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WORLD'S WOMEN

FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE

A Framework for Action



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
COP	Conference of the Parties
GBV	gender-based violence
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature
LGBTIQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer
LVC	La Via Campesina
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDC	National Determined Contributions
UN-Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNCBD	United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity
UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Combatting Climate Change
WAMUA	Women Affected by Mining United in Action
WED	women environmental defenders
WGC	Women and Gender Constituency

INTRODUCTION

As global temperatures break records and government ambitions fail to match the urgency of the moment, the Paris Agreement target to limit global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels is increasingly in peril.¹ Every fraction of a degree is critical as, across the globe, extreme weather events are causing flooding, drought, wildfires, food shortages, health problems and major damage to ecosystem functions and human habitats. Since 1900, global sea-levels have risen faster than in any preceding century in the last 3,000 years, endangering coastal farmlands and water reserves and posing an existential threat to low-lying small islands.² Skyrocketing levels of pollution, including plastic, are reducing ecosystems' ability to adapt to climate change, and biodiversity loss is accelerating.³ With all 20 of the 2010 Aichi Biodiversity Targets having been missed, 1 million species are under threat of extinction in the coming years, a loss that is unprecedented in human history.⁴

This ecological meltdown is driven by an economic system, under which the drivers of climate change, environmental degradation and gender and social inequality are interconnected. Each depends on the extraction of natural resources and the exploitation of cheap labour from poor women and colonized and racialized groups.⁵ Over centuries, this colonial, extractivist, patriarchal and racist⁶ system has turned the natural environment, particularly in the Global South, into a tap for the extraction of resources and a sink for disposing of waste.⁷ These violent histories are reflected today in the deeply unequal share of both historical responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions and who suffers most from the impacts. The Global North has been responsible for 68 per cent of CO₂ emissions since 1850.⁸ While only accounting for 16 per cent of the world's population, high-income countries generate 34 per cent of the world's waste, which is often exported to lower-income countries that lack the infrastructure to process it in environmentally safe ways, contributing to toxic chemical and microplastic contamination of food chains on land and in the sea.⁹

Gender inequalities, along with other social and economic inequalities, intensify vulnerability to climate change impacts. A growing body of evidence on gender and climate change identifies negative impacts across a range of economic and social outcomes for women, girls and gender-diverse people because of underlying gender inequalities and the failure to take gender issues into account in environmental policymaking.¹⁰ In the past 20 years, the number of climate-related disasters has nearly doubled.¹¹ Women and girls are more vulnerable to disasters, in terms of both the immediate impacts as well as their capacity to recover in the aftermath, because of gender inequalities.¹² For example, women's lower levels of literacy and use of technology hamper their access to information about what to do in the event of a disaster; and poor design of emergency shelters can prevent women and girls from using them when weather disasters strike.

Globally, laws, policies and social norms that discriminate on the basis of gender mean that women typically have less access to income and finance, employment and productive resources, including agricultural land. This means that when weather patterns change, disrupting infrastructure and public services or affecting food production, they are less able to adapt their livelihoods, recover and rebuild. Women's unpaid care responsibilities in families and communities often increase in the context of environmental change and stress, as water, fuel and nutritious food are harder to come by and the health-care needs of family members increase.¹³ Globally, by mid-century, under a worst-case scenario, climate change may push up to 158 million more women and girls into poverty (16 million more than the total number of men and boys).¹⁴

Economic hardship wrought by a heating planet is having additional knock-on effects for gender equality. Evidence shows that as communities are plunged into recurrent crises, tensions within families and between partners rise and gender-based violence escalates.¹⁵ After years of slow progress,

rates of child marriage are increasing in places experiencing environmental stress.¹⁶ Droughts have been found to increase son preference and sex-selective abortion as well as the likelihood of girls dropping out of school.¹⁷ Hard-won progress on gender equality since the Beijing Platform for Action has been incremental but inadequate,¹⁸ and without action to halt climate change, the world's women and girls now face wholesale reversal of their human rights.

The climate crisis unfolds within, and is marked by, a series of other crises:

- a crisis of extreme economic inequalities that has concentrated wealth and power among the few while causing widespread economic insecurity among the many and trapping millions of women and girls in poverty and hunger;
- a crisis of care, exacerbated by a vicious cycle of debt, austerity and the retrenchment of public services, which has left millions of children and care-dependent adults without support while imposing hard choices and enormous costs on women and girls;
- a crisis of racialized violence and dispossession, rooted in attempts to dehumanize and disenfranchise Black, Indigenous and other people of colour, including migrants and refugees;
- a crisis of democracy, which is hampering action on climate change, fuelled by the rise of movements that propagate xenophobic, regressive nationalism and climate denialism, often alongside anti-immigrant and anti-gender rhetoric; and
- an upsurge in violence and protracted conflict, resulting in forced migration and conflict-related sexual violence, which is also leading to increased fragmentation and geopolitical gridlock on the international stage.¹⁹

Taken together, all these add up to an 'epochal crisis'²⁰ with pervasive and mutually reinforcing effects that

accelerate the existential threat of climate change while simultaneously undermining the political conditions needed to address it. As such, this requires not tinkering around the edges but the transformation of every part of the world's economies and societies.

Using the frame of feminist climate justice, this paper provides a vision of where the world needs to go in this critical moment as well as a policy framework to guide action towards it. It requires that gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities are recognized and addressed as countries transition to low-emission economies that are resilient to a changing climate; and that resources are fairly redistributed so that such transitions are just and equitable and women and gender-diverse people can benefit from future opportunities. It recognizes the leadership and agency of women and gender-diverse people, particularly when they organize collectively, in adapting and driving the change that is so urgently needed.

The term 'climate justice' has been in use for a long time, first in academia to discuss the moral and ethical dimensions of climate change, and subsequently taken up by civil society through activism to foreground the people and communities who have contributed least to the problem but are suffering its most intense impacts.²¹ Feminist climate justice brings a gender lens to this by showing how the drivers of climate and environmental breakdown are also the structural drivers of gender inequalities.²² Feminism is a mode of analysis, but it is also about progressive action to transform institutions, laws, policies and practices towards greater gender equality. Therefore, in this paper, the aim is to define conceptually what feminist climate justice is and to then unpack it in a practical way that can provide guidance to policymakers on what needs to happen and can support its monitoring and implementation.

Section 1 of the paper outlines the feminist climate justice framework, which includes four interlinked domains: recognition, redistribution, representation and reparation. It also brings into view the principles of interdependence – between humans and

ecosystems, between countries and generations – and intersectionality as a basis for solidarity and political action.

Section 2 then provides an example of how this conceptual framework can be applied to policy in practice. It focuses on food systems and agriculture, which is one of many sectors that needs to be transformed to address climate change and environmental degradation, showing how gender and other inequalities can be transformed in the process. Globally, more than one third of working women are employed in this sector (rising to two thirds in sub-Saharan Africa and nearly three quarters in southern Asia), which is extremely vulnerable to climate change.²³ The sector therefore lends itself to the application of the feminist climate justice approach.

Finally, the paper turns to the issue of accountability. Holding climate decision-makers accountable to women and girls requires shifting power dynamics and the renewal of democratic practices at all levels. Section 3 looks at how this might be achieved and presents a forthcoming accountability tool, the gender equality and climate policy scorecard, that UN-Women is developing with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Kaschak Institute for Social Justice for Women and Girls at Binghamton University to contribute towards this effort.

The ideas contained here will provide the conceptual framework for the forthcoming edition of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women's (UN-Women) flagship report, *Progress of the World's Women: Gender Equality in the Age of Climate Crisis*. In addition to a conceptual framework, this series includes data and policy analysis, as well as promising case studies of public action, and draws together recommendations for policy actors to accelerate the achievement of gender equality.

This paper was developed based on a diversity of feminist academic and activist perspectives, spanning a range of disciplines from economics to political ecology, sociology, social policy, political science and geography. In June and July 2023, UN-Women convened two expert consultations, bringing together a group of leading feminists to present these ideas and to hear their critical feedback. The proposals were further scrutinized in a consultation in August 2023 with youth leaders active in UN-Women's Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on Feminist Action for Climate Justice.²⁴ It is hoped that all the rich insights from these meetings have been adequately reflected here and that this paper, the conceptual framework for the forthcoming *Progress of the World's Women* report, will continue to generate debate and discussion around these ideas.



1

**IN PURSUIT
OF FEMINIST
CLIMATE JUSTICE:
A FRAMEWORK**

WHY FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE?

Gender inequalities intensify vulnerability to climate change impacts, which in turn jeopardize hard-won gains on women's rights

Without bold action, the world is headed for

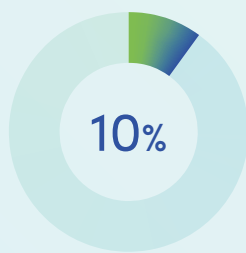
3°C of global heating

by the end of this century and an increasingly unliveable planet.^a

In the past

20 years

the number of climate-related disasters has **nearly doubled**.^b



Today, 10 per cent of women live in **extreme poverty**.^c

By 2050, under a worst-case climate scenario, up to

158.3

million more women and girls may be pushed into poverty globally.^c

Gender-based violence increases in times of crisis, and the climate crisis is no different.^a For example,

The 2022 drought in the Horn of Africa resulted in a nearly fourfold **increase in child marriage** in affected areas of Ethiopia.^d



In Somalia, episodes of **intimate partner violence and rape** increased by 20 per cent.^d



Climate change is exacerbating water scarcity, which **increases the burden of water collection and treatment** on women and girls.^c



Globally, every day, women spend

2.8

more hours than men on unpaid care and domestic work.^c



Feminist climate justice aims for a world where women, girls and gender-diverse people can flourish on a healthy and sustainable planet.

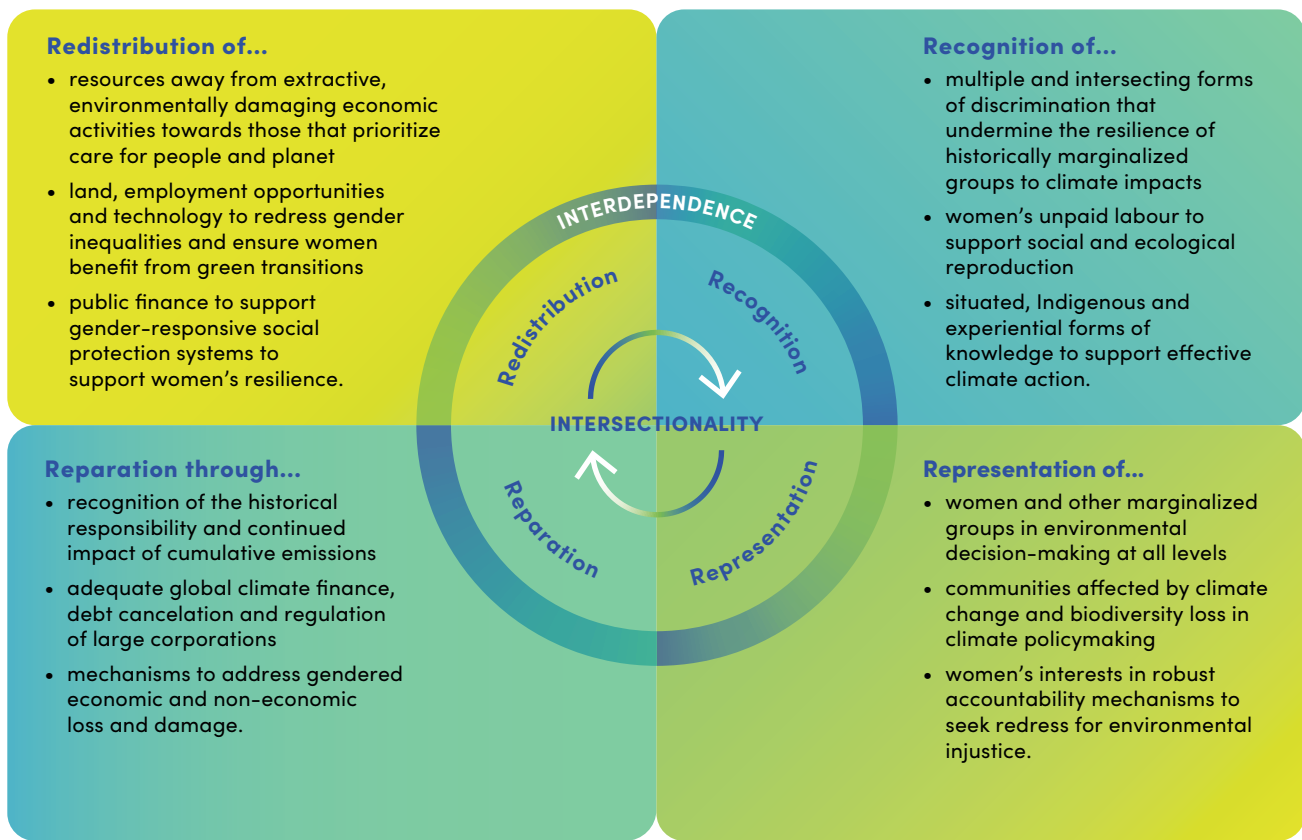
The vision for feminist climate justice is of a world in which everyone can enjoy the full range of human rights, free from discrimination, and flourish on a planet that is healthy and sustainable. To achieve this, economic and social policies will have to be substantially transformed away from the pursuit of growth at any cost and profits for the few.

Drawing on Nancy Fraser’s pioneering theory of justice,²⁵ climate justice requires: the **recognition** and respect of diverse identities, experiences and forms of knowledge; the **redistribution** of resources; and the **representation** and meaningful participation of women and marginalized groups in climate-related decision-making. Though not specific to gender equality, these dimensions closely mirror the definition of climate justice proposed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): “distributive justice which refers to the allocation of

burdens and benefits among individuals, nations and generations; procedural justice which refers to who decides and participates in decision-making; and recognition which entails basic respect and robust engagement with and fair consideration of diverse cultures and perspectives”.²⁶ In addition, the intergenerational dimensions of climate change call for reparative justice, including **reparations** for past and future harm.²⁷

This framework (see Figure 1.1) is intended to provide conceptual clarity on what the barriers are to feminist climate justice as well as practical guidance on how public action can drive the transformation needed at all levels and across all sectors. Based on decades of feminist economist, ecological and decolonial thinking, this transformation must be guided by an ethics of care that embraces interdependence as the basis of human interaction and intersectionality as a core principle.²⁸

Figure 1.1 DIMENSIONS AND PRINCIPLES OF FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE



1.1 RECOGNITION: WHOSE RIGHTS, KNOWLEDGE AND LABOUR ARE CONSIDERED VALID?

As the Black American writer James Baldwin stated: “Not everything that is faced can be changed; but nothing can be changed until it is faced”.²⁹ The recognition of multiple and intersecting inequalities that affect a person’s experience in the world – whether based on their gender, age, race, ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation – is crucial for human dignity and acknowledging the diversity of human experience.³⁰ Yet, too often, ‘misrecognition’ occurs whereby differences are weaponized through stereotyping and stigmatization, which naturalizes the dehumanization of groups, their oppression and discrimination against them.³¹ Violence against women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ+) people, which is increasing in the context of the climate crisis, is one very widespread and pernicious form of ‘misrecognition’.³² While analytically distinct, recognitive justice is closely linked to distributive justice: that is, recognition wrongs can be experienced regardless of relative socio-economic disadvantage, but they also often compound it.

In climate change-related policy, research and practice, ‘misrecognition’ manifests itself in the institutionalized neglect and devaluation of the rights, contributions and knowledge of women and marginalized groups. Environmental justice scholars have long shown, for example, how poor, Black, Indigenous and other marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by pollution, chemical exposure and toxic waste,³³ while new and old forms of extractivism continue to fuel the dispossession of Indigenous territory.

Feminist scholars, in turn, have consistently drawn parallels between the devaluation and depletion of women’s unpaid labour and the natural environment, with both considered infinitely elastic and costless

even as together they create the very foundation on which the economy rests.³⁴ Neither women’s unpaid care work nor ecosystem services are taken into account in conventional economic metrics, meaning they are both invisible in measures of economic progress and prosperity, notably gross domestic product (GDP), an issue on which the United Nations Secretary-General has recently called for change.³⁵ More generally, quantitative data on gender and the environment is scarce, hampering evidence-based policymaking (see Box 1.1).

Whose knowledge is recognized as valid and valuable is highly gendered. A recent study analysing 100 highly cited climate science papers revealed that less than 1 per cent of authors were based in Africa, while almost three quarters had affiliations with European or North American institutions. Less than a quarter of authors were women and only 12 papers had female lead authors.³⁶ There are clear hierarchies of knowledge in climate change discussions, with a tendency to prioritize top-down technological solutions and strong reliance on (male-dominated) disciplines such as physical sciences and engineering.³⁷ This goes alongside the privileging of quantitative over qualitative data and of ‘measurable’ over ‘lived-world’ knowledge that is often held by women and Indigenous people. A wider array of knowledge remains excluded from dominant climate change narratives and policymaking.³⁸ This is despite mounting evidence that inclusive planning informed by diverse cultural values and Indigenous and local knowledge is critical to prevent maladaptation and facilitate climate resilient development.³⁹ Recognizing the equal value of these situated forms of knowledge about mitigation and adaptation needs and solutions will be critical if feminist climate justice is to be achieved.

Box 1.1 DATA INNOVATIONS TO VISIBILIZE THE GENDER-ENVIRONMENT NEXUS

Capturing the intersections of gender and environment in quantitative data is challenging and has long been neglected. Until recently, environmental statistics have focused on input-output variables, such as CO₂ emissions and fish stocks with little attention paid to the interaction and interdependence between humans and the environment. As a result, the targets and indicators of the sustainable development goal (SDG) framework were not designed with a gender perspective and the mainstreaming of gender in environment statistics is not yet a key part of the work of national statistical systems. The large gaps in gender statistics on this critical issue are holding back progress on gender-responsive policymaking.

Mainstreaming gender in environment statistics is not just about compiling sex-disaggregated data. It also requires developing methodologies and guidance on how to measure and monitor environment-related issues affecting or affected by women or men alone, or a preponderance of women compared to men, or vice-versa. This in turn can ensure data capture socially constructed vulnerabilities, the differentiated roles women and men play in environmental conservation and decision-making, and the specific needs, challenges and priorities of all genders in relation to the environment.

Qualitative and mixed methods studies, informed by interdisciplinary social and natural sciences, are needed to fully capture the gender-environment nexus. Innovative analysis of existing datasets also has a part to play. For example, combining household survey and geospatial data can shed light on how droughts, increases in temperature and evapotranspiration affect the odds of child marriage, adolescent births, violence against women, access to clean water and use of clean cooking fuels.⁴⁰ Citizen-generated data can provide unique insights and bring in a diversity of perspectives and experiences. Such innovation will require partnerships that go well beyond the traditional actors within national statistical systems.

As part of its Women Count programme, UN-Women has worked with partners in the United Nations and governments to develop survey tools, including a model questionnaire on gender and environment, which several countries in the Asia-Pacific region have already implemented (Bangladesh, Mongolia, Samoa and Tonga) or plan to do so (Cambodia, Kiribati and Viet Nam).⁴¹ The Global Conference on Gender and Environment Data, in the run up to COP 28, provides a space for sharing expertise and experiences on collecting, analysing and using data on the nexus to catalyse innovation and replication, scale-up data collection and ultimately improve decision-making and accountability for feminist climate action.⁴²

1.2 REDISTRIBUTION: WHO BENEFITS AND WHO BEARS THE BURDEN?

Climate justice is centrally concerned with the fact that those who have contributed least to the problem of climate change are most affected by its impacts.⁴³ There is an important global dimension to this as countries in the Global South are disproportionately affected by devastating climate impacts that were

triggered by centuries of cumulative emissions of predominantly Global North countries (see Section 1.3). But within countries too, in both the Global North and South, there are vast inequalities between the 'polluter elites', who are responsible for the largest share of emissions, and the 'precarious' who have

contributed little and who, without substantial resources to build their resilience, are much less able to handle the impacts of climate change and adapt their livelihoods to the new reality.⁴⁴

Socio-economic disadvantages are often exacerbated by other inequalities that compound vulnerability to climate change impacts. Black, Indigenous and other people of colour, as well as LGBTIQ+ people, are overrepresented among those who are poor and disproportionately exposed to ecological harms and toxic environments.⁴⁵ Women and gender diverse people's lesser access to education, jobs and productive resources, including land, as well as their disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work, may reduce their capacity to adapt and exclude them from new economic opportunities that open up in transitions towards sustainability. Climate policies therefore need to engage head-on with questions of "who benefits, who loses out, in what ways, where, and why?"⁴⁶ Unless climate action simultaneously addresses underlying gender, racial and income inequalities,

it is likely that solutions will exacerbate these.⁴⁷ Indeed, many large-scale renewable energy projects are already replicating the social and ecological damage caused by extractive industries, which has adversely impacted the rights of women and girls in local and Indigenous communities.⁴⁸

A redistribution of resources is needed to prevent harm and redress the multiple socio-economic disadvantages faced by women in all their diversity. In the energy sector, for example, gender-just transitions need to break with current extractivist practices, do more to address the needs of 'energy-poor' women and ensure that women benefit from new jobs and leadership opportunities created in the renewable energy sector.⁴⁹ More broadly, gender-just transitions would transform economies away from fossil fuel-dependent growth towards economies that recognize human and planetary interdependence through investments in sectors that are both low carbon and critical for gender equality and human flourishing writ large, notably the care economy.⁵⁰

1.3 REPRESENTATION: WHOSE VOICES COUNT?

The third dimension of justice is political and centrally concerned with equal representation. Both connected to and conceptually distinct from the other two dimensions of justice, "it tells us not only who can make claims for redistribution and recognition, but also how such claims are to be mooted and adjudicated".⁵¹

'Misrepresentation' occurs when political boundaries or procedural rules work to prevent some groups from having an equal voice and fair representation in public deliberations and decision-making processes that affect their lives. In the context of climate change, misrepresentation is clearly visible at all levels. Despite their longstanding leadership on environmental issues, whether as political leaders (e.g., Gro Harlem Brundtland, Christiana Figueres, Mia Mottley), civil society activists (e.g., Berta Cáceres, Wangari Mathaai, Vanessa Nakate) or scholars (e.g.,

Maria Mies, Elinor Ostrom, Vandana Shiva), women remain largely marginalized from environmental decision-making. For example, globally, women are only 15 per cent of environment ministers⁵² and, at the same time, the space for feminist movements, youth and women's civil society organizations to stake claims, co-shape or contest climate mitigation and adaptation policies that affect their communities either does not exist or has been shrinking rapidly in many countries.⁵³

While gender action plans have been adopted to strengthen the implementation of the Rio conventions, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Combating Climate Change (UNFCCC), the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD) and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), gender equality advocates

have also long decried women’s underrepresentation in delegations, boards and bodies.⁵⁴ Between 2012 and 2022, women’s participation in national delegations to the UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COPs) rose from 30 to 35 per cent; however, the proportion of delegations headed by women declined slightly from 21 to 20 per cent over the same period.⁵⁵

While supporting women’s leadership and participation in these spaces is critical, there are other aspects of procedural injustice that also need to be addressed. The UNFCCC COPs are important for hammering out agreements between Member States, but they provide little space for affected communities to make demands and seek redress for environmental injustice. Even the milestone loss and damage fund agreed at COP 27 in 2022, which potentially provides (voluntary) compensation for when harm is done, includes no mechanism for holding Global North countries accountable for causing it. A similar vacuum exists at the national level, where the rights

of Indigenous communities are often bulldozed over in the name of large-scale renewable energy projects.⁵⁶ Women environmental defenders are at the forefront of struggles against the encroachment of extractive industries on Indigenous territories, often facing significant threats and violence, including extra-judicial killings (see Section 3.2).⁵⁷

Although there are some limited indications of change through the courts,⁵⁸ there has so far been little accountability for those governments who fail to meet their legal commitments under the Paris Agreement, woefully inadequate action by multinational corporations and inadequate scrutiny of the global financial architecture, which makes investments in sustainability all but impossible for many countries.⁵⁹ This lack of accountability is corrosive to democracy at national and global levels and thus to the possibility of inclusive decision-making. Without addressing these broader democratic deficits, feminist climate justice will remain out of reach.

1.4 REPARATION: HOW CAN THE CONTINUED IMPACT OF PAST INJUSTICES BE CONFRONTED?

Climate justice has important intergenerational and global dimensions too. As the latest IPCC assessment report recognizes, both responsibility for the climate crisis and the ability of countries and communities to respond to its devastating impacts have been shaped by histories of systemic racism, colonialism and imperialism.⁶⁰ To advance towards feminist climate justice, the continuing impact of these legacies needs to be acknowledged and redressed to ensure that present and future generations are not subject to similar harm.

Indeed, economic prosperity in today’s high-income countries was built, to a large extent, on the colonization, enslavement and exploitation of people and natural resources in the Global South.⁶¹ In the process, Global North countries have incurred massive ecological or climate debt, accounting for 68 per cent of cumulative global emissions and 92 per cent of excess emissions

since 1850.⁶² Against this backdrop, the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities”⁶³ for climate change mitigation and adaptation have long been recognized and are a central tenet of the UNFCCC. Yet, for years, Global North countries have failed to acknowledge this debt or to make good on their climate finance commitments. On the contrary, the contemporary architecture of international climate finance has been critiqued as a form of neocolonialism, whereby Global North countries promote debt-increasing options such as loans and green bonds for Global South countries under non-concessional or unfavourable conditions.⁶⁴ Further, the abilities of Global South countries to promote resilience in the face of the climate crisis are often constrained by debt: 3.3 billion people live in countries that spend more on interest payments than on health or education due to severe constraints on public spending.⁶⁵

To address this climate debt, a global redistribution of resources from the Global North to the Global South is needed, not only to support adaptation and mitigation efforts but also as part of a process of accountability for climate-induced loss and damage.⁶⁶ Demands to address loss and damage have been articulated by Small-Island Developing States and low-income countries, in partnership with civil society, since at least the 1980s, while heavily contested by some of the largest emitters in the Global North.⁶⁷ Indeed, progress had been blocked by high-income countries for years prior to the decision to establish a fund for loss and damage at COP 27 in 2022.⁶⁸

Calls for accountability for climate-induced loss and damage share some common ground with calls for 'climate reparations', a phrase rooted in Black radical thought and decolonial and Indigenous movements. They have long emphasized the interconnection between the monetary and symbolic aspects of reparations, including the public acknowledgement of and apology for harm and the commitment not to repeat such harm.⁶⁹ In the context of climate change, this means recognizing the impact of greenhouse gas emissions and other environmentally harmful practices on poorer countries and communities and preventing them from happening in the future. Given the outsized responsibility of large corporations, almost exclusively from the Global North in such practices, governments have a responsibility to introduce and enforce regulations that prevent them. This would include preventing land grabbing in the Global South for carbon offsetting, which in the absence of adequate regulation provides 'permits to pollute' for companies with few if any climate benefits for local communities.⁷⁰

Movements for climate justice also emphasize redress for 'non-economic' loss and damage, which could include harms such as displacement from ancestral lands, increases in gender-based violence, inter-generational trauma, ill-health and loss of cultural

heritage and Indigenous knowledge.⁷¹ From an environmental perspective, too, compensation paid to the human survivors of environmental destruction does not necessarily or automatically lead to the repair or restoration of fragile ecosystems or lost biodiversity.⁷² Many of the 'non-economic' damages are highly gendered and racialized, reflecting the exclusion of women and gender-diverse people from the formal economy as well as the unpaid contributions that they make to the care and repair of families, communities and societies, including during and after crises.⁷³ However, not everyone's losses are valued equally, and damages incurred by some groups are often prioritized for repair over others.⁷⁴

Climate reparations are therefore a "world making question" about how we are protecting each other and how harm is addressed.⁷⁵ Going beyond economic compensation for loss and damage, reparations are also about apology and making amends, based on trust and cooperation,⁷⁶ and a starting point for transforming the world towards climate justice.⁷⁷

The four dimensions of this framework each focus on a different aspect of feminist climate justice that needs to be addressed to achieve gender equality and transform economies and societies away from environmental degradation. While each dimension is distinct, they are also closely linked to one another, and action in one dimension will inform action in another. For example, without recognizing women's unpaid labour in households and support to ecosystems, policies to redistribute resources and opportunities may not reach or benefit them. Recognizing intersectional discrimination and validating diverse forms of knowledge will be required to ensure that women and other historically marginalized groups are meaningfully represented in decision-making and policy deliberations. Reparation entails the recognition of injustice, the redistribution of resources and the representation of marginalized voices.

1.5 CROSS-CUTTING PRINCIPLES: INTERDEPENDENCE AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Underpinning the four dimensions are two critical feminist principles: interdependence and intersectionality. These principles distinguish the vision of feminist climate justice from other approaches based on binary oppositions, including between humans and nature, dependence and autonomy and individual action and collective solidarity.

Interdependence

As humans, we begin and end our lives depending on others for care, and in between those times we are continuously engaged in interdependent relationships of care with others.⁷⁸ This idea of **human interdependence** recognizes that human existence is relational; we do not exist outside of the relationships that enable and sustain us. Nor does human life exist outside of our relationship with the ecosystems that surround us. Such **planetary interdependence** also refers to interdependence within nature – ecosystems are complex networks of components that interact and depend on one another.⁷⁹ These interdependent relationships have been recognized in different historical and cultural contexts. For example, the African philosophy of Ubuntu – “I am because we are” – implies that individuals define themselves through their relationship with the community.⁸⁰ In Latin America, in turn, the *Buen Vivir* (Living Well) paradigm that underpins the development strategies of Bolivia and Ecuador is inspired by Indigenous knowledge and values that promote harmonious relationships between humans and nature, based on an understanding that nature, as well as humans, has rights.⁸¹

Conventional Western Enlightenment thinking, on the other hand, laid the basis for a series of artificial divides: between humanity and nature, as well as between public and private and, as a corollary, between (male-dominated) paid work and unpaid care work that is predominantly performed by

women. While economic production depends on social reproduction and ecological regeneration, both are devalued and depleted under the current economic system.⁸²

Acknowledging our human and planetary interdependence dissolves these rigid divisions and allows for the recalibration of priorities.⁸³ In doing so, it lays the basis for a vision where the relentless pursuit of economic growth, productivity and efficiency no longer overrides considerations of ecological, social and political sustainability. Instead of expecting individuals to absorb and bounce back from ever more extreme conditions and inequalities, it recognizes that resilience is relational and can only be achieved or strengthened through relationships with others.⁸⁴ Therefore, care comes to the fore and the question of how societies can collectively organize care for people and the planet to ensure the “survival and flourishing of life”⁸⁵ claims centre stage.

As Section 3 explores, adequate responses to this question can only be found through inclusive, democratic processes and institutions. Citizens depend on the state for the provision of public goods, and the survival and success of democratic States depends on whether they are able to respond to the legitimate demands of their people. In many countries, this **political interdependence** has been severely curtailed by the pressures of global financial markets and repeated cycles of debt, austerity and privatization. In addition, international migration and refugee flows mean that most States now comprise a significant number of ‘non-citizens’, whose rights also need to be addressed. In a globalized and deeply unequal world, interdependence therefore extends beyond the confines of the State. **Interdependence is global**, in the sense that it includes relationships with diasporas and stateless people, and because problems such as climate change can only be solved through global action and cooperation.⁸⁶

Interdependence also extends across time.

Intergenerational interdependence summons moral obligations both to the generations who will inherit this planet as well as to past generations who experienced violence and dispossession through enslavement, colonialism and imperialism. Colonialism still reverberates today in both the causes of the climate crisis and the disproportionate impacts it has had and continues to have on people in the Global South.

Intersectionality

The neglect, sidelining and profound damage inflicted on these interdependent relationships has not only ushered in the ‘epochal crisis’ described earlier; it has also impaired our collective ability to respond to it. An intersectional approach is indispensable to overcoming this impasse, providing both analytical and political purchase for thinking and acting on the possibilities for solidarity, alliances and collective action across differences.⁸⁷

As an analytical concept, intersectionality “provides an understanding of social inequalities and power as complex, interlinked, shifting and multifaceted, constituting both penalties and privileges”.⁸⁸ It concentrates on the lived experiences of those who are hidden or marginalized and highlights the complexity of their disadvantage. As such, it recognizes the specificities of gender inequality and, at the same time, seeks to explain how these are caught up and reproduced by other systems of subordination and oppression (classism, racism, caste-based discrimination, ableism, xenophobia and homophobia).⁸⁹ In relation to the climate crisis,

an intersectional approach asks: How have gender and racial inequalities been reproduced and exacerbated by histories of extractivism, commodification and climate change? And how far do current policies aimed at climate mitigation and adaptation repair these histories or reproduce them in new forms?⁹⁰

As a political practice, intersectionality goes beyond recognizing these inequalities, by uncovering power hierarchies and bringing historically marginalized voices into deliberative processes, to generate solidarity and common agendas.⁹¹ As such, an intersectional approach “can pursue commonalities that do not lose sight of specificities of difference and specificities which do not lose sight of commonalities”,⁹² creating opportunities for alliances across feminist, ecological, social and racial justice movements. As Section 3 shows, efforts to build such alliances across movements and campaigns have already emerged.

With a clear vision for feminist climate justice, four dimensions to operationalize it and the principles of interdependence and intersectionality to underpin action, Section 2 lays out what this looks like in practice. Pathways to prevent and reverse environmental degradation and climate change are complex and context specific. They are not about one policy area or sector; they require transformation of entire economies and the whole of societies. But, to chart a path forward, the next section zooms into one major sector, food systems and agriculture, to examine in more detail what changes are necessary to move towards feminist climate justice.



2

**ADVANCING
FEMINIST CLIMATE
JUSTICE IN THE GLOBAL
FOOD SYSTEM**

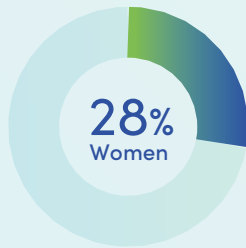
THE GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM, CLIMATE CHANGE AND GENDER INEQUALITY

The global food system is broken. It is fuelling climate change, failing to feed the world's population and exacerbating inequalities. It is one major sector that needs to be transformed to advance feminist climate justice.

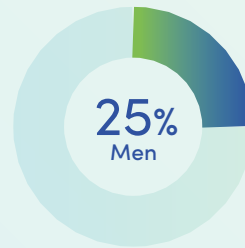
Globally, **one third of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions** come from agrifood systems,



an increase of **9 per cent** since 2000.^a



In 2022, 28 per cent of women and 25 per cent of men **experienced moderate or severe food insecurity.**^b



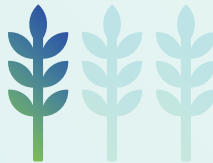
By 2050, under a worst-case climate scenario, an additional

236

million women and girls could be pushed into food insecurity.^b

Small-scale farmers, the majority of whom are women, **produce one third of the world's food.**^c

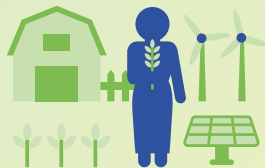
Yet, their adoption of climate-resilient agriculture is held back by lack of finance and insecure land rights.



Women are less likely than men to own agricultural land in

40 OUT OF 46

countries with available data.^b

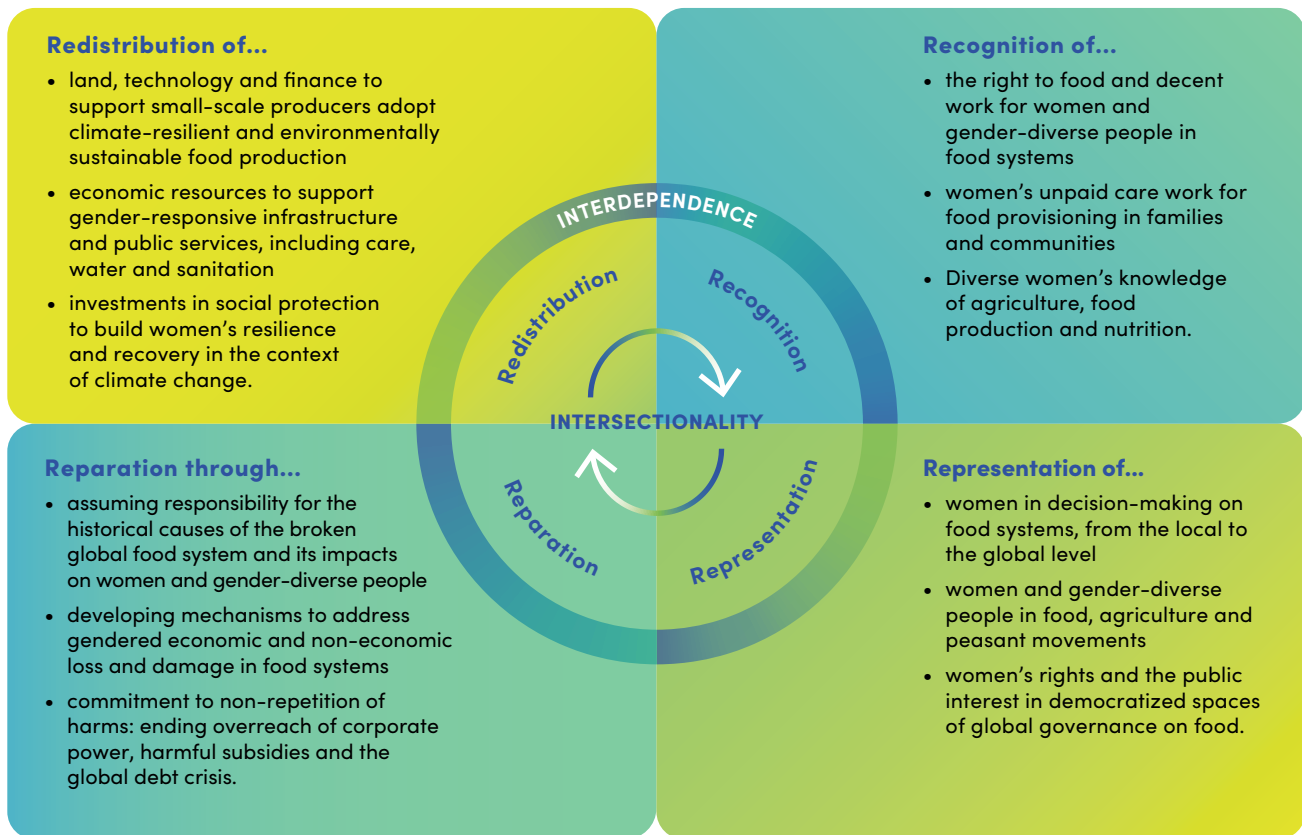


Policies should support small-scale women farmers to adopt climate resilient agriculture, scale up social protection systems to protect against rising food insecurity and cancel debt so that countries can invest in sustainable food production.

As the United Nations Secretary-General recently stated, the global food system is broken.⁹³ It fails to feed the world’s population adequately, is fuelling climate change and is exacerbating inequalities, including gender inequality. Transforming this system is therefore one important part of moving towards feminist climate justice and supporting the global transition to environmentally sustainable economies and societies in which all women and girls can enjoy the full range of their human rights. While Section 1 outlined the framework for feminist climate justice, this section zooms into one major sector – food systems and agriculture – to provide guidance on what this daunting task looks like in practice. As Figure 2.1 shows, in relation to transformation of the global food system:

- **Recognition** means moving away from top-down climate adaptation that fails to take into account women’s knowledge, labour and rights towards approaches that build diverse and resilient food systems from the bottom up.
- **Redistribution** means shifting resources away from industrial agricultural production to ensure that women producers have access to the land, finance, markets and social protection they need to adapt to a rapidly changing climate.
- **Representation** means decision-making on climate and food systems, from the local to the global, that prioritizes the voices of marginalized groups, including women and those most affected by hunger.
- **Reparation** means acknowledging that the roots of contemporary food crises run deep, demanding that the mistakes of the past are not repeated and that resources are provided to repair historical harms.

Figure 2.1 APPLYING FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE IN THE GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM



Interdependence is at the heart of the global food system. Food provisioning is a key part of human interdependence and care, a role for which women are often responsible. It is a system that is fundamentally based on interdependence between humans and ecosystems: In the absence of sustainable food production, ecosystems are rapidly breaking down. The problems in food

system governance demonstrate the deep interdependence between countries and the need for global cooperation to create more a more sustainable and equitable future. An intersectional approach, which both recognizes difference and enables solidarity, will be necessary to guide the kinds of alliances and public action needed to advance change.

2.1 HOW THE GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM DRIVES THE CLIMATE CRISIS AND GENDER INEQUALITY

The global food system includes the complex web of actors, processes and infrastructure involved in feeding the world's population, encompassing the primary production of food as well as food storage, post-harvest handling, transportation, processing, distribution, marketing, disposal and consumption. It has become a major driver of environmental degradation and climate change, and it has marginalized women farmers while also failing to address hunger and malnutrition. As such, today's food systems, and in particular dominant approaches to agricultural production, present a major barrier to both gender equality and efforts to prevent and adapt to climate change.

Globally, one third of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions, the equivalent of 16 billion tonnes of CO₂ in 2020, come from agrifood systems, an increase of 9 per cent since 2000.⁹⁴ The global food system is also responsible for the decimation of biodiversity. The rate of species extinction today is higher than the average rate over the past 10 million years, with agriculture alone being the identified threat to 24,000 of the 28,000 species at risk.⁹⁵ The culprit for this devastating environmental impact is industrial agriculture, a process of consolidation away from small, diverse producers and a variety of crops and livestock to large-scale, intensive production of animals and a small number of crops, often reliant on chemical fertilizers, pesticides and antibiotics.⁹⁶ These processes generate greenhouse gas emissions through not only crop and livestock production itself but also

land-use change such as deforestation or peatland degradation. Demand for animal products in the Global North, as well as among the growing middle classes in the Global South, is increasing emissions of methane, an especially potent greenhouse gas, and driving destruction of forests for grazing and production of grains for animal food.⁹⁷ Large-scale irrigated agriculture also creates massive demand for water, contributing to the growing number of people living in contexts of critical water stress.⁹⁸

Industrial agriculture has led to the concentration of resources and power in the hands of a small number of landowners and multinational corporations. In the process, the work of small-scale farmers, a majority of whom are women, has become more difficult. These farmers produce around one third of food globally, which makes their work essential for food security in many parts of the Global South.⁹⁹ Small-scale agriculture is highly vulnerable to climate impacts. The increased frequency of extreme weather events and the impacts of slower-onset environmental degradation – including that associated with soil salinization, desertification, sea level rise and the acidification of oceans – is directly impacting agricultural and aquacultural harvests and yields.¹⁰⁰ Many women producers are in an especially precarious position because they lack secure rights and control over land, which hampers their access to the finance, technology and information that would enable them to adopt climate-resilient agricultural techniques.

Transformation of the global food system is therefore essential from the perspective of both mitigating climate emissions and supporting the adaptation and resilience of small-scale producers. It is also necessary to address widespread hunger and malnutrition. Currently, the world produces enough food to feed every person on the planet, so the problem is not global availability but a question of accessibility and entitlement.¹⁰¹ This framing is central to the ‘right to food’, which places a duty on governments, not just to provide food, but to create the conditions under which everyone is able to access food for themselves.¹⁰²

In spite of these human rights guarantees, more than a quarter of women and men globally in 2022

– 2.4 billion people – experienced moderate or severe food insecurity (27.8 per cent and 25.4 per cent, respectively), meaning they did not have access to adequate food.¹⁰³ Progress on addressing global hunger stagnated from 2014 onwards and went into full reverse during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, under a worst-case climate scenario, it is projected that as many as 236 million more women and girls may fall into food insecurity (and 131 million more men and boys) by 2050.¹⁰⁵

Given that the current global food system has shown itself unable to feed the world’s population even now, with especially harsh impacts on women and girls, as climate change escalates, the imperative for change is clear.

2.2 OPERATIONALIZING FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE TO FIX THE GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEM

The four dimensions of feminist climate justice provide a roadmap to addressing the dysfunction in food systems in ways that can support the right to food, climate resilience and gender equality. Recognizing women’s knowledge, redistributing resources, ensuring women’s voices are heard in decision-making and repairing historical harms are central to achieving these outcomes.

Recognition of women’s rights, knowledge and labour in global food systems

Women’s rights, knowledge and labour in food systems are too often violated, invisible or exploited. Since women are the backbone of food security in many countries, this matters from the perspective of advancing gender equality as well as of ensuring the well-being of broader families and communities.

The global food system has moved towards concentration and homogeneity but, given how much is unknown and unpredictable about how the climate crisis will unfold, resilient solutions lie in greater diversity and context-specific approaches.¹⁰⁶ For that,

recognition of women’s knowledge at all levels, from global to local, is invaluable.

Women are involved at all parts of the global food system – as producers, processors, traders and consumers.¹⁰⁷ Globally, 36 per cent of working women are employed in agrifood systems, making up 38 per cent of the agricultural workforce and almost 50 per cent of workers in aquaculture value chains.¹⁰⁸ Women’s work in food systems is often in the most precarious positions, performing unpaid labour on family farms or hired as seasonal, part-time and low-paid labour, including in food processing, preparation or vending. Women’s food work also includes provisioning and preparing food for their own families, for others as domestic workers and for broader communities through communal kitchens.¹⁰⁹ Women’s informal paid and unpaid food work is often unrecognized or taken for granted and, as a result, not captured in official statistics. This means that when policymakers think about how to strengthen food systems, including in the context of climate change, they often fail to take gender equality into account.

Official data need to be strengthened to make women's work visible and inform policymaking. In addition, the valuable experience and knowledge that diverse women have gained as a result of their work in food systems needs to be brought to bear on policy. This is especially true in contexts where weather patterns are changing and, through necessity, women are already adapting their work and livelihoods. Without burdening women with being 'sustainability saviours', perceived as naturally more caring and connected to the environment, recognizing these context-specific, constantly evolving knowledges is vital for effective climate adaptation and efforts to build resilience.¹¹⁰

At the global level, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is an authoritative voice, convening leading scientists to compile cutting-edge knowledge to guide policy and practice. Their work has been dominated by the natural sciences, however, often overlooking the contribution of the social sciences to understanding climate change as a social and political as well as biophysical phenomenon. This has sidelined analysis of gender and other inequalities in the work of the IPCC, contributing to the marginalization of these concerns in policymaking too.

The adoption of the IPCC Gender Policy and Implementation Plan in 2020 aimed to address this¹¹¹ and enabled the nomination of prominent feminist scholars to the writing teams. For example, Martina Caretta, a feminist geographer, served as the coordinating lead author of the chapter on water for working group II of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report.¹¹² Under her leadership, the chapter brought Indigenous knowledge to bear on impact assessments and solutions and emphasized a climate justice approach that acknowledges and aims to rectify the colonial and patriarchal drivers of climate change.¹¹³ This feminist perspective on a crucial issue for climate resilience in water and food systems is unprecedented and paves the way for greater recognition of diverse women's knowledge in shaping policy on climate change.¹¹⁴

Meanwhile, at the local level, effective climate adaptation and mitigation in the agrifood sector requires approaches that are based on the bottom-up, context-specific knowledge and expertise of small-scale farmers. For example, women have used their knowledge of Indigenous varieties to lead community seed banks and conserve a diversity of genetic resources, which is good for nutrition, biodiversity and climate resilience. Keeping Indigenous or local breeds of livestock, which are resilient to climate stress and inexpensive to feed, is also a common strategy.¹¹⁵ Agroecology, which is the antithesis of industrial farming, is another approach that has been gaining traction (see Box 2.1).

Redistributing resources for resilient food systems and feminist climate justice

Redistribution will be required to transform food systems towards feminist climate justice. Industrial farming, which is characterized by the concentration of resources in the hands of a few large landowners and corporations, harms the environment and marginalizes women farmers and other food workers. Therefore, to make small-scale farming sustainable for both workers and the environment, and to address hunger and malnutrition, governments need to both redistribute land and economic resources and invest in gender-responsive infrastructure, public services and social protection.

Land reforms aimed at creating larger industrial farms mean that 1 per cent of farms today operate more than 70 per cent of farmland.¹¹⁶ In the Global South, these reforms have reinforced women's unequal access to land, with the result that they are less likely than men to have ownership or secure tenure rights over agricultural land in 40 of 46 countries with available data.¹¹⁷ Without such rights, women often cannot access the finance needed to buy increasingly expensive inputs or access value chains for their produce. Meanwhile, as crops become less diverse and food becomes less nutritious, women's unpaid work to provide healthy food for themselves and their families has become more burdensome.

Box 2.1 AGROECOLOGY: RECOGNIZING WOMEN'S KNOWLEDGE FOR GENDER EQUALITY AND CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Agroecology is a form of food production that values ecosystems services, fixes carbon and protects biodiversity.¹¹⁸ The basic tenets include combining a diversity of seeds, crops and animal varieties; avoiding harmful agrochemicals that impact the environment and human health; and using botanical herbs and non-toxic methods to treat pests.¹¹⁹

Alongside its ecological benefits, agroecology can hold significant advantages for women farmers.¹²⁰ By valuing a range of work tasks and forms of knowledge, it has the potential to provide them with a diversified role. It is characterized by lower start-up costs and more stable yields to provide less risky and more affordable sources of income. It can reduce the detrimental health impacts of agrochemicals that disproportionately impact women and can improve household self-sufficiency and nutrition through a diverse array of crops and livestock.¹²¹

To harness this potential, agroecology prioritizes small producers, mutual learning, Indigenous knowledge and local ecosystems rather than unsustainable top-down policy prescriptions.¹²² However, the benefits for women are not automatic. If agroecological models do not challenge gender inequalities in access to resources, land and information, they may reinforce inequalities at the household and community levels. Further, the impact on women's workloads may be mixed. On the one hand, growing diversified grains, vegetables and fruits improves nutrition and household self-sufficiency, which can reduce hours and money spent procuring food. On the other hand, agroecological methods can be more labour intensive, and that additional work can fall to women.¹²³

To avoid these pitfalls, women farmers have formed cooperatives and groups to share and reduce their workloads and increase their productivity and incomes.¹²⁴ These groups have also enabled horizontal sharing and learning between farmers, which is an essential part of scaling up agroecology. The campesino-a-campesino (CAC) or farmer-to-farmer methodology, developed in Latin America and the Caribbean, is based on farmer-promoters who use popular education to share knowledge and solutions for common problems with their peers using their own farms as classrooms.¹²⁵ Women farmers have built on this methodology to support their agricultural livelihoods and organized to provide education, promote food security, improve health and prevent gender-based violence for themselves and their broader communities.¹²⁶

Approaches to increasing women's land ownership include strengthening legal rights in relation to inheritance and divorce as well as through joint titling programmes.¹²⁷ While reversing land concentration will be difficult and complex, laws and regulations are needed to protect the remaining collective land rights on which 2.5 billion local and Indigenous people, and especially women, depend.¹²⁸ Land taxes are a way to reduce the further concentration of land and disincentivize speculation and can be used to promote more effective and sustainable land

use.¹²⁹ The revenues from such taxes can also be redistributed to support women small-scale farmers to adopt climate-resilient approaches, including through harnessing technology. These range from solar powered irrigation systems to the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to provide expert advice and weather information. A major constraint to women's productivity in agriculture is their unpaid work responsibilities, so investments in childcare services, including in rural areas, and in water, sanitation and energy

are essential.¹³⁰ Improvements in climate-resilient irrigation, storage, processing facilities and market spaces as well as roads are also necessary.¹³¹

Redistribution based on progressive taxation can also be used to finance gender-responsive social protection. Countries with social protection systems in place can respond more effectively to crises when they happen.¹³² Such systems can protect against the

impacts of extreme weather shocks and slow-onset events, including through scaling-up emergency cash transfers or in-kind food provision in response to disasters. They can prevent poverty and hunger through bolstering women's savings and food security. Social protection can also potentially contribute to transformative, gender-just transitions within food systems, including through agricultural public works or school feeding programmes (see Box 2.2).¹³³

Box 2.2 SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAMMES: A TRIPLE DIVIDEND FOR FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE

Scaling up social protection will be an essential part of responding to the climate crisis. School feeding programmes can generate wins for tackling global hunger, creating jobs and markets for women workers and farmers and supporting climate-resilient agriculture.

Most countries have school feeding programmes of some kind, which together in 2022 reached 418 million children, around half of all school-age children in the world.¹³⁴ The impacts are far-reaching: Evidence shows that they increase enrolment, attendance and educational outcomes, with these effects especially strong for girls and those in poorer households.¹³⁵ In a global context of widespread hunger and malnutrition, including obesity driven by ultra-processed food, these impacts are impressive in and of themselves. But, with more investment and strategic, gender- and climate-responsive policy design, their potential is even greater still.

The programmes already create employment for women, albeit often under-valued and informal jobs, as chefs and providers of meals in schools. Formalizing these valuable jobs and increasing their pay and status would reap benefits for women and their families.¹³⁶ Women's economic empowerment can also be bolstered by sourcing school food from small-scale producers. By directing government investment away from large multinational food producers, school feeding programmes can promote shorter food value chains and support more sustainable agricultural practices.

This is already happening in some countries. For example, in Côte d'Ivoire, the Integrated Programme for Sustainable School Canteens supports women-led micro-agricultural projects that sell food to school canteens.¹³⁷ In Brazil, where every child in a public school receives a free meal, 30 per cent of federal school funds are reserved for smallholder farmers.¹³⁸ Some programmes are also pioneering efforts to re-introduce greater nutritional value and cultural diversity into diets. For example, The First Nations Development Institute's Native Farm to School Project in North America is advancing Indigenous food sovereignty that "ensure young tribal leaders can experience traditional foodways inside culturally inclusive school food systems".¹³⁹ All in all, cost-benefit studies show that public school food programmes can generate returns as high as \$9 for every \$1 invested.¹⁴⁰

Within a broader frame of social protection, school feeding programmes are a large-scale investment into the care infrastructure, with the potential to provide nutrition for children, create and support decent quality jobs and sustainable livelihoods for women, and support the repair of ecosystems through sustainable agriculture.

Yet, on a global scale, comprehensive coverage of state-provided social protection is severely lacking, particularly in countries facing the most severe impacts of climate change. In a study of 122 countries, only 10 per cent of people were covered by social assistance programmes in high climate-risk countries (compared to 78 per cent coverage in countries with the lowest climate risk).¹⁴¹ Coverage is particularly low for women workers in food systems because their work is often informal or unpaid. In rural areas, programmes are rarely tailored to combat financial, administrative and design barriers that limit women's access.¹⁴² Further, where social protection systems contain a climate component, these are rarely gender-sensitive. For example, agricultural crop insurance schemes with very high premiums for weather-related events are usually unaffordable for women.¹⁴³

As the climate crisis deepens and overlaps with other crises, greater universality and generosity of social protection coverage will be required to support women's food security and livelihoods in food systems.¹⁴⁴

Representation: Making women's voices count in decision-making on food and climate change

The voices of women and other historically marginalized groups are often not heard in food governance, with the result that the people who are affected most by the impact of climate change on food systems have little or no say in how these function. The representation dimension of the feminist climate justice framework demands that this is addressed, from the community up to global policymaking, both as a matter of fairness and to improve accountability for climate action (see Section 3).

Since women's work in food systems has often been invisible, they have not been recognized as key actors whose views and expertise need to be taken into account. This is true in families, local community organizations, trade unions and social movements. The policies of national governments, whether on land reform or agricultural extension services, have often prioritized men on the assumption that women's

agricultural work is subordinate. In global governance spaces, where corporate interests are increasingly dominant,¹⁴⁵ the perspectives of Global South social movements, including organizations of women, peasants and Indigenous people, are often shut out of decision-making.

Agribusiness, a sector in which a handful of companies have monopoly control over agricultural inputs, food production, processing, commodity trade and food retail, has invested heavily in influencing global governance spaces on food, including at the United Nations.¹⁴⁶ The result is a privileging of solutions that benefit their businesses over changes needed for food security or environmental sustainability. To amplify the demands of women at the sharp end of the climate crisis, and meet the broader public interest, collective action is needed along with measures to democratize governance spaces.

At the global level, efforts have been made to ensure space for civil society in decision-making, including in the intergovernmental and multistakeholder Committee on Food Security, which was comprehensively reformed in 2009 to include the principle that the people 'most affected' by food insecurity must be prioritized in its deliberations and decisions.¹⁴⁷ The Civil Society and Indigenous People's mechanism, which includes organizations such as La Via Campesina (see Box 2.3), has made strenuous efforts to ensure voice and representation of key constituencies, including a strand devoted to gender equality.¹⁴⁸ However, major power imbalances between Member States, corporate interests and civil society continue to create an uneven playing field.

These power imbalances came to the fore at the United Nations Global Food Systems Summit in 2021, when three United Nations special rapporteurs – on the right to food, on human rights and the environment and on poverty and human rights – expressed concern that because of excessive corporate influence at the expense of broad civil society participation, the Summit was sidelining human rights and failing to promote evidence-based, bottom-up solutions to the food crises facing the world.¹⁴⁹

To address this problem, proposals for structural reform at national and global level focus on the need for regulation and the application of global human rights norms and standards on the practices of corporations. These include proposals by Member States, led by Ecuador, for an international legally binding instrument to regulate the activities of transnational corporations to replace the voluntary approach of the existing guidelines on business and human rights.¹⁵⁰ Women's organizations working in broad coalitions have been active in demanding this new binding approach.¹⁵¹ In addition, as recognition grows of the harm done by industrial agriculture, frameworks used in parts of the United Nations system such as by the World Health Organization (WHO) to curb the undue influence of tobacco companies could provide useful models for ensuring that the food industry's activities in global governance spaces are aligned with the public interest and human rights principles.¹⁵²

The aim of increasing women's agency, voice and representation is not limited to formal decision-making spaces. Feminist climate justice demands that women's exclusion from decision-making in households, communities and movements should also be addressed. Participation in collective organizations, networks and cooperatives, which enable them to pool resources and share unpaid care work, give women a stronger negotiating position within families and communities and strengthen their voice and agency.¹⁵³ Furthermore, when women's voices are heard and they are able to participate, the benefits accrue not only to women themselves but to broader outcomes too. Women's participation in collectives is associated with greater productivity and more climate-responsive practices across a range of contexts.¹⁵⁴

Movements for food sovereignty and organizations of peasants and Indigenous people have strongly demanded transformation of food systems, calling out the social injustices and environmental destruction that they cause. Feminist and women's organizations have forged alliances with these groups and carved out distinctive intersectional spaces for collective action to bring about change. The case of La Via Campesina (LVC) is an emblematic example of how

change can be achieved through sustained strategic engagement over decades (see Box 2.3).

Repairing harm and addressing the root causes of inequalities and environmental degradation in food systems

The Global South's capacity to self-determine food production has been impaired by policies over many decades that have widened inequalities, have weakened the right to food and that continue to damage the environment. Feminist climate justice demands that these historical injustices are addressed and reparations are made.

Colonialism and imperialism transformed local food systems across continents, whereby massive territories and raw materials were seized to fuel industrialization in Europe, reshaping power over land, displacing Indigenous peoples and their knowledge of ecosystems and food cultures and, in the process, changing gender relations.¹⁵⁵

More recently, in the early 1980s, agricultural liberalization began to be imposed on the Global South through structural adjustment programmes and free trade agreements, which reduced tariffs that protected domestic agriculture and food production. National agricultural research and extension systems were dismantled.¹⁵⁶ These policies were especially damaging to women small-scale farmers and other groups that lacked access to capital and productive resources and so were unable to seize opportunities for new export markets.¹⁵⁷ They also made developing countries dependent on food imports, which exposes them to the effects of food price volatility and increasing levels of hunger and poverty, most recently seen in 2021-2022.¹⁵⁸

Today, the world is navigating the highest level of global public debt in almost 60 years, and more than 70 developing countries are either in default or close to it.¹⁵⁹ The debt crisis is crowding out funding for responses to hunger and climate change. Debt servicing costs are estimated to exceed climate spending in 94 per cent of countries, while only 3 per cent of public climate funding is channelled to food systems.¹⁶⁰

Box 2.3 TAKING COLLECTIVE ACTION ON FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND CLIMATE JUSTICE: THE CASE OF LA VIA CAMPESINA

La Via Campesina (LVC), founded in 1993, now has 182 member organizations in 81 countries, representing around 200 million poor peasants, small and medium-size farmers and landless rural labourers, making it one of the foremost social movements in the world.¹⁶¹ Its work has spanned global campaigning and local organizing, and it has developed, disseminated and popularized the concept of food sovereignty and the practice of agroecology in order to advance the rights of peasants and protect the environment.

Women and gender-diverse people have worked tirelessly to integrate gender justice into the work of LVC. This has been achieved in three key ways. First, from the early days, it was recognized that women needed autonomous spaces within the organization to develop their demands and analysis. This was achieved through a series of women's working groups and committees, which later developed into a regular Women's Assembly that convened on a regular basis ahead of the organization's global conferences. Second, parity of representation has been prioritized. Women in the movement successfully advocated for a doubling of the movement's International Coordinating Committee, with two elected coordinators per region (one man, one woman), and a new space for the women regional coordinators called the International Women's Articulation. And third, an intersectional gender lens has been used to analyse issues and develop demands.¹⁶²

In recent years, there have also been growing efforts to recognize the role of LGBTIQ+ farmers and peasants within LVC. Separate spaces for collective organizing have been created, such as the LGBT Collective in Brazil, as well as targeted efforts to promote the inclusion of lesbian and trans women in existing women's spaces, as in the case of CONAMURI (National Coordination Organization of Peasant and Indigenous Women) in Paraguay.¹⁶³

As a result, gender equality, including on land rights, representation, ending violence against women and a fair division of productive and reproductive work, is understood within the movement as integral to food sovereignty.¹⁶⁴ Through this work, women and gender-diverse people in LVC have built cross-regional solidarity, raised the consciousness of themselves and the broader movement and developed a powerful collective identity within the organization as well as in their personal and working lives. In doing so, they have exemplified intersectionality as a mode of analysis and as a powerful basis on which to build solidarity and collective action.

As well as acknowledging the harms caused by this complex history, reparations requires a global redistribution of resources from the Global North to the Global South to support the building of more equitable, sustainable and climate-resilient food systems that can support greater equality, environmental sustainability and the right to food for all, now and into the future.¹⁶⁵ Building climate-resilient food systems will require debt cancellation and for countries in the Global North to meet their climate finance obligations (see Section 3), including

to ensure that finance reaches grassroots women's organizations to support their work in building climate resilience.

Policies that need to be reformed include the massive agricultural subsidies in Europe and North America that shut developing country farmers out of global markets.¹⁶⁶ New regulations are needed to prevent land grabbing for biofuels and discredited climate off-setting schemes, a practice to which women are especially vulnerable.¹⁶⁷ Curbs are also needed

Box 2.4 LOOKING AT LOSS AND DAMAGE IN FOOD SYSTEMS THROUGH A GENDER LENS

Loss and damage in food systems over the course of history, and specifically due to the climate crisis, disproportionately affect women and gender-diverse people, especially those facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Such losses and damages are often unaccounted for because they either impact the informal economy or unpaid care workers or they are intangible in nature, such as emotional or cultural loss and as such not captured by traditional econometric measures.

With regards to gendered 'economic' loss and damage within food systems, they include those impacting women smallholder farmers, for example through crop loss and land dispossession, as well as their lesser access to climate-related insurance or other economic support in the face of such events. They may include damages faced by women working under poor conditions across food chains, which may worsen during extreme weather events, and the impacts of corporate capture of food systems that drain resources and profit away from women workers.

Many more losses are 'non-economic' and are often gendered. For example, women and girls are more likely to experience hunger, malnutrition or diet-related health issues compared to men and boys. The climate crisis is also negatively affecting women's cultural practices around food and access to ancestral food sources. The rise in unpaid care responsibilities in providing food and water during times of climate stress and gender-based violence experienced while procuring food or water are other impacts that need to be taken into account.¹⁶⁹

Outside of the UNFCCC proceedings, some Indigenous and women's groups have looked to alternative legal redress for loss and damage. In 2020, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights ruled for the first time that Argentina had violated the rights of the Indigenous Communities of the Lhaka Honhat (Our Land) Association to a healthy environment, food, water and cultural identity. This was a milestone recognition of Indigenous people's rights, specifically including the right to food. The ruling ordered a number of reparation measures, including action to recover forest resources and ensure access to adequate food and water and setting up a community development fund to redress the harm to cultural identity.¹⁷⁰

on the financialization of food markets, which has led to damaging volatility in the prices of food and fertilizers, creating additional work and insecurity for women in their roles in food provisioning.¹⁶⁸

The new loss and damage fund, agreed at COP 27 and under discussion at COP 28, should also address gendered economic and non-economic losses and damages within food systems as part of broader accountability for climate-induced loss and damage (see Box 2.4).

With Section 2 having zoomed into the global food system to illustrate how the four dimensions of the feminist climate justice framework can be applied in practice, Section 3 will focus on the issue of accountability to analyse the barriers to transformative climate action and how they can be dismantled.



3

**BUILDING
ACCOUNTABILITY
FOR FEMINIST
CLIMATE JUSTICE**

CHALLENGES TO ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE

Feminists are relentless in demanding climate justice, but face many barriers to accountability.

In 2022, the average level of democracy reverted to a point not seen since 1986.

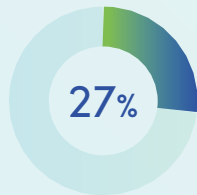
In the past decade:

34 countries have eroded women's rights to open dialogue

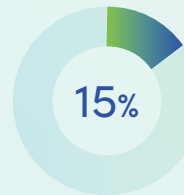
47 countries have seen declines in media freedom

30 countries have regressed in the conduct of free and fair elections^a

Women's representation in parliaments is associated with stronger climate change policies,^b but globally



women hold only 27 per cent of parliamentary seats^c



and are only 15 per cent of environment ministers^d

Between 2012 and 2022, women's participation in UNFCCC national delegations increased from

30% to 35%

but only 20 per cent of delegations were headed by a woman.^e

In a study of 94 countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), only 26 considered national gender machineries integral to climate change governance.^f



As of January 2022:

there were at least **3,545** environmental conflicts worldwide.^g

842 of them involved women environmental defenders as visible leaders.^h

In **81** of these conflicts, women environmental defenders were assassinated.^g



Action is needed to end impunity for violence against human rights defenders, build coalitions, support women's substantive representation and their use of monitoring tools and reinvigorate democratic institutions at all levels.

Sources: ^a V-Dem 2023b. Data covers the decade from 2012-2022; ^b Mavisakalyan and Tarverdi 2019; ^c UN-Women and UNDESA 2023 (26.7%); ^d IUCN 2021a; ^e WEDO 2023a; ^f UNDP 2022b; ^g Tran and Hanacek 2023; ^h EJAtlas database as of 31 January 2022 (likely to be an underestimate, given gaps and frequent bias in media reporting).

As the world nears irreversible climate tipping points, the most pressing question confronting activists, governments and the global community is how to catalyse decisive climate action. An ‘all hands on deck’¹⁷¹ approach is needed, but meaningful progress towards meeting the objectives of the 2015 Paris Agreement, which will be assessed in the inaugural Global Stocktake at COP 28, seems more elusive than ever.¹⁷² The gap between the visionary aspirations of feminist climate justice and sluggish government responses raises urgent questions on how to ensure accountability.¹⁷³

At the global level, efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions are hindered by stark power imbalances between countries in the Global North and Global South, as well as the increasing influence of corporate actors with vested interests in fossil fuels and other environmentally harmful industries. These imbalances have played out in the UNFCCC intergovernmental process, which, notwithstanding some incremental progress on the integration of gender-related language, has been marked by low ambition, slow progress and bitter political conflict.

At the national level, feminists and Indigenous and climate activists are tirelessly advocating for systemic changes to ensure the survival and flourishing of people and planet. A growing number of national climate policies recognize the gendered impacts of climate change. But, overall, accountability for fundamental change is compromised by ongoing de-democratization and the surge of far right, patriarchal and exclusionary forces. Such forces are often deeply implicated in the spread of misinformation and climate scepticism as well as in hollowing out gender

equality and other human rights commitments. They stifle voices demanding justice and transparency and are often hostile to the international cooperation needed to address global problems such as climate change. Without addressing these accountability gaps and bottlenecks, feminist climate justice will remain elusive and out of reach.

Reclaiming and democratizing the state as well as global spaces for cooperation is therefore crucial. While earlier sections explained the ‘what’ of feminist climate justice and its core policy components, this section focuses on the ‘how’. Strengthening accountability for feminist climate justice is essential to implement the entire framework, but in particular it speaks to the domain of representation, which is about removing barriers that prevent women and other historically marginalized groups from having an equal voice and fair representation in deliberations and decision-making processes that affect their lives. Those most affected by climate change must see their needs and rights reflected in climate solutions and be able to monitor the performance of governments, offer feedback and demand explanations from those in power when necessary.

The analysis in this section dives deeper into the political processes involved, sheds light on the causes of accountability gaps and highlights solutions proposed by climate activists, gender equality advocates and affected communities. Accountability for feminist climate justice needs to prioritize intersectionality as a basis for political action and solidarity to ensure that the voices of women and gender-diverse people can be heard and heeded in climate decision-making.

3.1 UNDERSTANDING ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Accountability is a cornerstone of democratic politics.¹⁷⁴ It compels those in power to listen to and answer the claims of all rights holders, particularly those of historically marginalized voices such as

Indigenous, Black, low-income or migrant women. Ideally, this process enhances the delivery of public goods, including a clean and healthy environment for all, by assigning well-defined duties and performance

standards to authorities (responsibility); assessing the adequacy of public performance by women and other marginalized groups (answerability); and imposing corrective action or remedy in cases of performance failure and/or rights violations (enforceability).¹⁷⁵

Accountability for feminist climate justice encompasses a wide array of institutional mechanisms, both formal and informal, operating at all levels aimed at ensuring governments are answerable for their actions. It also involves transnational, national and local actors who employ multiple strategies to keep those in power accountable to the populations they are meant to serve. Established vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms range from international monitoring bodies to national elections, and from parliamentary oversight committees to judicial systems (see Box 3.1). Simultaneously, social accountability from below driven by media and civil society efforts may exert direct or indirect pressure to monitor government action, denounce inaction and propose alternatives (see Figure B3.1.1).¹⁷⁶ Actions at different levels may lead to a dynamic ‘spiral,’ with the various levels reinforcing each other.¹⁷⁷

However, the current climate accountability system falls far short of this ideal. It is obstructed by unequal power dynamics and is fragmented, with diffuse authority and weak regulations, particularly of transnational corporations.¹⁷⁸ Accountability institutions, mechanisms and processes on climate are far from immune to the cascading effects of today’s multiple and overlapping social, economic and political crises. Democratic erosion has not only limited civic space but has also led to alarming levels of distrust in public institutions, mainstream political parties, elites and scientific and expert knowledge, creating fertile ground for the growth of climate

denialism and exclusionary and misogynist political narratives and alternatives.¹⁷⁹

As a result of these broad dynamics, three structural cleavages emerge as hindering decisive climate action:

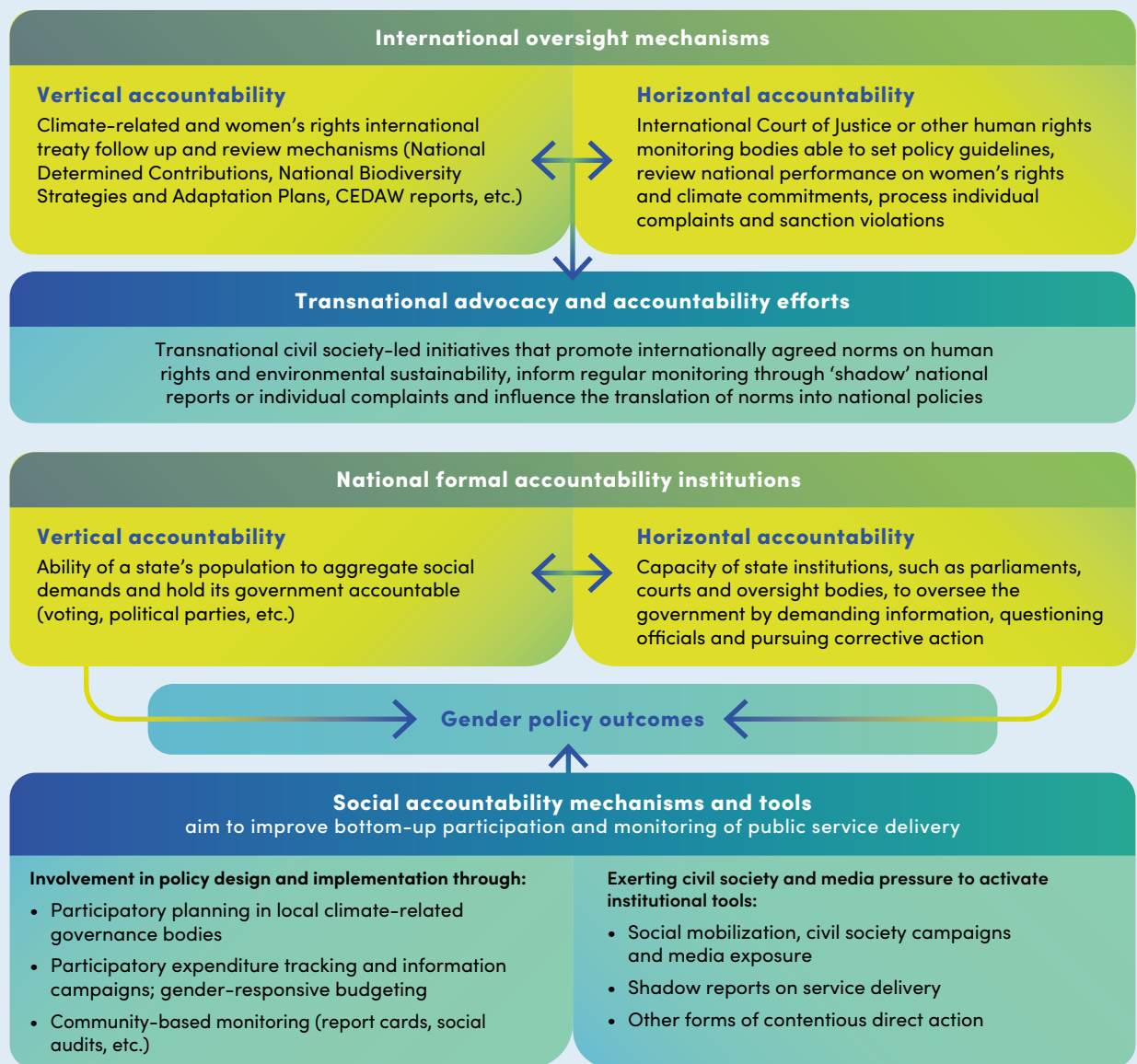
1. **Global challenges, reduced state capacity:** Combating climate change necessitates global cooperation and coordinated state action. It requires powerful democratic States and a reinvigorated multilateral system at a time when the power and legitimacy of both have been seriously curtailed.¹⁸⁰
2. **Rights-based versus market-centric solutions:** Achieving feminist climate justice requires a shift away from prevailing economic models that commodify care and the environment. Yet implementing climate commitments persistently favours market-based solutions and depolitized technical fixes, while leaving corporations largely unchecked and/or poorly regulated.¹⁸¹
3. **Fragmentation amidst urgency:** To avert environmental destruction and biodiversity loss, solidarity across countries, social groups and economic classes is paramount.¹⁸² But colonial legacies, escalating socio-economic inequalities, rising living costs and patriarchal political discourses are deepening fragmentation, pitting disadvantaged groups against each other and hampering collective action.

Overcoming these cleavages is crucial for humanity’s survival. It has the potential to shift climate governance away from fragmented and technocratic efforts to more participatory and transformative approaches.

Box 3.1 NAVIGATING COMPLEX ACCOUNTABILITY PATHWAYS

Accountability for feminist climate justice operates at multiple levels. At the global level, it is channeled through the international human rights system, the United Nations, regional intergovernmental bodies and the informal pressure some countries and civil society actors can exert.¹⁸³ International agreements and conventions establish benchmarks against which national governments are periodically evaluated through country reviews and reporting mechanisms. Transnational advocacy networks, such as feminist and environmental movements, have played a pivotal role in building support for global standards on climate change, sustainable development and human and women’s rights. These networks help monitor state compliance and build international momentum to support local adoption and implementation across countries.¹⁸⁴

Figure B3.1.1 ACCOUNTABILITY IN PRACTICE: MULTIPLE LEVELS, MECHANISMS AND ACTORS



At the national level, in democracies, political accountability is best exemplified by free and fair elections in which voters assess the performance of elected officials and penalize underperformers by voting them out. Parliamentary and judicial checks and balances are intended to ensure oversight of executive administrations. If these formal accountability mechanisms are ineffective, civil society and media actors have a significant role to play.¹⁸⁵ In both democratic and non-democratic settings, they may indirectly constrain governments and enhance the effectiveness of other accountability mechanisms. This can be achieved, for instance, by exposing abuses and misconduct in the mass media or by presenting new evidence in court. Alternatively, they may apply direct pressure through street protests, advocacy or media campaigns and/or make use of government-led ‘invited spaces of participation’¹⁸⁶ and bottom-up monitoring tools to strengthen citizen’s voices in reviewing the quality and delivery of policies.

When faced with regressive or slow moving national governments, local activists often find limited avenues for influencing national decisions and may turn to transnational allies who are better positioned to denounce human rights abuses against environmental activists or Indigenous communities – a process often referred to as a ‘boomerang effect’.¹⁸⁷ This approach can be safer in contexts where there is impunity for violence against activists (see Section 3.2).¹⁸⁸

Yet synergies between global and national accountability are not automatic. All too often, grassroots women’s groups do not have the resources to participate in regional or global climate advocacy, and their voices are largely excluded from COPs and other key global processes. In turn, justice claims at one level can be easily disregarded at another. A case in point is governments that champion international accountability by celebrating the creation of the Loss and Damage Fund, for example, but who fail to redress historical injustices against local communities residing in mineral-rich regions within their own territories.¹⁸⁹

3.2 BARRIERS TO ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE

The possibility of accountability for feminist climate action is up against destabilizing economic and political crises. These crises erode the efficacy of oversight mechanisms and intensify the formidable obstacles faced by advocates. The result is a climate accountability landscape that is becoming increasingly complex to navigate for those striving to hold institutions accountable for the rights of women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Political and economic forces are hampering climate accountability mechanisms

At global level, the main climate accountability mechanism is the intergovernmental UNFCCC process, which sets international goals to be collectively pursued by all 198 parties to the convention and regularly reviews country compliance with mitigation targets through national reporting mechanisms.

Building on the pioneering work of gender advocates within environmental organizations, transnational feminist networks, including the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC), have played a pivotal role in incorporating gender-related language into at least 120 UNFCCC decisions, particularly since the establishment of the Lima Work Programme on Gender in 2014.¹⁹⁰ They have also promoted the inclusion of women in global climate negotiations: at COP 27 in 2022, women accounted for 35 per cent of Party delegations.¹⁹¹

However, feminists' social justice claims and the more transformative demands of activists – many of them voiced by the United Nations Secretary-General himself – have struggled to gain traction in these spaces.¹⁹² Civil society activists, including Global South grassroots feminists, could play a potentially transformative role in oversight and accountability but have found themselves shut out of diplomatic negotiations and relegated to the fringes of climate decision-making at global level. Since 2015, opportunities for informal interactions between delegations and civil society representatives at UNFCCC COPs have dwindled.¹⁹³

More broadly, unlike the United Nations General Assembly, UNFCCC procedural rules have never been adopted, so the negotiations proceed by consensus, giving de facto veto power to any party involved.¹⁹⁴ As a result, climate negotiations have become overly technocratic and male-dominated, with constant struggles over technical and procedural details, resulting in low ambition and limited public or civil society oversight, particularly by gender equality advocates.¹⁹⁵

Against a backdrop of multiple crises, progress in the UNFCCC space is slow and contentious, held back by tensions and power imbalances between countries, particularly between high emitters and those most vulnerable to climate risks, which have been leveraged to stifle ambitions and weaken accountability.¹⁹⁶ Unfulfilled promises, particularly on climate finance, have deepened these divides, leading to regular stand-offs and stalemates on

questions of justice and responsibility, including on loss and damage, among others.¹⁹⁷

The possibility of transformative change and accountability for climate action also faces well organized and generously funded resistance from non-state actors, including those with vested interests in environmentally harmful industries. It is now well documented that some fossil fuel companies, including the oil, gas and coal industries, and high-carbon sectors such as airlines and car manufacturers have long been aware of the harm these industries have caused to people and planet and, rather than be an effective part of the solution, have chosen to invest heavily in lobbying efforts to obstruct or delay coordinated climate action.¹⁹⁸ These efforts mirror the behaviour of agrifood corporations in global food governance spaces (see Section 2.2).

While feminists and other grassroots activists are shut out of the negotiations, corporate lobbyists have enjoyed increased presence within national delegations at UNFCCC COPs, emboldening efforts to block climate action.¹⁹⁹ Obstructive tactics range from attempting to stop the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the first international agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions, to more recent calls for financial compensation of oil companies for economic losses faced as a result of climate policies.²⁰⁰ Diplomatic stalling and behind-the-scenes lobbying are complemented by broader public opinion-influencing campaigns. These campaigns mislead the public on the science that proves that climate change is anthropogenic.²⁰¹ 'Greenwashing' techniques are employed to exaggerate companies' environmental performance and to hide the impact of their operations on local and Indigenous communities and women environmental defenders.²⁰² Taken together, these actions are a major brake on progress and accountability for feminist climate justice.

At the national level, where climate policy priorities are defined and accountability can be demanded (see Box 3.1), gender concerns – thanks to the efforts of advocates – have gained some prominence in national

strategic documents such as National Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), with some countries developing their own gender action plans.²⁰³ However, this promising, if incremental, progress is weakened by democratic erosion, which is degrading the checks and balances, including judicial independence and autonomous civil society spaces that are meant to make national powerholders answerable to the communities they are entrusted to serve.

The global state of democracy is a cause for major concern, with the average level of democracy in 2022 reverting to a level not seen since 1986 – an era marked by the Cold War and the Berlin Wall.²⁰⁴ Today, 42 countries have embarked on authoritarian trajectories, with nearly three quarters (72 per cent) of the world’s population living under autocratic rule.²⁰⁵ Indeed, between 2012 and 2022, numerous countries have seen declines in essential aspects of democratic accountability, including media freedom (47 countries), civil society freedom (37), women’s rights to open dialogue (34), the conduct of free and fair elections (30) and the oversight of executive powers (25).²⁰⁶ The national accountability pathways that feminists rely on to champion climate and gender justice are increasingly under threat.

Meanwhile, the ability of States to effectively respond to climate change and its disproportionate impact on women and girls has been hobbled by the policies of international financial institutions that are locked into old recipes of enforcing fiscal austerity measures that prevent countries from accessing the finance they need to invest in climate adaptation.²⁰⁷ Indeed, the confluence of debt, austerity and climate crises has created a vicious cycle that undermines the capacity of many low- and middle-income countries to recover from disasters, strengthen climate resilience, including in food production, and invest in critical social protection and public services to protect the rights of present and future generations of women and girls (see Section 2).²⁰⁸

Domestic financing challenges are exacerbated by inadequate global climate funding.²⁰⁹ In 2009, donor

countries promised \$100 billion in funding per year to finance climate adaptation and mitigation in low- and middle-income countries, a pledge that has still not been fulfilled. The claim that \$83.3 billion had been achieved in 2020 has been called into question by shadow reports that put the real value at closer to \$24.5 billion.²¹⁰ Moreover, three quarters of funding was provided through loans rather than grants, exacerbating the debt burdens of countries in the Global South²¹¹ at a time when more than 70 developing countries are either in dire need of debt relief or already in default.²¹² Very little funding goes to grassroots initiatives and women’s organizations. Gender assessments of the main climate funds find that gender mainstreaming efforts have fallen short due to lack of dedicated funding and capacity to measure impact on the ground, lack of expertise and a failure to adequately consult with stakeholders and beneficiaries.²¹³

Socio-economic disparities are exacerbated by fiscal austerity measures and lack of investment in public services and climate resilience, which in turn erode trust in mainstream politics and bolster support for far-right political outsiders.²¹⁴ These exclusionary forces, gaining prominence and strength across regions, weave a compelling narrative that includes backlash against gender equality and hostility to both outsiders and international cooperation, diminishing the impetus for national action on both women’s rights and climate change.²¹⁵ In contexts where such forces hold sway, those in power voice critiques against national or global ‘elites’, cast doubt on the veracity of climate change and advocate for a return to ‘traditional family values’.²¹⁶ Paradoxically, the policies advanced by their administrations, including reductions in social spending and the weakening of corporate regulations and environmental protections, primarily serve to consolidate, rather than erode, elite power.²¹⁷ These policies also effectively shift the responsibility for caring for people and the planet back to the private sphere, placing a disproportionate burden on women while undermining public accountability and the imperative of collective solutions in the process.²¹⁸

Barriers to demanding accountability from below

The institutional challenges described above are compounded by the barriers that advocates face when demanding accountability for feminist climate justice. Historically, feminists have relied on States' universal human rights commitments as a key pathway for accountability. But international climate agreements are weak on human rights. Although the 2022 Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework includes specific commitments on ensuring protections for environmental human rights defenders (target 22),²¹⁹ neither the 2015 Paris Agreement nor the most recent COP 26 or COP 27 outcomes acknowledge human rights as a fundamental pillar for climate action, despite abundant evidence on the negative impact of climate change on the enjoyment of human rights.²²⁰

Furthermore, while a powerful oversight mechanism, the human rights system has been slow to elaborate the connections between human rights and climate change. For example, it was only in 2022 that the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment was enshrined by a United Nations General Assembly resolution.²²¹ It explicitly acknowledges that climate change, pollution and environmental degradation impede the fulfillment and enjoyment of a range of human rights, with certain groups – including women and girls – particularly vulnerable.²²² In fact, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was ahead of the curve in 2018 with its General Recommendation No. 37 on gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change, which outlines a clear set of obligations for States Parties to apply in the context of climate change related to non-discrimination, access to justice, participation and data collection.²²³ It will be important for other treaty bodies to follow the lead of the CEDAW, as indeed the Committee on the Rights of the Child has done in 2023, in clarifying the obligations of Member States in the context of climate change, and for human rights advocates to push for their full implementation.²²⁴

Accountability from below has also been limited by the weakness of legal obligations of States to hold non-state corporate actors answerable for their operations, including beyond national boundaries.²²⁵ In addressing issues related to the extraterritorial obligations of transnational companies, women's organizations have collaborated with other civil society actors and like-minded States to establish regulations. This includes the adoption of the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and, as yet unsuccessful, efforts towards a binding United Nations treaty to regulate the activities of transnational corporations under human rights law (see Section 2).²²⁶

As civic spaces continue to contract and formal accountability mechanisms falter, some movements and campaigns, often with women and feminists at their helm, are turning to direct action as a means to seek redress for climate injustices.²²⁷ Afro-descendant and Indigenous women in both the Global South and North are standing on picket lines and creating roadblocks to impede corporate landgrabs, the construction of oil pipelines, mining operations and other large-scale infrastructure projects that threaten their livelihoods and communities.²²⁸

As of January 2022, there were at least 3,545 socio-environmental conflicts worldwide.²²⁹ Almost a quarter of these conflicts, comprising 842 cases, visibly involved women environmental defenders – likely to be an underestimate, given gaps and frequent bias in media reporting.²³⁰

As women step up to defend the environment and their communities, they face persecution and violence. A gender analysis of the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJAtlas), a global database of socio-environmental conflicts developed in partnership with activists and academics, reveals that as of January 2022, 81 documented conflicts involving women environmental defenders led to their assassinations (see Figure 3.1).²³¹

These defenders paid the ultimate price for their unwavering pursuit of justice. Hotspots for violence

Figure 3.1 REPORTED SOCIO-ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICTS THAT RESULTED IN THE MURDER OF WOMEN ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENDERS AROUND THE WORLD, AS OF JANUARY 2022



Source: Tran and Hanaček 2023, Figure 1 and Table 1, p. 4146, based on a gender analysis of 3,545 cases contained in the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJAtlas) global database as of 31 January 2022, accessible at <https://ejatlas.org/>. For an overview of EJAtlas and its methodology see: Temper et al. 2015. Notes: Data from the EJAtlas database as of 31 January 2022 show 81 conflicts spanning 29 countries in which 97 women environmental defenders (WEDs) were murdered for their advocacy. The size of each dot corresponds to the number of WEDs murdered in that case. The sample population of conflicts is inherently limited to the information publicly available. The number of conflicts in which WEDs were killed is also likely to be higher due to censorship and under-reporting. For instance, according to Tran and Hanaček 2023, more information is available from Latin America and Southeast Asia than from Africa.

against women environmental defenders are Latin America, Asia and, to a lesser extent, Africa. Across regions, protests about the use of agricultural land and other natural resources (such as forests), mining and large-scale industrial plants have attracted the most extreme violence.²³² Accountability for feminist climate justice will be meaningless without

concerted efforts to end impunity for often deadly violence against women human rights defenders.

3.3 TOWARDS ACCOUNTABILITY FOR FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE

Given the gaps and bottlenecks outlined above, three avenues to move towards accountability for feminist climate justice emerge: Reinvigorating multilateralism and democratic institutions, inclusive of women; promoting coalitions and protecting civic space; and enhancing bottom-up monitoring. In each case, these approaches support the implementation of the representation domain of the feminist climate justice framework to ensure the rights and interests of women and other marginalized groups are central to defining climate policy solutions. They also speak to other domains of the framework, particularly on the recognition of diverse knowledge. While the changes needed will not materialize overnight, this section sheds light on some promising examples that provide glimmers of hope to be carefully nurtured and supported.

Reinvigorating multilateralism and democratic institutions, inclusive of women

The foundations for accountability for feminist climate justice should be laid at the national and local levels, but global institutions and processes also need to be transformed. To stop what the United Nations Secretary-General has described as the “suicidal war against nature”,²³³ the current fragmentation in multilateral cooperation must be overcome to articulate more ambitious goals based on human rights, devise effective regulatory frameworks for global environmental governance and leverage sustainable financing.²³⁴

The Secretary-General has recently joined a growing chorus of calls for reform of the international financial architecture to ensure it is fit for purpose for the formidable challenges the world faces, notably climate change. Proposed reforms include changes to voting rights and decision-making rules to make them more democratic and representative of countries in the Global South and to strive for gender-balanced representation in governance structures. He has also

called for delinking access to resources from outdated and biased quotas that favour wealthier nations. This would apply to the allocation of special drawing rights, for example, which should provide vital liquidity for countries in the event of disasters.²³⁵

Feminists will also be looking to the multilateral climate funds for a step change in their gender mainstreaming efforts to ensure that climate financing is reaching the grassroots women’s organizations who are leading local adaptation and mitigation efforts.

Other proposals on the table to strengthen democratic accountability for climate action have come from the United Nation’s High-Level Board on Effective Multilateralism. In light of the recently recognized right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, they have suggested that Member States could identify new monitoring and accountability mechanisms, with a mandate to investigate and report publicly on environmental violations.²³⁶

At the national level, insufficient progress on climate mitigation and adaptation is sometimes blamed on slow processes of democratic governance and accountability. But the answer is “more democracy, not less”.²³⁷ Feminist climate justice demands inclusive planning and implementation, which is pivotal in preventing maladaptation and facilitating climate-resilient development.²³⁸

Deliberative democratic spaces strive to promote egalitarian, evidence-based debates, free from vested interests, which can generate collective decisions and policy alternatives tailored to specific contexts.²³⁹ Some countries, including France, Ireland and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, have established people’s assemblies on climate change to boost democratic deliberation about how societies should respond to the climate crisis. Along similar lines, a global

citizens' assembly presented their collective demands at COP 26 in 2021.²⁴⁰ Such spaces can help to demystify climate science, counter mis- and disinformation and engage people in some of the policy dilemmas and trade-offs at stake. While not without limitations, these processes amplify different voices from the usual policy influencers such as business lobbies, trade unions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Under the right conditions, boosting such 'deliberative mini-publics', alongside other participatory approaches, may help counter power imbalances while garnering public support for climate and environmental policies.²⁴¹

For deliberations at all levels to be truly democratic, they must be inclusive of women and other historically marginalized groups. Increasing women's representation in local, national and global climate governance is a matter of fairness in and of itself, but it also correlates with positive policy outcomes. For example, at the local level, women's participation in forestry institutions has led to improvements in conservation, welfare outcomes and women's empowerment in India and Nepal.²⁴² At the national level, women's representation in parliaments has been linked to the implementation of more stringent climate change policies.²⁴³ At the global level, transnational feminist advocacy networks have played a pivotal role in advancing gender balance within all UNFCCC delegations, boards and bodies, which bolstered support for the adoption of the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan in 2014.²⁴⁴

However, women's presence in these spaces does not guarantee their policy preferences are taken up. Substantive representation also necessitates strengthening women's bargaining power and oversight capacity within those structures. This can be achieved both through mechanisms that monitor policymakers' performance and through external pressure from civil society.²⁴⁵ National gender machineries and women's ministries could play an important role in linking policymakers with civil society actors, but so far they have been marginalized from climate policymaking. The number of countries acknowledging gender concerns

in their latest NDCs increased significantly. But, as of 2021, only a quarter of the 94 countries reviewed considered national gender machineries integral to their climate change governance structures, and only 37 countries conducted comprehensive consultations to define the core climate and gender considerations within their NDCs.²⁴⁶

This points to the imperative for feminists in different spaces to organize and build coalitions as a basis to demand accountability.

Promoting coalitions and protecting civic space

Feminist climate justice requires broad-based counter-hegemonic coalitions that can span all parties from diplomatic elites to grassroots activists, and cut across institutional spaces and policy issues, to set ambitious egalitarian and ecological goals.

With significant civil society support, pro-environment coalitions of States have bridged longstanding geopolitical divisions to elevate mitigation ambitions in climate negotiations. For instance, the High Ambition Coalition (HAC) successfully facilitated the creation of the 2015 Paris Agreement and has re-emerged during subsequent COPs to counter negotiation standstills.²⁴⁷ Such broad coalitions of new actors can also encourage less powerful countries or civil society actors to pursue innovative solutions to accountability gaps. In 2023, for example, 132 Member States, led by Vanuatu and supported by student legal activism, successfully sought an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on international law concerning climate change (with a particular emphasis on human rights and intergenerational equity), which is expected by the end of 2024. While not binding, advisory opinions carry great legal weight and moral authority and provide clarity on the development of international law.²⁴⁸

Similarly, feminist movements have been most effective when they have formed coalitions that bring together Indigenous groups and environmental

movements to co-create platforms for justice in the face of racist violence, land dispossession, destruction of the natural environment and economic deprivation. One prominent example is the Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders, which operates in a subregion where environmental and human rights defenders face significant threats. This collective has united over 2,250 activists and 300 organizations from diverse social movements and territories in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua to develop a regional, holistic and culturally sensitive response to violence against women's human rights defenders, which puts the basic principle of care – for one's self and for the collective – at the heart of activism.²⁴⁹

The collective has played a pivotal role in informing and promoting the 2018 Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean.²⁵⁰ This landmark binding agreement, which was adopted in Escazú, Costa Rica, and entered into force on 22 April 2021, currently has 15 States Parties and is the first to include explicit provisions to prevent the criminalization of environmental human rights defenders.²⁵¹ In this case, demands by a grassroots network for accountability influenced a regional agreement, which now provides protection for civil society actors, demonstrating the spiralling effects from local to national to international and vice versa, as shown in Figure B3.1.1. Delivering on the promise of such agreements requires financial resources for the civil society organizations that connect advocacy at those different levels, as well as concerted political will on the part of governments to strengthen the rule of law and eradicate impunity.

This example also shows that strengthening accountability for feminist climate justice requires a vibrant, diverse and progressive civil society. This plays a dual role: collaborating with capable state actors to oversee and enhance policy design and implementation, while simultaneously carving out an autonomous civic space to critically assess state practices, challenge vested interests, expose harm and offer alternative solutions.

Empirical evidence underscores the significance of civil society engagement for accountability. Climate governance institutions gain legitimacy when they are inclusive of civil society, and external pressure from advocacy networks can make institutional accountability mechanisms more effective.²⁵² Comparative research across contexts consistently finds that peaceful protests are particularly potent in challenging systems that perpetuate environmental degradation and exacerbate inequalities.²⁵³ Non-violence reinforces the legitimacy of civil society's demands and places violence by state and other non-state actors into stark relief. When it comes to protests against environmentally contentious projects, early mobilization is key because it significantly enhances the likelihood of the project being cancelled – as attested by a recent global study of more than 2,700 socio-environmental conflicts.²⁵⁴ This is especially true when coupled with the use of multiple advocacy strategies, including litigation, a combination that has been successfully used by Indigenous communities in a range of contexts.²⁵⁵

Qualitative studies complement this finding and, even in cases where favourable court decisions were not fully enforced, the litigation process itself can yield important political advances. The legal activism of Women Affected by Mining United in Action (WAMUA) in South Africa against exploitative mining practices, a legacy of Apartheid rule, is a case in point. After the democratic transition, and enabled by a conducive constitutional and legal framework, WAMUA sought to rectify the exclusion of mining-affected communities from consultative processes. The Mining Charter was introduced in 2004 to address longstanding inequalities in the industry, primarily involving government, business and union representatives, leaving mining communities marginalized. Under the "nothing about us without us" banner, WAMUA used legal strategies to demand the active participation of women from mining-affected communities in shaping the Charter, to address environmental harms, workers' rights and a gender equitable distribution of employment opportunities.²⁵⁶ Though dissatisfied with the extent of their involvement in the subsequent Charter

review process, WAMUA's legal campaigns led to coalition building with community organizations and raised awareness of industry challenges, bolstering their capacity for future mobilization efforts.²⁵⁷

Enhancing bottom-up monitoring

Monitoring policy design and implementation is another important pathway to achieve accountability for feminist climate justice. Key national policy instruments, such as NDCs, NAPs, National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification's (UNCCD) National Action Programmes, gender and climate action plans and CEDAW country reports, offer opportunities to evaluate whether countries are translating their commitments into concrete actions and adequately mainstreaming gender equality.

Social accountability tools such as citizen scorecards or participatory budgeting can help uncover systemic failures requiring corrective action and can also build community ownership and grassroots policy oversight.²⁵⁸ For instance, the emerging adoption of gender-responsive climate budgeting in various low- and middle-income countries, often referred to as "double-mainstreaming",²⁵⁹ is a nascent but important trend. These tools help identify ways to allocate resources to address gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities at both local and national levels, including by supporting the diversification of women's livelihoods impacted by environmental degradation. Countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Bangladesh, Indonesia and Nepal, have started budget tagging in key gender and climate policy institutions.²⁶⁰ Meanwhile, countries in Africa such as Benin and Rwanda are implementing

monitoring systems that track the integration and impact of gender mainstreaming across government agencies, including on climate.²⁶¹ The effective use of gender-responsive climate budgeting necessitates a unified government approach based on robust national frameworks, leadership to coordinate efforts across government institutions and transparent and participatory systems that allow for public scrutiny of budget planning and priorities.²⁶²

Thus far, effective climate policy monitoring from a gender perspective has proven challenging due to a lack of comparable data on policy actions. There are some useful analyses emerging, however. For example, a recent study that analysed the latest round of NDCs from 89 countries found that only six countries recognized women's heightened risk of gender-based violence in the context of climate change.²⁶³ Likewise, novel research on unpaid care in NDCs shows that 12 countries out of 133 studied acknowledged women's increased unpaid care demands in the context of climate change, with only Cambodia committing to policy action to reduce the time women spend on unpaid work related to energy, agriculture and water access (see Figure B3.2.1).²⁶⁴ But global policy assessments that look at country performance across different gender equality thematic areas – spanning women's voice, agency and participation; economic security; unpaid care work; and gender-based violence and discrimination – are not readily available. To address this, UN-Women, working with IUCN and the Kaschak Institute for Social Justice for Women and Girls at Binghamton University, plans to develop a new tool, the gender equality and climate policy scorecard, to monitor gender-responsive national climate policies more systematically (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2: GENDER EQUALITY AND CLIMATE POLICY SCORECARD

Thanks to decades of feminist mobilization in environmental policymaking arenas, there is an emerging consensus on the necessity for gender-responsive climate action.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, there is a lack of clarity on what exactly this entails, and comparative evidence on the adoption of gender-responsive national measures in mitigation, adaptation and disaster response is, at best, patchy.

Building on existing attempts to track gender mainstreaming in national climate policies,²⁶⁶ along with experience of developing the COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker,²⁶⁷ UN-Women is working with IUCN and the Kaschak Institute for Social Justice for Women and Girls to develop the gender equality and climate policy scorecard, which will serve as a global monitoring tool for evaluating country progress on integrating gender equality into national climate policy action.

Its innovative analysis will assess policy commitments across four gender equality dimensions – women’s participation in decision-making, unpaid care responsibilities, violence against women and women’s economic security – and incorporate evidence on implementation.

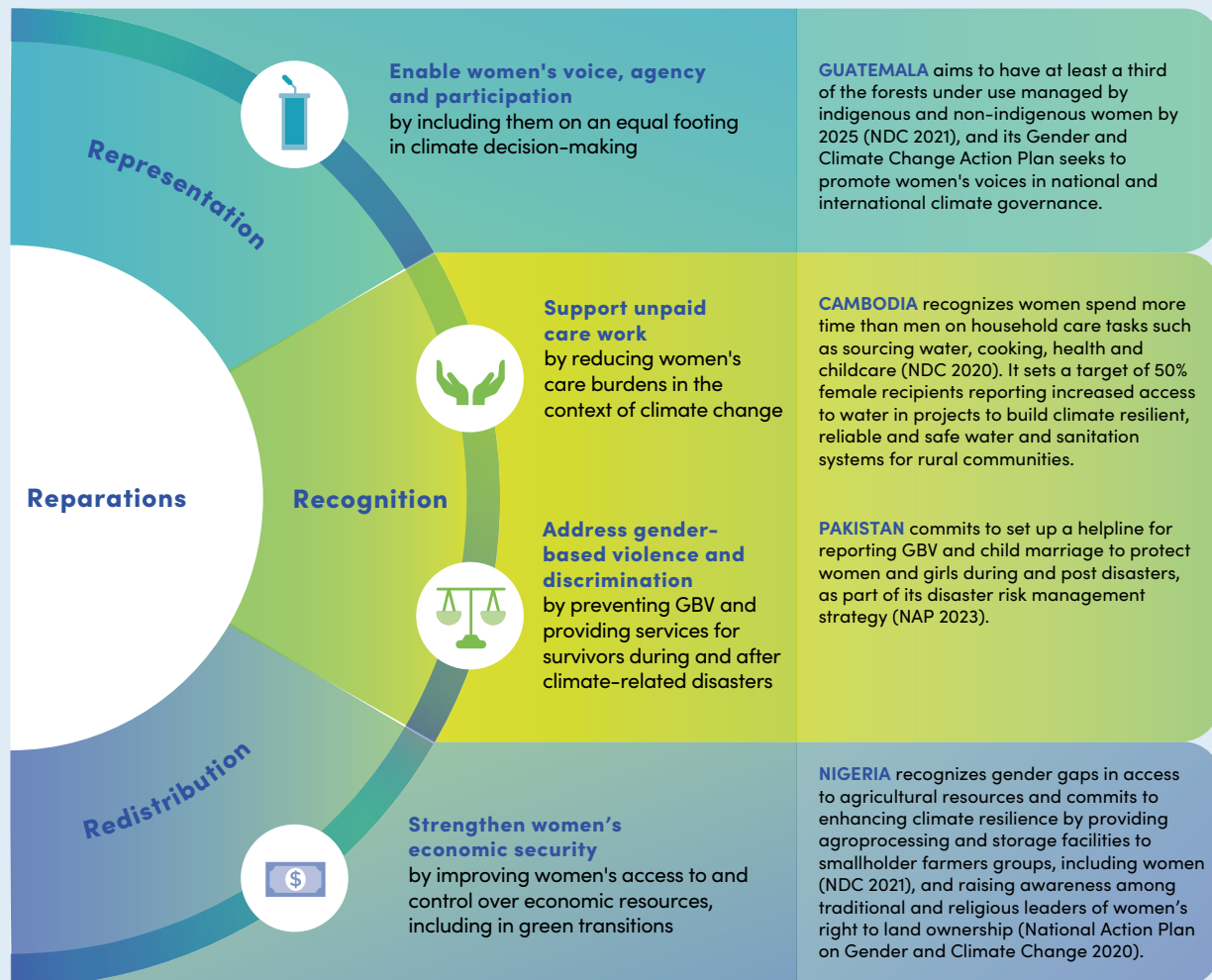
To date, the academic literature has underscored how gender mainstreaming in climate policies has often been reduced to a superficial ‘tick-box’ exercise, missing its transformative potential.²⁶⁸ To go beyond this minimalist approach, the scorecard will appraise the extent to which a set of gender inequalities, clearly exacerbated by climate change, are both acknowledged as part of the policy problem and addressed through policy actions. The four gender inequalities to be monitored are clustered around three core pillars of feminist climate justice: parity in representation, recognition of women’s rights and labour and equal distribution of economic resources, as shown in Figure B3.2.1. Under each dimension, the scorecard aims to answer the following justice-related questions:

- Representation: Do climate policies seek to strengthen women’s participation in climate decision-making and fully incorporate their voices and concerns?
- Recognition: Do climate policies seek to adequately recognize women’s labour and rights by supporting unpaid care and addressing gender-based violence and discrimination in the context of a changing climate?
- Redistribution: Do climate policies seek to redress women’s unequal access to economic resources and opportunities through climate action?

Because the scorecard exclusively tracks national climate policy actions, the fourth pillar of feminist climate justice, reparations – which primarily requires international action – is regarded as a facilitating factor rather than a component suitable for national-level monitoring.

The scorecard aims to reveal gaps as well as good practices to encourage policy learning and uptake across settings, as the policy examples in Figure B3.2.1. illustrate. Ultimately, it will provide a global snapshot of where the world stands on integrating gender into climate action and act as an accountability tool for monitoring progress going forward.

Figure B3.2.1 UNPACKING THE GENDER EQUALITY AND CLIMATE POLICY SCORECARD



Sources: Federal Government of Nigeria 2021, p. 28; Federal Ministry of Environment, Nigeria 2020; Government of Guatemala 2021; Government of Guatemala 2022, p. 67; Kingdom of Cambodia 2020; Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, Pakistan 2023.

Addressing climate change demands global cooperation and coordinated state action, which are both in short supply. It calls for rights-based approaches at a time when unchecked corporate power is in the ascendency. More than anything, it requires solidarity at a time of growing inequalities and distrust. In the face of these formidable obstacles, this section has identified some pathways to

accountability, including meaningful representation of women at all levels, bolstering coalitions that cut across divides, the use of grassroots monitoring tools and the protection of civic space for environmental and human rights defenders. Elevating and nurturing these approaches can bring the vision of feminist climate justice closer to reality.

CONCLUSION

The fact that the world is facing a polycrisis is fast becoming a cliché. But it bears repeating that the multiple, overlapping and reinforcing crises that are engulfing the world are unprecedented in scope and complexity and demand a radical change of course.

The rapidly heating planet stands out as the most globally existential crisis, and one that also reinforces and exacerbates all the other challenges facing the world today. The vast inequalities between and within countries will only deepen if large areas of the planet become uninhabitable; racist, misogynist and nationalist sentiments will be even harder to push back as economic conditions deteriorate; and conflict and violence will worsen if resources continue to be hoarded and become scarcer as the climate changes. Those who have historically endured marginalization and discrimination on the basis of class, gender and/or race or ethnicity are looking at a bleaker future as they bear the brunt of these interlinked crises.

This paper articulates an alternative vision of a world in which everyone can enjoy the full range of their human rights, free from discrimination, and flourish on a planet that is healthy and sustainable. This means prioritizing the well-being of all people and the planet over profits and elite power. Recognizing the interdependence of humans and nature, it entails leaving behind economies based on extraction and pollution and embracing ones based on care and regeneration.

The feminist climate justice framework can move the world closer to achieving this vision. Based on four dimensions, it aims to create a world where women's rights, labour and knowledge are accorded their rightful value (recognition), where economic resources and opportunities are equitably shared (redistribution) and where collective decisions are made with the inclusion of all voices (representation). It is a world that acknowledges historical injustices and is accountable to past and future generations (reparation).

As well as unpacking these four dimensions, this paper has applied the framework to the global food system,

which epitomises the problems the world faces: the exploitation of women's labour; the concentration of power and resources in few hands; and destructive production systems that are eroding ecosystems while failing to support the realization of human rights. Alternatives require channelling support to solutions pioneered at local level, often by women, such as agroecology and other climate-resilient agricultural approaches; building on and reorienting innovative approaches such as school feeding programmes to support women's environmentally sustainable food production; and cancelling debt so that countries can invest in domestic food security for the long term.

So how do we get there? For gender-just solutions to the climate crisis to go to scale, the accountability pathways that environmental, Indigenous and feminist activists are using to demand answers and action from those in power need to be unblocked. The paper highlights some promising avenues to achieve this at local, national and global levels. Progressive movements for change, especially coalitions that bring together actors from across diverse social movements, need civic space and guarantees of safety to do their vital work. Against the global trend towards autocracy, democratic politics needs to be deepened, including by strengthening women's substantive representation at all levels – in forestry councils, in local governance, in environment ministries and in UNFCCC delegations. And the current fragmentation in multilateral cooperation must be overcome to raise policy ambitions, leverage sustainable financing and enforce regulatory frameworks for global environmental governance.

This paper outlining the feminist climate justice framework is the first instalment of UN-Women's flagship report, *Progress of the World's Women*, which in 2025 will focus on gender equality in the age of climate crisis. Going forward, we will deepen and broaden our engagement with interdisciplinary feminist researchers, data experts, policymakers and other partners to identify strategies for feminist climate justice across sectors and develop tools to promote greater accountability for gender-responsive climate policies.

ENDNOTES

Introduction

- 1 UNEP 2022a; IPCC 2022a.
- 2 World Meteorological Organization 2023.
- 3 IPBES 2019.
- 4 Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity 2020.
- 5 Resurreccion 2022.
- 6 Sultana 2022a; Cohn and Duncanson 2023.
- 7 Resurreccion 2022; Fraser 2022.
- 8 Hickel 2020.
- 9 Karlsson et al. 2023.
- 10 IPCC 2022b, p. 2700.
- 11 UNDRR 2022.
- 12 UN CEDAW 2018.
- 13 MacGregor et al. 2022, p. 129; UN-Women and UN-Water undated.
- 14 UN-Women and UNDESA 2023.
- 15 UN-Women 2020.
- 16 UN-Women and UN-Water undated.
- 17 Fruttero et al. 2023.
- 18 UN ECOSOC 2020.
- 19 Jaldi 2023.
- 20 Fraser 2022.
- 21 Newell 2022.
- 22 Sultana 2021.
- 23 FAO 2023a.
- 24 See the acknowledgements for a list of participants in both meetings.
- 49 GI-ESCR 2021.
- 50 UN-Women 2021a; WBG 2020.
- 51 Fraser 2005.
- 52 IUCN 2021a.
- 53 UN-Women 2021b; UN-Women and UNDP 2022.
- 54 UNFCC 2020a; UNCBD 2022; UNCCD 2018.
- 55 WEDO 2023a.
- 56 GI-ESCR 2020.
- 57 Tran and Hanaček 2023; Tran 2021.
- 58 For an example of the use of the courts for accountability on climate commitments, see Box 4.3 in UN-Women 2021a, p. 61.
- 59 Fraser 2005.
- 60 IPCC 2022a.
- 61 Fraser 2021; Global Forest Coalition 2022.
- 62 Hickel 2020. 'Excess emissions' refers to national contributions to cumulative CO₂ emissions in excess of the planetary boundary of 350ppm atmospheric CO₂ concentration.
- 63 United Nations 1992.
- 64 Latindadd 2023.
- 65 UN Global Crisis Response Group 2023.
- 66 WGC 2022; African Feminist Taskforce 2022.
- 67 Mechler et al. 2018; WEDO 2022.
- 68 Wyns 2023; 143 US Organizations 2022.
- 69 Táiwò 2022; People's Agreement of Cochabamba 2010; Chinweizu 1993; Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development et al. 2022.
- 70 See, for example, Greenfield 2023.
- 71 Boyd et al. 2021; Simpson 2022; Loss and Damage Youth Coalition 2022.
- 72 Forsyth et al. 2022.
- 73 Wijenayake 2020; Chakma et al. 2022.
- 74 Tschakert et al. 2017.
- 75 Táiwò 2021.
- 76 Almassi 2022.
- 77 Bhadani 2021.
- 78 Tronto 2013.
- 79 Williams 2021.
- 80 UNRISD 2022.
- 81 Harcourt et al. 2023.
- 82 Gebara 2022.
- 83 For example, Nelson and Power 2018; Bauhard and Harcourth 2019; Reksten and Floro 2021.
- 84 Bourgault 2023.
- 85 Nelson and Power 2018; Barca et al. 2023.
- 86 Williams 2023.
- 87 Williams 2021; Sultana 2022b.
- 88 Williams 2021.
- 89 Crenshaw 1989.
- 90 Williams 2023; Amorim-Maia et al. 2022; Sultana 2022b.
- 91 Ewig 2018; Lykke 2011.
- 92 Williams 2021.

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- 25 Fraser 1995; Fraser 2005.
- 26 IPCC 2022c.
- 27 Almassi 2022; Sultana 2021; Sultana 2022b.
- 28 Tronto 1993; Tronto 2013; Williams 2021.
- 29 Baldwin 1962.
- 30 Fredman and Goldblatt 2015.
- 31 Fraser 1995.
- 32 Duerto Valero and Kaul 2023; Castañeda and Sabater 2020; Zhu et al. 2023.
- 33 Bullard 1990.
- 34 Nelson 1997.
- 35 United Nations 2023a; United Nations General Assembly 2021a.
- 36 Carbon Brief 2021.
- 37 Gaard 2015; Seager 2019.
- 38 Hochsprung Miguel et al. 2022; Jasanoff 2005.
- 39 Maladaptation refers to actions intended to reduce the impacts of climate change that create more risk and vulnerability instead. See: Schipper 2020; IPCC 2022c.
- 40 Duerto Valero and Kaul 2023.
- 41 UN-Women undated; UN-Women 2022.
- 42 United Nations Climate Change 2023.
- 43 Newell 2022.
- 44 Ibid., p. 917; Chancel 2022.
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- 93 UN News 2023.
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- 97 Xu et al. 2021; Milman 2021.
- 98 UN-Women and UN-Water undated.
- 99 Lowder et al. 2021.
- 100 FAO 2023b.
- 101 CFS 2022; Sen 1982.
- 102 Sen 1982; FAO 2019.
- 103 UN-Women and UNDESA 2023. Note that the statistics in this paragraph are based on the amount of food required to support a sedentary life, which does not reflect the reality of, for example, rural women in developing countries. As such, these figures may underestimate the true extent of hunger globally. For a critique, see Urhahn undated.
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- 106 Cabral et al. 2023.
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- 108 FAO 2023a.
- 109 Motta 2021.
- 110 Resurreccion 2013; Leach et al. 2016.
- 111 IPCC 2023.
- 112 Caretta et al. 2022.
- 113 Carbon Brief 2022.
- 114 Huyer et al. 2020.
- 115 Huyer et al. 2021.
- 116 Lowder et al. 2019.
- 117 UN-Women and UNDESA 2023.
- 118 Akram-Lodhi 2021.
- 119 Anderson and Tripathi 2019.
- 120 Bezner Kerr et al. 2022; Bezner Kerr et al. 2019.
- 121 Seibert et al. 2019; Anderson and Tripathi 2019.
- 122 FAO 2018; UNHRC 2011a; Agarwal 2014.
- 123 Razavi 2009; Bezner Kerr et al. 2019.
- 124 Agarwal 2017.
- 125 Rosset 2015.
- 126 La Via Campesina 2021; Friends of the ATC 2017; Motta 2021.
- 127 FAO 2023c.
- 128 Anseeuw and Baldinelli 2020
- 129 Ibid.
- 130 UN-Women 2019.
- 131 CFS 2015.
- 132 UN-Women and UNDP 2022.
- 133 Costella et al. 2023.
- 134 Watkins 2023.
- 135 Ibid.; Gaddis and Roberts 2023; for evidence of impact in Ghana, see: Aurino et al. 2023; and in Burkino Faso, see: Nikiem 2017.
- 136 Gaddis and Roberts 2023.
- 137 Across 85 countries, 35 per cent of school feeding programmes already integrate agricultural goals into their programme design. See GCNF 2019.
- 138 Watkins 2023.
- 139 First Nations' Development Institute 2022.
- 140 WFP 2020.
- 141 Bharadwaj 2022.
- 142 UNDESA 2021.
- 143 Act Church of Sweden et al. undated.
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- 147 FAO 2015.
- 148 CSIPM 2023a; CSIPM 2023b.
- 149 UN OHCHR 2021; United Nations General Assembly 2021b.
- 150 Oliveira Soares et al. 2022.
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- 152 IPES-Food 2023b; Dorado et al. 2021.
- 153 Bryan et al. 2023; Kumar et al. 2021.
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- 155 Grey and Patel 2015, p. 438; Raschke and Cheema 2008.
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- 157 Prügl et al. 2021.
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- 168 iPES-Food 2022.
- 169 UN CEDAW 2022; Tschakert et al. 2019.
- 170 Tigre 2020.

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- 171 Nelson 2018, p. 173; Moncel 2012, p. 163.
- 172 United Nations Climate Change undated-a.
- 173 Kramarz and Park 2016.
- 174 This paper utilizes a broad concept of democracy, based on the theory of Robert Dahl (1971), as is operationalized and measured by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project. It encompasses seven core dimensions of democracy: electoral, liberal, majoritarian, consensual, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian. This definition moves beyond strict electoral or procedural conceptions of democracy and recognizes the various alternative pathways through which citizens can exert influence over political processes, in particular social movements or civil society participation. It is essential to recognize these non-electoral pathways for gender and climate progress. For further reading, see V-Dem 2023a.
- 175 UN-Women 2018.
- 176 Lührmann et al. 2020.
- 177 Risse and Sikkink 1999.
- 178 Kramarz and Park 2016.
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- 180 Fraser 2005.
- 181 UNRISD 2016; Cullenward and Victor 2020.
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- 183 Sepúlveda 2017.
- 184 Keck and Sikkink 1998.
- 185 Goetz and Jenkins 2005.
- 186 Cornwall 2017.
- 187 Keck and Sikkink 1998.
- 188 Graddy-Lovelace 2021.
- 189 Arora-Jonsson 2023.

- 190 The Women and Gender Constituency is one of nine stakeholder groups of the UNFCCC, which brings together diverse civil society actors to develop common advocacy positions and influence negotiations. See: WGC 2023 and Decision 18/CP.20 of the Lima Work Programme on Gender (UNFCCC 2014, p. 35). The five priority areas identified under the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan include: capacity-building, knowledge management and communication; gender balance, participation and women's leadership; coherence; gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation; and monitoring and reporting (UNFCCC 2020b, pp. 6–9).
- 191 WEDO 2023a.
- 192 Dankelmann 2010; Aguilar 2021; Picard 2021; Resurrección 2021.
- 193 Leiva Roesch and Curtin 2022.
- 194 Ibid.
- 195 Klöck et al. 2021; Huyer et al. 2020.
- 196 Maslin et al. 2023; Stoddard et al. 2021.
- 197 Maslin et al. 2023.
- 198 Lamb et al. 2020; Brulle 2019; Supran and Oreskes 2017; Oreskes and Conway 2010. More recent evidence points out that even though, for instance, the five biggest oil corporations in their latest public campaigns portray themselves as positive and proactive on the climate emergency, their lobbying and policy engagement activities were found to be misaligned with the 2015 Paris Agreement. See: InfluenceMap 2022.
- 199 The vested interests of oil producers have also been influential within the larger coalition of developing countries, including through bullying, providing financial assistance to poorer countries, making appeals to South-South identity and solidarity and regular chairmanship of the G77 and working groups within it. See: Klöck et al. 2021.
- 200 Barnett 2008; Klöck et al. 2021, p. 210.
- 201 Oreskes and Conway 2010.
- 202 Lyon and Montgomery 2015.
- 203 UNDP 2022a; UNEP 2022b; IUCN 2020.
- 204 V-Dem 2023b.
- 205 Ibid.
- 206 Ibid.
- 207 Ghosh et al. 2023.
- 208 Fresnillo Sallan 2020.
- 209 This refers to local, national or transnational financing – drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing – that seeks to support mitigation and adaptation actions that will address climate change. See: United Nations Climate Change undated-b.
- 210 Oxfam 2023.
- 211 Ibid.
- 212 IMF 2023.
- 213 Cooper Hall et al. 2019; Schalatek 2020.
- 214 Engle and Weisstanner 2021.
- 215 Norris and Inglehart 2019; Verloo and Paternotte 2018; Roggeband and Krizsan 2020.
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- 219 Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity undated.
- 220 Atrey 2023a.
- 221 United Nations General Assembly 2022. The United Nations Human Rights Council had already introduced the right in a resolution the previous year (UNHRC 2021).
- 222 United Nations General Assembly 2022.
- 223 UN CEDAW 2018.
- 224 UNCRC 2023.
- 225 Atrey 2023b.
- 226 UNHRC 2011b; Business & Human Rights Resource Centre undated.
- 227 Malm 2021.
- 228 Muñoz and Villarreal Villamar 2019; Caretta et al. 2020.
- 229 Tran and Hanaček 2023, based on data from the Environmental Justice Atlas (EJAtlas), accessible at <https://ejatlas.org/>. The process of vetting cases to be included in EJAtlas involves four main stages: identification, write up and coding, review and validation and approval for publication.
- 230 Datapoint provided to UN-Women by EJAtlas on 6 November 2023. It refers to all EJAtlas cases that, as of 31 January 2022, were coded as YES for “women collectives or women organizations play[ing] a key role in the mobilisation against the contentious activity, either because they are affected by specific impacts (health, labour, household conditions, sexual exploitation, discrimination or murder), or because they lead the main narratives of resistance and transformation”, as defined by EJAtlas undated.
- 231 Tran and Hanaček 2023.
- 232 Ibid.
- 233 UN News 2022.
- 234 Alam 2022.
- 235 United Nations 2023b.
- 236 UNHRC 2021 and United Nations General Assembly 2022, respectively; High-Level Advisory Board on Effective Multilateralism 2022.
- 237 Willis et al. 2022, p. 3.
- 238 IPCC 2022b; Harris et al. 2019.
- 239 Bächtiger et al. 2018.
- 240 Willis et al. 2022; Global Assembly 2021.
- 241 Willis et al. 2022
- 242 Agarwal 2010.
- 243 Mavisakalyan and Tarverdi 2019.
- 244 Flavell 2023.
- 245 According to Hannah Pitkin (1967), substantive representation relates to the actions taken on behalf of, or in the interest of, the represented.
- 246 UNDP 2022b.
- 247 Klöck et al. 2020.
- 248 Pacific Islands Students Fighting Climate Change 2023; TIME 2022; Vanuatu ICJ Initiative 2023; ClimaTalk 2023.
- 249 IM-Defensoras 2021.
- 250 Aguilar 2022a.
- 251 Graddy-Lovelace 2021.
- 252 Bernauer and Gampfer 2013; Lall 2023.
- 253 Tran 2021.
- 254 Scheidel et al. 2020.
- 255 Tran 2021; Scheidel et al. 2020.
- 256 The Mining Charter is meant to set a framework, timetable and targets to enable excluded people to enter into and benefit from the mining industry. See Chamberlain 2023.
- 257 Chamberlain 2023.
- 258 In other words, fulfilling the corrective and preventive functions of climate accountability. See: Sepúlveda 2017.
- 259 CABRI 2022.
- 260 Patel et al. 2021; Ministry of Finance Indonesia and UNDP 2020.
- 261 CABRI 2022.
- 262 Patel et al. 2021.
- 263 Argentina, Dominican Republic, Guinea, Seychelles, Sierra Leone and Somalia. See IUCN 2021b.
- 264 Aguilar 2022b.
- 265 UN CSW 2022.
- 266 IUCN 2021b; NAP Global Network 2022; UNDP 2022b; UNEP 2022b; UNFPA 2021; WEDO 2023b.
- 267 UN-Women and UNDP 2022.
- 268 Arora-Johnson 2014; Resurrección 2021; Huyer et al. 2020.

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UN-Women is the United Nations organization dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. A global champion for women and girls, it was established to accelerate progress on meeting their needs worldwide.

UN-Women supports United Nations Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality and works with governments and civil society to design the laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; and Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN-Women also coordinates and promotes the United Nations system's work in advancing gender equality.

The climate crisis is the most pressing issue of our times, one that is threatening progress on gender equality and human rights and hindering the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Against this backdrop of rising global temperatures and unfulfilled national pledges, women, girls and gender-diverse people are mobilizing to demand that their voices be heard in decision-making on climate policy.

To answer their demands, this paper describes how to achieve feminist climate justice through four interlinked dimensions (recognition, redistribution, representation and reparation) and the principles of interdependence and intersectionality. It provides practical guidance on what countries need to do to transition to low-emission economies that are resilient to a changing climate, while advancing gender equality and recognising the leadership of women, girls and gender-diverse people in driving the change that is so urgently needed. In doing so, it zooms in on the global food system as just one illustration of how this framework can be applied, as well as provides analysis of the major barriers to accountability for gender-responsive climate action and how they can be overcome.

The vision for feminist climate justice is of a world in which everyone can enjoy the full range of human rights, free from discrimination, and flourish on a planet that is healthy and sustainable. With this conceptual framework, UN-Women aims to open up space for discussion of feminist alternatives to the status quo and to inform the next edition of its flagship report, *Progress of the World's Women*, on gender equality in the age of climate crisis.

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