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Policy Brief

Maximising Impact: Connecting Climate Policy and Gender Equality



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Maximising Impact: Connecting climate policy and gender equality

Existing research has established a clear connection between climate change and its disproportionate impact on women and girls, particularly in low-income and marginalised communities.¹ This includes increasing the likelihood and severity of gender-based violence.

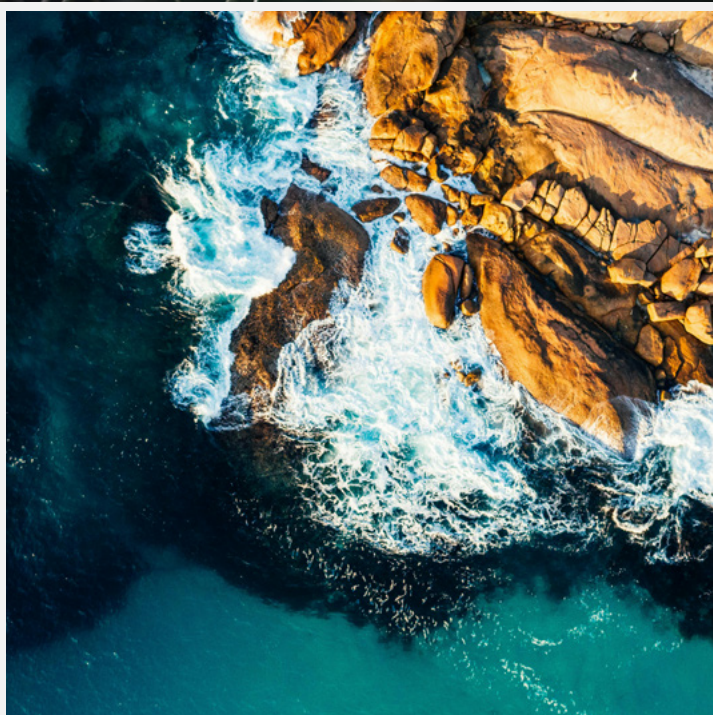


Understanding the relationship between climate change and gender inequality is critical for effective solutions to the climate emergency.²

Policymakers can accelerate climate solutions by:

- Recognising the interlinkages between climate change and gender inequality in climate policy
- Expanding gender-responsive climate finance
- Championing the importance of the gender and climate nexus
- Strengthening women's leadership in climate governance
- Investing in protection systems that prevent gender-based violence
- Enhancing data and evidence to understand the gender and climate nexus

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Gender inequality weakens the effectiveness of climate solutions

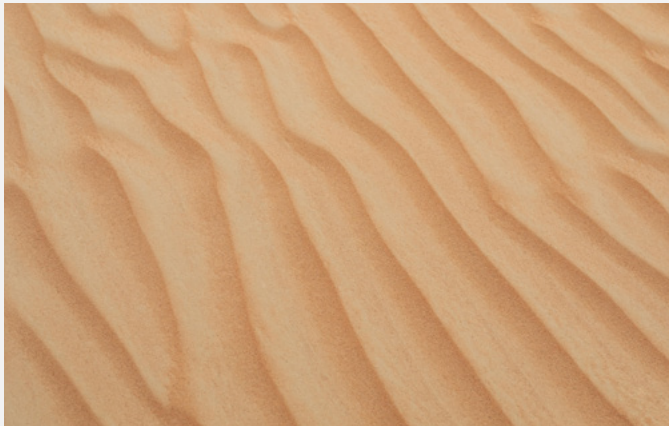
When women's knowledge, skills, and needs are fully integrated into climate policies and programs, solutions become more inclusive, equitable, and effective.³ Yet, gender inequality undermines women's participation in climate solutions by limiting women's mobility, health, leadership, agency and economic independence. This is compounded for women and gender-diverse people who face intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression.

Despite their widespread exclusions from formal decision-making spaces, women continue to resist climate and security harms. Yet they do so in the face of increasing violence, criminalisation, and underfunding.⁴ For example, Indigenous women are targeted due to their critical role in environmental stewardship.⁵

Gender inequality also undermines women's ability to adapt to and recover from climate shocks.⁶ This, in turn, reduces the overall adaptive capacity of communities. For example, in humanitarian and climate-stressed contexts, gender-based violence and gender discrimination can reduce women's workforce participation, slowing economic recovery after disasters. Resources invested in advancing gender equality increase the community's overall resilience to climate impacts.

“Gender equality and climate action are mutually reinforcing and allow for more effective and sustainable solutions.”

— European Union, Statement at COP29 on the importance of an ambitious outcome on gender and climate change.



Integrated strategies accelerate achievements across the SDGs

Gender inequality poses a barrier to environmental conservation, sustainable development and efficient climate action. Yet, actions to address climate change and to promote gender equality often exist in siloes. For example, coherence and integration between gender equality and environmental frameworks, agreements, and goals are largely absent.⁷

Evidence demonstrates that progress on gender equality (Goal 5) impacts progress across the sustainable development goals.⁸ Given climate change is amplifying existing gender inequalities across sectors, such as health, economy, poverty and social protection, this interplay is likely to stall progress even further (See Figure 1). Significantly, it is estimated, under the worst-case scenario, that climate change could push up to 158 million, 310 million and 422 million more women and girls into poverty at the \$2.15, \$3.65 and \$6.85 per day international poverty thresholds.⁹ Recent FAO research has shown that if climate change increases by another one degree Celsius, female-headed households could lose 34 per cent of their income compared to male-headed households.¹⁰

By addressing climate change and gender inequality simultaneously, each dollar spent multiplies its effect across social, economic, and environmental outcomes. This, in turn, accelerates progress across the sustainable development goals. For example, working with local women to plan and build safer water points, supports water security and inclusive community decision making, as well as reducing risks of violence and women's unpaid workload associated with long journeys for water. This moves away from reactive spending (responding to crises) to proactive investment (preventing harm, building resilience, and maximising resources).



Gender and climate change nexus

Key impacts across sectors

See *Quantifying the Nexus between Climate and Gender: Research Report (2026)* – forthcoming report for this project – for research informing this visual.

Figure 01

● INVESTMENT

Gender-responsive climate finance remains limited. Women-led and Indigenous organisations driving resilience are underfunded.

● CONFLICT & DISPLACEMENT

Climate-linked conflicts increase violence and insecurity. Refugee and stateless women face compounded discrimination and insecurity. Natural resource driven conflicts make young men vulnerable for recruitment to armed extremist groups.

● LAND

Women's unequal land rights weaken resilience and adaptive capacity. Development related land acquisitions are more likely to displace and dispossess marginalised women.

● OCEANS

Lack of recognition of women's roles, such as in small scale fisheries, limits adaptive capacity. Indigenous and coastal women face exclusion from marine governance.

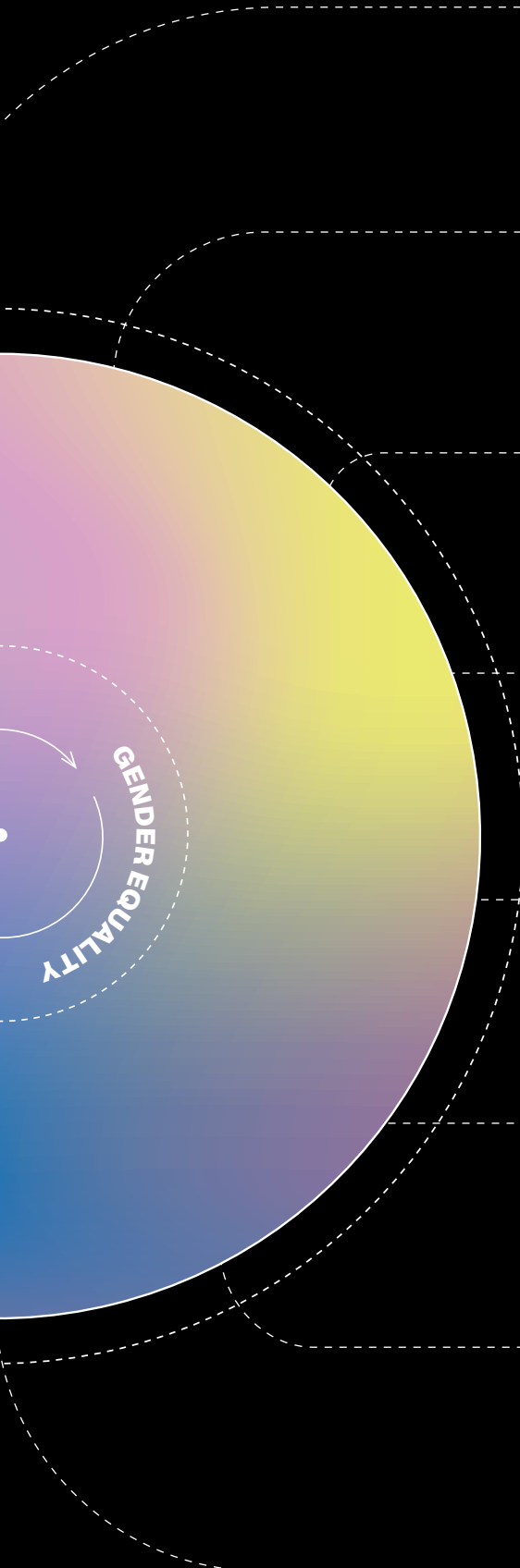
● SUSTAINABLE CITIES

Gender-blind urban/climate policies perpetuate inequalities. Women's groups, community organisations, and women leaders often play a central role in urban disaster risk reduction, particularly in informal settlements.

● ECONOMY

Climate stress intensifies unpaid care burdens. Climate shocks impact on agriculture, tourism, and informal work reducing women's income security.





● POVERTY

Women, especially rural and Indigenous, face increased poverty risk due to droughts, floods, and resource loss that threaten climate-sensitive livelihoods.

● HEALTH

Heat, floods and disease outbreaks impact maternal and newborn health. Climate stress and displacement heighten GBV risks.

● EDUCATION

Families prioritise boys' return to school after climate-related disruptions. Women's under-representation in STEM education limits access to green jobs and innovation.

● GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Climate crises increase risks of GBV. Violence undermines women's and girls' resilience to climate hazards and participation in climate solutions.

● GOVERNANCE

Women, especially from Global Majority and Indigenous groups, remain underrepresented in climate decision-making, limiting inclusive solutions.

● WASH

Water scarcity and poor sanitation increase women's workloads and safety risks. Time spent collecting water reduces education and income opportunities. Droughts increase injury risk for men collecting water.

● CLEAN ENERGY

Women face disproportionate health impacts from polluting fuels within the household. Women face increased barriers accessing and contributing to clean energy transitions. Gender-inclusive conservation is more effective.

Climate change and gender inequality are global problems requiring global solutions

Climate change does not stop at national borders, and neither do its social and economic consequences. Rising temperatures, resource scarcity, and displacement affect communities across the globe, impacting on international stability, trade, health and security, and deepening existing gender inequalities.

Gender inequality, climate change, and conflict are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing (see Figure 2).¹¹ Responding to these overlapping global crises, therefore, necessitates international cooperation and commitment to gender-responsive, climate-resilient, and conflict-sensitive policies. However, just 2.3 per cent of international climate finance has gone to projects with gender as a principal objective; and less than 1 per cent of bilateral ODA has gone to projects with both climate adaptation and gender as principal objectives.¹²

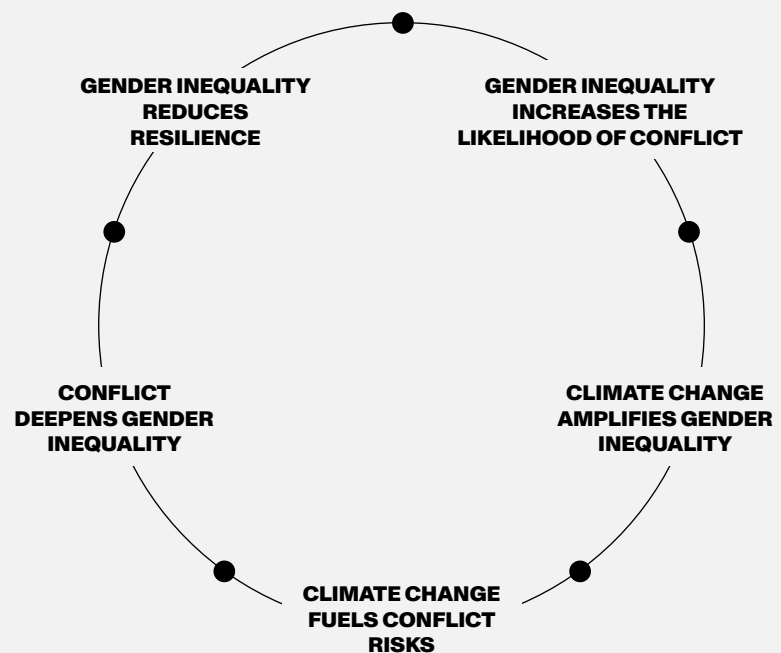
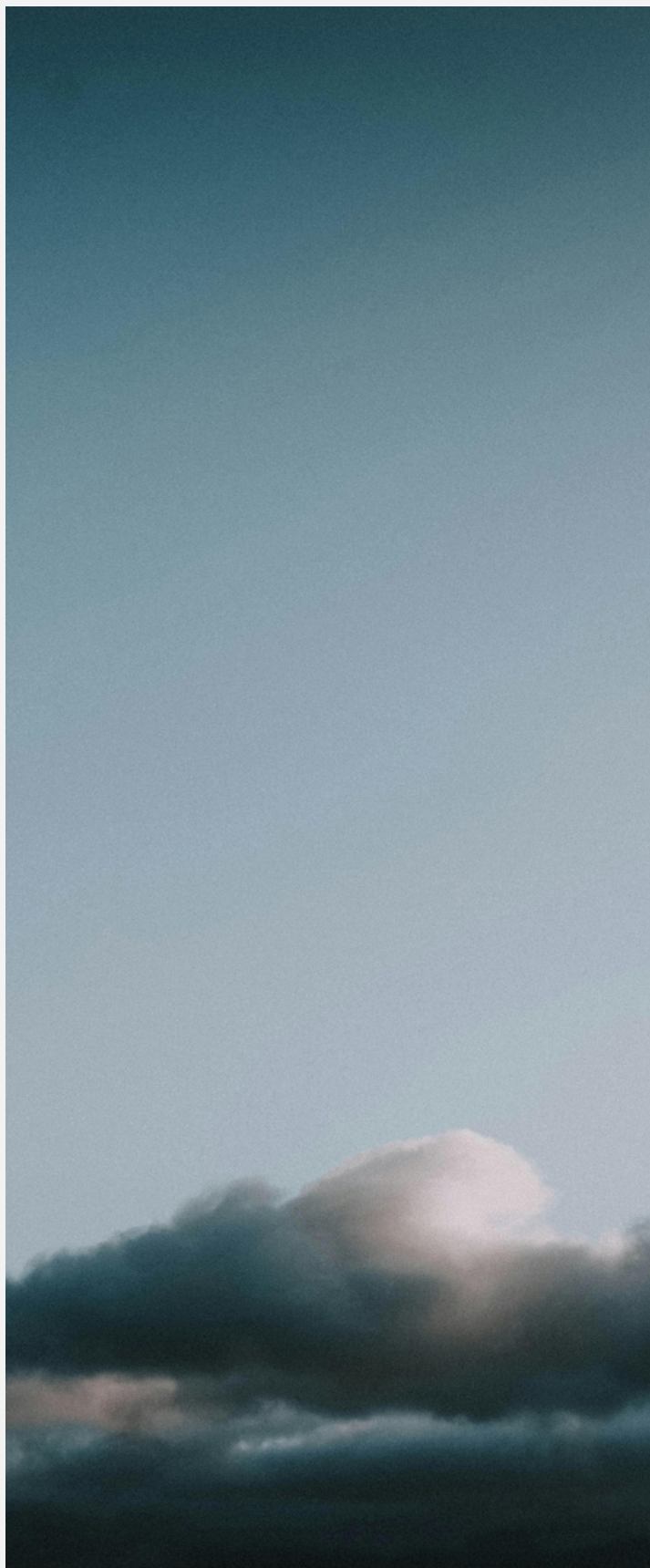


Figure 02



Climate change increases the risks and costs of gender-based violence

Climate change increases the risk of gender-based violence, such as intimate partner violence, child marriage, trafficking and sexual harassment.¹³ In fact, it is estimated that by the end of the century, **1 in 10 cases of intimate partner violence will be linked to climate change.**¹⁴ Despite this alarming projection, the relationship between GBV and climate change remains underexplored, with existing research largely confined to small-scale, context-specific qualitative studies.¹⁵

The global costs of gender-based violence have been estimated to be US\$1.5 trillion or approximately 2 per cent of global GDP.¹⁶ This includes healthcare, legal services, and lost productivity, as well as the immediate and long-term physical, sexual, and mental consequences for women and girls. Taking action to prevent gender-based violence, as part of climate adaptation programs, will reduce these costs for individuals and countries. Conversely, ignoring gender-based violence risks can undermine the success of climate-related investment.

Recommendations

With the adoption of the Belém Gender Action Plan for 2026–2034 at COP30, Governments have an opportunity to accelerate climate solutions by investing in action to promote gender equality connected to climate change:

**Recognise the interlinkages between climate change and gender inequality in climate policy:**

Integrate gender-based violence, and other gender inequalities, as climate-related risks into climate strategies and frameworks, and report on progress against the Belém Gender Action Plan.

**Champion the importance of the gender and climate nexus:**

Advocate for the importance of integrated strategies on climate, gender inequality and preventing gender-based violence in international forums including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and for resourcing and state accountability under the Belém Gender Action Plan.

**Invest in protection systems that prevent gender-based violence:**

Include gender-based violence prevention and response mechanisms in climate and humanitarian programs, especially in areas affected by displacement and resource stress.

**Enhance data and evidence:**

Support data collection and research partnerships to document how climate stressors exacerbate gender inequality and gender-based violence, including the development of dedicated, scalable quantitative metrics that capture gender-climate dynamics. Partner with civil society practitioners for data validation and localised assessments.

**Expand gender-responsive climate finance:**

Direct climate finance to women's organisations, evidence-based gender-based violence prevention initiatives, and actions to address gender inequality.

**Strengthen women's leadership in climate governance:**

Support women's participation and leadership in international and regional decision-making platforms.

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- ⁷ Castañeda, C., I., Sabater, L., Owren, C., & Boyer, A. E. (2020). *Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality*, IUCN & USAID.
- ⁸ Homan, S. and Fulu, E. (2019). *Sustainable Development Goals and VAWG*. Melbourne, The Equality Institute.
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- ¹¹ UNDP (2020). *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*; Le Masson, V., et al. (2019). *How Violence Against Women and Girls Undermines Resilience to Climate Risks*. ODI; Castañeda, C., I., Sabater, L., Owren, C., & Boyer, A. E. (2020). *Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality*, IUCN & USAID; UN Women (2022). *Gender, Climate and Conflict: Understanding Interconnected Risks*.
- ¹² See Patel, S., Plutshack, V., Kajumba, T., Lopez, M. and Krishnapriya, P. (2023). *Gender, climate finance and inclusive low-carbon transitions*. IIED, London; and Moss, L. & Grutter, N. (2025) *Climate change and the gender justice backlash*, 6 May, IIED Insights.
- ¹³ This happens through three pathways: climate change fuels the stressors that trigger GBV, post-disaster environments and response create an enabling environment for GBV, and climate pressures amplify the underlying structural causes of gender-based violence – see Thurston, A., Stöckl, H., & Ranganathan, M. (2021). *Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review*. *BMJ Global Health*: 6: e004377.
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