



The Climate-Gender- Conflict Nexus

Amplifying women's contributions at the grassroots

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Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincerest gratitude to Briana Mawby (International Organization for Migration) and Molly Kellogg (UN Joint Programme on Women, Natural Resources and Peace) for serving as external reviewers to this report. Their comments were provided in their individual capacities, not as representatives of their respective organizations. Additionally, the authors are grateful to Dr. Jeni Klugman (Managing Director, GIWPS) and Ambassador Melanne Vermeer (Executive Director, GIWPS) for their valuable insights, and Fleur Newman (UNFCCC) for her guidance on this important topic. The authors would also like to recognize the generous support of the Scintilla Foundation, whose contribution made this research possible. Finally, the authors would like to thank Joshua W. Busby and Ashley M. Moran for sharing data and graphics from their USAID project, represented in Figure 1.

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Cover photos: front: Ollivier Girard/CIFOR on Flickr, back: Paolo Nicoletto/Unsplash

Editing, design and layout: Green Ink (www.greenink.co.uk)

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Executive Summary

The world is confronted by rapidly accelerating threats of climate change and conflict, and the gendered impacts they generate. For policymakers and practitioners, promoting the contributions and capacity of women in environmental peacebuilding and natural resource-related conflict resolution can accelerate gains across peace, conservation, and sustainability.

Climate change destabilizes political systems, undermines agricultural production, and deepens poverty.¹ In fragile contexts, climate change aggravates underlying political, social, and economic conditions that can provoke increased or renewed conflict.² Among the various potential manifestations of this feedback loop, climate change is intensifying the depletion of already stressed natural resources, including fresh water, arable land, and forest resources. This deepens pre-existing livelihood and food insecurities, which in turn exacerbate local tensions and erode peace and security.

Climate-conflict linkages create pervasive and gendered effects. In rural areas of developing countries, women often rely on natural resources as a critical source of sustenance and income for themselves and their families. Despite being the key gatherers and suppliers of these resources, women lack equal rights of ownership and control over land, property, and other assets. These gendered disparities, coupled with discriminatory norms, put women at a disadvantage in situations of conflict or crisis and can increase their vulnerability to climate impacts. The impacts of climate change on women can be further exacerbated at the intersection of gender with class, race, and ethnicity, thereby impacting the lives of Indigenous and other marginalized women differently.³

The same structural factors and inequalities that can make women disproportionately vulnerable to climate change can also exclude them from processes, platforms, and discussions surrounding natural resource management and conflict mediation. Women have been traditionally excluded from these male-dominated local-level spaces and mechanisms, despite being on the frontlines of these challenges.

Yet as this report affirms, women are not solely victims of conflict or climate change threats. Where women can overcome structural barriers to their participation, they are uniquely positioned to contribute to sustainable natural resource management, climate-resilient communities, and enhanced peace and stability. Therefore, marginalization of women from climate change-related conflict resolution is a missed opportunity for policymakers to develop effective climate change mitigation, adaptation and conflict reduction strategies.

Literature on the role of women, particularly at the grassroots level, in natural resource management and in addressing climate-related challenges, is scarce. There is, however, growing attention to the centrality of women at the climate-conflict nexus, and expanding

Where women can overcome structural barriers to their participation, they are uniquely positioned to contribute to sustainable natural resource management, climate-resilient communities, and enhanced peace and stability.

portfolios of research and programming by the Joint Programme on Women, Natural Resources, and Peace, co-hosted by UN Women, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), and the UN Environment Program (UNEP).⁴

This report, based on a comprehensive desk review and case study analysis, aims to further address gaps in the literature by providing an overview of the linkages within the climate-gender-conflict nexus and investigating how these play out differently across three diverse contexts.

Chapter 1 explores the linkages between climate change and conflict and how gender is a cross-cutting lens through which people experience both issues. It also explores the critical role women play in sustainable natural resource management and the barriers to their meaningful participation.

Chapter 2 investigates the gaps in frameworks, policy, knowledge, and evidence within the climate-gender-conflict nexus. It outlines that while commitments and action continue to advance gender equality globally, in particular, through the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, policymakers and practitioners are siloed in their respective climate, gender, and security spheres.

Chapter 3 studies how the dynamics of climate change and conflict are unfolding in Colombia, Sudan, and Nepal and how in each case, women are contributing to enhanced peace and sustainability in their local communities despite gendered obstacles. In Chocó and Antioquia, Colombia, Afro-Colombian and Indigenous women are leveraging peace agreements to cement their place in environmental activism and advocate for land tenure security. In North Kordofan, Sudan, women are building their knowledge and capacity in sustainable natural resource management as an entry point into local natural resource dispute management spaces. And in the Terai region of Nepal, women from marginalized castes are deepening their engagement in forest management.

Finally, **Chapter 4** draws from this analysis to formulate five priority areas of action and outline recommendations to accelerate gender-equal and climate-resilient communities:

- ① Buffer the disproportionate vulnerabilities women bear from climate change impacts.
- ② Center women as crucial actors in climate, peace, and security.
- ③ Strengthen linkages between the different levels and sectors in the climate-gender-conflict nexus.
- ④ Address knowledge gaps within the nexus.
- ⑤ Promote women's leadership in climate-related conflict mitigation and prevention and reduce barriers to inclusion.

This report is a real-time call for policymakers and practitioners to invest in research and policy within the climate-gender-conflict nexus and expand the evidence base on why women's meaningful engagement is crucial to successfully addressing these formidable challenges. This work begins with learning from the legacy of women who have long been building peace and preserving resources in their communities. Addressing barriers to women's meaningful participation and local leadership will further accelerate gains across gender equality, peace and security, sustainability, and climate resilience.

1. Climate-Gender-Conflict: A Nexus

Understanding the Links Between Climate Change and Conflict

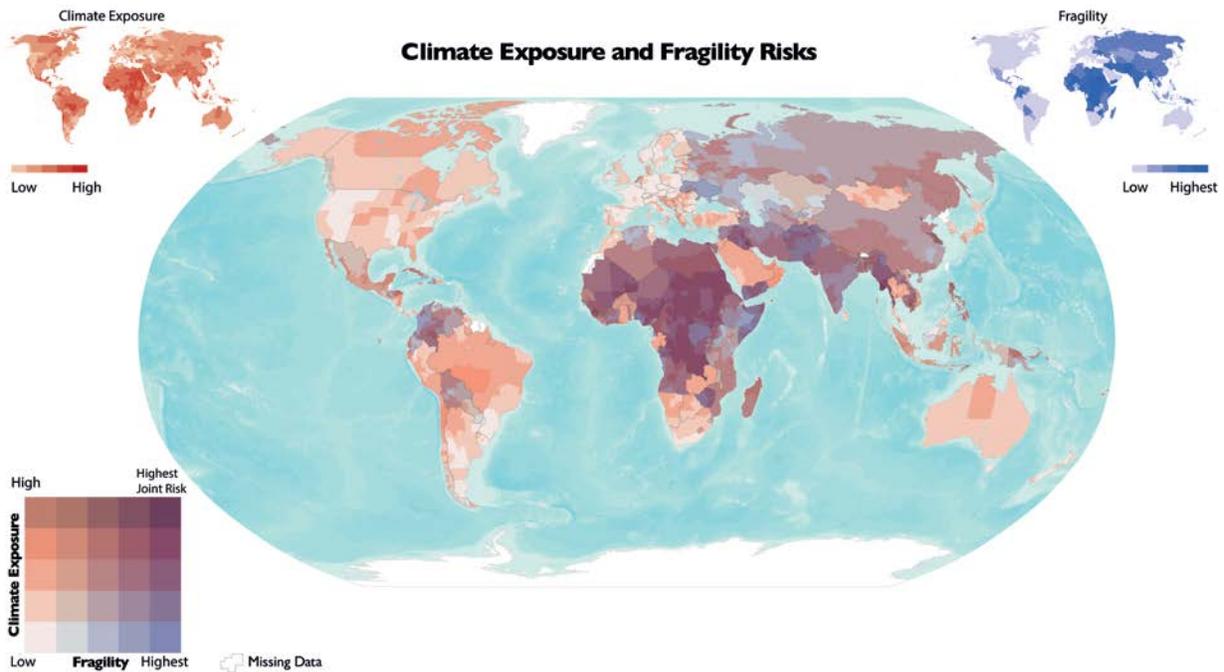
Climate change is widely and increasingly recognized as a “threat multiplier” that will contribute to heightened fragility.⁵ At the same time, however, climate change does not inevitably or directly lead to conflict.⁶ Experts emphasize that climate change aggravates pre-existing political and economic conditions and can push tensions over a threshold, giving rise to violence or leading to relapses into old cycles of conflict.⁷ This is particularly likely in already unstable contexts where climate change impacts – including sea-level rise, floods, droughts, and intensified natural disasters – can undermine peace and insecurity in climate-impacted communities. Intensifying droughts in the Dry Corridor of Central America, for example, are triggering crop failures, food and economic security, and consequently increasing levels of forced displacement.⁸ Understanding the complex interplay between these factors is important to address how conflict dynamics and instability can be exacerbated by climate change, and the ways in which conflict can increase climate vulnerability.

When conflict constrains adaptive capacity, or the ability of states and communities to absorb, cope with, and respond to climate impacts and shocks, these effects are even more pronounced. This is especially true in the case of weak states, where the struggle to absorb climate shocks can overwhelm their limited resources and erode social cohesion.⁹ In 26 of the 39 states classified as highly fragile, a large share of the population faces high climate risks (Figure 1). Climate change impacts disproportionately affect countries in the Global South, which also bear the least responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁰ The highest-ranking countries are Sierra Leone, with 100 percent of its population living in high exposure areas, followed by Guinea with 64 percent, Cambodia with 45 percent, and Cameroon and Egypt with 39 percent each.¹¹

Simultaneous fragility and climate threats amplify potential risks. As McLeman notes, “States that are already politically fragile are the most likely future epicenters for climate-related violence and forced migration events.”¹²

Where climate change impacts cannot be adequately prevented or mitigated, they can further destabilize fragile and conflict-affected settings (Box 1). Climate and conflict are closely interlinked in a feedback loop, further impacted by gender dynamics. Successfully addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach accounting for the complex interactions between each of these dimensions, which centers gender as a fundamental and cross-cutting consideration.

Figure 1: The intersection of climate exposure and fragility risks



Note: The climate exposure measure is a composite of susceptibility to six key hazards: cyclones, flood events, wildfire events, rainfall anomalies, chronic aridity, and low-elevation coastal zones. The fragility measure is assessed across four key areas: political, security, economic, and social.

Source: Moran et al. 2018. See original data sources for the model listed in the figure.

Gendered Impacts of Climate Change and Conflict

Climate change and conflict affect everyone, but not equally. Conflict can escalate violence against women and girls, including torture, forced marriage, and sexual violence. The latter has been employed as a tactic of war, for example against Yazidi women and girls in Northern Iraq and Rohingya women and girls in Myanmar.¹³ Although sexual and gender-based violence in conflict predominantly affects women and girls, men and boys have also been targeted.¹⁴ In fragile contexts such as Central America's Northern Triangle (Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador), women also face increased gender-based violence from armed groups and gangs.¹⁵ Conflict can also disrupt access to essential services such as justice systems, education, and healthcare, including sexual and reproductive health services, especially for displaced women.¹⁶ Conflicts and situations of instability therefore exacerbate pre-existing vulnerabilities and patterns of discrimination against women and girls.¹⁷

Similarly, climate-conflict risks have differential gendered impacts. Climate change exacerbates conflict by aggravating pre-existing and underlying tensions including weak governance and poor social cohesion, while pressuring already strained natural resources and increasing food and livelihood insecurity. In turn, intensified natural resource-related conflicts, instability, forced displacement, and exploitation by armed groups intensify environmental degradation and increase the vulnerability of communities to climate change shocks. This dynamic, according to Neumayer and Plümper, "can and often does systematically differ across economic class, ethnicity, gender, and other factors."¹⁸ Gender intersects with climate change impacts and security, positioning gender as a critical bridge between both conditions (Figure 2).

BOX 1

Climate change impacts, instability, and armed groups: Examples from the ground

Exacerbated competition over increasingly scarce resources can accelerate tensions into conflict, especially in contexts where this dynamic inflames deep-seated political and economic instability.¹⁹ For example, in Karachi, Pakistan, climate change is compounding water shortages. The rise of a “water mafia,” or network of informal water providers illegally extracting and reselling water, has triggered community violence between the “water mafia” and the local population.²⁰ Climate change has thereby destabilized an already tenuous situation, making the challenges more pronounced.

In Syria, a historic drought from 2006 to 2011 led to water scarcity and agricultural failures in rural regions, which, in turn, worsened economic and food insecurity. Climate-induced forced displacement into urban areas then intersected with other factors of instability, including long-festering grievances with the state, poverty, and ethnic divisions. Drought added to all of these stressors, hastening the outbreak of violent conflict.²¹

Environmental degradation through climate change can also make young people more vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups and insurgent

organizations, which exploit communities’ climate-related grievances to gain support for their political agenda and drive recruitment.²²

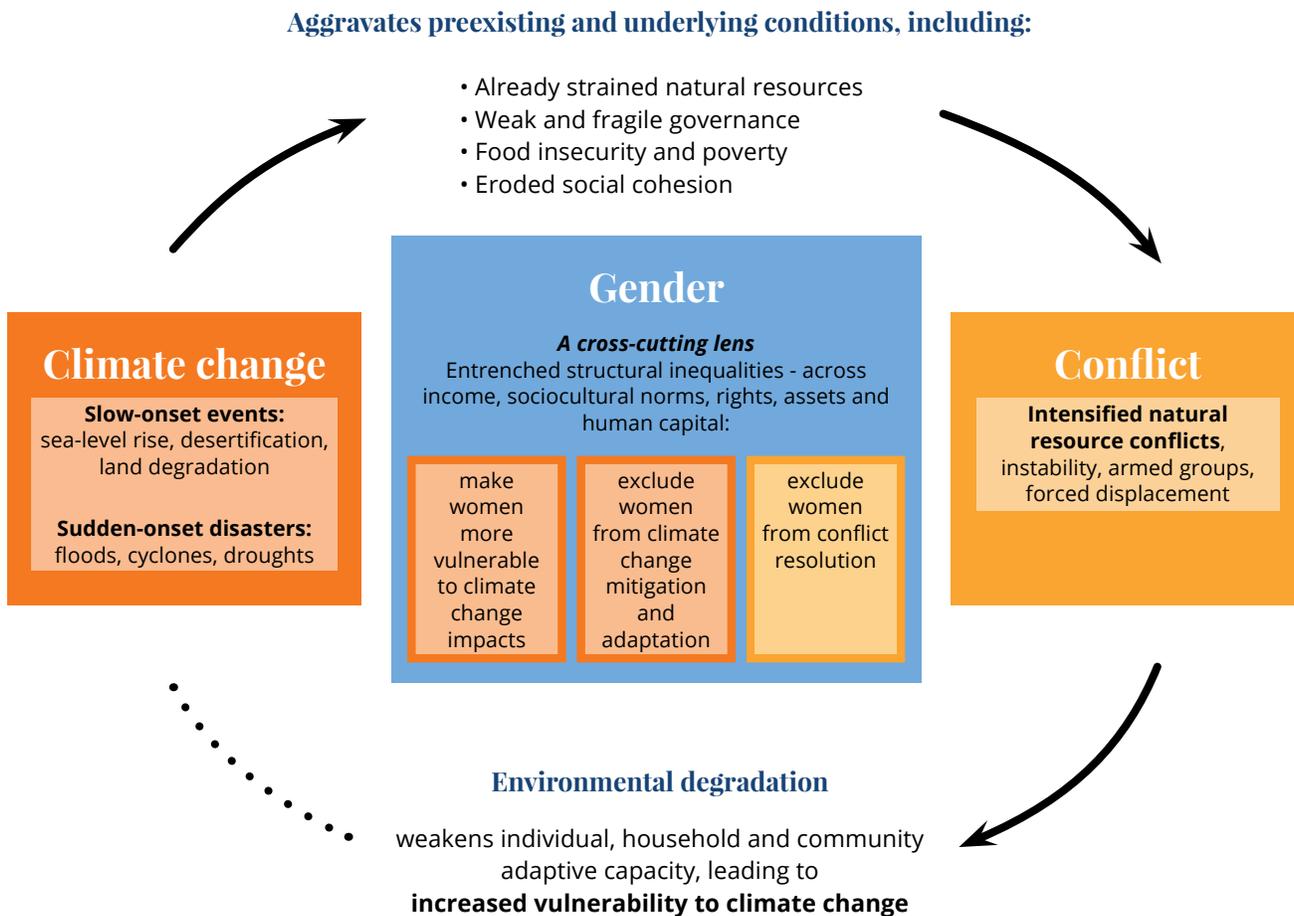
In Afghanistan, reduced water availability as a result of climate change, coupled with poor irrigation systems, make the production of staple crops increasingly unreliable and threaten the livelihoods of many farmers, driving their engagement in illicit poppy production. The Taliban supports and protects farmers cultivating opium, consequently increasing their presence and legitimacy among local populations.²³ During the 2006–2007 drought, many young men in Balkh province also opted to join the Taliban or other insurgent groups to diversify their livelihoods.²⁴

In the Sahel, large portions of the population – 80 percent in Burkina Faso – rely on agriculture for their livelihoods.²⁵ Yet the region is highly vulnerable to climate change, which has degraded swathes of once-arable land.²⁶ Increases in poverty, lack of economic opportunity, a growing population of young people, and intensifying inter-ethnic conflicts make the Sahel ripe for the proliferation of armed extremist groups.²⁷ As they have flourished, violence across the Sahel has increased five-fold since 2016.²⁸

The framework in Figure 2 illustrates the interplay and linkages between climate change, gender, and conflict, capturing the negative feedback loop between climate change and conflict. From this perspective, gender becomes a lens through which people experience both climate change and conflict. The framework also highlights the dynamics by which entrenched structural gendered inequalities make women more vulnerable to climate change impacts and exclude them from meaningful participation in the solutions.

Recent Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) research by Kellogg highlights that climate vulnerability is not only a product of the environmental hazards themselves, but also a product of the adaptive capacity of affected individuals and communities.²⁹ Here, lower adaptive capacity means that women have fewer material and social resources to cope with, absorb, and recover from climate shocks.³⁰ A constellation of pre-existing gender inequalities

Figure 2: The Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus



– in income, assets, and human capital, as well as structures of power, legal and customary rights, gender roles, and sociocultural norms – contributes to this lower adaptive capacity.³¹ For example, women and girls are over-represented among the poor; 330 million women and girls live on less than \$1.90 a day.³² These factors translate into higher vulnerability and added burdens for women, who are thus disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Climate change also exacerbates an already uneven distribution of labor. Women spend two to ten times more time on unpaid care work than men,³³ including caring for others whose health is affected by environmental hazards.³⁴ For example, in Delhi, India, and Dhaka, Bangladesh, where torrential rain is increasing the rates of diseases such as dengue and chikungunya, women dedicate on average one hour more per day to care if they have a climate-related illness in the family and are over two times as likely to be sleep-deprived.³⁵

As a result of gendered divisions of labor, low-income and rural women are often responsible for collecting water, procuring and producing food, and sourcing fuel for heating and cooking. Their dependence on natural resources renders them “vulnerable to changes in the availability and quality of these resources” as a result of climate change.³⁶ Water deficits force women and girls to travel farther to collect water, increasing burdens on their time, health and safety, including greater exposure to gender-based violence.³⁷ In Guatemala, for example, as a consequence of climate change, women dedicate up to eight hours per day to searching for water, almost doubling the time burden and distance required during normal years.³⁸

As gender overlaps with axes of social difference, women from marginalized cultural, political, ethnic, or economic groups typically face heightened challenges. Through this intersectional lens, Indigenous women are doubly oppressed and impacted by climate change impacts.³⁹ While they “have contributed least to carbon emissions, their lives and (traditional) livelihoods, which are inextricably linked to nature, are adversely affected.”⁴⁰

Although women are dependent on natural resources for their income, sustenance, and health, they are disadvantaged in terms of ownership of and access to land and control over the resources they produce.⁴¹ In Guinea, women comprise over half of all agricultural workers, but just over five percent of agricultural landholders.⁴² In West Papua, Indonesia, Indigenous women play a significant role in community natural resources and native lands are “deeply embedded in their cultural and ethnic identity,” but they have no rights of ownership.⁴³

Migration and Forced Displacement

Women are differently impacted by the forced displacement and migration patterns resulting from climate change impacts.

Migration is generally and widely recognized as voluntary, to some degree, and premeditated.⁴⁴ It can be a positive and productive means of adaptation for people to better their lives and livelihoods. The freedom to willingly migrate is shaped by economic and social status, which translates to unequal opportunities for mobility among men and women.⁴⁵ In developing contexts, women’s limited wealth and social capital inhibits their ability and autonomy to proactively and willingly flee high-risk areas.⁴⁶ Women and other marginalized groups often bear the greatest risks because of greater restrictions on their freedom of movement. Furthermore, migration of men to urban areas to diversify household income intensifies the feminization of societies as women often become the de facto heads of household and take on a greater workload.⁴⁷

In contrast, forced displacement is generally viewed as a negative phenomenon, because it is usually unplanned and involuntary.⁴⁸ Slow or sudden-onset climate change impacts can forcibly displace families or entire communities, who are sometimes referred to as “climate refugees,” although they fall through the cracks of international refugee policy.⁴⁹ Four times more people are displaced by extreme weather events than by conflict.⁵⁰ This disproportionately impacts countries in the Global South. A 2018 World Bank report anticipated that Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and Latin America could see more than 140 million people forcibly displaced by slow-onset climate change impacts.⁵¹

Women are often worst hit by climate-related forced displacement. For example, women displaced by disasters face an increased risk of gender-based violence and have less access to relief resources.⁵² Furthermore, it is well established that refugee girls are half as likely to be in school as refugee boys.⁵³ Climate change impacts could further amplify disruptions in girls' access to education, impacting lifelong opportunities and the status of women globally.

The complex interaction of climate, gender, and conflict underscores the importance for policymakers and researchers to mainstream environmental issues into conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and ensure awareness and responsiveness to gendered impacts in both areas. Specifically, policymakers should look to women leaders already navigating the climate-impacted natural resource for peacebuilding practices.

Women's Roles in Natural Resource Management and Climate Change-Related Conflict Mitigation

Given their dependence and proximity to natural resources, women at the local level are "not only well suited to find solutions to prevent environmental degradation and adapt to a changing climate, they have a vested interest in doing so."⁵⁴ Women play a critical role in their local communities as they mobilize to adapt to climate change and preserve natural resources. There is ample evidence that suggests this leads to better outcomes in terms of conservation and sustainability. In India and Nepal, for example, the presence of women in community forest management – and the application of their in-depth knowledge of forest species – leads to "significantly greater improvements" in regeneration and conservation.⁵⁵

This is especially true of Indigenous women. Today, nearly 80 percent of the world's biodiversity is under the guardianship of Indigenous and local communities.⁵⁶ It is increasingly recognized that Indigenous women are conduits of deep ancestral knowledge regarding the land and its resources, and that the "traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of Indigenous peoples and local communities make an important contribution to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity."⁵⁷ Yet Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge is persistently undervalued, and Indigenous women's roles and contributions have been overlooked and invisibilized.⁵⁸ For example, in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Indigenous women's voices remain largely silenced and they are "primarily regarded as stakeholders, not rights holders."⁵⁹

At the intersection of natural resources, climate change, and conflict, women's influence, particularly that of Indigenous women, is further limited. When it comes to mitigating conflict around natural resource usage, entrenched structural barriers inhibit women's roles and representation. The UN Forum on Indigenous Peoples has repeatedly urged Member States to take concrete steps to strengthen the role of Indigenous women in decision-making processes and address barriers to their meaningful inclusion.⁶⁰

Local-level Natural Resource Conflict Resolution

Natural resource-related conflict refers to violence provoked by competition over dwindling fresh water, forest resources, and arable land. In the broader context of extractive economic development and globalization, climate change is compounding stress on already fragile and increasingly scarce assets.⁶¹ Rural livelihoods are “intricately linked to the condition of natural resources,”⁶² thus, as supply fails to fulfill growing demand, and allocation is inadequately managed, resource scarcity can retrench poverty and unravel social cohesion.

Among the potential manifestations of the climate-conflict nexus, natural resource-related conflict is becoming increasingly prominent. Firstly, factors such as increased extreme weather events, more frequent drought, and a general increased unpredictability of rainfall all impact the quantity and quality of natural resources. Secondly, many of the already existing conflicts that climate change may exacerbate and multiply, especially at the local level, take place within the realm of natural resource management and its associated institutions.⁶³



Ibu Rosalina cutting Nanas Bogor in Kapuas Hulu, Indonesia.
Photo: Icaro Cooke Vieira/CIFOR

While climate change and natural resource conflicts are not interchangeable, this report will focus on natural resource-derived conflicts, as current conflicts classified as natural resource-based may already be impacted by changing weather patterns, natural disasters, and other climate impacts. Additionally, as the global community has only recently begun designing climate-specific conflict resolution interventions, lessons drawn from natural resource-related conflicts can provide insightful lessons to address climate change-induced conflicts. Natural resource-related conflicts also have a series of unique gendered implications, and understanding these is important for efforts directed at empowering women at the grassroots level.

At the local level, communities have developed systems, processes, and platforms to promote both the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources, and to mitigate conflicts around their usage. These approaches can take a number of forms, differing in their structure, purpose, legitimacy, and formality.⁶⁴ Largely, however, they fall into two categories: customary and statutory.

- Customary mechanisms include “traditional” authorities in communities – such as chiefs, elders, or village councils – who are called upon to settle disputes through “mediation, arbitration or adjudication.”⁶⁵ Evidence from the Tana river basin in Kenya,⁶⁶ Yunnan, China, and Haruku Island, Indonesia⁶⁷ underscore the importance of customary players.
- Statutory mechanisms are more often participatory, elected groups, such as community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) groups or peace committees.⁶⁸ Local communities across Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe engage some 4.4 million people in community-based resource natural management activities, coordinated through over 6,400 management bodies.⁶⁹

These two types of resource-management systems (customary and statutory) often operate in parallel, which can cause misunderstandings and dissonance.⁷⁰ Key to note, however, is that both are traditionally dominated by men.⁷¹

The same sociocultural norms and barriers entrenched in society that disproportionately expose women to climate risks also inhibit their participation in discussions, forums, and spaces dedicated to combating climate change-related conflicts. Insecure land rights are one barrier: according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), women lack “decision-making power over how land is used and managed if they do not own it.”⁷²

Logistics and timing are another – in Nepal, community forestry meetings take place at a time convenient for men rather than women, and sometimes demand more time than women have to invest.⁷³ Thirdly, male leaders and members often hold negative perceptions of women’s skills and knowledge; for women, needing to prove themselves is a barrier in and of itself.⁷⁴

As a consequence of these barriers, women are underrepresented in local-level decision-making surrounding natural resource management and conflict mediation. In Marsabit, Kenya, for example, women are excluded from water management and conflict resolution meetings.⁷⁵ In Liberia, across the 17 established Community Forestry Management Bodies (CFMBs), no more than two of the total ten members

in each committee are women.⁷⁶ Marginalization is particularly acute for Indigenous women, who are often excluded to an even greater extent.⁷⁷ In the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut territories of northern Canada, women comprise 16 percent of members on Indigenous natural resource management boards.⁷⁸ The underrepresentation of women also applies beyond the local level to all levels of governance.⁷⁹

It is important to note that simply adding more women is insufficient to address the greater structural challenges at play. As Staples and Natcher write, “such an approach only promotes the tokenistic attitude that women’s representation is simply a box that can be ticked off a list for achieving diversity.”⁸⁰ Facilitating women’s meaningful participation requires deeper institutional change and efforts to address harmful gender norms.

The UN Joint Programme emphasizes that the failure to engage women in natural resource management and conflict resolution is a missed opportunity.⁸¹ Ignoring or overlooking women’s needs, priorities, and deep and rich local knowledge narrows the scope and consideration of decisions and inhibits groups’ ability to fulfill their mandates.⁸² The positive outcomes of women’s meaningful participation for conservation, sustainability, and peace underscores the need to address barriers to women’s engagement and to actively promote women’s inclusion and influence in decision-making. Much of the most effective work occurs in local community contexts and lessons learned should be integrated into global frameworks, policies, and institutions.

The failure to engage women in natural resource management and conflict resolution is a missed opportunity.



Woman in Sierra Leone.
Photo: Annie Spratt

2. Strengthening Work at the Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus

Leveraging Global Policy and Frameworks

Successfully promoting the role of women in addressing the challenges presented by the climate-gender-conflict nexus requires connection of local and global efforts and translation of political commitments into action. Policymakers, scholars, and practitioners should leverage the strengths and expertise of current global policy frameworks aiming to advance gender equality. An integrative approach among global frameworks will advance both climate and security objectives.

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) is one of the most notable and influential international policy commitments on gender equality. Adopted by global leaders at the Fourth World Conference on Women, the Platform played a pivotal role in shifting norms around gender equality and laid a solid foundation for further action.⁸³ “Women and the environment” was identified as one of 12 critical areas of concern and the Platform articulated three related strategic objectives: involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels, integrate their concerns and perspectives into policies and programs, and establish ways to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.⁸⁴ However, translating policy into practice has been slow and uneven. As the international community marks the 25th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration, there is a valuable opportunity for policymakers and activists to re-commit to action on this front. Centering women in environmental decision-making is more pressing than ever before and the Beijing Platform for Action provides a valuable policy tool to advance the role of women in the climate-gender-conflict nexus.

Following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, momentum to advance gender equality globally continued to grow. Activists and civil society actors were able to leverage the political commitments made in the Platform for Action to call on the UN Security Council account for women’s experiences and contributions in all aspects of peace and security.

In 2000, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a landmark resolution, UNSCR 1325 (2000),⁸⁵ which became the foundational resolution of the Women, Peace

and Security (WPS) Agenda. While the WPS Agenda has achieved notable progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective into the field of peace and security, the connection of climate change and security is currently underdeveloped. It took seven additional resolutions to the WPS Agenda after the adoption of UNSCR 1325 for a cursory reference to climate change to be included in UNSCR 2242 (2015).⁸⁶

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In an effort to bolster political commitments to advance the WPS Agenda, National Action Plans (NAPs) have been created by Member States as a mechanism to fulfill the mandate of UNSCR 1325 in their unique contexts. However, only 17 out of 80 WPS NAPs address gender, climate, and conflict, and only three plans (Finland, Ireland, and the US) include specific objectives at this nexus.⁸⁷ This is despite climate change increasingly being recognized by the international community as a threat multiplier.

Several Member States and civil society groups have pushed for the UN Security Council to incorporate climate security more broadly into their mandate.⁸⁸ National Action Plans on WPS could be an influential avenue to advance climate action within peace and security. However, women's participation in climate solutions has not been formally linked in recent advocacy at the UNSC level, beyond the weak connection in UNSCR 2242. As action at the global level does not currently meet the urgency and complexity of the climate-gender-conflict nexus, climate-responsive WPS NAPs would be a powerful mechanism to address climate-security threats and promote the role of women in these efforts.

More recently, global commitments to gender equality have gained traction within the climate community, which has begun to acknowledge the gendered nature of climate change. In 2014, the UNFCCC established the Lima Work Programme on Gender to mainstream gender considerations in its bodies and conferences in order to advance the "full, equal and meaningful participation of women."⁸⁹ And gender considerations were integrated into the implementation of the Paris Agreement through a Gender Action Plan (GAP).⁹⁰

The GAP, renewed at the Conference of Parties (COP 25) in 2019, focuses on capacity-building, knowledge management and communication, achieving a gender balance in UNFCCC activities, improving coherence with other UNFCCC workstreams, and developing and implementing national climate policies that are gender-responsive. Although the GAP is a significant advancement in the global climate policy architecture, progress is uneven, and there are no formal accountability mechanisms. Further, security considerations are not substantively integrated into the workplan, missing an opportunity to leverage GAPs to strengthen work at the climate-gender-conflict nexus.⁹¹

The past several decades have seen a global movement by policymakers, activists, scholars, and practitioners to advance gender equality by mainstreaming gender into traditional foreign policy spheres. However, synergies between these efforts have yet to be fully realized. Although gender is well-established as a cross-cutting issue, peace and security work fails to account for the threat multiplier of climate change, and those working to address the climate crisis have not fully appreciated how the gendered implications of conflict and peacebuilding map onto their agendas. This results in a missed opportunity for the international community to accelerate gender equality and achieve their respective policy objectives.

The profile of political commitments to the Beijing Platform for Action, the technical expertise of gender advisors working to develop WPS NAPs, and the climate knowledge of experts informing UNFCCC GAPs position all three frameworks as powerful mechanisms to advance work at the climate-gender-conflict nexus. Additional action is needed to strengthen these linkages and build the evidence base for informed response.

This report seeks to call attention to the urgent need for more research, programs, and initiatives at this nexus, including additional evidence on emerging trends from diverse geographies and contexts. A more integrated response that leverages the expertise and strengths of global agendas and actors working across these issues will generate a more comprehensive understanding of both challenges and solutions, leading to more effective policy and practice.

Building the Evidence Base

Advancing political commitments and integrating policy frameworks will depend on comprehensive and relevant evidence to understand complex dynamics at the intersection of climate, gender, and conflict. While some progress has been made in investigating the nexus, further research, with a particular emphasis on the collection of best practices, is needed to inform policymakers at all levels.

Work specifically related to the gender-conflict-climate nexus is limited because of the tendency of research and policy to address the dynamics between pairs of components: gender/peacebuilding, gender/climate change, and climate change/peacebuilding.⁹² For example, CGIAR, a leading climate security research partnership, lists only 20 publications focused on gender inequality out of 240 reports in its global database, and a significant proportion of those resources center on migration or adaptation rather than peacebuilding.⁹³

When the nexus is addressed, the gender focus is often on conditions that produce women's vulnerability, rather than on women's agency and capacity to lead local efforts to address climate change and security in their communities. This emphasis is not without warrant; as discussed, women tend to adversely suffer from climate-conflict risks in terms of their assets and well-being. However, vulnerability is not intrinsic to women, but rather produced through gender dynamics that create differing experiences of marginalization and exposure for women, for example, through the gendered distribution and organization of land and labor.⁹⁴

An overemphasis on women's vulnerability can obscure the leadership qualities, unique skill sets, and important perspectives women bring to issues of climate change, security, and natural resource management. It can also result in insufficient attention being directed toward understanding and addressing barriers to women's influence and developing pathways for promoting agency and decision-making power. This is especially needed at the grassroots level where women are on the frontlines of these issues.

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In addition to a need for research that can inform evidence-based policymaking at global and institutional levels, successfully translating policy into practice will require further study of local-level dynamics and how issues at the nexus manifest in people's everyday lives. Research that brings attention to the lived experiences of women navigating the challenges of climate change, the barriers to gender equality they confront, and strategies they have developed to address issues of peace and security in their communities will be critical to the success of interventions at the nexus. Participatory and inclusive approaches to research that create opportunities

for individuals at the local level to contribute to knowledge generated about the issues affecting them would be particularly suited to this level of inquiry and could strengthen and inform interventions.

Furthermore, research agendas should be expanded to include informal, communal, or other non-institutionalized forms of governance deployed by women at grassroots in the Global South, to address the persistent underemphasis on these domains of influence in academic literature.⁹⁵ Additionally, an over-reliance on researchers based in the Global North can marginalize contributions from scholars and/or practitioners in other countries, further limiting uptake of actions on the ground, and can erase the voices of the most vulnerable communities.⁹⁶ These factors contribute to a significant lack of research on the role of women in climate governance.

Much of the progress and leadership in the climate-gender-conflict nexus can be attributed to the UN Joint Programme on Women, Natural Resources and Peace borne out of the flagship 2013 report “Women and Natural Resources: Unlocking the Peacebuilding Potential.” Established as a partnership between four UN agencies (UNEP, UN Women, UNDP, and DPPA/PBSO), the Programme promotes natural resource-based interventions as a tool for strengthening women’s participation in three areas: conflict resolution and mediation, democratic governance, and sustainable development.⁹⁷ The 2020 report “Gender, Climate, and Security: Sustaining Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change,” compiled existing evidence from both researchers and practitioners through 11 case studies, and represents the most comprehensive research to date on this topic.⁹⁸ Building on this growing body of research, the Joint Programme has implemented two pilot projects in Sudan and Colombia to test and develop opportunities to strengthen women’s political and economic empowerment through natural resource-related interventions in conflict-affected countries.⁹⁹

It is becoming increasingly clear that the climate-gender-conflict nexus is critical to both peacebuilding efforts and developing strong communities resilient to climate change impacts. Research has shown for meaningful progress to be achieved, women must be centered in the international community’s discussions and efforts¹⁰⁰ and women’s perspectives, in particular women situated at the intersections of different identities, must be taken into account. However, additional research is needed to better understand the role of women at the local level in managing natural resources, mitigating climate change impacts and conflict, and sustaining peace, and to strengthen the evidence-based case for why women’s meaningful inclusion is crucial to successfully addressing issues of climate, security, and peace.

3. Women-led Efforts to Address Conflict and Climate Change

This section highlights how women are actively addressing highly localized climate-conflict risks and natural resource-related conflicts in their daily lives and communities. The three case studies on the intersection of gender, climate change, and conflict selected for this report are drawn from Chocó and Antioquia, Colombia, North Kordofan, Sudan, and the Terai region of Nepal. Within the limited pool of available and comprehensive research in this area, these cases were chosen for their geographic diversity and illustrative power to demonstrate a variety of ways women are, despite hindering norms and challenges, leading on the frontlines against climate change and conflict.

The first case, Colombia, explores how women have contributed to environmental activism, natural resource management, and peace within a context of displacement, insecurity, and land disputes. The Sudan case looks at a UN Joint Programme pilot project in North Kordofan that centered women in environmental conservation and conflict mediation efforts between pastoralist and farming communities. Finally, the case of Nepal investigates the influence of women in resolving small, local-level conflicts over diminishing water and forest resources.

Colombia

Leveraging Peace Agreements for Environmental Peacebuilding and Training Women as Environmental Activists

Colombia's legacy of natural resource fueled-conflict and continued environmental degradation have created adverse gendered impacts, but also opportunities for women to emerge as environmental peacebuilders. Their leadership is increasingly crucial as climate change further stresses natural resources in the country.

Colombia is highly vulnerable to climate change as weather patterns shift and heat waves, floods, and droughts become more frequent and intense.¹⁰¹ Rising seawater could endanger over a million people in cities by 2060, while the lower basins and valleys of Colombia's principal rivers are highly susceptible to flooding.¹⁰² Livelihoods are also at risk. Analysis suggests that by 2050, 80 percent of crops could be impacted in more than 60 percent of current areas of cultivation as a result of rising temperatures, soil erosion, desertification, and flooding.¹⁰³ Climate change is an added stressor on strained ecosystems, contributing to reduced rural productivity and rising food insecurity, which generates additional community tensions.

In Colombia, long-standing grievances around access to land contribute to conflict and environmental degradation. Beginning in the 1960s, civil unrest between the

Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), right-wing parliamentary groups, and criminal organizations drove deforestation, increased land degradation, and displaced hundreds of thousands of rural villagers. In fact, Colombia has one of the highest numbers of internally displaced people in the world because of the long-running civil conflict, leaving as many as 3.7 million people vulnerable to climate impacts.

Displaced people, out of lack of other viable options, often take up illegal cattle ranching or mining, which leads to environmental degradation, or they illegally encroach into protected wild areas impacting local ecosystems.¹⁰⁴ Farmers forced to flee their homes left an opening for the armed groups to raise funds through illegal logging, drug growing, and mining, which led to widespread deforestation.¹⁰⁵ It is estimated Colombia has lost more than 23,000 square miles of virgin forest since 1990, almost five percent of Colombia's national territory.¹⁰⁶

Studies indicate that only 26 percent of women in rural areas in Colombia have decision-making authority over agricultural production of the land they work and women rarely have full legal rights to property.¹⁰⁷ In the northwestern region of the country, about 90 percent of land in the area is under collective ownership by Indigenous or Afro-Colombian communities and cannot be sold or mortgaged by individual women. Additionally, traditional land uses – generally environmentally sustainable practices often worked by women – compete with commercial plantations of legal crops, illegal crops, mining, and logging that result in the destruction of forest and water resources, erosion, and increased community tensions.¹⁰⁸

Attention to the linkages within this nexus has resulted in several programs supporting Colombian women peacebuilders in the natural resources space. In Chocó and Antioquia, along the country's northwestern coast, illegal mining fuels violence and instability. To address these root causes of land and natural resource conflicts, a Mercy Corps project aimed to strengthen women's leadership in resolving conflicts among Afro-Colombian and Indigenous communities. These communities were chosen because they have historically experienced higher rates of displacement and general insecurity. The project spent years earning the trust of locals to gain a comprehensive understanding of the legal, economic, and social practices around land use, and to identify local leaders perceived as trustworthy to the local population.¹⁰⁹

The Mercy Corps project built Afro-Colombian women's knowledge and strengthened their participation in the creation of ethno-territorial plans, municipal development plans, and decisions regarding land use. Women were trained on Alternative Dispute Resolution methods, which when combined with capacity-building in GIS/GPS technologies and land titling procedures, enabled them to facilitate mediation and prevent conflict escalation.¹¹⁰ Since 2008, Mercy Corps and its local partners have resolved land and natural resources conflicts on 228,076 hectares of land, benefitting 20,236 people.¹¹¹

Women leaders trained through the program were able to formalize 499 vacant state land title applications (between 2007 and 2012), 165 of which were intended for women-headed households. Their efforts resulted in the transfer of ownership rights of over 2,500 hectares of land to rural Afro-Colombian families. Additionally, women who participated in the project have now joined community councils and

are leading conflict mitigation and land tenure processes. In these roles, women are able to advocate for greater equity of property rights policies and have more influence on local development plans.¹¹²

Colombia's intertwined legacies of natural resource-induced conflict, gender-responsive peace agreements, and climate vulnerability provide valuable insights on implementing projects aimed at the climate-gender-conflict change nexus. While the Mercy Corps program did not explicitly address climate change, natural resource management and land tenure are key considerations in increasing resiliency to respond to climate shocks and mitigate the chance of conflict. The project demonstrates the effectiveness of building leadership and technical capacity of women to manage natural resources and address community conflict and land disputes. As climate change impacts – including flooding, coastal erosion, and desertification – reduce available arable land, conflict over land tenure will most likely increase, necessitating women's active involvement in dispute resolution and peacebuilding.

Programmatic interventions to empower local women are powerful tools to address climate-conflict, but policymakers should also take advantage of opportunities to leverage international frameworks and peace agreements to formally enshrine gender equality.

Research shows that inclusive mechanisms can help ensure lasting peace.¹¹³ The 2016 Peace Accord between the Colombian Government and FARC incorporates gender and natural resources and provides valuable lessons on developing sustainable peace agreements. The Accord included significant provisions on rural development,¹¹⁴ and, while climate change is not specifically mentioned in the Accord, natural resource access and competition are recognized as drivers of the civil unrest.

Colombian women were identified not only as combatants and victims in the conflict, but also as influential stakeholders in the peace process. Previous research from GIWPS demonstrated the prominent role women-led peacebuilding and civil society organizations played in the development of the peace agreement, resulting in gains for women in the final Accord.¹¹⁵ The Accord established a gender perspective as a guiding principle for its implementation and includes nearly 130 affirmative measures to promote equal rights for men and women, emphasizing and requiring the active participation of women in peacebuilding.¹¹⁶

However, by 2019, 42 percent of the gender commitments had not been initiated, compared to 27 percent of overall commitments.¹¹⁷ While progress is challenging, integrating gender into peace agreements is both an effective strategy to promote women's influence and leadership, as well as to maintain peace.¹¹⁸ The Colombian Accord is a model for formally incorporating the climate-gender-conflict nexus into peacebuilding and lessons learned could be applied to other conflicts.

The case of Colombia illustrates how empowering women as environmental activists through training, sharing best practices, and strengthening peacebuilder networks advances gender equality and increases community resilience in confronting climate shocks. It also highlights how the post-conflict period presents a crucial opportunity to leverage peace agreements to further gender equality and incorporate environmental peacebuilding.

Sudan

Empowering Women to Meaningfully Participate in Mediating Resource-Related Conflicts Within Community-Level Structures

The state of North Kordofan in Sudan borders North Darfur to its west and South Kordofan to its south. This region has been embroiled in decades of violent conflict and civil war, which has led to the influx of weapons and internally displaced people into North Kordofan.¹¹⁹ This insecurity has disproportionately affected women and girls in Sudan, particularly through high levels of sexual violence.¹²⁰ Poverty is also deeply entrenched in the region, affecting over half of the population, which further diminishes women's adaptive capacity to shocks, including those associated with climate change.¹²¹

According to the 2020 Global Climate Risk Index Report, Sudan is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts.¹²² North Kordofan is characterized by low rainfall, extreme temperatures, drought, and desertification. Rain-fed agriculture and pastoralism, which undergird the livelihoods of over 80 percent of North Kordofan's population, are especially affected by the depletion of water resources.¹²³ These hazards are intensifying land degradation and crop failure, and stressing already limited natural resources, including fresh water.¹²⁴ Even without climate change, water demand is expected to far outpace supply by 2030.¹²⁵ As the primary water collectors, women and girls are disproportionately affected by water scarcity.

Despite these vulnerabilities, women play a fundamental role in agricultural production and food security in Northern Kordofan. According to Ahmed et al., women contribute about 75 percent of monthly agricultural income by preparing and harvesting food and cash crops such as sorghum, millet, and sesame.¹²⁶

Non-climatic factors – including high levels of poverty and a lack of income diversity – mean that smallholder rain-fed farmers and pastoralists are typically the least able to cope with climate change-related shocks.¹²⁷ Pastoralist communities in North Kordofan are also becoming increasingly sedentary, creating greater proximity to and contact with farming communities. This can be attributed to the convergence of a number of factors, including conflict and insecurity in neighboring states, as well as the degradation of pastoralist grazing lands as a result of climate change.¹²⁸ Competition over depleting resources further escalates tensions among different pastoralist groups and between pastoralist and farming communities, in some cases leading to violence.¹²⁹ In less than two years, between July 2016 and April 2018, the region experienced nine violent resource-related conflicts, resulting in 24 deaths.¹³⁰

Conflict and climate change have gendered impacts on communities in Sudan. Gender dynamics within communities are shifting because of the increasing pattern of male out-migration to urban areas, which is increasing the share of female-headed households.¹³¹ While this migration can generate new sources of income and economic security for families, the sustained absence of men generates additional struggles for women who can hold land access rights only through a male relative, face obstacles to obtaining credit, and have less social capital in their communities.¹³²

Within the context of addressing conflict in the country, Sudanese women have historically been marginalized from conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts,

despite evidence that women's engagement is crucial to peace and stability.¹³³ For example, within the broader peace processes in Sudan, women comprised just eight percent of the negotiators in the 2006 Darfur Peace Agreement and 15 percent of the negotiators for the "Two Areas" peace track since 2016.¹³⁴

In response to the underrepresentation of women, the Taskforce on the Engagement of Women, composed of Sudanese female civil society and political leaders, mobilized "across religious, ethnic, and regional divides" to enhance women's engagement in the peace process.¹³⁵ Through their efforts, the Taskforce has made significant contributions to peacebuilding, through informal mediation, community consultations, and other means.¹³⁶ Sudanese women continue to be active in pushing for change, playing a significant role in ousting President Omar al-Bashir through their pro-democracy protests.¹³⁷

Although Sudanese women are gaining ground in conflict resolution and peacebuilding, they continue to face barriers to meaningful engagement in governance mechanisms, including those that address natural resource disputes. Community-level structures such as the *Joyeda* – a network of local mediators trusted to address and resolve conflicts – have often excluded women entirely.¹³⁸

A pilot project by the UN Joint Programme aimed to fill this gap. The project, implemented from 2016 through 2018, promoted "natural resource-based interventions as a tool for women's political and economic empowerment in peacebuilding contexts."¹³⁹ Through practical training and technical support and the establishment of community forums and committees, the project sought to increase women's leadership in resource governance and natural resource conflict resolution.

The project saw promising initial results. Women's knowledge and capacity on natural resource management, as well as on conflict mediation and resolution, increased. This occurred through educational, technical, and financial support for women in land preparation and crop production, and training for women in natural resource conflict resolution skills. Moreover, gender sensitization sessions and discussion forums with youth, men, and traditional elders sought to change the norms around women's role in conflict mediation processes, especially concerning natural resources.

As a result, perceptions underwent a radical shift and women went from being virtually absent to being involved in three out of four mediation processes.¹⁴⁰ Finally, the women established new forums and committees and mobilized around new projects in their communities. In Nawa, for example, women mobilized their community to plant 6,000 seedlings for soil conservation.¹⁴¹

While it is yet unclear if this has led to a reduction in conflict – which can be attributed to the convergence of many factors – the project suggests that "natural resources are a strong entry point for women's empowerment in peacebuilding, especially in the context of a changing climate."¹⁴² Based on previous research demonstrating that inclusion of women leads to more durable peace,¹⁴³ we could expect programs like this, which empower women to participate more fully in mediating resource-related conflicts, to have a positive impact on environmental peacebuilding and stability within communities.

Nepal

Promoting Women's Contributions to Post-Conflict Peacebuilding in Local-Level Dialogues

Nepal underwent a decade-long violent civil war that ended in 2006 and the undercurrents of political instability and structural inequality continue to be felt today.¹⁴⁴ This legacy of violence has inhibited economic development, as over half of the Nepali population lives below the poverty line, and Nepal remains a Least Developed Country. Today, climate impacts are threatening to undermine Nepal's already fragile socioeconomic fabric.¹⁴⁵

Nepal is highly prone to summer monsoons and natural disasters, including floods, landslides, earthquakes, and avalanches.¹⁴⁶ According to Nepal's Climate Change Gender Action Plan, changes in climate are anticipated to increase the frequency of these climate extremes and intensify resource degradation and depletion, which in turn will exacerbate resource-related conflicts.¹⁴⁷

Forest resources are the backbone of rural Nepali communities.¹⁴⁸ They supply fuel for over 85 percent of the Nepali population, fodder for livestock, and other important resources for peoples' livelihoods.¹⁴⁹ Women, Indigenous people, Dalits, and low-income rural communities have "greater and more frequent dependence on forest resources."¹⁵⁰ Unfortunately, because of exploitation and increasing fires from drought, Nepal lost roughly 25 percent of its forest cover between 1990 and 2010.¹⁵¹

Against the context of underdevelopment, structural inequalities, and escalating climate impacts, land and forest resources in Nepal are increasingly "becoming a highly sensitive political issue and source of conflict."¹⁵² A study by Satyal Pravat and Humphreys investigating the Terai forest region in Nepal shows how corruption, poor governance, and skewed land distribution are escalating forest-related conflicts among households or communities, or between communities and industries or the state.¹⁵³

Nepal is rich in water resources; however, poor and unsustainable management practices have resulted in water scarcity.¹⁵⁴ Moreover, as demand for water continues to outpace available supply, and climate change triggers rising temperatures and rainfall variability, these shortages are becoming increasingly acute. Water deficits severely affect the rural economy, as more than 70 percent of rural populations rely on agriculture for their livelihoods.¹⁵⁵ Shortages also particularly affect women who bear the responsibility for fetching water, increasing time and labor burdens. As shortages worsen, conflicting claims over stressed water sources have proliferated.¹⁵⁶ The different causes of water-related conflicts, according to Upreti, are competition between sharing water for industrial use, domestic consumption, and irrigation for agriculture.¹⁵⁷

Given these considerable challenges, facilitating women's meaningful participation in advancing peace and sustainability is more critical than ever. However, Nepali women have historically been sidelined from decision-making, a pattern that can be traced back to the feudal hierarchy of gender, caste, ethnicity, and other axes of difference in Nepal. Rural Dalit women, in particular, face multiple layers of discrimination.¹⁵⁸

This feudal caste system was one of the main driving forces of the civil war. It was also a source of grievances that the Maoist insurgents tapped into to mobilize support, by promising to “eliminate social and political inequalities, and ensure women’s liberation from patriarchal oppression,” thereby increasing momentum in a movement for women’s rights.¹⁵⁹ Although women served on the frontlines of the conflict, they were “conspicuously absent” from the peace negotiation processes.¹⁶⁰ While the post-war era has brought gains for women’s formal, high-level political participation and representation, and for women’s rights across property, domestic violence, and reproductive rights, women’s capacity to influence decision-making, particularly at the local level, has not kept pace.¹⁶¹

Nepal’s growing susceptibility to climate change is further exposing this gap between post-war high-level gains and women’s lived experiences, rights, and well-being on the ground. Gender-based discrimination magnified the adverse impacts of the 2015 earthquakes for Nepali women, according to GIWPS research by Mawby and Applebaum, “by inhibiting their access to political, economic, and social rights, justice and reparations, and aid and recovery efforts.”¹⁶²

Persistent gender inequality has also marginalized Nepali women from natural resource governance. Nepali women comprise only six percent of total landowners in Nepal and hold a combined share of only four percent of arable land, despite the primary role women play in the management of forest and water resources.¹⁶³ Although women from traditionally marginalized castes, such as the Tharu ethnic minority in the Terai, rely most heavily on forests, they are excluded from the control, and therefore management, of these resources.¹⁶⁴ Dalit rural women face similar barriers and have very limited control over land, water, and other communal resources.¹⁶⁵ As Wagle et al. argue, “those who manage and protect the forests, and who have the greatest need to access forest resources, are being neglected by forestry institutions at all levels.”¹⁶⁶

When it comes to resource governance, Nepal’s forest management systems at both the local and national level are “male-dominated and insensitive or unresponsive to women’s voices and roles in forestry institutions.”¹⁶⁷ Women comprise only three percent of people employed in national forestry bureaucracies, and of the 74 District Forest Officers, only one is female.¹⁶⁸ At the local level, only 25 percent of members in Community Forest Executive Committees (CFECs) are women.¹⁶⁹ And where women are present, they are often included in tokenistic ways, lacking the ability to influence decision and policymaking processes.¹⁷⁰ Research shows that this exclusion undercuts the “material, monetary and social benefits of community forestry programmes.”¹⁷¹

Women’s exclusion from these platforms and processes can be attributed to discriminatory norms, gendered power dynamics, and social suppression, as well as low literacy rates, particularly among women from marginalized Indigenous communities. The reluctance to go against *Thulomanche* (local elite and village landlords), and the time-burden of domestic workloads are further barriers.¹⁷²

Many of these factors also stymie women’s involvement in natural resource management as it relates to conflict mediation. Upreti notes that most resource conflicts are resolved through informal practices, and that male domination in these spaces is common.¹⁷³ However, the role of women is often instrumental in

mitigating local-level resource conflicts. Women are a “rich source of Indigenous knowledge and skills for natural resource management.”¹⁷⁴ They can bring conflicting parties to the table, exert pressure on male family members to negotiate and compromise, and act as mediators in conflicts with neighbors.¹⁷⁵ This has been demonstrated by women of the Brahmin and Chhetri castes in Pawoti village, Dolakha District, for example, where they have resolved disputes between their communities over a drinking water source.¹⁷⁶

There is also evidence of women already organizing in structures and institutions related to local-level resource management. The Himalayan Grassroots Women’s Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI), for example, is a nonprofit civil society organization composed entirely of female members – some 50,000 strong across 31 districts in the country – who are also members of Community User Forest Groups (CFUGs). HIMAWANTI seeks to elevate the role of women in sustainable natural resource management in Nepal across land, water, and forest resources. It runs forestry projects and builds the capacity of its members through training, workshops, and exposure visits.¹⁷⁷

Organizations such as HIMAWANTI could serve as strategic entry points for broadening the role of women in natural resource management as it relates directly to conflict prevention and resolution. These projects and efforts present valuable avenues to reframe perspectives on the roles, knowledge, and capabilities of women, thereby shifting discriminatory norms. The sharing of best practices across networks, villages, and districts, through local women’s organizations mobilizing around these issues, can promote women as agents of change in environmental peacebuilding and local conflict resolution.



Women from the Chisapani Community Forest User Group harvesting lemongrass in Madhyamanchal, Nepal.
Photo: Chandra Shekhar Karki/CIFOR

4. Recommendations and Ways Forward

Climate change, gender, and conflict are inextricably linked. Yet research and policy approaches at this nexus remain underdeveloped and disconnected. This report punctuates the need for an expanded evidence base to advance synergies between silos and frameworks in order to accelerate gender equality, conflict reduction, and climate response at global, national, and local levels.

The cases of Colombia, Sudan, and Nepal demonstrate how interactions within the climate-gender-conflict nexus play out across diverse contexts and how this interplay is multifaceted and multidirectional. Despite differing contexts and systems of natural resource management, these cases present a common set of challenges, namely:

- Climate change is a threat multiplier. Climate change impacts stress fragile environmental and sociopolitical systems and inflame underlying conditions, including deep and pervasive poverty, lack of income diversity, and insecurity. This can push tensions over local thresholds, provoking violent conflict.
- In turn, these same non-climate factors enhance the vulnerability of communities to climate change by diminishing their adaptive capacity.
- Gender is a cross-cutting lens that bridges both climate change and conflict. Specifically, climate change impacts and resource scarcity have gendered implications, although these unfold differently across contexts.
- Social norms and barriers largely inhibit women's meaningful participation in male-dominated natural resource management and conflict mediation platforms, groups, and spaces.

Each case study reaffirms the gendered nature of these overarching patterns, while also offering unique insights. In Colombia, women face the combined challenges of insecure land tenure, natural resource degradation, and climate change-related impacts on agriculture, which collectively threaten the country's fragile peace. In Sudan, competition over depleting arable land and fresh water escalates tensions between pastoralist and farming communities and the out-migration of men increases the share of women-led households. And in Nepal, in the broader context of a highly socially stratified society along gender, class, and ethnic lines, conflicts have proliferated over limited water and forest resources, to the detriment of marginalized rural women who rely on these resources the most.

However, as the case studies illustrate, women are not merely passive victims of climate change and resulting conflicts. Across diverse contexts, local women are able to provide effective solutions to climate change-impacted conflicts, from managing natural resources sustainably and securing land rights in Colombia, to resolving disputes over drinking water sources in Nepal, and leading reforestation efforts in Sudan.

The cases offer several key insights for promoting the role of women at the grassroots level:

- Climate change is a global threat, but mitigation and adaptation responses must be gender-responsive, inclusive, and attentive to local conditions.
- Building the adaptive capacity of local communities is critical. Women should be targeted in these efforts, for example through adapting and diversifying livelihoods, to enhance community resilience to climate shocks.
- Women on the ground are not solely victims of conflict or climate threats, but are also uniquely placed to respond given their localized knowledge and perspectives. Leveraging women's contributions can more effectively mitigate climate-conflict risks.
- Natural resource management has high potential as an entry point to empowering local women in climate-related peacebuilding.
- Barriers to women's leadership at the local level must be addressed to support women's full and meaningful participation in developing solutions for their communities; local mechanisms for women's inclusion should be taken into account.

Five Priority Areas for Action

Climate change impacts undermine peace and security by exacerbating pre-existing and long-simmering social, political, economic, and environmental factors. As seen in each of the three case studies, already fragile and insecure contexts are particularly vulnerable to climate-conflict risks, including natural resource conflicts, forced displacement, and heightened insecurity. In turn, conflict diminishes people's ability to cope with future climate shocks.

Climate-conflict impacts are both localized and gendered. Critically, women are often on the frontlines of climate change and are also among those most exposed to its threats. Yet they are also marginalized from the conflict mediation, environmental peacebuilding, and sustainable resource management systems to which they are uniquely suited to contribute, thus barriers to women's full and meaningful participation must be addressed.

Given these findings, five priority areas of action emerge for scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and donors seeking to protect, empower, and engage women within the climate-gender-conflict nexus:

1. Buffer the disproportionate vulnerabilities women bear from climate change impacts

- Incorporate gender considerations into climate change plans at all levels – local, national, and international – such as the National Adaptation Plans, Sector Adaptation Plans, and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). As countries prepare to submit revised NDCs under the Paris Agreement, this is a crucial opportunity to integrate gender within climate strategies. Ensure that women are included in disaster response efforts such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, evolving migration compacts and frameworks, and target the development of climate-resilient livelihoods towards women.
- Build women’s adaptive capacity to climate shocks through advancing their access to quality education, healthcare, credit, and financial resources. In particular, furthering the mainstreaming of gender-responsive climate financing, as modeled by the Green Climate Fund, is key to building women’s capacity.

2. Center women as crucial actors in climate, peace, and security

- Invest in and promote women’s leadership and meaningful participation in decision- and policymaking around climate change mitigation and adaptation, and sustainable natural resource management.
- Partner with local women-led initiatives, community leaders, and civil society organizations to engage women in the design, delivery, and assessment of interventions aligned with community-identified needs. Existing women-led networks can be leveraged to promote women’s engagement on climate change-related issues.

3. Strengthen linkages between the different levels and sectors in the climate-gender-conflict nexus

- Bridge the silos between the gender and climate professional communities. Cross-train gender specialists on the implications of the climate crisis on gender and security while training climate specialists on gender mainstreaming.
- Facilitate synergies between international organizations, national governments, civil society, and grassroots organizations, to enhance implementation of climate, gender, and security frameworks. Leverage the strengths of global gender equality movements to develop an integrative approach to the nexus. Build gender-sensitive implementation strategies and accountability mechanisms into national action plans on climate change and WPS.
- Ensure that climate change mitigation and adaptation targets and frameworks are gender-sensitive and gender-responsive, and that gender targets and frameworks account for climate-conflict risks. In particular, rural women, Indigenous women, and other marginalized groups should be included in these considerations.
- Integrate the climate-gender-conflict nexus into the agendas of international governance structures such as the UNFCCC and the UN Security Council.

4. Address knowledge gaps within the nexus

- Prioritize collection of sex-disaggregated data in climate change-affected communities.¹⁷⁸ Increase the breadth and depth of diverse case studies of women-led efforts to address insecurity and conflict exacerbated by climate change.
- Center local voices, particularly from women situated at intersecting identities, in research processes. Create opportunities for local women to contribute to the knowledge base through participatory methods and processes.
- Promote and amplify the expertise of scholars in the Global South and those situated in affected contexts, especially from marginalized and Indigenous communities.

5. Promote women's leadership in climate-related conflict mitigation and prevention and reduce barriers to inclusion

- Address legal barriers, in particular land ownership and tenure, as well as other structural and cultural barriers to gender equality that limit women's participation in climate-related peacebuilding.
- Engage male members of the community, as well as traditional authorities and elders to shift discriminatory gender norms.
- Integrate women into the complete peacebuilding, negotiation, and implementation process and train women in conflict resolution techniques.
- Enhance the development of more inclusive natural resource management mechanisms.

Action across these five priority areas can address unequal power dynamics, barriers, and gendered disparities to pave the way for meaningful participation of women in decision-making around the climate, gender, and conflict nexus. As is evident in the case studies and the supporting literature, this has the potential to generate improved outcomes across conservation and peace. It also reframes the role of women not just as bearing the brunt of climate change and conflict, but as agents of change with the capacity to inform and influence solutions. As climate change threatens global security and the advances women have made in achieving equality, the global community must learn from and empower women building peace.

Endnotes

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