

PROMOTING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND SOLUTIONS FOR A HEALTHY AND JUST PLANET



Recommendations and Action Steps for Stockholm+50

Compiled by the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network

"This is a moment of truth for people and planet alike. COVID and climate have brought us to a threshold. We cannot go back to the old normal of inequality, injustice and heedless dominion over the Earth. Instead we must step towards a safer, more sustainable and equitable path. The door is open; the solutions are there."

António Guterres
UN Secretary General¹

"We are not separate from nature– We are Nature, and we are Nature protecting itself. If we continue along this path of unraveling the web of life and carelessly burning the Earth in fossil fuels, we will be yet another species to disappear. What will our legacy be in seven generations?"

Casey Camp-Horinek
Ponca Nation
Environmental Ambassador
WECAN Board Member

The science is clear: we must keep global warming below 1.5°Celsius to preserve a liveable and healthy planet for ourselves, future generations, and all of Nature.

The climate crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, and socio-ecological injustices continue to intensify and deepen due to interconnected systems of capitalism, racism, the commodification of nature, colonialism, imperialism, and patriarchy. To confront these deepening crises and accelerate a path forward, we need to have collective cross-cutting approaches and actions to secure a healthy and thriving planet for all generations.

At Stockholm+50, governments, financial institutions, businesses, and stakeholders have convened to celebrate 50 years since the first international UN summit on the environment, and to accelerate action to achieve the 2030 Agenda² and beyond. As part of the dialogues, it is vital that women and feminists stand at the forefront of policy-making and action. Due to unequal gender norms globally, women continue to be the most adversely impacted by climate change, and socio-ecological degradation, derailing progress toward gender equity and the 2030 Agenda.

Indigenous, Black and Brown women, women from low-income communities, and women from the Global South bear an even heavier burden from the impacts of the climate and other crises because of the historic and continuing impacts of colonialism, racism and misogyny; and in many cases, because they are more reliant upon natural resources for their survival and/or live in areas that have poor infrastructure.

Yet, within this context, we know that women are simultaneously indispensable actors and leaders of just and effective solutions, demonstrating every day that they have unique and essential ideas and skills to offer to advance the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which are at the heart of the 2030 Agenda, aimed to protect and uplift our global communities and the planet.

Furthermore, since its inception, civil society has noted the constraints and limitations of the SDGs in fully providing bold and urgent action that scientists have determined is necessary as we face catastrophic ecological tipping points. Our recommendations challenge governments to approach the SDG's with a perspective of deep structural change that leads to equitable solutions and the protection of Nature. The SDG's can only be truly achieved if there is a systemic analysis that seeks to dismantle structural patriarchy, colonialism, racism, and endless economic growth models, and instead integrate socially just environmental frameworks³ that have been outlined by peoples' movements for decades.

THE DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACT AND INEQUITIES OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON WOMEN

Worldwide, women farmers feed the world, but own less than 10% of land. Women also have less access to agricultural assets, inputs, supports and services. Evidence indicates that if these women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields by 20 to 30 percent.⁹

As of September 2021, there are only 26 women currently serving as Heads of State. At this current rate, achieving gender parity would take another 130 years.⁸

Women in Global South nations engage disproportionately in subsistence farming and fuel and water collection.⁶ As droughts, floods and other erratic weather events increase, there will be an increased burden on women holding responsibility for their families food, water, and energy needs.⁷

Women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die during a disaster. Women accounted for 61 percent of fatalities caused by Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, 70–80 percent in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and 91 percent in the 1991 cyclone in Bangladesh.⁵

Women make up upwards of 80 percent of climate refugees. 2009 studies report that women comprise 20 million of the 26 million people estimated to have been displaced by climate change.⁴

Much of women's work in and outside of the home is not recognized, resulting in 'time poverty'. 'Time poverty' may increase with climate change, as it becomes more difficult to secure water, food, and fuel for cooking and heating. Increased burdens reduce women's ability to engage in education or income generating opportunities.¹⁰

UPLIFTING THE POWER OF WOMEN'S CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Globally, women are responsible for the majority of the world's food production. In most Global South countries, women produce between 40-80% of food, and are central stewards of seeds and agricultural biodiversity.¹¹

One study sampling 72 countries in the Global South and Global North found that a one unit increase in a country's score on the Women's Political Empowerment Index was associated with a 11.51% decrease in the country's carbon emissions.¹²

Women and girls are responsible for collecting water in almost two-thirds of households in developing countries and hold vital knowledge of local water systems and stewardship practices.¹³ The UN has repeatedly recognized that effective sustainable water resource management engages women at all levels of decision-making and implementation.¹⁴

Actively involving women to participants in management and decision making surrounding local forests,¹⁵ and disaster planning and response lead to more successful programs and projects.¹⁶

80% of remaining global biodiversity is within the lands of global Indigenous peoples.¹⁷ Indigenous women are at the forefront of efforts to protect these territories¹⁸ of socio-ecological diversity and hold invaluable Traditional Ecological Knowledge¹⁹ critical to healing the Earth's climate and cycles.²⁰

Electing women politicians in national parliaments leads countries to adopt more stringent climate change policies, which results in lower carbon dioxide emissions.²¹



Photo: Lori Waselchuk/WECAN International

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN) is providing recommendations for governments and financial institutions attending Stockholm+50 to encourage ambitious action for our communities and the planet.

The recommendations were produced parallel to the 2021 UN General Assembly, as part of the Call to Action²² from the "Global Women's Assembly for Climate Justice: Solutions from the Frontlines and the Protection and Defense of Human Rights and Nature," organized by the Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN). The original Call to Action was collectively discussed and endorsed by 150 organizations, representing millions globally, and based on the tireless work, efforts, and frameworks²³ of diverse global climate and social justice movements.

The Assembly hosted 20 panels featuring over 100 grassroots, Indigenous, Black, Brown, and frontline women leaders, global advocates, and policy-makers from 40 countries addressing environmental and social injustice, drawing attention to root causes of multiple interlocking crises, and presenting the diverse array of visions, projects, policy frameworks and strategies with which they are working to shape a healthy and equitable world.

For long-lasting change, it is essential to collectively recognize, understand, and transform the dominant social constructs that are at the root of environmental degradation and interconnected injustices. In order to do this, we are calling for a transformation of how we relate to the natural world and to one another. We must transition from an extractivist, colonial paradigm to a sustainable, globally-conscious paradigm of respect, restore and replenish.

Thus far, it is clear that countries are not on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals outlined in the Agenda 2030 framework.²⁴ While global progress on the SDGs was lacking prior to 2019, it has been further delayed by the proliferation of multiple global crises.

In the face of escalating and expanding crises, we are calling for bold action from both governments and financial institutions, as these entities often work in tandem and enable the actions and policies of the other. The following recommendations offer frameworks and action steps toward achieving the global collective goal of a healthy and prosperous future and planet.

ACTION STEPS FOR GOVERNMENTS

1. End Fossil Fuel Expansion and Rapidly Accelerate a Just Transition to 100% Renewable and Regenerative Energy

It is imperative that governments align their actions with the Paris Agreement target of keeping global warming at or below 1.5° C. To do so, policymakers must immediately halt the extraction, expansion, and burning of fossil fuels, and implement a Just Transition to a 100% renewable and regenerative economy and social system.

- Commit to a binding international emissions reductions plan that limits global temperature rise to below 1.5°C, in line with the IPCC Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C and the 2021 IPCC Sixth Assessment Report.
- Prohibit new permits and leases for fossil fuel companies.²⁵
- Divest public funds from coal, oil and gas corporations. End all subsidies and insurance allowances to oil, gas and coal projects.
- Implement the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities in all climate finance.²⁶
- Decentralize and democratize ownership of renewable and regenerative solutions. Invest in community-owned solar and wind, public green utilities and nationalized energy industries.²⁷
- Support fossil fuel workers to find new employment in renewable energy, transport and land use sectors.
- Ensure dignified conditions for all care workers. Care work, from childcare to healthcare, is an undervalued and underpaid sector that disproportionately employs women and women of color. At the same time, it is a crucial backbone of our economic and social system, and plays a key part in the transition to a renewable, regenerative economy.²⁸
- Reject “net zero” schemes.²⁹
- Reject false solutions, such as fracked gas, nuclear energy, geo-engineering, bioenergy and biofuels,³⁰ carbon capture and storage, and forest offsetting.
- Endorse the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.³¹

2. Promote Women’s Leadership and Gender Equity

Due to unequal gender norms, women and gender non-binary people are disproportionately impacted by climate change and fossil fuel extraction. At the same time, they are crucial leaders in the transition to a just, renewable future. Countless studies have shown that when women hold positions of leadership at all levels, entire communities and nature benefit.³²

- Ensure women’s full and equal participation in all aspects of climate policy and finance.
- Realize the Paris Agreement principles that all climate actions must respect human rights, including the promotion of gender equity. Use the UNFCCC Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan to guide activities.³³
- Acknowledge the unique and essential roles, responsibilities, solutions, needs, and desires of women in climate change mitigation efforts.

- Uplift the leadership and solutions of diverse identities across the gender spectrum.
- Given the crucial role of women, and particularly women of color, in the care economy, their rights and well-being must be respected and upheld.³⁴
- Learn from and respect Indigenous women's traditional ecological knowledge as central to climate solutions.
- Honor women's rights to self-determination in all contexts, from the right to make reproductive choices to the choice of where and how to live and work.

3. Protect the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The traditional ecological knowledge of agriculture, seeds and biodiversity held by Indigenous communities is indispensable for confronting climate change, even as Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately harmed by fossil fuel development, deforestation, extractive industries and climate impacts. In every step of the Just Transition, the rights of Indigenous Peoples must be upheld and the leadership of Indigenous Peoples respected.

- Uphold all treaties with Indigenous Peoples and immediately halt the violation of treaty rights
- Defend Indigenous Peoples' rights to inhabit traditional lands undisturbed by industrial projects and extractive industries.
- Respect and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent in all cases.³⁵
- Prioritize Indigenous Peoples' decision-making power at the national and international levels.
- Learn from and follow Indigenous and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.
- Invest in Indigenous People's global leadership to protect and promote healthy relationships with life-sustaining ecosystems.

4. Protect Forests and Biodiversity

The maintenance of healthy forests and robust biodiversity is crucial to the fight against climate change. Globally, the stewardship of forests and biodiversity lies heavily in the hands of women, local communities and Indigenous Peoples.³⁶ The success of forest and biodiversity conservation depends on immediately halting all deforestation and respecting women's leadership, local use rights, and traditional ecological knowledge.

- Impose a global moratorium on the logging and burning of all old growth forests.³⁷
- Immediately halt the burning of forests to produce cropland or pastureland for ruminative livestock.
- Set forestry management targets that are in line with the UN Convention on Biological Diversity.³⁸
- Phase out all agricultural practices that cause soil erosion, depletion and compaction.
- Oppose the commodification of forest carbon through carbon offset schemes. Forest offsets have been widely, scientifically discredited.³⁹

5. Preserve Oceans and Freshwater and Address Water Security

Earth's oceans and the hydrological cycle are gravely threatened by climate change. Governments must act now to halt the greenhouse gas emissions, pollution, and human exploitation that are destabilizing the water systems fundamental to all life on Earth.

- Recognize the human right to sufficient, safe, clean, affordable, and physically accessible water.⁴⁰
- Outlaw water privatization. Water should be a free, public good everywhere.
- Implement natural ecological water treatment methods.

- Protect vulnerable and threatened fisheries and coral reefs in marine sanctuaries (Marine Protected Areas).
- Clean up the plastic, sewage and trash in the world's oceans, streams, rivers, and freshwater systems.
- Recognize Integrated Water Resource Management for better understanding of the value of water.

6. Promote Food Security and Food Sovereignty

Hotter temperatures, changing precipitation patterns and extreme weather events are already causing global disruptions to food production and storage.⁴¹ Climate change is a primary cause of food insecurity, even as our industrialized food system drives pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.⁴² For this reason, we must promote the holistic management of our food system, both to mitigate climate change and prevent hunger and malnutrition. Gender disparities in access to land, water, credit, technology and tenure rights inhibit women's food security. At the same time, women farmers feed the world, and play key roles in maintaining food security. In affecting deep changes to our agricultural system, we must center the leadership of women, Indigenous Peoples, and smallholder farmers.

- Support decentralized, "people-run" economies, natural, non-genetically modified foods, and cyclical and sustainable agro-ecological farming practices.
- Outlaw international trade agreements that determine seed "ownership" and "use." Prohibit the global patenting of seeds.⁴³
- Reject false solutions such as climate-smart agriculture, soil sequestration programs, Ag-NBS (Nature Based Solutions), and payments for environmental services (PES).
- Support communities with skills and financing to take increasing ownership of their local agricultural sovereignty.
- Reduce the production and consumption of industrial meat and dairy products. Industrial animal agriculture produces a third of global greenhouse gas emissions.⁴⁴
- Support Indigenous communities to maintain their traditional food practices.

7. Protect the Rights of Nature

The Rights of Nature is a groundbreaking legal framework that recognizes natural systems, such as rivers, forests, mountain ranges, and water bodies, as rights-bearing entities with an inviolable claim to protection and preservation. Although the Rights of Nature is new to our legal system, it is based on traditional knowledge from Indigenous Peoples about how to live in harmony with the natural laws of the Earth.

- Recognize the Rights of Nature in law and practice.
- End the commodification, financialization, and exploitation of all ecosystems such as forests, grasslands, deltas, rivers, and wildlife preserves.
- End market-based mechanisms that purport to protect ecosystems, but actually promote the industrial and monocultural destruction of biodiverse regions and hotspots. These include carbon offset schemes.
- Based on the Universal Declaration of Rights of Mother Earth legal framework, acknowledge that nature in all its life forms has the right to exist, persist, maintain and regenerate its vital cycles.⁴⁵

ACTION STEPS FOR FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

By removing support from harmful projects and re-directing resources into climate solutions, financial institutions can be agents of positive change. In order to maintain 1.5° C of global warming, financial institutions must align their actions with the ambitious emissions pathway set forth in the Paris Agreement and commit to respect human rights and the rights of Indigenous Peoples at every turn.

- Halt financing to any project that would explore new fossil fuel reserves, expand fossil fuel extraction, or build new fossil fuel infrastructure.
- Rapidly phase out financing for existing fossil fuel projects. Require existing fossil fuel clients to publish plans by COP26 to phase out fossil fuel operations on a timeline aligned with SR1.5 pathway 1. Decline financing to companies that refuse to publish such plans.
- Deny loans to any company or project that fails to comply with a No Deforestation, No Peatland, No Exploitation (NDPE) policy at a corporate group level.
- Require all investee companies to uphold human rights in accordance with the International Bill of Human Rights, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.⁴⁶
- Conduct direct consultations with Indigenous, frontline, and local communities in decision-making processes in areas where operations impact those communities.
- Refuse financing to projects involving false solutions or “net zero” carbon accounting, including carbon capture and storage, nuclear power production, and bioenergy.
- Acknowledge and redress the role of one’s financial institution in perpetrating past and current gendered and racialized harms against women and the climate.
- Invest in and facilitate a Just Transition. Fund dignified, green jobs, and care jobs at every level, especially in community-owned and democratically managed ventures.
- Invest in community-led solutions, such as regenerative agricultural, energy, and forestry ventures, led by Global South, frontline and Black, Brown and Indigenous communities and women.



Photo: Emily Arasim/WECAN International

CONCLUSION

Global movements have spent decades calling for government action to address the climate crisis and socio-environmental degradation. It is clear from the most recent IPCC reports that climate change is unequivocally caused by humans, the worst impacts are yet to come, and current government commitments will not keep global warming below 1.5° Celsius.⁴⁷

We know we can do better, and that we must act swiftly in the short window of time we have.

Uplifting women's and feminist leadership and solutions is necessary as we reach this vital point for humanity. Globally women are leading community-led solutions that promote food sovereignty,⁴⁸ halt fossil fuel infrastructure,⁴⁹ build renewable energy,⁵⁰ advocate for rights of nature⁵¹, fight for Indigenous rights,⁵² shape emerging feminist economies,⁵³ protect forests and biodiverse ecosystems,⁵⁴ and many more solutions that are advancing a just and equitable transition.

In the era of Climate Emergency, we must be unwavering in our honesty and our fierce dedication to call for justice and action to halt a trajectory toward irreparable climate chaos.

There is an opportunity to build the future we seek, if we act now for climate justice.



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