

CLIMATE CHANGE

Introduction

Climate change constitutes a serious and existential threat to human security, ecosystems, water supply, food security, and human health. It also, at least indirectly, [increases the risk of violent conflict](#) and associated human suffering. How national governments respond to it has domestic and transnational implications, including [violent conflict, migration, human rights violations](#), and [gender inequalities](#). Such responses are heavily influenced by gender dynamics, with patriarchal norms, expectations and exclusionary practices contributing to increased levels of [climate vulnerability and conflict](#). There is [no graver threat](#) to women's security than climate change. Constituting a majority of the world's poor, women are more likely to depend on fragile local natural resources for their livelihoods than men; have less access to economic and material resources and resilience; and are less able to flee or migrate in response to climate change due to caring roles and responsibilities. While gender inequalities mean women are disproportionately impacted by the negative impacts of climate change, there is [evidence](#) that climate change exacerbates existing social inequalities further still. Climate change must be recognised and approached as a central pillar of any feminist foreign policy (FFP).

Climate change, Women Peace and Security, and feminist foreign policy

There is widespread consensus within existing feminist and FFP literature that intersectionality is a critical guiding principle. This also resonates with the increasing critical and indeed intersectional application of Women, Peace and Security (WPS). It recognises that feminism is not simply about women but [should also actively seek to avoid, disrupt and shift discriminatory power structures and norms such as neocolonialism and racism](#) (exemplified by extractivism and asymmetrical exposure to debt and climate risks); acknowledge the unique knowledge and values held by Indigenous peoples, especially women and gender-diverse people, on environmental management and conservation; commit to protect [Indigenous women and girl human rights defenders](#); and [guarantee the full and meaningful participation](#) of women and girls in all their diversity in climate change policy development and action.

Climate change is an increasing part of the WPS mandate, and was codified by [UN Security Council Resolution 2242](#) (2015). According to research by SIPRI, as of 2020, [one out of every four](#) national action plans (NAPs) included climate change, albeit mostly in narrative sections. The same research found that the NAPs of Liberia, Nigeria, Finland, and Ireland were the most concrete. It also noted that the USA released a [dedicated strategy on climate change and women](#) in 2023, outlining explicitly how climate action and WPS implementation must be aligned. The United Kingdom's [fifth NAP](#) recognises the consequences of climate change on the security of women and girls, and commits to mainstreaming gender considerations into climate policy and using its International Climate Finance to support women and girls in developing countries to respond to climate change.

Yet current action on the linkages between WPS and climate across these states largely focus on the participation of women, girls, and in some cases gender-diverse people, in prevention activities including international climate negotiations, climate science, and adaptation and mitigation policy development. Increased attention on FFP can strengthen [holistic WPS approaches inclusive of climate action](#) and increase the impact of gender-responsive climate and conflict interventions as [benefit-multipliers](#) tackling root causes of inequality and environmental degradation. The existing architecture of WPS can ensure women, girls, and gender diverse people are seen as actors with expertise and leadership rather than passive victims, whereas an explicit feminist approach can prevent the climate-gender-conflict nexus from becoming highly [securitised](#).

In the states that have adopted FFP, these approaches [tend to employ](#) the “triple R” approach emphasising the promotion of: (1) rights for women and girls, (2) their representation and participation in decision-making, and (3) resourcing gender equality initiatives. A number of these apply this approach to climate change, with a focus primarily on promoting women’s full, meaningful, and equal participation and leadership in decision-making. This commitment is critical, and the need to invest in support initiatives is pressing. Such efforts should [recognise and value women's contributions](#) in managing natural resources and promoting sustainable development, and can challenge the pervasive casting of [women as passive victims rather than stewards of environmental justice](#) and change agents.

Yet while the framing of the “triple R” approach and the focus on promoting representation of women in climate decision-making is important, such approaches remain limited in scope and potential and should be viewed as ‘minimum standard’ and not best practice. They fail to harness the dual transformative potential of FFPs to (1) strengthen gender equity outcomes via improved climate change policy and action and (2) strengthen climate change policy outcomes through gender-responsive and inclusive approaches.

It is also important to recognise and mitigate against the risks of burdening women as ‘sustainability saviours’ through this approach. As such, it is critical to focus on addressing the underlying and overlapping social, political, and economic factors driving climate change and intersectional gender inequality. Key opportunities are outlined below.

Opportunities for transformative intervention

There is a critical opportunity to move beyond ‘minimum standards’ and use a critical feminist lens to create mutually reinforcing policy and action on climate change and gender equality, following two key transformative pathways:

Leverage climate policy and action to transform social, economic and political inequalities: Existing structural and cultural inequities and unequal power relationships are major reasons why the climate crisis is particularly harmful for already marginalised segments of society. Climate change policy and action has the potential to further exacerbate these existing structural and cultural inequities and unequal power relationships, but it also has the potential to transform them if developed through an anti-oppressive and feminist rationale and process. By taking an intersectional, decolonial, and gender-transformative approach to climate policy and action, [there is an opportunity](#) to address the roots of climate injustice and inequality, which include patriarchy, neo-colonialism, racism, and global power-inequalities. It is essential that the [economic root causes](#) of the climate crisis are confronted, challenging the current economic status quo that has led to the brink of climate and biodiversity collapse. Policies that reflect feminist alternative models of economies designed to foster the well-being of all people and the planet itself should be promoted. [An emphasis on strengthening equality and inclusion](#), and promoting feminist alternatives social, political, and economic systems through climate initiatives, is key to mitigating the vulnerability of those most at risk, guaranteeing that climate policy is fair and equitable for vulnerable people, and to ensuring that we preserve planetary well-being. A [gender-transformative analysis of policies and measures](#) is a necessary starting point to leverage and guide this opportunity.

Unlock effective climate policy and action through just and equitable approaches: [Evidence](#) suggests that countries with higher levels of gender inequality are most vulnerable to climate change, and see lower levels of effective climate action. High rates of inequality and socio-economic vulnerability inhibit a country’s [adaptive capacity](#) in the face of climate change, impeding the ability of communities, institutions, and systems to respond quickly and effectively to the impacts of climate impacts and pressures. Conversely, [effective climate responses are more likely when when actors work in equitable, just, and enabling ways](#) to reconcile divergent interests, values and worldviews, toward equitable and just outcomes. Evidence presented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change shows that carefully designed and implemented legal, policy, and process interventions from the local to global that specifically address inequities based on gender, ethnicity, disability, age, location, and income can reduce overall structural vulnerabilities to climate change. It also highlighted that the just and equitable participation of Indigenous peoples is key, showing that climate policy and action that connects scientific, Indigenous, local, practitioner, and other forms of knowledge are more effective and sustainable because they are locally appropriate and lead to more legitimate, relevant, and effective actions. With regard to specific opportunities, [sexual and reproductive health and rights represent one priority area](#), contributing to

change resilience and socio-economic development through improved health and well-being of women and their children, including increased access to education, gender equity, and economic status. Likewise, another priority is [supporting and funding protection mechanisms](#) for women human rights defenders and environmental defenders, and promoting their roles as leaders in environmental decision-making to strengthen climate outcomes. It is therefore critical to have [rights-based approaches](#) that focus on capacity-building, creating enabling environments for the participation of the most marginalised, and often therefore most vulnerable, groups and their access to key resources, including financing, to reduce risk and adapt. Identifying opportunities to leverage, and extend and strengthen, existing rights-based frameworks to advance the approaches outlined is a priority.

Conclusion

A FFP approach to climate change presents many opportunities. It provides a framework to guarantee and move beyond 'minimum standards'. It provides an agenda around which to facilitate and coordinate civil society dialogues, exchange, and idea generation at a critical moment for governmental policy and action on climate action and foreign and domestic policy. [Evidence](#) suggests that just as the urgency and pressures surrounding the climate crisis increase, the political buy-in to work on more gender-inclusive, systemic, and transformational solutions is stalling. Crucially, the discourse around FFP currently permits a level of transformative ambition to push forward and accelerate emerging climate-inclusive approaches to the WPS agenda.

However, the question of how an FFP approach can be mobilised to accelerate climate justice integration into WPS poses a number of significant questions in practice. What are the potential risks and benefits of seeking to progress gender-just and equal approaches to climate change via national-level policies, rather than through the hard-won WPS bureaus and mechanisms now provided for within international multilateral cooperation? What would taking an FFP-led approach to climate change mean for the stability and political support for the agenda across domestic political transitions?

Navigating the pathway between the clear opportunities and significant risks presented by an FFP approach to climate change requires a focus on 'harmonising' efforts between advancing FFP and the WPS agenda. This should include identifying how some more transformative interventions and outcomes that emerge from an FFP analysis of climate change can currently be integrated and advanced through existing WPS infrastructure and NAPs, while also analysing how the WPS agenda itself can be reformed to better deliver more ambitious and transformative goals.

Key recommendations

His Majesty's government should:

Leverage climate policy and action to transform social, economic, and political inequalities that cause human insecurity, undermine adaptive capacity, and drive climate vulnerability and instability.

- Ensure that all future Climate Change National Adaptation Programmes, and other relevant development strategies and delivery plans such as WPS NAPs, apply an intersectional analysis bringing together climate and gender.
- Guarantee the meaningful participation of women and girls most affected by the climate crisis to ensure climate policies are gendered and address the needs and experiences of women and girls and promote and strengthen their rights and gender equality.

Integrate a participatory, consultative, and gender-transformative analysis into all climate policies and measures to identify and guide context-specific opportunities; and conduct a climate and environment analysis of all gender policies to understand and adequately respond to linkages

- Support and fund protection mechanisms for women human rights defenders and environmental defenders that are based on a sound protection strategy.

Recognise that investing in intersectional equality initiatives and just approaches to climate change is a key contributor to unlocking effective and sustainable climate policy and action, and invest in initiatives with these gender-transformative objectives.

- Ensure the inclusion of women, girls, gender-diverse people, Indigenous peoples, and other frontline communities across all national, bilateral, and multilateral climate negotiations, and ensure their participation is meaningful in the planning, developing, and implementing of climate policies.
- Catalyse and enable effective climate action by supporting WROs and other frontline climate communities through long-term, core, and flexible funding and provide additional capacity-building support directly or via partners.

Focus on strengthening coherence between FFP approaches to climate change and the WPS agenda.

- Develop, design, implement, and monitor NAPs on WPS that are inclusive of climate-related conflict and insecurity.
 - Support and conduct research to identify how existing WPS infrastructure and NAPs can be leveraged to advance gender- and inequality-transformative interventions and outcomes that emerge from an FFP analysis of climate change.
 - Collaborate with civil society, academia and champion states on how the WPS agenda itself can be reformed to better encourage and deliver more ambitious and gender-transformative goals on climate response and justice.
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