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## Fostering Gender Justice in Climate Action: Recommendations to Strengthen Gender in UNFCCC decision-making

The climate crisis touches everyone, but the impact of extreme weather events – from scorching heat waves and massive floods to raging forest fires – is not equal. It has a particularly severe impact on already vulnerable people, with women and girls, in all their diversity, being the most affected. In societies around the world, women and girls still do not have equal rights. As a result of this lack of rights, in addition to negative social norms, they generally have less access to education, financial services, legal support, and job markets.

This gender inequality hinders their capacity to be prepared for and respond to climate change, leaving them more vulnerable to its impacts. This is compounded by discrimination based on other, intersecting aspects of their identity. Gender inequality also worsens the climate crisis itself. In the wake of extreme weather events, women have stepped up to organise, adapt and innovate, proving that they hold the solutions to address and tackle the impact of climate change. Yet, they remain largely excluded from policy and decision-making processes and lack access to equitable finance.

For CARE, **gender justice** is a cornerstone of all climate action. We urge the international climate decision-making under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to go beyond just being **gender sensitive** by recognising gender discrimination is a global reality, or even being **gender responsive** by questioning or challenging gender inequality. Instead, UNFCCC decision-making and its implementation must strive to be **gender transformative** and work to close gender gaps and fundamentally change gender relations and unequal power dynamics, ensuring all genders are on an equal footing.

### Gender justice

Gender justice entails ending the inequalities between the different genders. In the context of Climate Action, it signifies a fundamental commitment to addressing the intertwined issue of climate change and gender inequality. It recognises that climate change affects different genders in different ways, and that other intersecting aspects of people's identity such as race, class, religion, ability, etc. further compound inequalities. Therefore, these diverse perspectives and experiences should be central to climate policies and actions.

## Gender in UNFCCC

Parties to the UNFCCC “have recognised the importance of involving women and men equally in UNFCCC processes and in the development and implementation of national climate policies that are gender-responsive.” This is reflected by the establishment of a dedicated agenda on gender and climate change, the inclusion of gender-related provisions in the Paris Agreement, and the adoption of the Lima Work Programme on Gender and the Gender Action Plan (GAP). The GAP focuses on five key areas: capacity-building and knowledge-sharing; gender balance and women’s leadership; policy coherence; gender-responsive implementation; and monitoring and reporting.

Despite progress, significant gaps remain in effecting gender justice within UNFCCC decision-making and implementing its outcomes. The regime does not offer any real guidance for addressing gendered experiences of climate change. Although coherence was prominently emphasised in the GAP, gender has been confined to the gender negotiations and GAP. Coherence was reflected in the organisation of joint workshops and events, but these efforts did not foster genuine complementarities that could lead to tangible outcomes. Moreover, many countries have appointed National Gender and Climate Change Focal Points, but they face major capacity and financial challenges, limiting the GAP’s impact at the national level. The implementation of the GAP has all in all failed to make tangible impact at the country-level. Also, the GAP lacks explicit references to the diverse impacts of climate change based on intersecting identities, and countries are not required to report on this beyond voluntary efforts.

Moreover, UNFCCC negotiations have increasingly led to diluted commitments and regressive language on gender equality and human rights, with procedural conflicts often overshadowing substantive progress in the gender negotiations. Women, in all their diversity, remain underrepresented in climate decision-making spaces, including in influential spaces like the UNFCCC. WEDO’s Gender Climate Tracker showed that at COP28, only 34% of Party delegates were women, and less than 20% of Heads of Delegation were female. Just 2% of delegations had an equal number of men and women. Furthermore, feminist and women’s groups’ climate solutions are still overlooked and underfunded, with estimates indicating they received just 0.22% of bilateral climate finance in 2018-2019.



## Our recommendations towards strengthening gender justice in the UNFCCC

**1) Fully commit to gender and intersectional considerations in all UNFCCC decisions while recommitting to actively promote gender justice and women and girls’ equal rights.** This should be achieved by ensuring the UNFCCC fully implements and upholds the UN Gender Equality Acceleration Plan launched in 2024, and through the following actions:

a. **Leverage established gender just intersectional and human rights UN language.** For example, using the definition on an intersectional gender approach given in Modality 2.d of the Gender Plan of Action of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). As well as drawing on the conclusions of CSW68 about the importance of gender equality for achieving sustainable development.

**b. Resist pushbacks on rights.** Delegations should make gender just climate action a key priority, and not allow it to become a bargaining chip. Establish a minimum expectation for inclusive language in UNFCCC decisions, drawing from existing agreed-upon standards and emphasising intersectionality. Identify and condemn any regressive language that undermines gender equality or human rights. An example of such language is using the term ‘gender balance’ rather than equality, which leads to focusing on representation rather than substantive action towards equitable participation.

**c. Ensure that negotiating teams, including their leadership, have sufficient gender expertise,** to be able to resist pushbacks. Parties should **appoint full-time gender focal points with adequate seniority, whose sole responsibility is to ensure the centrality of gender within their delegations.** Additionally, a demonstrated commitment to Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls should be a key criterion for selecting new members of delegations and the UNFCCC secretariat.

**d. Gender experts should be involved in all stages of policy development under UNFCCC and its monitoring, as both participants and decision-makers.** This includes meaningful consultation with diverse Women Led Organisations (WLOs) and Women Rights Organisations (WROs) with mandates to promote gender equality and defend women and girls’ rights. Priority should be given – and resources allocated – to organisations from the Global South, particularly those working with underrepresented communities, including minority groups, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ individuals.

**e. Ensure systematic collection and analysis of Sex, Age and Disability Disaggregated Data (SADDD) as part of all climate decision-making, implementation and monitoring,** enhance transparency in climate-related data, and allocate resources for research and knowledge-sharing, ensuring that decisions address the diverse needs of vulnerable populations. Develop guidelines on gender data for reporting on Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs).

**f. Develop gender goals in all negotiation tracks, as well as all programmes and projects stemming from these negotiations.** Gender issues should not be isolated to gender negotiations and the GAP. Ensure gender integration and consideration through other negotiation processes, particularly multi-year processes (such as the next global stock take), and through specific dialogues, engagement of the gender Secretariat, etc. Gender goals and plans should not only be integrated throughout all negotiation tracks, but also be established at local and project level as well as national and international level.

**2) Ensure women’s full, equal, meaningful, and safe participation and (co-)leadership in all levels and bodies.** The IPCC showed that there is substantial evidence and consensus that empowering women benefits both mitigation and adaptation efforts. The UNFCCC itself highlighted that communities become more resilient and better equipped to tackle climate change when women are included in decision-making and planning processes. To move beyond inclusive decision-making and equal participation towards genuine equal leadership, substantial action is required:



a. UNFCCC, Parties, and donors must **ensure that climate negotiations and processes include the full, equal, meaningful and safe participation of diverse women and girl's organisations and individuals**, particularly in decision-making roles. This means Parties need to provide timely support and quality funding at the national level to facilitate their effective participation and leadership in UNFCCC processes.

b. Additionally, **States must support international programmes and initiatives that promote political participation of women from underrepresented groups**. An example of such programmes is the Women Delegates Fund, which provides financial support for delegates from LDCs and SIDs to participate in UNFCCC meetings.

c. **Implement gender quotas in UNFCCC and related climate decision-making processes, to advance inclusive decision-making**. Corrective mechanisms to enhance gender equality are a well-established tool in international human rights law. Research also indicates that gender quotas successfully enhance the fairness and effectiveness of climate policy measures if accompanied by capacity-building and gender transformative measures.

**3) Ensure more robust and just financing for gender equality in climate decision-making and action.** To achieve this, it is essential to significantly increase overall climate finance for developing countries – from billions to trillions – particularly for adaptation, loss, and damage funding, which are critical for vulnerable and marginalised groups. For this finance to be truly gender-transformative, it is crucial to:

a. **Increase and sustain simplified, direct access to finance for marginalised and disenfranchised groups, prioritising women's groups' climate solutions.** Reform climate finance channels by reducing administrative barriers and providing mechanisms for simplified and enhanced access (e.g. via small grant mechanisms). Improve accessibility by streamlining climate-related funding and reporting processes across different donors. Increase the volume of climate finance available to local and national actors, especially WLO's and WRO's in line with other existing donor commitments like the Grand Bargain. Ensure that this finance is of high quality. For example, see the one-pager on how to scale up Quality Funding in the Grand Bargain.

b. **Raise the proportion of global climate finance directed towards gender-responsive climate solutions.** Only one-third of climate finance projects in 2019-2020 incorporated gender equality objectives, as marked through the OECD DAC gender equality markers. Alarming, gender equality was not targeted in 20% of these projects and was not marked in 45% of them. To address this gap, donors should strive to raise marked bilateral climate finance targeting gender to 88%, as stipulated in the 2021 Global Acceleration Plan. This should also be integrated into the NCQG.

c. **Ensure climate finance does not lead to increased indebtedness.** Focus on grant-based public climate finance (in the NCQG and the implementation of climate-related programming) to avoid exacerbating debt, particularly considering the gendered impacts of debt and the unpaid, informal care work resulting from climate change and inadequate social protection.



d. **Focus on fostering a gender-just green transition, including providing robust financing for the shift to green economies.** The green transition promises to create 65 million new jobs by 2030, however, without putting gender equality front and centre, women will not automatically benefit from it. Instead, there is a real risk of further rolling back progress on gender equality. Decision-makers must integrate a gender lens across all green transition initiatives. This includes targeted training and upskilling programmes for women and girls in green and higher-skilled jobs, while tackling structural barriers through improved social and legal protections (e.g. parental leave, universal childcare, domestic and work violence support programmes). A first key step is to **broaden the definition of green work to include low-carbon and often unpaid sectors dominated by women, such as care and social work.** Increasing investments in these areas is vital, as global care needs are projected to rise by 10% in the next decade due to the growing youth and elderly populations and climate-related health challenges.

**4) In addition to the above recommendations that apply to the UNFCCC beyond the Gender Action Plan, it remains essential to create a stronger and inclusive GAP that adopts an intersectional approach and aligns with the recommendations of the Women & Gender Constituency,** including:

a. Future iterations of the GAP must **include clear, measurable indicators to track progress** over time. These indicators should be both collective and disaggregated by Parties or constituted bodies, enabling detailed monitoring and ensuring accountability at different levels.

b. The GAP must provide **support to and outline national level actions,** in ways that are detailed, specific, and connected to existing processes and resources.

c. The next GAP cannot be operationalised without fully being resourced. The current GAP lacks the necessary funding to turn gender commitments into action. To make real progress, a new iteration should **clearly outline strategies for mobilising adequate means of implementation** that will allow the GAP to move beyond negotiations and drive tangible outcomes.

### Acknowledgements

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