

WORKING PAPER

THE CLIMATE-CARE NEXUS:

ADDRESSING THE LINKAGES BETWEEN CLIMATE
CHANGE AND WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' UNPAID
CARE, DOMESTIC AND COMMUNAL WORK



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COMMUNAL WORK



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT SECTION
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ACRONYMS

AR6	Sixth Assessment Report (IPCC)	NAPs	National Adaptation Plans
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity	NDCs	Nationally Determined Contributions
CCPI	Climate Change Performance Index	NDPs	National Drought Plans
CEDAW	Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women	OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
COP	Conference of the Parties	SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women	STEM	Science, technology, engineering and mathematics
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean	UNCCD	United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations	UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product	UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
GHG	Global Greenhouse Gas	UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
GM	Global Mechanism	UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
ILO	International Labour Organization	WEF	World Economic Forum
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change	WHO	World Health Organization
MEAs	Multilateral Environmental Agreements		

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PREFACE

Care work is any labour that involves caring for others, caring for the planet and caring for oneself, all of which are premised on the existence of basic conditions and the availability of time as well as goods, resources and services. Care work ensures the complex and life-sustaining web on which our very existence depends; without it, individuals, families, societies and economies would not be able to survive and thrive. Care work as a public good is fundamental for well-being and essential for a vibrant, sustainable economy with a productive labour force. The centrality of care to sustainable development and its relevance for gender equality are widely recognized by nations and communities, including as a target under Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls: SDG 5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate. Yet around the world, women and girls shoulder a disproportionate share of care work that is *unpaid, unrecognized and undervalued*.

As decades of feminist research has made clear, the impact of crises is not gender neutral.¹ This has been brought into sharp focus by cascading crises, multiplying conflicts and the accelerating impacts of climate change and environmental degradation,² all of which have exacerbated the care demands on women and girls. Women and girls inevitably take on the bulk of care work when care demands increase and intensify and public and private systems and services are inadequate and underfunded to meet them.

To address inequities in unpaid care and domestic work, UN Women, with the support of Global Affairs Canada, piloted the initiative, “Transformative approaches to recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work in women’s economic empowerment programming” in Rwanda, Senegal and South Africa, to respond to lessons learned that insufficient attention was being given to women’s unpaid care and domestic workloads and overall time poverty. With the goal of removing structural barriers to women’s full and

equal participation in the economy by recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care work (see Box 1), the programme complemented existing UN Women programmes on climate-resilient agriculture and rural women’s economic empowerment in the three countries. It allowed for an analysis of the climate-care nexus and exploring policies and measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute women’s and girls’ unpaid care and domestic work in the context of climate change.

The transformation of societies and economies towards paradigms centred on interdependence, care and sustainability is urgently needed. In this context, this working paper sheds light on emerging efforts to address women’s and girls’ unpaid care, domestic and communal work in a dramatically changing climate. The paper establishes linkages between climate change and women’s and girls’ unpaid care, domestic and communal work, discussing the ways in which climate change and environmental degradation disrupt the care economy and increase and intensify women’s and girls’ unpaid care, domestic and communal work.

The paper analyses nascent national efforts to address unpaid care and domestic work through multilateral environmental agreements and valuing paid

1 UN Women 2021a.

2 In this paper, environmental degradation is intended to include biodiversity loss, pollution, land degradation and desertification, among others forms of environmental damage.

and unpaid care work in gender-responsive just transitions. The paper concludes with recommendations for governments, international organizations, UN agencies, academia and civil society at a key moment

for rethinking the dominant development model based on the extraction and exploitation of natural resources, fossil fuels and human lives, and for making caring for people and the planet a central concern

BOX 1.

From the 3Rs to the 5Rs of care work

The global discourse on care work has shifted from a 3Rs framework to a 5Rs framework whereby the **recognition, reduction and redistribution** of *unpaid* care work are complemented by **reward** and **representation** of *paid* care work. The **resilience** of care systems in the face of global crises such as climate change and environmental degradation could also be included in the framework, as well as the **resources** needed to support and finance its implementation.

Recognize

- Recognizing women's care work across their life course
- Incorporating measures of paid and unpaid care work in national statistics and in measures of economic progress, such as GDP
- Measuring time-use and unpaid care work and its distribution within families and communities
- Tracking care in public policies and investments

Reduce

- Increasing access to care infrastructure and time- and labour-saving technologies

Redistribute

- Investing in quality, affordable, and accessible care services
- Ensuring gender-responsive social protection systems with care at the centre
- Implementing gender-responsive maternity, paternity, and parental leave policies
- Implementing family-friendly workplace policies and arrangements
- Shifting social norms on care
- Engaging men and fathers in care
- Developing care-relevant training and advocacy tools

Reward

- Ensuring decent work for all care workers, including in the informal economy
- Extending social protection to informal workers
- Applying the principle of equal pay for work of equal value

Represent

- Formalizing care and domestic work
- Promoting freedom of association, social dialogue, and collective bargaining for care workers
- Ensuring equal opportunity and treatment for migrant care workers

Source: UN Women 2022b.

I.

ESTABLISHING LINKAGES BETWEEN CLIMATE CHANGE AND WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' UNPAID CARE, DOMESTIC AND COMMUNAL WORK

The [global care crisis](#) is being aggravated and intensified by environmental degradation and the global climate emergency. Its impacts are more acute for people with scarce resources and low incomes, especially in rural areas of the Global South.³ Climate change exacerbates women's and girls' disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work. Globally, they already spend three times as much time on this work on average as do men and boys.⁴ Moreover, time-use surveys from around the world reveal that when paid and unpaid work are combined, women work longer hours overall than men do.⁵

The gaps are even wider for women and girls living in rural areas who are the ones responsible for managing resources and services for daily household consumption; their workload can vary in areas with limited access to regular essential services such as energy, water and sanitation. For example, in Senegal rural women's unpaid work, including domestic work, caring for relatives and communal work, takes 4 to 8 hours a day but at times up to 12 hours a day, which is significantly higher than the global average of 4.5 hours.⁶ In the Arab States, which has the highest women-to-men ratio of time spent on unpaid care work, women spend, on average, between 17 and 34 hours per week on unpaid care work, whereas men spend no more than 1 to 5 hours.⁷

Moreover, care work and care responsibilities affect women and men in different ways depending on circumstances, including their gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, marital status and migration status. This paper is grounded in an intersectional approach to women and girls in all their diversity, recognizing their differences and the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination they face.

3 MacGregor, Arora-Jonsson and Cohen 2022.

4 International Labour Organization (ILO) 2018a.

5 UN Women 2020a.

6 UN Women 2022a.

7 UN Women 2020b.

BOX 2.

Definition of structural nodes of inequality

Gender inequality is manifested in six structural nodes:⁹

1. Socio-economic inequality and the persistence of poverty
2. Inequitable control of and access to natural resources (including land)
3. Lack of or limited access to markets, capital, training, technical assistance, financial services and technologies
4. Patriarchal, discriminatory and violent norms
5. The gendered division of labour and the unequal social and economic organization of care
6. The concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public and private spheres

The cascading crises⁸ of recent years with their multiple dimensions and uneven recovery worldwide have disproportionately affected women and girls, deepening the structural challenge of gender inequalities. The gendered division of labour and the unequal social and economic organization of care are among the six 'structural nodes of inequality' (see Box 2).

These nodes reinforce each other and generate complex structural barriers and discriminatory social

8 These include, in addition to the ongoing climate and environment emergencies, the COVID-19 pandemic and aftermath, cost of living (food and energy) and debt crises.

9 Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) 2017. To the four identified by ECLAC, two more nodes have been added: inequitable control of and access to natural resources (including land) and lack of or limited access to markets, capital, training, technical assistance, financial services and technologies.

BOX 3.

Definition of unpaid care work

Unpaid care work includes direct and indirect care for people and living environments. It encompasses direct care, indirect care, environmental care, domestic and communal work that take place in the household or in the wider community:

- *Direct care* refers to hands-on care for people including children, older persons, persons with disabilities, and able-bodied adults.
- *Indirect care* refers to the provisioning of necessary goods and services for people.
- *Environmental care* includes activities outside the household necessary for provisioning and subsistence, including caring for animals, plants and common spaces on which households depend. This paper includes environmental care in the definition and references to ‘unpaid care, domestic and communal work’.
- *Domestic work* refers to cooking and food preparation, cleaning, washing clothes, water and fuel collection.
- *Communal work* is collective work that supports personal or household care, such as community kitchens or cooperative childcare.

Sources: MacGregor, Arora-Jonsson and Cohen 2022; UN Women 2022b.

norms that hinder and reduce the scope of policies for gender equality and women’s empowerment. Efforts towards gender-responsive outcomes need to tackle the structural nature of the challenge and the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women face. Moreover, the experiences of countless women are at risk of being completely overlooked if women’s and girls’ disproportionate responsibilities for unpaid care and domestic work are not understood and recognized. To achieve gender equality, it is vital to recognize the economic, social and affective value of unpaid care and domestic work, including through integrating it in measures to go beyond GDP to “value what counts”,¹⁰ reducing its time and effort and redistributing it more equally between women and men and between households and the state.¹¹

Consequently, care should be acknowledged as a public good, universal right and essential building block for economic and social well-being and sustainable development. Its low status and unequal gender distribution constitute key barriers to women’s social, political and economic empowerment. Furthermore, care work should be recognized as work, as skilled work and as a public issue, as opposed to merely a private family or household matter (see Box 3).

While there has been progress in addressing some of the structural challenges of gender inequality in research and policies for climate change mitigation and adaptation, better understanding of the linkages between climate change and women’s and girls’ unpaid care, domestic and communal work is needed for climate advocacy and policy and programmatic action.

10 United Nations 2023: “GDP does not capture the full extent of the informal economy, such as unpaid care work in households, nor does it capture the social value of activities, such as health care, or the value of security. For example, unpaid care work, carried out largely by women, is often invisible and undervalued. This was particularly pronounced during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, when women spent an estimated 512 billion hours globally doing additional unpaid childcare work that sustained our economies.”

11 UN Women 2018 and 2022a.

1.1

The care society in the context of climate change and environmental degradation¹²

The impacts of the cascading crises highlight the urgent need to transform social and economic systems and how they relate to nature towards ones centred

12 This section builds on discussions and processes carried out by ECLAC’s Gender Division over the past two years.

on notions of interdependence, care and sustainability. This is an opportunity to change the dominant development model based on the extraction and exploitation of resources and life to a model that makes caring for people and the planet central.

As explicated in UN Women's *Feminist Plan for Sustainability and Social Justice*,¹³ the natural environment and women's and girls' labour are both taken for granted, undervalued and treated as if their supply is limitless and their use is costless, even though they are the foundation for all economies. The prevailing economic model has broadened racial and gender inequalities while at the same time scaling back state regulations that protect the environment, investments in public goods and services, and support for social reproduction, i.e., the process by which a society reproduces itself from one generation to another and also within generations.

In the context of the debt crisis that has brought low-income countries to their knees, 93 per cent of the countries most vulnerable to the climate crisis are in or at significant risk of debt distress may be forced to increase investments in extractive and fossil fuel industries to repay the debt. Developing economies have struggled to secure enough financial resources to respond to and recover from the impacts of cascading and compounding crises – let alone repay their debt. Moreover, austerity measures and cuts in public services increase women's unpaid care and domestic work and jeopardize efforts to address it.¹⁴ The dominant development model that prioritizes the accumulation of capital and austerity measures that threaten lives and livelihoods put the sustainability of all life at risk.

The sustainability of life presupposes the interrelationship of two fundamental principles. First, it is necessary to guarantee social reproduction to ensure the continuity of the economy and society, and the goods and services for its realization. Secondly, it is necessary to sustain the inputs for the continuity of production processes. This is a relationship of dependency, which respects nature, prevents its

degradation and ensures the life of present and future generations.¹⁵

To advance a fair organization of care, the link between caring for people and caring for the planet needs to be addressed and conceptualized at different scales: national, regional and global. In doing so, it is necessary to understand the systematic linkages between the environment and care. It is evident that the provision of care requires the existence of the material bases that sustain life. In turn, the sustainability of the planet requires a development model that places care at the centre of its priorities, that recognizes the interdependence between people and the environment, and the multiple interdependencies between economic, social, human and environmental dimensions.¹⁶

Within this context, the notion of a “care society” emerges. A care society includes caring for people and the planet from a gender and human rights-based perspective. A care society is a society to be shaped collectively and multidimensionally to overcome the structural challenges of gender inequality and place the care of people and the planet at the heart of sustainable development. A care society is an essential alternative to the current dominant development model, which fails to consider and value activities that are essential for sustaining life and consequently reproduces gender, socioeconomic, ethnic and territorial inequalities and causes social, economic and environmental harm and damage.¹⁷

Times of turmoil require proposals that offer hope. This is what the care society is. It is a proposal for organizing society in such a way that the sustainability of life is the priority objective. For this, it is essential to recognize the irreplaceable value of care for both people and the planet and to distribute care provision based on shared co-responsibility between the State, markets, communities and families.¹⁸

To operationalize the notion of a care society, two entry points can be identified to comprehend the

13 UN Women 2021a.

14 ActionAid 2023.

15 Carrasco 2017.

16 Celiberti, ed. 2019.

17 ECLAC 2022.

18 ECLAC 2022.

interrelationship between caring for people and caring for the planet:

- Climate change and environmental degradation lead to an increase in women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work.
- Gender-responsive climate action towards climate change mitigation and adaptation and a low-carbon, climate-resilient economy offers opportunities for achieving the 5Rs of care work.

1.2 Care in relation to multilateral environmental agreements

Nearly three decades have passed since 1992, when world leaders at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), also known as the Earth Summit, agreed on a development approach to protect the environment and ensure economic and social development, based on the [Convention on Biological Diversity \(CBD\)](#), the [United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification \(UNCCD\)](#) and the [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change \(UNFCCC\)](#).

It should be noted that these and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) do not contain specific mentions or mandates on the issue of care, including in their gender action plans: the [CBD Gender Action Plan](#) and the [UNFCCC Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and Gender Action Plan](#), while the [UNCCD Gender Action Plan](#) makes one reference to women's use and care of land resources. Moreover, in recent MEA publications, the co-responsibility for care between women and men and between the State, the market, families and the community is not addressed. Similarly, country reports to the Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) do not mention the relationship between care and the environment, except for a few instances in relation to water.¹⁹

The conclusions of the 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report

¹⁹ See CEDAW database analysis in Aguilar 2022.

(AR6), show how far we are from achieving the promises made in 1992:²⁰

- **To ensure a liveable and sustainable future for all, the window of opportunities is small and closing quickly.** For many places on earth, adaptive capacity is already significantly constrained. Ambitious concerted global action on adaptation and mitigation is therefore required. Each incremental rise in temperature will lead to more frequent and costly impacts in terms of disease, death, disaster and destruction. No place in the world will be unaffected by climate change. But the regions that have contributed the least to the problem, notably Africa, Central America, South Asia and Small Island Developing States, will suffer some of the most severe consequences.
- **The net global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions caused by human activity during the decade starting in 2010 were higher than at any previous time in human history.** Humans have released more than a trillion tons of carbon dioxide since the start of the Industrial Revolution. This has caused an increase in the average global temperature of more than 1 degree Celsius compared to the end of the 19th century. Those emissions, even if they ceased tomorrow, have set in motion a number of irreversible changes.
- **Climate change affects the populations with the least capacity for adaptation.** In the last decade, the average number of deaths from floods, droughts and storms in countries considered "highly vulnerable" was 15 times higher than in places with low vulnerability. With high levels of global warming, Small Island Developing States and some tropical regions will reach limits in their ability to adapt to extreme heat and flooding. Depending on how much temperatures rise, between 31 and 143 million people could be displaced in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Latin America.

²⁰ IPCC 2022; Carbon Brief 2022; World Economic Forum (WEF) 2022; United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) 2022; International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) 2022.

- **The next generations will inherit a much harsher planet than the one their parents knew.** People under the age of 10 in 2020 are projected to experience a nearly fourfold increase in extreme events at 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming and a fivefold increase if temperatures rise by 3 degrees Celsius.

Unfortunately, the world continues to face the challenging limitations of an orthodox development model. No country is yet on track to limit global warming to 1.5°C based on the Paris Agreement (see Box 4).²¹ Unless immediate actions are taken, the climate change scenarios described above will have a disproportionately negative effect on gender equality and the time and effort that women and girls are investing in unpaid care, domestic and communal work.

The IPCC AR6 contains significant reference to care work and climate change, many of which are in relation to water, for example:

- Recognition that “*climate-induced water scarcity and supply disruptions disproportionately impact women and girls. The necessity of water collection*

*takes away time from income-generating activities, childcare and education.”*²²

- Concern that “*consumption of larger volumes of water is essential for healthy women during pregnancy, lactation and caregiving, which increases the amount of water that has to be fetched. Fetching of water is associated with increased risk of sexual abuse, demand for sexual favours at controlled water collection points, physical injuries (e.g., musculoskeletal or from animal attacks), domestic violence for not completing daily water-related domestic tasks, and poorer maternal and child health.”*²³

AR6 also recognizes the impact of cascading crises on women’s and girls’ unpaid care and domestic work, which spirals in the absence of public services and infrastructure: “*compound disasters have arisen due to either the co-occurrence of drought, storms or floods and COVID-19. COVID-19 acts as a stress multiplier for women and girls in charge of water collection and minorities and disabled people who are not engaged in water management. Across the world, existing inequalities deepened due to lockdowns, which further limited access to clean water and education for women and girls, and reinstated gendered responsibilities of child, elderly and sick care, which had been previously externalized.”*²⁴

The AR6 reinforces that the gender division of labour, systemic racism and other social and structural inequities lead to heightened vulnerabilities and climate change impacts for women, youth and Indigenous Peoples.²⁵ In this context, it cautions about the lack of attention to social reproduction and care work when climate programmes, for example, set aside forestland that poor people rely on for logging and fail to compensate for the greater workloads of women who are obliged to turn to non-timber forest products for their livelihoods. Similarly, austerity measures that reduce public services mean greater unpaid care and domestic workloads for women and girls.²⁶

BOX 4.

The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 21) in Paris on 12 December 2015, and entered into force on 4 November 2016. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2 degrees and preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.

While the Paris Agreement recognizes the centrality of gender equality, women’s empowerment, intergenerational equity and human rights, it does not refer to care.

Source: UNFCCC. [The Paris Agreement](#).

21 [Climate Change Performance Index](#) (CCPI).

22 IPCC 2022, Chapter 4, pp. 586-587.

23 IPCC 2022, Chapter 4, pp. 587.

24 IPCC 2022, Chapter 4, pp. 628.

25 IPCC 2022, pp. 55, 123, 126, 132, 656-657, 784, passim.

26 IPCC 2022, Chapter 18, pp. 2701.

1.3

Linked climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation increase women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work

Climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation have accelerated and intensified into widespread and interlinked crises. Climate change has caused increasingly frequent and severe disasters, disrupted ecosystems and contributed to biodiversity loss. The IPCC estimates that 10 per cent of all plant and animal species face a high risk of extinction from global warming, even if the world limits warming to 2 degrees Celsius.²⁷ These losses in less than a century would be comparable to the magnitude of species extinction due to human activities over the previous 12,000 years.²⁸ Loss of ecosystems and biodiversity imperils human survival, threatening the sources of food, water and air and endangering human health and safety.²⁹ Moreover, by weakening wildlife populations and damaging habitats, climate change increases the potential for zoonotic diseases that spread from animals to people.³⁰

The impacts of climate change are often felt in terms of water availability for both domestic and productive purposes due to more intense and frequent droughts, extreme flooding, erratic seasonal rainfall and the accelerated melting of glaciers. More than 3.6 billion people do not have access to an adequate water supply and this is expected to reach 5 billion by 2050, and large areas of the world are only getting dryer.³¹ Also by 2050, environmentally critical streamflow is projected to be affected in 42 to 79 per cent of the world's watersheds, causing negative impacts on freshwater ecosystems.³²

27 IPCC 2022, pp. 56, 202.

28 Dennis and Kaplan 2022.

29 IPCC 2022, pp. 12-17, 55-57, 83-83, 72, 79, 92, *passim*.

30 IPCC 2022, pp. 11, 51-52.

31 World Meteorological Organization 2022.

32 IPCC 2022, pp. 61. Streamflow is defined as the stage when groundwater levels drop significantly such that discharges from groundwater to streams decline, reverse in direction or even stop completely.

Such circumstances related to climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation increase women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work, with repercussions that are discussed below.

Reduction in availability of natural resources affects women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work

Climate change coupled with rapidly rising water demand, unchecked pollution and perennial mismanagement have exacerbated water stress and women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work. The loss of biodiversity and climate-related weather events such as droughts and floods reduce the availability of natural resources such as fish, trees, timber and firewood, mushrooms, honey, and medicinal plants. For example, between 1983 and 2009, some three quarters of the global harvested areas, about 454 million hectares, experienced yield losses induced by meteorological drought, with the cumulative production losses corresponding to US\$166 billion.³³ The lack of availability of natural resources clearly affects women and girls. Women take on a more significant share of unpaid work by working longer hours, undertaking more tasks, and engaging children in economic activities. Girls often are given the responsibility for household tasks, leading to their absence from school and other activities.

It is widely recognized that women and girls are largely responsible for provisioning the water their families need to survive—for drinking, cooking, sanitation and hygiene. During droughts, the work of “caring for others” is expressed partly by standing in queues for water, walking long distances to collect water, and coping with the lack of potable water. Indeed, 1.8 billion people worldwide rely on drinking water from supplies off premises, with women and girls primarily responsible for collecting water in seven out of ten households.³⁴

In 2022 more than a quarter of women globally, or over one billion women, lacked access to safely managed drinking water services, a significant decline from over a third of women with access in 2000. In 2023,

33 IPCC 2022, pp. 584.

34 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and World Health Organization (WHO) 2023.

some 380 million women and girls, or nearly 10 per cent of the world's female population, live with high or critical water stress, which is estimated to go up to 674 million by 2050.³⁵ In Iraq, which is affected by high water stress and where 30 per cent of the rural population has no improved drinking water on premises, women spend up to three hours per day collecting water. In India, in a quarter of rural households with no water on premises, women and girls devote more than 50 minutes per day to collecting water compared to men's and boys' four minutes per day.³⁶

Gendered impacts of fragile food systems

Climate change and environmental degradation underpin food insecurity and malnutrition and the impacts on food systems are increasingly evident. Higher atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations cause lower nutritional quality of wheat, rice and other major crops. Inadequate or insufficient food consumption leads to malnutrition and increases the risk of disease in populations exposed to extreme weather and climate events. A spike in food insecurity can lead to malnutrition, including undernutrition, overweight, obesity and disease susceptibility in low- and middle-income countries. These projected changes are expected to slow the progress towards the eradication of child undernutrition and malnutrition.³⁷

Women and girls are disproportionately affected despite being key contributors to sustainable food systems. They do not reap the same benefits as men and boys, and tend to be more food insecure on average, with women from poor and landless households facing greater food insecurity. The gap in food insecurity between men and women widened from 1.7 percentage points in 2019 to 4.3 percentage points in 2021.³⁸

When available food is inadequate, women and girls bear the brunt of food provisioning and distribution, as in the case with water. Many poor households resort

to reducing the number of meals per day or favouring some household members over others, often in accordance with customary household food distribution practices. For example, it is common in many societies to distribute food according to sex, age and status. Under this system, men are usually served first, followed by boys, then girls, and then women eat last and least.³⁹

Drought-induced crop and income losses also force many women to turn to less productive and/or low-income activities such as subsistence farming, seasonal agricultural labour and participating in public works and employment programmes, adding to their workloads. Women and girls are obliged to cope with food insecurity and insufficiency by increasing time and effort spent on provisioning food for their families and households further afield, collecting food from forests, rivers and other bodies of water, depending on seasonality, availability and access.⁴⁰

Health impacts of climate change and environmental degradation

IPCC AR6 documents a rise in various diseases, which have and will continue to have a disproportional impact on women's and girls' care workloads, as their family members are exposed to vector- and water-borne diseases including dengue, malaria, cholera, diarrhoea, in addition to heat stress. For example, where torrential rain is increasing the rates of diseases such as dengue and chikungunya, women in Delhi, India, and Dhaka, Bangladesh, dedicate on average one hour more per day to care if they have a climate-related illness in the family and are over two times as likely to be sleep deprived.⁴¹

The observed impacts, projected risks and vulnerabilities on health include⁴²:

- The growth of climate-sensitive, food-borne, water-borne and vector-borne diseases. This leads to a significant increase in ill health and premature deaths from climate-sensitive diseases.

35 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and UN Women 2023.

36 UN DESA and UN Women 2022.

37 This summary of observed impacts is drawn from IPCC 2022, Chapter 7.

38 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) 2023.

39 Aguilar 2022.

40 Aguilar 2022.

41 Smith, Olosky and Grosman Fernández 2021.

42 The summary of observed impacts is drawn from IPCC 2022, Chapter 7.

- A global increase in diet-related risk factors and related non-communicable diseases as well as undernutrition, stunting and related childhood mortality, particularly in Africa and Asia, due to climate change and an upsurge in atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide.
- A spike in the population exposed to heat waves, with a differentiated impact in elderly populations.
- Lower access to health care during extreme weather conditions becomes a health risk for Indigenous Peoples and rural people living in remote areas.⁴³
- A rise in mental health impacts is expected from exposure to high temperatures, extreme weather events, displacement, malnutrition, conflict, climate-related economic and social losses, and anxiety, distress and worry about climate change.

Due to insufficient food consumption, increasingly linked to climate change-induced drought as described above, women are prone to health problems. Inadequate food consumption causes stomach aches, vomiting, weakness, diarrhoea and malnutrition. Food shortages also exacerbate the challenges women experience during pregnancy. The prevalence of spontaneous abortions and complications during childbirth—and in the worst case, maternal and infant death—are higher in times of drought due to malnutrition.⁴⁴ Health impacts on women are compounded by greater demands for unpaid care work to take care of sick children and other family members.

Environmental care adds to women’s and girl’s unpaid care workloads

Environmental care, a form of unpaid care, includes people individually or collectively organizing to pursue sustainability through cooperative work and service. This type of work is rarely considered in economic analyses, even though many hours of volunteer or unpaid work are invested. Unfortunately, many projects related to climate change mitigation

and adaptation, such as reforestation, land rehabilitation, waste management, among others, count on women and their unpaid labour as “sustainability saviours”. Such approaches assume that women’s time is “infinitely elastic” and an unlimited resource to sustain people and environments, often ignoring or overlooking women’s own health and well-being and the many competing demands on their time.⁴⁵ These initiatives, led by governments, non-governmental organizations and international organizations, draw upon and reinforce gender stereotypes regarding women’s roles in their families, the community and the environment—that women and girls are responsible for environmental care. Hence the additional time and labour demanded by many climate and environment initiatives actually increase women’s and girls’ unpaid care and domestic work.

Some climate-resilient practices require intensive labour, such as organic agriculture, recycling and composting. Women are primarily responsible for waste management, for example, within the household; it is thus their time and energy most affected by the additional tasks of waste segregation and recycling. “My lack of time does not allow me to be ecological” is a woman’s response in the absence of redistribution of unpaid work within the household.⁴⁶ Women are paid less or often not paid at all for agricultural labour.⁴⁷ Such situations often add to women’s already heavy load of unpaid work without conferring rights, resources and benefits. While the participation of women is vital, their involvement in environmental care does not necessarily address the structural nodes of gender inequality or lead to greater gender equality.

Work by environmental human rights defenders, a form of communal and environmental care work, is often unpaid and unrecognized. As the global demand for natural resources grows, Indigenous Peoples, farmers and small-scale women producers, among others, are at the forefront of sustainability efforts as environmental human rights defenders. For some women, the right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable

43 Amstislavski et al. 2013.

44 Aguilar 2022.

45 UN Women 2014.

46 Chauchan 2021.

47 FAO 2023.

environment⁴⁸ is a matter of life or death for their families and communities. Similarly, a looming chasm exists between the urgency for climate action at all levels and the impunity of attacks on environmental, land and indigenous peoples' rights defenders on the frontlines of the global climate justice movement.⁴⁹ Many women see this “*fight*” as part of their role as caretakers of the resources their families need to survive, as well as part of their stewardship responsibilities, especially for indigenous women, to Mother Earth and to climate justice, as also noted by the Paris Agreement. However, they are attacked and even murdered by those who oppose them because of corporate or political interests.

The increase in femicides, threats and violence against women environmental human rights defenders, including indigenous women, is alarming. In 2022, at least 401 human rights defenders were killed, the majority in Latin America (45 in Mexico, 17 in Honduras, 186 in Colombia, 26 in Brazil). Of the total, 48 per cent were defending land, indigenous peoples' and environmental rights (the most targeted group), 22 per cent were indigenous people and 17 per cent identified as women.⁵⁰

Women environmental human rights defenders are more exposed to gender-based violence because they challenge deeply rooted patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes about the role of women in society.⁵¹ For women, the risks of being environmental human rights defenders are exacerbated by misogyny, and the attacks committed against them are underestimated in formal records, especially in remote and rural areas.⁵² Moreover, women face a double struggle in the public and private spheres. Just as they speak out publicly to protect their land, water and environment, they must also defend their right to speak out and be considered in discussions about the use and care of natural resources in their in their own communities

and families.⁵³ Many women environmental human rights defenders are isolated from their own communities and families,⁵⁴ who insult them as “bad women” or “bad mothers” because of their visibility and the time and effort they spend on activism.⁵⁵ Indigenous women face defamation, threats and physical attacks in their own communities regardless of the rights they defend.⁵⁶

In an effort to safeguard the safety of environmental human rights defenders, the United Nations General Assembly, at its seventieth session, adopted resolution 70/161. With it, progress was made in formally recognizing the vital work of defenders and reaffirmed the “*urgent need to respect, protect, facilitate and promote the work of promoting and defending economic, social and cultural rights, as a vital factor towards the realization of those rights, in particular in relation to the environment and issues of land ownership and development*”.⁵⁷

Similarly, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, target 22 calls to “*ensure the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making, and access to justice and information related to biodiversity by indigenous people and local communities, respecting their cultures and their rights over lands, territories, resources, and traditional knowledge, as well as by women and girls, children and youth, and persons with disabilities and ensure the full protection of environmental human rights defenders*” [emphasis added].⁵⁸

48 UN General Assembly resolution ([A/RES/76/300](#)) on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

49 Front Line Defenders 2023.

50 Front Line Defenders 2023.

51 Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) 2016.

52 Global Witness 2021.

53 Forst 2016.

54 Mesoamerican Initiative of Women Human Rights Defenders 2017.

55 OHCHR 2018.

56 Front Line Defenders 2023.

57 UN General Assembly resolution [A/RES/70/161](#) on human rights defenders.

58 The Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework was adopted at the UN Biodiversity Conference (CBD COP15) in Montreal, Canada on 19 December 2022 as the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework \(CBD/COP/DEC/15/4\)](#). It builds on the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and sets out an ambitious plan to implement broad-based action to bring about a transformation in society's relationship with biodiversity, ensuring that by 2050 the shared vision of “living in harmony with nature” is fulfilled.

II.

EMERGING EFFORTS TO ADDRESS WOMEN'S AND GIRLS' UNPAID CARE, DOMESTIC AND COMMUNAL WORK

This section describes the ways in which the UNCCD, the UNFCCC and other normative frameworks are linking women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work to actions to address climate change and environmental degradation. As discussed above, although the Conventions have not acknowledged or incorporated care issues into their mandates, references to the linkages between women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work and climate change and environmental degradation are starting to emerge, particularly in national communications and reporting to the Conventions.

2.1

National Drought Plans under the UNCCD

In 2021, the UNCCD commissioned a study on the differentiated impacts of desertification, land degradation and drought on women and men.⁵⁹ The document sets forth that whether paid or unpaid, formal or informal, care work must be recognized, reduced and redistributed. The study acknowledges that the linkages between care work and drought have not been extensively analysed.

The study reviewed data on the inclusion of gender issues in the National Drought Plans (NDPs). Nine NDPs developed by Parties to the Convention⁶⁰ are in the forefront with references to care work and drought.⁶¹

Afghanistan. The NDP reports that women and girls had to travel farther from home to collect water and cooking fuel, thus exposing themselves to possible harm. Overall, 61 per cent of the households indicated that women's workload had increased due to drought.

Nearly half of all households—46 per cent—reported that the drought had caused increased tensions within the family. Increased tensions could result in greater gender-based violence in these households.

Bolivia. The NDP states that the contribution of Bolivian women in the reproductive, productive and management fields at both community and political levels is comparable to and sometimes more significant than that of men. Paradoxically, women's roles in these areas are not recognized socially, and various customary norms and practices have contributed to maintaining unequal and unfair gender relations.

Central African Republic. The NDP describes that women's experience and understanding of drought are closely linked to their roles in the household. Whether in urban or rural areas, women bear the primary responsibility for the family's daily survival, even during natural disasters. It is the duty and responsibility of women to supply the household with water and food, either by purchase for some women residing in large urban centres, or by gathering and production for rural and peasant women, who perceive drought through the weight of its effects on the household.

Côte d'Ivoire. The NDP explains that women often bear additional workloads in the event of extreme weather events due to the roles and responsibilities they are expected to assume in caring for the family, while men bear additional responsibilities due to their economic role in the family.

Grenada. The stakeholder consultations during the preparation of the NDP revealed that women and girls have been severely affected by droughts. For example, they miss work in order to take care of children when schools are closed due to lack of water; arrive late for work or need to leave work early in order to cope with water shortages; experience compromised personal hygiene; spend extra time, sometimes losing sleep, in order to collect water from emergency tanks or

⁵⁹ Aguilar 2022.

⁶⁰ UNCCD n.d.

⁶¹ NDP country excerpts have been edited for comprehension and clarity.

late at night when water pressure improves; as well as greater responsibility for taking care of sick family members, which is typically done by women and girls.

Honduras. The NDP says that care work, despite not being economically remunerated, demands more time and dedication, making it difficult for women who provide care to participate in community processes. Therefore, implemented actions must reduce the workload for women, adapting to their availability, and must be inclusive; that is, men must participate actively to obtain positive results, since it is essential to recognize the differences in power relations between men and women in planning processes, especially in rural areas.

Turkmenistan. The NDP mentions that rural women spend more than six times as much time as men on housekeeping; women also work slightly more than men on household plots of land.

Venezuela. Although there are still no official indicators on the use of time and the distribution of care responsibilities between genders, the NDP notes that observation indicates that the responsibility for care work tends to fall on women, especially regarding the care of children, the elderly and people with permanent or temporary disabilities. These characteristics make women more vulnerable to poverty as a consequence of drought as well as making some 39 per cent of the country's families more vulnerable.

Vietnam. The NDP proposes that structural gender challenges, unequal gender relations and power dynamics, including the lack of ownership of land and other production assets, unequal division of labour and inequitable decision-making, must be addressed as all of these inhibit women's access to adaptation technologies and practices.

It is worth noting a relatively new topic, the psychological impact on women when they cannot fulfil their care duties. Two NDPs mention this phenomenon:

Central African Republic. The NDP describes that according to Central African custom, women have a moral obligation—“the duty of the mother”—to feed their children and husbands. The weight of tradition compels them to ensure, whatever the situation, that their husbands and children eat. Urban women

struggle to manage the family budget to make ends meet and have enough money for the market, whereas those in rural areas must travel distances to find food. Drought is a time of reflection, of imagination for women to provide a meal for the family. With thought and imagination comes physical pain. For example, the chore of getting water, generally done by women and girls, becomes difficult during drought. Drought also makes the preparation of cassava chips difficult; this foodstuff is the basis of meals in the country, but the compactness of soil in times of drought makes it difficult to dig up the tubers and there is an absence of water for proper soaking. Drought increases risks of waterborne disease, which could increase women's care responsibilities for sick children.

Venezuela. The NDP described that another dimension to highlight in relation to drought is mental health. Linked to drought, women experience frustration, loss of joy, anger and loss of resilience to face other challenges in life. This is very closely related to their roles as carers, because they are not only affected by a lack of water for their own needs, but also concern for people under their responsibility or care, for example, a daughter who cannot go to school or a relative who is bedridden and cannot be adequately cleaned.

The incorporation of care work in some NDPs may be attributed to concerted efforts made by UNCCD in recent years, particularly its [Global Mechanism \(GM\)](#), in providing close support and guidance to countries on integrating gender into these plans. As part of the drought initiative launched in October 2017, the UNCCD Secretariat and the GM supported 60 countries in the design of NDPs.

2.2

National Determined Contributions under the UNFCCC

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are the planned reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by Parties to the Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC. NDCs are a series of measures and actions that Parties plan to adopt to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. An analysis of the NDCs submitted between October 2021 and July 2022 reveals that 90 per cent provide information related

to gender integration and affirm the Party's commitment to implementing gender-sensitive or in some cases gender-responsive climate policies.⁶²

Concerning the incorporation of women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work in the context of climate change, a more in-depth examination of the second/revised NDCs⁶³ per region (as defined by the UNFCCC) through 1 December 2022 shows that:

Africa. Of the 47 NDCs examined, five (9.4 per cent) contain a reference to elements related to the gender division of labour and women's time poverty.⁶⁴

Cabo Verde. The NDC explains that the key reasons that the majority of women are in poverty and have low productivity are their lack of time for productive labour, lack of land for building assets, lack of financing for extending businesses, and lack of knowledge to increase production and market access. The key to the next big step in gender equality in Cabo Verde is women's economic empowerment.

Côte d'Ivoire. The NDC says that women are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of change climate because of the division of labour and gender roles, economic disparities and imbalances in the time dedicated to tasks.

Guinea. The NDC notes that the availability of water resources greatly affects the place of women in the household. Traditionally in charge of fetching water, they are the first to suffer from a depletion of resources through a loss of time and energy which constrains their economic and social autonomy.

Namibia. The NDC proposes gender analysis should be integrated into vulnerability and risk

assessments to understand the different ways in which disasters affect men and women as well as gender roles and norms. Social roles and a gender division of labour lead to different and specific degrees of exposure and vulnerability for women and girls compared to men and boys.

Somalia. The NDC notes that climate change has exacerbated gender inequality, with women and children affected more by climate change due to lack of access to and control over critical resources, unequal labour division and absence from decision-making processes from the household to the national level.

Asia. Of the 31 NDCs analyzed in the region, only Cambodia's addressed care issues, and of all the NDCs studies worldwide, Cambodia's is the only one that identifies actions with indicators to measure the reduction of women's unpaid care and domestic work.

Cambodia. The NDC describes that in the health sector, gender-disaggregated data are a priority, especially to understand the different impacts of air- and vector-borne diseases on women and men. This is of particular significance to women, who often carry the responsibility for household care, including medical care for the family, but who also play an important role in championing behavioural patterns which may improve health and hygiene and reduce disease spread. Five of the programmes under Cambodia's NDC have been designed to have an impact on women's unpaid care activities:

- *"Actions to promote sustainable sourcing of fuel wood in the garment industry"* to reduce the distance women have to travel to extract fuelwood as well as to reduce the number of children, especially girls, in the industry.
- *"Improvement of Agricultural Productivity and Diversification and Agri-Business Development of rice crops for increase production, improved quality safety, harvesting and post harvesting technique and agrobusiness enhancement"* such that 50 per cent of women participants report a reduction in their workloads and 50 per cent of women participants report a

62 UNFCCC 2022.

63 The NDCs can be found [here](#). The analysis was conducted only on the English, French and Spanish language NDCs. MaxQDA qualitative data analysis software was used to identify keywords (care, unpaid work, domestic work, reproductive work, communal work, community work, care work and household work). Each keyword mentioned was then examined. Using a context analysis framework, the strategies utilized by the countries to address care were also analyzed.

64 NDC country excerpts have been edited for comprehension and clarity.

reduction in hours spent on horticulture as a result of access to improved practices and technologies.

- *“Improvement of support services and capacity building to crop production resilient to climate change by promoting research, trials and upscaling climate smart farming systems that increase resilience to climate change and extreme weather events services”* such that 35 per cent of women farmers report a reduction in hours spent on agricultural activities.
- *“Enhance climate resilience in health service delivery”* so that 50 per cent of women report increased access to water for themselves and their families.
- *“Repair and rehabilitate existing road infrastructure and ensure effective operation and maintenance systems, considering climate change impact”* to ensure women’s access, particularly those living in areas hit hard by climate change, to necessary basic needs, water resources, markets and health care, and that 30 per cent of local women report increased mobility throughout the year due to improved roads.

Europe. Two of the 14 NDCs (including the European Union NDC submission) refer to unpaid care and domestic work.

Albania. The NDC highlights that following the 2015 floods in the southeast of the country, the consequences for women were an increase in their workloads by four hours on average to clean up and to fill the gap due to lack of energy supply and loss of access to services (e.g., kindergarten, schools) that helped to alleviate women’s workload.

Norway. The NDC says that in 2018, a new and comprehensive Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act entered into force. The Act’s purpose is to promote gender equality. The Act provides protection against discrimination on the basis of gender, pregnancy, leave in connection with birth or adoption, and care responsibilities. Women and men are to be given equal opportunities in

education and work and in their cultural and professional development.

Latin America and the Caribbean. Of the 28 NDCs, three countries (10.71 per cent) contain references to unpaid care and domestic work.

Argentina. The NDC mentions that the recognition of the social and environmental importance of care work means its more equitable reorganization, redistribution and social re-evaluation in the context of sustainable development.

Cuba. The NDC states that the use of biogas for the production of heat and electricity will improve the living conditions of producers, mainly women, by improving cooking and working conditions.

Panama. The NDC notes that spread of disease has a direct impact on care responsibilities and workloads, especially for women and girls, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Disparities in access to good quality infrastructure leave women in situations of vulnerability and put at risk social inclusion, poverty reduction, gender equality, and women’s empowerment. The design of sustainable infrastructure that considers the differentiated needs and preferences of men and women leads to more inclusive, sustainable and resilient development.

Regarding gender, the *National Water Security Plan (PNSH) 2015–2050: Water for all* highlights that water scarcity exacerbates gender inequality and, in some cases, involves girls in child labour.

North America. Neither of the two NDCs address the topic of care.

Oceania. Of the 11 NDCs from this region, only one included reference to gender-differentiated roles within the household.

Vanuatu. The NDC describes that climate vulnerability and its consequences not only reflect existing gender inequalities, they also reinforce and exacerbate socially constructed relations of power, norms and practices that constrain progress toward gender equality in Vanuatu. This includes culturally influenced gender roles and

responsibilities that confine women’s activities and mobility to the home ... When age is added to considerations of gender—that is, if the focus is specifically on girls—there is another layer of vulnerability and impact. After climate events, adolescent girls are at additional risk of being pulled out of school to help alleviate extra domestic workloads, like fetching water, that are shouldered by women in households under climate-related stress. Leaving school also makes girls less likely to be informed about climate change and further increases their vulnerability. Such circumstances put into play the early onset of key life transitions, including early pregnancy, that function to direct girls into a cycle of intergenerational poverty, vulnerability and marginalization.

It should be noted that even though 11 per cent of the 133 NDCs (see Table 1) mentioned women’s and girls’ unpaid care and domestic work, only Cambodia’s NDC includes actions to reduce their workloads.

TABLE 1.
NDCs per region that include references to care

Region	Number of NDCs reviewed	Number of NDCs with text on care
Africa	47	5
Asia	31	1
Europe	14	2
Latin America and the Caribbean	28	3
North America	2	0
Oceania	11	1
Total	133	12

National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) under the UNFCCC, which are means of identifying medium- and long-term adaptation needs and developing and

implementing strategies and programs to address those needs, could also serve as entry points for the inclusion of considerations of women’s and girls’ unpaid care, domestic and communal work,⁶⁵ although an analysis of this remains to be done.

2.3 UNFCCC COP27

The co-facilitators of the UNFCCC Subsidiary Body for Implementation in its fifty-sixth session, held in Bonn from 6 to 16 June 2022 in support of COP27, under agenda item 17 “Gender and climate change,” produced an informal note that included, for the first time under these negotiations, reference to unequal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, which stated:

*Stressing the urgency of eliminating persistent historical and structural inequalities, racism, stigmatization and xenophobia, unequal power relations between women and men, discriminatory laws and policies, negative social norms and gender stereotypes, unequal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, and gender-based violence and of eradicating poverty and disadvantage in accessing resources, social protection systems and public services, including universal health services and quality education, in order to realize gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, including in the context of climate change.*⁶⁶

Unfortunately, the text was not approved. One of the lessons learned from this process is the need to build the capacity of negotiators on this issue – since many may not have been aware of the links between women’s and girls’ unpaid care, domestic and communal work and climate change – for example, by drawing on references in IPCC AR6 or the Agreed Conclusions of the sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66).

65 NAP Global Network & UNFCCC 2019.

66 [SBI 56. 06 - 16 Jun. 2022; Draft Text on SBI 56 agenda item 17 Gender and climate change.](#)

2.4

UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66)

The sixty-sixth session of the Commission on the Status of Women held in March 2022 focused on the priority theme, “Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.” In preparation for CSW66, UN Women convened an Expert Group Meeting whose report noted that “*women’s and girls’ disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work—rooted in the highly unequal gender division of labour and distribution of care and domestic work responsibilities within the household and between the household and the state—intensifies in climate and environmental crises and disasters*”.⁶⁷

Similarly, the report recognizes that the economic and social consequences of COVID-19 meant that women experienced increased unpaid care and domestic work and the concomitant loss of jobs and livelihoods. This, in turn, jeopardizes women’s resilience and prospects for recovery from climate and environmental crises. The report also highlights that care must be at the centre of addressing the gendered impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters. This is essential to bring together care for people and care for the planet as a collective responsibility.

These concerns were also reflected in the CSW66 Agreed Conclusions:⁶⁸

Paragraph 23. *Stresses the urgency of eliminating ... the unequal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work ... in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.*

Paragraph 28. *Expresses concern that the economic and social fallout of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has compounded the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters and has pushed people further behind and into extreme poverty. It further*

expresses deep concern over the increased demand for unpaid care and domestic work ...

Paragraph 38. *Acknowledges that natural resources and ecosystems and women’s labour are treated as infinite and are undervalued in the current metrics of economic growth, such as GDP, despite being essential to all economies and the well-being of present and future generations and the planet. It further acknowledges that recognizing, reducing and redistributing women’s disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, and rewarding and representing paid care work, would greatly contribute to this transformation.*

Paragraph 47. *Recognizes that women and girls undertake a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work, which can be exacerbated by climate change, environmental degradation and disaster, limits women’s ability to participate in decision-making processes and occupy leadership positions and poses significant constraints on women’s and girls’ education and training, and on women’s economic opportunities and entrepreneurial activities. It stresses the need to recognize and adopt measures to reduce, redistribute and value unpaid care and domestic work by promoting the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men within the household and by prioritizing, inter alia, sustainable infrastructure, social protection policies and accessible, affordable and quality social services, including care services, childcare and maternity, paternity or parental leave.*

Based on the above, the Commission urges UN Member States to take the following actions:

Paragraph 62 (jj). *Take all appropriate measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute women’s and girls’ disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work by promoting work–life balance, the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men within households and men’s and boys’ equitable sharing of responsibilities with respect to care and household work, including men’s responsibility as fathers and caregivers, through flexibility in working arrangements, without reductions in labour and*

67 UN Women 2021b.

68 United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022a.

social protections ... and the implementation and promotion of legislation and policies such as maternity, paternity, parental and other leave schemes, as well as accessible, affordable and quality social services, including child care and care facilities for children and other dependents, take steps to measure the value of this work in order to determine its contribution to the national economy ...

Paragraph 62 (tt). Support and fund research and analysis to better understand the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation and disasters on women and girls, including in relation

... to paid and unpaid care and domestic work ... in order to inform policies and programmes.

Paragraph 62 (uu). Support and finance a gender-responsive, equitable and sustainable transition towards low-emission energy systems, including by rapidly scaling up the deployment of clean power generation and energy efficiency measures, that work for all people and the planet, taking into account the potential of ecosystem-based approaches and nature-based solutions, with gender-sensitive and age-inclusive social protection and care at the centre.

III.

ADDRESSING PAID AND UNPAID CARE WORK THROUGH GENDER-RESPONSIVE JUST TRANSITIONS

Care as a public good is central to any thinking about a just transition to a low-emission, climate-resilient economy and key for a gender-responsive just transition. The transformation of the economy from reliance on fossil fuels to one that is low-carbon and sustainable means a just transition of the workforce and creation of decent work with social protection and care at the centre (see Box 5). Countries are pursuing a [decarbonization agenda](#) towards the goals of the Paris Agreement, and 24 million new jobs could be created worldwide by 2030 to achieve the just transition necessary to hold global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.⁶⁹

However, more than 80 per cent of the new jobs created by the decarbonization agenda will be in sectors currently dominated by men. Only 20 per cent of these new jobs will be created in sectors where women are the majority.⁷⁰ Discriminatory social norms and stereotypes, persistent gender gaps in secondary and tertiary science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education and occupational segregation keep young women from attaining high-quality jobs in the green and blue economy and in climate and environmental governance.⁷¹ For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, women are well positioned in sectors such as agriculture, forestry and tourism, where mostly lower-paid jobs are likely to be created, while they are underrepresented in key sectors offering the best paid green jobs such as renewable energy and sustainable transport.⁷²

In building a low-carbon and sustainable economy, a just transition can ensure that women are not left behind and that their existing and potential

contributions to sustainable development are not undermined by their disproportionate share of unpaid care, domestic and communal work.⁷³ To lay the foundations of gender-responsive just transitions, greater investments in the care economy, renewable energy and sustainable agriculture are needed. The creation of new jobs in the care economy—which are quintessentially green and regenerate human capabilities—is a major priority, alongside ensuring that women have the right to work and rights at work while benefiting from new quality jobs in emerging sectors such as renewable energy.⁷⁴ Care jobs – such as in health, education and long-term care – are low-carbon jobs. An average health or care job produces 26 times less greenhouse gas than a manufacturing job, over 200 times less than an agricultural job and nearly 1,500 times less than a job in the oil and gas sector.⁷⁵ Care jobs are an investment that contributes to greening the economy as well as increasing decent paid work, especially for women.

Without universal access to high-quality and affordable care, significant barriers will remain to women attempting to take advantage of the job opportunities created by the decarbonization agenda. For example, investment in sustainable, low-carbon child-care services and infrastructure should go hand-in-hand with investment in clean energy, to increase the numbers of women entering a workforce that today is predominantly male.⁷⁶

69 ILO 2018b.

70 Saget, Vogt-Schilb and Luu 2020.

71 United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022b; Kwauk and Casey 2021.

72 UN Women and the African Development Bank 2021.

73 ILO n.d.

74 UN Women 2021a; UN Women and UNIDO 2023.

75 Women's Budget Group and Wen 2022.

76 UN Women and UNIDO 2023; Palladino and Gunn-Wright 2021.

BOX 5.

Gender-responsive just transition

The Paris Agreement calls for “a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs”, which is reinforced by the International Labour Organization [Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all](#) on managing transitions to environmentally sustainable, low-carbon economies to create decent jobs at scale, minimize impacts on affected workers, make the economy more inclusive, eradicate poverty and promote social protection.

A gender-responsive, just transition is grounded in the centrality of gender equality and care in policies and programmes to foster an economy that works for all people and the planet while upholding rights and the principle of leaving no one behind, inclusive of people facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, class, age, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability, marital status and migration status, among others.

An alternative development model is called for that places the elimination of inequalities and poverty above the imperative of economic growth and that combats wasteful consumption and environmental degradation rather than viewing them as ingredients of growth. Galvanizing green and blue economies through investments (e.g., in expanded gender-responsive public services, universal social protection, health and care systems that are adaptive to climate change, and sustainable transport and infrastructure) that translate into new and abundant decent jobs for women and men should be at the heart of any just transition.

Source: United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022b.

Aligned with efforts towards a gender-responsive just transition, countries need to formulate, invest in and implement gender-responsive policies and programmes that create green jobs for women; support women and their enterprises to access financial products and services to participate in the transition; enhance women’s participation in STEM fields; provide sustainable, low-carbon care services and infrastructure to enable women to access green jobs; and prioritize efforts to retrain and reskill women workers to facilitate their transition from low-productivity, low-paid jobs to quality low-carbon ones.

At the same time, climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives that are intended to contribute to a just transition must be gender responsive. This means first, *not increasing* women’s and girls’ unpaid care, domestic and communal work, which happens when such initiatives rely on women and their unpaid labour as “sustainability saviours” (please see section on “Environmental care adds to women’s and girl’s unpaid care workloads”). Second, just transition initiatives should actively *decrease* women’s and girls’ unpaid care, domestic and communal work by emphasizing climate-resilient and time- and effort-reducing technologies and practices and ensuring women’s and girls’ greater access to public services, social protection and sustainable infrastructure, including care services and infrastructure. No initiative, large or small, can be considered sustainable and contributing to a gender-responsive just transition if it increases, rather than decreases, the unpaid care, domestic and communal work of women and girls.⁷⁷

77 UN Women 2014; United Nations Economic and Social Council 2022b.

IV.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Emerging efforts at different levels are recognizing the linkages between climate change and women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work. Sustainable development policies and initiatives should build on such efforts to recognize care as a public good, universal right and essential building block for the well-being of societies, economies and environments.

At the global, regional and national level, efforts to address climate change and environmental degradation should embrace and promote a care society that cares for people and those who care for them, as well as care for the planet.

It is recommended that the governments and other stakeholders *recognize, reduce and redistribute* unpaid care, domestic and communal work in the context of climate change and environmental degradation while bearing in mind the need to *reward and represent* paid care work in a gender-responsive just transition with sufficient *resources* towards low-carbon climate-resilience, with the following actions:

Governments

- Take all appropriate measures to recognize, reduce and redistribute women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care, domestic and communal work when developing, implementing and evaluating climate change and environmental degradation policies and actions.
- Incorporate women's and girls' paid and unpaid care and domestic work as a priority in negotiating country positions towards MEAs and in national communications and reporting to the MEAs such as NDCs, NAPs and NDPs.
- Ensure the participation, voice and agency of women and girls to advocate for and monitor the implementation of the 5Rs of care work in negotiations and decision-making related to climate and environmental policies at the subnational, national, regional and international levels.
- Develop or strengthen national and local government laws, policies and services that recognize and address women's and girls' disproportionate share of unpaid care, domestic and communal work.
- Ensure that national gender equality policies or plans address women and girls' paid and unpaid care, domestic, and communal work in relation to climate change and environmental degradation.
- Incorporate the issue of women's and girls' paid and unpaid care and domestic work in relation to climate change and environmental degradation in national CEDAW reports.
- Address the crippling debt crisis and austerity measures in developing countries by calling for debt cancellation and an overhaul of the global debt architecture, to allow countries to make the investments necessary to achieve climate goals and the 5Rs of care work.
- Invest in universal social protection systems and accessible, affordable and quality care services that are adaptive to a changing climate.
- Provide quality healthcare, including mental healthcare, to women and girls, particularly the poorest and marginalized, in the face of increases in unpaid care and domestic work.
- Invest in quality green jobs, including decent care jobs, for women as well as sustainable care services and infrastructure and adaptive social protection towards a gender-responsive just transition.
- Invest in the collection, analysis and generation of more and better gender data and statistics, including time-use surveys, with an intersectional approach on the interlinkages between gender equality, climate change and environmental degradation.
- Ensure implementation, monitoring and reporting on SDG target 5.4.1 to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

International organizations, UN agencies, academia and civil society

- Support and fund research, data collection and analysis to better understand the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation on women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work to inform policies, programmes and initiatives and paid work in the context of a just transition.
- Develop the capacity of policymakers and practitioners to address the 5Rs of care work in their climate and environment investments and initiatives at the global, regional and national level.
- Enhance the capacities of national gender equality mechanisms and women's civil society organizations and gender advocates to understand and address the linkages between women's and girls' paid and unpaid care, domestic and communal work in relation to climate change and environmental degradation.
- Develop a unified and concerted advocacy strategy to support the incorporation of considerations related to women's and girls' paid and unpaid care, domestic and communal work in MEA processes.
- Improve the capacity of gender negotiators under the MEAs, with special attention to the UNFCCC, so they can understand and address the linkages between women's and girls' paid and unpaid care, domestic and communal work and climate change and environmental degradation.
- Collaborate with the gender focal points of the financing mechanisms associated with the MEAs (Global Environment Facility, Climate Investment Funds, Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund and Global Mechanism) and multilateral development banks to identify ways to incorporate women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work into project approval, monitoring and performance criteria.

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