

# Women at the Intersection of Gender, Conflict, & Climate Justice

A COLLECTION OF STORIES FROM THE  
PHILIPPINES, BRAZIL, MOZAMBIQUE  
AND BURKINA FASO



GLOBAL ALLIANCE  
FOR GREEN AND  
GENDER ACTION

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# Introduction

Across the world, women, girls and trans, intersex and nonbinary people lead efforts to advance peace, gender and environmental justice. From the Philippines to Mozambique, Burkina Faso to Brazil, they face a deadly convergence of violence, environmental destruction, and extractivist land grabs. As corporate interests, state forces or other armed actors expand into their territories, entire communities are being displaced, criminalized, or subjected to violent repression. In particular, young people and those living in rural, Indigenous, Black and Afro-descendent communities. At the same time, worsening climate disasters further erode their means of survival, exacerbating food insecurity, water shortages, forced migration and gender inequalities.

Yet, these women, girls and trans, intersex and nonbinary people are not merely victims of crises and oppression. They are leaders, mobilizers, and defenders – reclaiming land, preserving indigenous or traditional knowledge, resisting militarization, and forging innovative solutions to climate change adaptation. Through endeavours like grassroots organizing, legal advocacy, alternative education, direct action, they challenge systemic injustices while seeking to preserve and strengthen their communities, livelihoods and environments.

This collection is the first publication of a cross country analysis, bringing together case studies from the Philippines, Brazil, Mozambique, and Burkina Faso, illuminating the gender-conflict-climate nexus through the lived experiences of those who navigate its most brutal realities. The research centers the voices of Indigenous, Black, and Brown women from both rural, semi- and urban areas, including cis and trans women, travesti women from Brazil, and heterosexual, lesbian and bisexual women. While some might be perceived as nonbinary or queer in Western contexts, they made it clear that these terms do not reflect their identities. In the face of violent environments and rigid gender norms, not all participants may have felt safe identifying as part of the LGBTIQ+ community. To ensure their protection, the study applied a strong do no harm approach.

**By highlighting women's voices from the frontlines, this publication highlights their strategies of survival and resistance, recognizing their power and agency in the struggle for a just and sustainable future.**

This series will also include a comprehensive report analyzing case studies across the Philippines, Brazil, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of Congo, along with a policy document offering concrete recommendations for supporting the work of women led community based organizations, Women Environmental and Human Rights Defenders (WEHRDs), and gender just climate solutions. It has been developed under the coordination of the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action, in partnership with organizations and WEHRDs across these countries and generously supported by UK's Foreign Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). Launched in 2016, the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA) rallies the collective power of women's rights, environmental, and climate justice movements around the world. GAGGA's vision is a world where women's rights to water, food security, and a clean, healthy and safe environment are recognized and respected. GAGGA has built a unique and powerful network across 44 countries, providing financial and non-financial resources to 1,850 women led and community based organizations (CBOs), 33 international, regional and national women's rights and environmental justice funds, and 93 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and supporting advocacy initiatives from the local, national, regional and international level.

# Key Findings: Women's Strategies of Survival, Resistance, and Adaptation

## RECLAIMING LAND AND LIVELIHOODS

Control over land and livelihoods is central to women's resistance against conflict, climate change, and extractivism. Across the Philippines, Brazil, Mozambique, and Burkina Faso, women fight for ancestral land, food security, and autonomy while resisting land grabs, intimidation, and forced displacement, often driven by oil and mining companies, agribusinesses, and state-backed interests. In Brazil, LGBTQIA+ activists form alliances with the Landless Workers Movement, Indigenous communities, and the Quilombola movement – which represents descendants of African enslaved people – to collectively fight land grabs and advocate for land reform. In Mozambique, women train as community based paralegals, preventing corporate land seizures and mediating community conflicts. In Burkina Faso, women lead advocacy efforts at both the community and municipal levels, demanding legal recognition of their land rights. Meanwhile, in the Philippines, women serve as defenders and mobilizers, protecting ancestral lands from corporate, state, and private encroachment.

## BUILDING COLLECTIVE STRENGTH

Women form solidarity networks to resist injustice, militarization, and the effects of climate change using a combination of legal advocacy, economic and agricultural cooperation, and movement building strategies. Women in Mozambique, for example, emphasized the importance of forming women's farming cooperatives to strengthen their bargaining power and financial capacity, enabling them to secure land tenure and adapt agricultural practices to climate change. In Burkina Faso, women highlighted powerful initiatives that foster collaboration between internally displaced women and host community women. This cooperation not only ensures continuous access to land for agricultural production but also strengthens social cohesion, helping to mitigate grievances, tensions, and resource-related conflicts. In the Philippines, women underscored the vital role

of collective action in protecting their communities from land grabbers who attempt to seize their land while men are away at work. Meanwhile, in Brazil, women stressed the importance of intersectional and inclusive approaches to ensure that no one is left behind in the fight to protect Women Environmental and Human Rights Defenders (WEHRDs).

## ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION AND POLITICAL AWARENESS

Education equips women and communities with critical knowledge to resist oppression and build more just and sustainable futures. In the Philippines, forcibly closed Lumad schools – community run institutions established by Indigenous Lumad peoples – integrated history, environmental stewardship, and human rights to train Indigenous leaders and offer a sense of belonging in a wider context that is set upon their extinction. In Mozambique, Centro Terra Viva (CTV) mainstreams gender justice into land governance, ensuring that women have legal literacy and leadership skills to challenge discriminatory land policies and corporate encroachment. In Burkina Faso, the Women Environmental Program (WEP) plays a key role in strengthening women's land rights and independence through teaching legal literacy, advocacy and negotiation skills. For incarcerated transvesti women in Brazil, legal education and a sustainable upcycling initiative provide a pathway to reclaim economic independence while resisting state violence and environmental dispossession. These educational efforts highlight how climate adaptation is not just about technical solutions, but about reclaiming power, challenging oppression, and creating alternative futures.



## WOMEN-LED CLIMATE ADAPTATION

Women drive sustainable climate solutions through agroecology, forest management, and water conservation. However, across the four countries, women do not only develop collaborative practices that restore ecosystems, protect biodiversity, and ensure long-term food security; they also reclaim political and economic agency over their land, resources and livelihoods. In Burkina Faso, women's farming cooperatives strengthen social cohesion and prevent resource conflicts by fostering collaboration between displaced and host community women.

In Mozambique, women engage in land governance and agroecology to ensure their communities can withstand extractivism and climate shocks while also promoting gender just land rights. In the Philippines, Lumad women defend ancestral territories against militarization and extractivism, integrating environmental stewardship with Indigenous knowledge to sustain both land and culture. Meanwhile in Brazil, travesti women like Débora Sabará challenge environmental transphobia by advocating for inclusive policies and leading sustainability initiatives that benefit communities who have been pushed to the margins.

## NAVIGATING MILITARIZATION AND SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Women face gender-based violence as a result of their activism, but also for simply existing as women in conflict and climate disaster zones. As land defenders and organizers, they are criminalized through red-tagging, imprisonment, harassment, and extrajudicial killings, as seen in the Philippines, where Lumad women resisting corporate land grabs and environmental destruction are often labeled as insurgents. In Brazil, WEHRDs like travesti leader Débora Sabará are subjected to surveillance, political persecution, and smear campaigns, facing state repression not only for their activism, but because of their gender identity.

Since the 2022 coup, Burkina Faso's military junta has deepened militarization and repression, restricting civil society and activism. WEHRDs, land rights activists and displaced women now face both, armed group violence and state-imposed restrictions, making mobilization even more dangerous amid rising gendered violence and human rights violati-

ons. Despite these threats, women continue resisting, rebuilding, and supporting survivors. Women-led organizations provide safe spaces, legal aid, and advocacy, reinforcing the link between bodily autonomy, land rights, and justice.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBLE, LONG-TERM CORE FUNDING

Sustained, flexible funding is crucial for women-led organizations, movements and initiatives addressing the intersection of gender, conflict, and climate justice. Across Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Brazil, and the Philippines, groups like CTV, WEP, GOLD Associação, and SABOKAHAN rely on funding to sustain land rights advocacy, legal support, climate adaptation, education, and support for survivors of violence. However, many struggle with short-term, project based funding, limiting their ability to scale impact, respond to crises and shrinking spaces for their work.

In Mozambique, CTV was only able to reshape its entire approach, embedding gender justice into the fabric of its organization and programmes, because of flexible, long-term core funding provided through GAGGA. In Brazil and the Philippines, movement building organizations like GOLD and SABOKAHAN carry the dual weight of driving long-term transformation while providing immediate support in two of the world's deadliest countries for WEHRDs. In Burkina Faso, WEP's work extends beyond securing tenure and adapting agriculture and into climate change by supporting women and communities in rebuilding social cohesion in areas fractured by displacement and resource scarcity. With sustained, unrestricted support, these organizations can do more than contribute to women's and communities' survival; they can create new possibilities for a gender and climate just future.



## LEADERSHIP AS A MODEL FOR CHANGE

These case studies highlight best practices that can be adapted and scaled:

- **Community based land defence** – Training women to lead land councils, negotiate tenure agreements and reclaim unlawfully taken land through legal processes.
- **Women's economic cooperatives** – Strengthening financial security and bargaining power through collective land use, cooperative farming, and shared resources.
- **Alternative and inclusive education** – Providing women and marginalized communities with the political awareness, legal knowledge, and climate adaptation skills needed to resist oppression and adapt to climate change.
- **Sustainable, women-led land management** – Advancing gender just agroecology, reforestation, and water conservation as solutions to climate change and food insecurity.
- **Networks of resistance** – Building or supporting solidarity across movements to challenge militarization, defend human rights, and amplify grassroots leadership.
- **Protection against gender-based violence** – Strengthening or establishing safe spaces, legal aid, and advocacy to support women facing persecution for their activism and identities.
- **Flexible, core funding** – Providing direct, long-term core funding to women-led organizations and initiatives, enabling them to sustain advocacy, adapt to crises, and strengthen land, climate and gender justice efforts.

These approaches demonstrate that women's leadership is not only about **survival** – it offers a transformative model for justice, strength, and sustainability.



# Indigenous Women on the Frontlines: Lumad Resistance in Mindanao's Climate and Militarization Conflict Crisis

The Philippines is rich in biodiversity but it is also among the deadliest countries for women environmental human rights defenders. Nowhere is this more evident than in Mindanao, where armed conflict between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the New People's Army (NPA) intersects with rampant extractivism. Corporations and elites exploit minerals, timber, and agriculture, displacing Indigenous Lumad communities, threatening their ancestral lands and existence. Climate disasters – typhoons, floods, and droughts – further destabilize livelihoods, while militarization enables land grabs and suppresses Indigenous resistance. In response, Lumad communities have birthed a strong tradition of environmental human rights defenders, with many women emerging as mobilizers, educators, and key figures in grassroots resistance efforts. Their narratives reveal a nuanced gender-conflict-climate nexus – where women's agency both emerges from and is shaped by the intersection of these overlapping crises.

## OPPOSING LAND GRABS AND POLITICAL PERSECUTION

One woman<sup>1</sup> in her forties recalls a childhood defined by poverty and the constant threat of dispossession. Growing up, she had to work on the family farm instead of attending school, as her large family struggled just to secure enough food. As a teenager, she attended study sessions with community organizers and resistance leaders, where she learned more about systems of exploitation and the impact on indigenous communities and land. Despite being urged to join the resistance, she laughed off the idea, remarking, "When the revolution is close to winning, then I'll come join you." Over time, however, she became deeply involved in an Indigenous People's Rights

organization, and her prominence led to a "shoot to kill" order from the AFP – a directive authorizing soldiers to kill rather than arrest her on sight. Fearing for her life, she left her children with relatives and went into hiding. Though she later surrendered and spent two years in jail for protecting fellow activists, her story highlights the difficult choices women face in defending their land and rights.

## FOLLOWING HER MOTHER'S LEGACY

Another young woman in her twenties, grew up in a rural community amidst dense forests and rugged mountains, where the sounds of gunfire were an everyday occurrence. Her grandmother's small plot of land, and stories of logging companies' intrusions shaped her early understanding of land struggles. She learned of her mother's decision to join the NPA as a medic, where she was killed when her daughter was only two.



<sup>1</sup>The women in this case study prefer to stay anonymous for security reasons.



Switching from public school to an alternative Lumad school not only fostered a sense of belonging but also opened her eyes to the systemic roots of poverty and environmental abuse. “I used to think poverty was normal, that you just had to work hard to escape it,” she recalls. “Then I realized – everything is connected to land.” Despite her father’s opposition, she embraced activism, driven by anger at the system that victimized her mother and by a conviction in Indigenous self-determination.

### **BUILDING STRENGTH THROUGH EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY**

For another young woman, the communal ethos of her childhood shaped her understanding of resistance. She describes growing up in a mountainous area: “In our community, each family cultivates its own land, but we also maintain a communal farm where we grow corn. Everyone contributes, and from the small profit we earn, we purchase shared essentials – like cooking pots and utensils – for communal activities, rituals, and protests.”

As she grew older, she became aware of external forces threatening their land. Ranchers, paramilitary groups, and big landlords tried to seize their ancestral domain through legal loopholes and intimidation. She remembers older family members forming a human barricade to stop a powerful landlord’s return. Inspired by this collective determination, she switched to a Lumad school as a teenager, where the curriculum prioritized Indigenous knowledge and resistance history. A shift to a Bakwit (evacuation) School in Manila later magnified her activism, giving her opportunities to meet other Indigenous communities and build solidarity. Once a shy student, she now leads discussions with university leaders, students, and visitors on the realities of the Lumad struggle in Mindanao.

**“Then I realized – everything is connected to land.”**

### **DEFENDING LAND AND LIFE AMID CLIMATE AND MILITARIZED THREATS**

A fourth young woman grew up in a watershed community where small-scale farming and mining had sustained life for generations. The community practiced strong mutual aid, ensuring that no one went hungry. Their resourcefulness was evident in their diverse water sources – from creeks to bamboo and tree sap – but was gradually eroded by climate change and militarization. Droughts, worsened by El Niño, stunted crops, while deforestation from outside interests disrupted water access. “Root crops can’t grow well in a drought,” she explains, describing how the shift from subsistence farming to cash crops like rubber and bananas altered both livelihoods and communal values. Meanwhile, military curfews and surveillance became routine, as soldiers accused residents – particularly her father, a respected community organizer – of being NPA members. “They said, ‘99% of the people in this community are NPAs.’ But we were not. We are civilians.”

Militarization intensified during Duterte’s Martial Law, imposing curfews and surveillance that persist until today. The loss of her father to extrajudicial killing solidified her commitment to organizing. Despite ongoing repression, she dreams of a future where Lumad communities regain autonomy, develop sustainable livelihoods, and reclaim their unity.

### **LEADING THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE AND SELF-DETERMINATION**

The stories of these four Lumad women reveal an unwavering determination to resist the intertwined forces of extractivism, militarization, and climate change. Their journeys – marked by personal sacrifice, collective solidarity, and transformative education led by Lumad leaders – demonstrate that even amid relentless hardship, Indigenous women can lead powerful movements for justice and self-determination.

<sup>2</sup> El Niño describes a climate pattern that causes periodic warming of ocean waters and disrupts weather systems, particularly in the central and eastern tropical Pacific ocean.

# Defending Land, Life, and Identity: Débora Sabará's Fight for Environmental & Gender Justice in Brazil

Brazil is one of the most dangerous countries for gender-diverse people, environmental human rights defenders, and activists, where structural violence, militarization, and extractivism drive both conflict and climate crises. Environmental transphobia exposes travesti communities to the compounded effects of climate disasters, social conflict, and systemic discrimination, yet these same communities continue to resist, organize, and create alternative pathways for survival and justice.

A travesti leader, defender of the environment and land demarcation, committed to being anti-racist, rejecting extractivist capitalism, and promoting intersectional policies, Débora Sabará challenges these systems of oppression while forging new possibilities for environmental and social transformation.

## CLAIMING IDENTITY

Born into a strict Protestant family, Débora grew up navigating a world that denied her identity and silenced her existence. Religious spaces that once shaped her political consciousness ultimately excluded her as she embraced her trans identity. "I realized those spaces only welcomed me as long as I wasn't recognized as trans," she recalls. Over time, Débora found her voice in activism, linking her fight for LGBT+ rights and environmental justice to broader political movements.

As a travesti, Débora is part of a long history of gender-diverse resistance in Latin America. The term travesti has historically been used to stigmatize and criminalize trans femininities, particularly those from marginalized and racialized backgrounds, those engaged in sex work and grassroots activism. However, Débora and her peers reclaim the



term as an identity of power and defiance, rejecting pressures to conform to what they call sanitized and acceptable forms of trans identity.

"The issue surrounding the identities of travestis and transsexuals is quite recurrent, as there is a social construction that associates the figure of the travesti with sex work and danger, with stigmas that they are aggressive figures, while trans people are often perceived as those who are educated, who go to university," she explains. For her, embracing travesti is a political act – an assertion that travestis belong in every space, including the environmental justice movement. She challenges marginalized travesti narratives, proving them to be leaders and defenders of land and life.

## FIGHTING FOR GENDER AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Débora's leadership in the GOLD Association, an organization advocating for LGBTQIAPN+ rights and environmental justice, has been crucial in bridging trans rights and environmental struggles. "My purpose includes planting trees, defending the environment, creating vegetable gardens and disseminating practices that can, in some way, mitigate the damage caused by human relationships and actions", she explains.



**“My message is one of resistance, strength, and purpose, always rooted in a political vision. While not every dream may be political, we can shape collective aspirations around justice and inclusion.”**

Débora Sabará

She advocates for inclusive disaster response policies and has strengthened GOLD as a community-led alternative to exclusionary shelters and food banks. Her work combines economic empowerment and sustainability, integrating training around income generating skills for incarcerated travestis with up-cycling initiatives and legal education. She also co-organized Brazil's first symposium on environmental transphobia and continues forging alliances with indigenous and Quilombola environmental defenders despite evangelical efforts to spread homo- and transphobia.

In a historic moment, Débora led Brazil's first Pride Parade with an environmental justice theme, organizing panel discussions on environmental issues and their impact on trans people, environmental crimes in their region, and planting trees as a symbol of resistance and resilience.

### **FACING STATE REPRESSION**

Débora's activism has come at a high cost, exposing her to death threats, surveillance, institutional barriers, and transphobia, which ultimately led her to step down as leader of the State Human Rights Council. She recounts an incident where prison guards attempted to frame her, coercing inmates into signing false statements. Her home was broken into, her belongings stolen, and she was informed by state security agents that she was being monitored.

In 2023, Débora and cartoonist Mindu Zinek were sentenced to pay 6.000 Brazilian Real (approximately 1.000 EUR) each to the mayor of the municipality of Vitória, Lorenzo Pazolini, for moral damages. The case stemmed from a political cartoon in which Débora denounced homo- and transphobia in the municipal administration. While such lawsuits typically target the cartoonist or media outlet, Débora, who was merely depicted in the cartoon, was also sued and convicted. This ruling sets a worrying precedent for freedom of expression and LGBTQIAPN+ activism, highlighting the state's attempts to silence those advocating for trans rights and environmental justice.

### **BUILDING A JUST FUTURE**

For Débora, climate justice and trans survival are inseparable. She envisions a future where travestis lead environmental movements, shaping policies and grassroots solutions that protect both people and the planet. Her commitment to sustainability, justice, and trans liberation directly challenges systems of exclusion and erasure.

Despite threats and systemic repression, she continues to organize, advocate, and build solidarity networks. From local sustainability projects to national advocacy, her work underscores the deep connection between trans rights, environmental justice, and human dignity.

# Advancing Women's Land Rights in Mozambique: CTV's Approach

Mozambique's 1997 land law is one of the most progressive in the region, granting communities land use rights without requiring formal titles. By recognizing occupation for over ten years as proof of tenure, it aims to protect customary land rights, to prevent privatization, and reduce bureaucratic barriers. This is crucial for women, who are the primary food producers and rely on the land for their livelihoods.

However, in reality, women face weak law enforcement, corruption, patriarchal norms, and costly registration processes – especially when companies seize land for mining, oil exploration projects, forestry plantations or agribusinesses. As a result, displacement often forces women onto infertile land with little to no compensation. Recognizing this, the women-led organization Centro Terra Viva (CTV) shifted its approach, embedding gender justice into every aspect of their work. As Executive Director, Samanta Remane explains: "When we realized that women, children and elderly populations were affected the most, we knew we needed a different approach." Today CTV works to ensure that women's land rights are legally recognized, enforced, and socially accepted, using three key strategies:

## 1. SHIFTING POWER STRUCTURES THROUGH GENDER MAINSTREAMING

CTV recognized that securing women's land rights required both internal and external change. It developed a gender policy and trained all staff – whether lawyers, scientists or community advocates – to address land issues through the lens of gender. Beyond internal reforms, CTV worked to ensure that women's participation in land councils was not tokenistic but influential. "An important step was integrating women into district consulting councils, so administrators started paying attention to their challenges," reflects Samanta.

## 2. STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

In the male-dominated communities predominant across Mozambique, women's land claims were often dismissed. CTV tackled these norms by training women to assert their rights, navigate power dynamics, and lead land governance efforts. Many attended community meetings but were overshadowed by male colleagues. Training, mentorship, and alliances helped them shift from passive participants to decision-makers.

Engaging men as allies was equally crucial. While some initially resisted changes to land tenure, community dialogues demonstrated how women's land ownership strengthens food security, economic stability, and climate resilience.

## 3. SECURING LAND RIGHTS THROUGH COMMUNITY-LED LEGAL ACTION

CTV prioritizes self-reliance, equipping communities to defend land rights independently. Women's groups and local associations receive training in land laws, negotiation tactics, and advocacy, enabling them to challenge land grabs and corporate exploitation.

Community-led legal assistance groups and para-legal networks provide ongoing support in resolving disputes and securing land tenure. "In the past, when someone came with a paper claiming the land, the community would leave. Now, they know their rights," explains Program Director Berta Rafael.

This approach reduces dependence on external legal aid, which is especially difficult to obtain in marginalized rural settings and strengthens communities' agency against land grabbing and forced displacement.



**“I became a community paralegal to raise awareness among women and support them to stand up for their rights. Today, I speak with confidence when engaging with other women.”**

Dejtai Roby Maki



## **LEADING LAND GOVERNANCE AND CLIMATE ACTION**

CTV's work has a transformative impact on land governance. Women take the lead in community land management bodies, known as Natural Resource Management Committees, where they actively participate in negotiating land tenure rights and implementing sustainable land use practices. Additionally, women paralegals, trained through a CTV initiative funded by GAGGA, have played a pivotal role in resolving land conflicts. They are instrumental in addressing the daily challenges faced by women and communities, working to uphold land rights and ensure access to related benefits. By integrating gender justice into climate adaptation, CTV empowers women to lead initiatives in agriculture, reforestation, and water management.

Women play a key role in preventing land burning, restoring soil through the preparation of organic fertilizer and compost, and adopting production techniques for a more resilient agriculture. They also engage in vegetable and fruit tree cultivation, as well as alternative livelihoods such as beekeeping, mariculture, and fish farming. Additionally, CTV supports

land titling to secure land ownership and protect women from losing their land. These efforts strengthen food security, environmental sustainability, and natural resource management, which in turn, mitigate land-related conflicts. However, lasting change takes time and commitment. Samanta cautions: “Gender justice is not a short-term project. Changing mentalities within 1-2 years is difficult. You need time, long-term investment, and trust building.” Flexible core funding through GAGGA and others has been essential, allowing CTV to build strong community relationships, provide legal support, and respond quickly to land disputes and corporate encroachment.

## **STRENGTHENING GENDER JUSTICE FOR LASTING CHANGE**

The struggles for women's land rights, conflict resolution, and climate justice in Mozambique are deeply interconnected. CTV's work demonstrates how securing land tenure for women strengthens communities, reduces conflict, and enhances climate resilience.

# Rebuilding Against the Odds in Burkina Faso: The Journey of Rabo Foutouna

Burkina Faso faces a worsening crisis, a crisis driven by climate change, resource scarcity, and growing insecurity. As one of the most climate vulnerable countries in the region, it suffers from recurrent droughts, floods, and desertification – threats that are particularly severe in a country where 80% of the population depends on agriculture, and where women typically farm subsistence plots allocated through marriage.

Since 2015, escalating violence fuelled by extremist groups, intercommunal tensions, and conflict spilling over from Mali has devastated rural communities. Armed groups attack villages, raid farms, destroy infrastructure, and steal livestock. Combined with two military coups, the instability has caused mass displacement, disrupted markets, worsened food insecurity, and strained already scarce resources.

Ongoing violence has forced over 2 million people – about 10% of the population – to flee their homes, creating an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Burkina Faso. Initially welcoming, host families now struggle with resource shortages, heightening tensions over land and housing. In this fragile context, securing land is about more than survival. As Rabo Foutouna puts it, "This production not only allows us to feed ourselves daily, but also to regain a certain independence, a guarantee of resilience in the face of the challenges we go through."

## ESCAPING CONFLICT

Originally from Kelbo in the Sahel region, Rabo was forced to flee with her four children when conflict made it impossible to remain in her home. Her journey to Ouagadougou was marked by fear, uncertainty, and the loss of everything she had built. Upon arrival, she found temporary refuge with her brother, but she knew that long-term survival depended on rebuilding her livelihood.

Determined to regain independence, she sought opportunities to resume agricultural work. Housed at an integrated farm in Roumtenga, she participated in an agricultural training program offered by the Women Environmental Programme Burkina (WEP Burkina). Having previously attempted to secure land on her own, she saw an opportunity to request a plot near the training centre. After convincing WEP Burkina of the importance of this step, the organization supported her in negotiating an agreement with the landowner, marking a crucial milestone in her journey toward autonomy.

Land access, however, was not straightforward. Customary land tenure systems overwhelmingly favor men, and landowners were hesitant to lease to a woman, especially one without financial backing. Even her own relatives suggested she abandon agriculture for a livelihood deemed more appropriate for a displaced woman and single mother, after her husband had left in 2008. Yet she persisted, negotiating until she was finally granted a small plot of land. With that, she began rebuilding her life,

# 80%

of the population depends on agriculture, and women typically farm subsistence plots allocated through marriage

# 10%

of the population were forced to flee their homes due to ongoing violence

## CONFRONTING CLIMATE CHANGE AND GENDER BARRIERS

Farming on unfamiliar land with poor soil conditions was a daunting task. Climate change had rendered the soil less fertile, requiring extra effort to restore its productivity. At the same time, she had to balance agricultural labor with raising her teenage children alone. Water scarcity and unpredictable weather patterns made it even more difficult to sustain yields and the family spent a significant amount of time warding off birds from the dry soil. Despite these challenges, she successfully cultivated maize, beans, and okra, ensuring food security for her family and earning enough income to regain some financial stability. Observing the severity of the heat and related difficulties in agricultural production, she expanded her skills, learning composting, seedling production, and eco-charcoal making – techniques that not only helped her but also provided her with knowledge to share with others.

Her determination and perseverance made her a role model for other displaced women, many of whom were hesitant to seek land or negotiate opportunities. By demonstrating that it was possible to access land and rebuild a livelihood, she encouraged other women to assert their rights and advocate for their own needs. Her willingness to share her knowledge and experiences further strengthened her role as a leader within her community. Women who initially lacked confidence began to follow her example, engaging in agricultural work and acquiring new skills. As she put it, “I do not beg, I do not need to ask anyone for permission before eating, and that is something to be proud of.”

## ADVOCATING FOR GENDER JUST CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Rabo's journey reflects both the determination of displaced women and the intersectional systemic challenges that make rebuilding livelihoods difficult. Conflict, restrictive gender norms, and climate change create compounded barriers, yet her experience also demonstrates that with determination and the right support, women can be powerful drivers of recovery. “If you don't go out and search, no one will offer you land on a silver platter. You must be proactive, persistent, and never lose hope,” she says.

Her story is a testament to the impact of investing in gender just climate solutions. Secure land tenure, access to financial services such as microcredit, savings opportunities, and financial literacy programs, as well as agroecology initiatives, can transform individual lives and entire communities. Programs that recognize and strengthen the leadership of displaced women – providing access to training, resources, and networks – can help scale solutions that benefit not just women like Rabo, but entire displaced and host communities. Strengthening and resourcing women's rights organisations, like WEP, that carry out initiatives to support women in their communities will ensure that women are not only able to secure their livelihoods but are also positioned as leaders in creating more sustainable, inclusive recovery efforts. At the same time, by investing in displaced and host communities, integration will be strengthened. The women-led CBOs and women's rights organizations' programs place strategic investments directly into affected communities, and therefore empower more women to move beyond survival and instead play a central role in shaping a future where displacement does not mean losing the right to rebuild.



Rabo Foutouna

**“I do not beg, I do not need to ask anyone for permission before eating, and that is something to be proud of.”**

Rabo Foutouna

# A Women-Centered Perspective from the Frontlines of the Gender-Conflict-Climate Nexus

The gender-conflict-climate nexus is often analyzed through academic debates and policy frameworks that fail to account for the multi-dimensional lived experiences and identities of those most affected. This brochure aims to shift the perspective, conceptualizing the nexus through the eyes of the women from across the globe who have experienced its impacts firsthand. Their stories reveal that gender, conflict, and climate change are not separate crises – they are deeply entangled, reinforcing systems of oppression while also generating spaces for radical resistance.

At its core, the nexus is a story of land: the land that sustains communities, the land that is stolen for corporate profit, and the land that women fight to reclaim. Conflict and militarization serve as enforcers of dispossession, using violence to suppress resistance. Climate change acts as a compounding force, deepening inequalities by making food and water security even more precarious. Yet, in the midst of these crises, women are leading the way – rebuilding, organizing, and demanding justice.

Their leadership is rooted in collective strength. Whether through alternative schools, legal battles, or agroecological practices, they are forging solutions that challenge the dominant paradigm of exploitation and extractivism. Their strategies of survival are strategies of transformation, demonstrating that the fight for land rights, gender justice, and climate solutions cannot be separated.

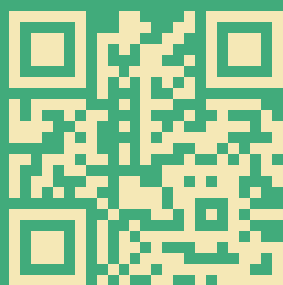
This publication is a testament to their power. It is a call to recognize and support the struggles of women who stand at the crossroads of multiple injustices yet refuse to be silenced. Their resistance is not only about survival – it is about reimagining a world where land, life, and justice are defended by those who have always been its fiercest protectors.







**Get in touch with the  
Global Alliance for Green and  
Gender Action and find  
out more about their work.**



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