.

Achieving "resilient" and "equity-focused" health systems therefore requires more than improving infrastructure, financing mechanisms, and climate competencies. It means addressing the gender gaps ingrained in the systems meant to respond to the physical and mental health impacts of a warming climate. As these impacts intensify, gender-disaggregated data, women's participation in health leadership, and gender-responsive policies are key conditions for these systems to work for everyone.

Call to Action

The ten chapters of this report demonstrate how deeply gender is entrenched in every area of the COP31 Action Agenda. The inequalities highlighted indicate the urgent need for mitigation and adaptation strategies that reflect women and girls' livelihoods, health, and lived experiences, and that tackle the financial and institutional barriers they face for building resilience and exercising decision-making power.

Three main takeaways appear:

1. The disproportionate impacts women experience from the climate crisis stem from a range of structural inequalities. Climate action that does not address these overlapping inequalities runs the risk of building resilience for some, while reproducing harm to others

2. Women are not just victims, but unmissable agents of climate action, in food systems and beyond.

3. Women's equal representation and leadership - at all levels of climate governance - is an essential building block of inclusive and effective climate action.



The possibility for incorporating a gender perspective in implementation lies within reach of all actors that contribute to the Action Agenda, from governments, to cities, private sector, civil society, and academia. To achieve COP31's vision of an "Implementation COP", we call for:

1. **Representative leadership** in climate and environmental governance, from the local to the multilateral.

2. **Meaningful participation of civil society and women's rights group**s working at the intersection of gender and climate in the formulation and implementation of climate plans and strategies. They hold significant knowledge, and an acute perception of needs and priorities, which can inform effective localized implementation.

3. Improvement in the collection, analysis and use of **gender-disaggregated data** and strengthening of the institutional capacity within governments to apply this data to real-world policy contexts.

4. Strengthening **cooperation** between national environmental and gender equality authorities.

5. **Gender-responsive climate finance** and budgeting, and targeted investment for women-led climate initiatives. Without finance, implementation will remain an ambition.

6. Familiarization of all Action Agenda actors with the landmark **Belém Gender Action Plan** adopted at COP30. The GAP is a roadmap for gender-responsive action for the next nine years (2025-2034), structured through 27 activities and 98 deliverables with entry points for all – governments, private sector, financial institutions, academia – and at all levels, from local, to national, regional, and international.

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