

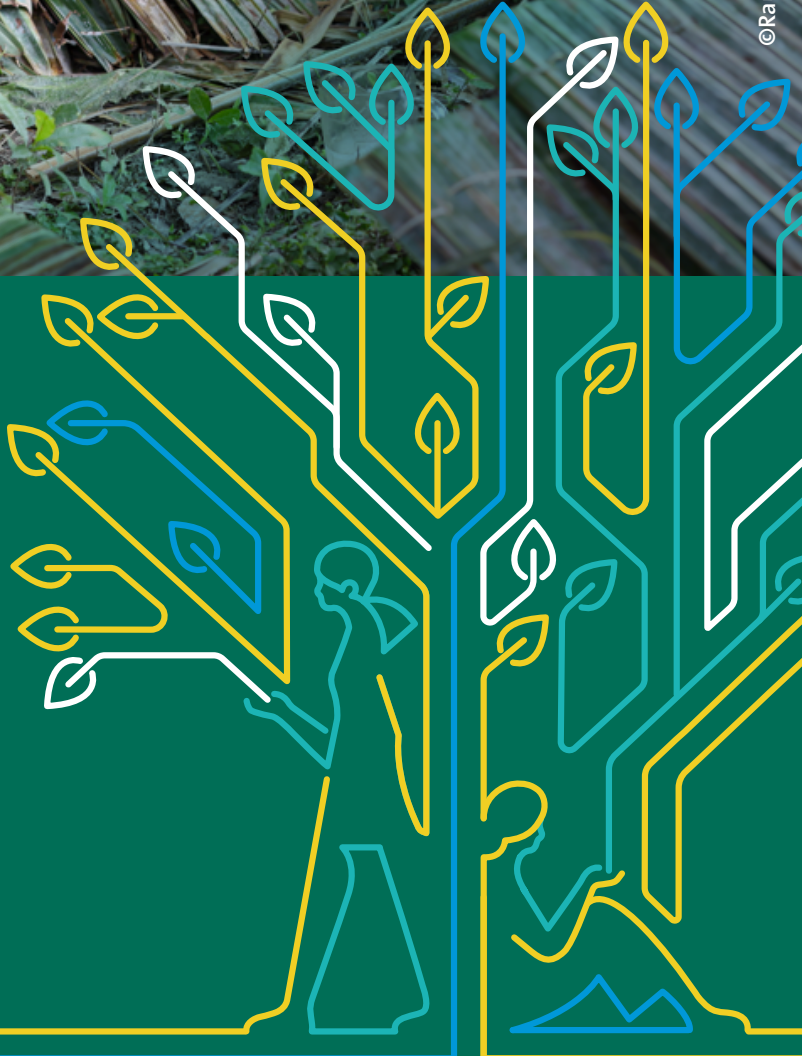


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Women weave reed mats, Mekong Delta, Viet Nam.

IN BRIEF

WOMEN, PEACE AND CLIMATE SECURITY IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC





The Challenge

Not only do climate change impacts pose pressing threats to human health and well-being, they also jeopardize peace and security, and force communities to redefine what these concepts mean to them. The environmental and geopolitical contexts of the Asia-Pacific region — including extensive coastlines, rapid urbanization and dependence on vulnerable natural resources — make it particularly susceptible to climate-related disasters. Further, as home to 10 of the 15 most climate change-affected countries globally, the climate crisis presents existential challenges in the region.

The effects of climate change, environmental degradation, and natural resource scarcity are increasingly exacerbating insecurity and instability worldwide. These challenges affect security through various pathways: altered migration and displacement patterns; intensified competition over land, water, and natural resources; diminished food security; shifts in the blue economy; and threats to national sovereignty. In Asia and the Pacific, the concept of climate security extends beyond the potential for violent conflicts, encompassing economic, political, and socio-cultural dimensions along the human security spectrum¹, which demands an equally comprehensive preventive approach.

Existing tensions and armed conflicts undermine climate action. Simultaneously, the security sector is a major contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions.²

Recent developments within the UN Security Council³, Peacebuilding Commission⁴ and UN Climate Change Conferences⁵ have further catalysed the understanding that the collision of climate change-related events and societal vulnerabilities deepen fragility, escalate tensions and lead to destabilization and potentially to conflicts, thus creating vicious cycles that further hamper societies' abilities to adapt to new climate paradigms. It is also recognized that climate action, when undertaken in a conflict-sensitive manner, can serve as a powerful tool for peacebuilding, offering pathways to address and alleviate the interconnected challenges.

Climate security discourse in the region has been a double-edged sword; although it offers to amplify the urgency of taking climate action and move the needle on climate finance in countries left farthest behind,⁶ some countries have leveraged it to justify increased militarization.

Research and programmatic evidence have shown that gender roles, norms and power dynamics, often reinforced by legal and policy frameworks, shape how women and men of different backgrounds experience, respond, or contribute to, insecurity in a changing climate. In turn, insecurity further undermines people's ability to respond and adapt to climatic changes and shocks.⁷

Women, who are disproportionately represented among the poor and vulnerable populations, highly reliant on natural resources, and often excluded from environmental decision-making, are particularly affected by climate change. However, there is increasing recognition of their crucial role in achieving better environmental and peace outcomes. Women, often the first responders in disasters and humanitarian crises, use their unique community and environmental knowledge to play pivotal roles in response and recovery. Their involvement in food and water security – as producers, domestic suppliers, and distributors – equips them to foresee climate issues, promote better natural resource management, and participate in natural resource-related mediation and peacemaking. Similarly, recognizing the unique challenges men and boys face due to climate change and societal norms is crucial, as it aids in addressing behaviours that contribute to gender inequality and insecurity, such as climate-related gender-based violence and crime.

Understanding the gender dimensions of climate-related security risks is essential not only to avoid exacerbating vulnerabilities but also to identify opportunities for promoting gender equality, enhancing climate resilience, and sustaining peace.⁸ As the need for climate change adaptation is increasingly recognized to address the root causes of conflict and vulnerability, the value of women's and girls' meaningful participation and leadership at the frontlines of peace, climate action, and natural resource management is evident.

1 The UNDP Human Development Report of 1994 coined the term "human security" and outlined its seven interconnected elements: economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political.

2 https://www.dcaf.ch/sites/default/files/imce/PRD/UniversityOfGeneva-GGPB_N2-2021-M-G_Manea.pdf

3 <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15318.doc.htm>

4 <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k14/k14dhddvqw>

5 <https://www.cop28.com/en/cop28-declaration-on-climate-relief-recovery-and-peace>

6 https://oi-files-d8-prod.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-12/Media%20brief%20-%20Forgotten%20Frontlines_English.pdf

7 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/06/gender-climate-and-security>

8 <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/3769>

“ The invaluable knowledge of communities, as well as that of women peacebuilders and environmental human rights defenders who often represent the communities that are most affected by climate change and environmental catastrophes, must be harnessed and integrated into community adaptation and mitigation strategies, and to inform global policymaking. ”

Report of the UN Secretary-General on Women, Peace and Security, 2023

Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan is one of the areas most prone to disasters, monsoon floods and glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs).

A recent study by UN Women in the **Sindh and Gilgit Baltistan regions of Pakistan** suggests a crucial link between women’s greater agency and decision-making power and stronger climate resilience and human security within communities. Stronger agency of women translates into more adaptive and thus more resilient communities.

However, while climate disasters are forcing change in gender roles as women take on new responsibilities, the findings also reveal that this does not automatically translate to greater agency for women. In fact, these shifts may even lead to a backlash. A year after severe floods in Pakistan, women continue to report heightened mental health challenges and protracted stress due to heavier household burdens, and in some cases resort to negative coping strategies like sending their children to work. The situation underscores the urgent need to address women’s limited access to resources and involvement in decision-making, exacerbated by cultural constraints and a trust deficit in local government structures.

UN Women aims to support the Government of Pakistan in realizing its post-flood Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Framework⁹ by documenting the intersection of women’s climate change experiences and human security, their adaptation strategies and identifying opportunities for improved, government-led climate resilience in the flood-impacted provinces.

Federalist reforms in **Nepal** have reinforced historical patterns of discrimination and further deepened gender divides.¹⁰ Women, particularly those from traditionally marginalized groups, remain excluded from most decision-making processes and are usually sidelined in land and natural resource governance.

Despite being the primary users or caretakers of land and natural resources, women comprise only percent of landowners in Nepal and hold a mere four percent of arable land.¹¹ This sort of systemic discrimination places women — and the households and communities reliant on them for basic necessities — at a disadvantage amid a scarcity of resources and a multitude of competing claims over them. When women, who are socioculturally responsible for securing domestic resources such as water or fuel, face competition with industrial and agricultural users, households’ resource security is at risk.¹²



Women in Gilgit contribute to livelihoods of their families and are engaged in household decision-making.

9 <https://www.undp.org/pakistan/publications/pakistan-floods-2022-resilient-recovery-rehabilitation-and-reconstruction-framework-4rf>
10 GIWPS (2018). Rebuilding Nepal: Women’s Roles in Political Transition and Disaster Recovery.
11 Aguilar and Rogers, IUCN (2012). Nepal’s Climate Change Gender Action Plan”.
12 Upreti (2001). Conflict Management in Natural Resources - A study of Land, Water and Forest Conflicts in Nepal.

Women's frequent reliance on forest resources situates them at the heart of increasingly politicized natural resource disputes. However, despite their extensive knowledge of these resources and proven mediation abilities, women are seldom involved in resolving such disputes.¹³

UN Women aims to bolster resilience in Nepal by supporting eco-villages, fostering women's leadership and enhancing women's capacity to ensure food security. UN Women will also support efforts to document and amplify local women-led adaptation and resource management practices that contribute to households' and communities' collective well-being.

In the **Highlands of Papua New Guinea**, climate change and climate-induced disasters are impacting food and water security, livelihoods, mobility and access to essential services. These impacts are immensely exacerbating gender-based violence and exploitation. Climate change also aggravates land disputes and competition for natural resources, intensifying inter-communal conflicts and further compounding the already extreme pressures on women and girls.

Many Highland communities face difficulties coping with these complex and interrelated challenges, particularly those aspects that are intensified by climate change. Most local civil society organizations (CSOs) focus on single issues and as such lack the capacity to address the synergistic effects of climate change impacts. Further, many local governments are under-resourced, leading them to struggle with basic service delivery and unable to provide adequate responses.

Papua New Guinea exemplifies the reality that women are much more than mere victims of climate-related security risks. Local women's leadership has been critical in the successful implementation of conservation, development and climate change adaptation projects, highlighting women's vital role in enhancing community resilience and disaster preparedness.¹⁴

Leveraging its extensive civil society network, UN Women aims to enhance the capacities of women-led CSOs to advocate for localized and peace-positive

climate change adaptation approaches. Over time, these efforts will significantly reduce the risk of climate-induced conflicts and reduce over-reliance on international non-governmental organization partners.

The ocean will likely completely submerge the **Carteret Islands** by 2040. Since 2009, a women-led civil society project (Tulele Peisa) has spearheaded the resettlement and sustainable development of Carteret communities in the **Autonomous Region of Bougainville**. The project has constructed new homes, created opportunities for farming and cocoa production, fostered relations with host communities to ease transitions and mitigate conflicts and raised awareness on conservation and climate change adaptation issues. The initiatives, including tree nurseries and mangrove restoration, ensure that the resettlement is guided by environmental stewardship and sustainability and enhances the resilience of both relocated and host populations.



Ursula Ravoka, Executive Director, Tulele Peisa.

UN Women aims to bolster Tulele Peisa's efforts in promoting community cohesion and resilience through joint projects on mangrove restoration and small-scale food forests. It also plans to enhance Tulele Peisa's partnership with local CSOs and the network of Bougainville community government chairpersons. Objectives include developing and implementing a policy on mangroves, raising awareness about climate change among Bougainville's policymakers and the House of Representatives and delivering climate change education in schools

¹³ GIWPS (2021). The Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus.

¹⁴ https://genderclimatetracker.org/sites/default/files/Resources/Raising_the_Voices_of_Pacific_Women.pdf



The Opportunity

WOMEN ON THE FRONTLINES OF CLIMATE ACTION AND PEACE

Women's leadership is key to the success of climate resilience efforts. Women are not merely victims of climate change impacts; they are often first responders in disasters and humanitarian crises and, due to their unique knowledge of communities and the environment, often play critical roles in recovery. There is also increasing evidence that women's leadership and participation are critical to the success of peacebuilding, human security, natural resource governance and mediation initiatives.¹⁵ In accord with the region's legacy of feminist activism and peacebuilding, women-led CSOs have been integrating related tools and approaches into building inclusive resilience to climate-induced emergencies, crises and conflicts.

Women's local leadership makes a critical difference. Although local actions are not inherently more effective than national or international measures, solutions that entail addressing the intersections of gender, climate change and peace and security are highly reliant on local knowledge and ownership. For example, local women's leadership was found to be an essential element of successful conservation, development and climate adaptation projects in Pacific communities.¹⁶ It is imperative that the UN system and its partners enhance support — including financial assistance — for women-led, localized and inclusive climate change adaptation and mitigation processes.

UN Women is a long-standing partner of civil society networks, women peacebuilders, grass-roots organizations and youth groups; it can support and amplify local solutions and strategies by acting as a nodal point in national and international processes. This potential is amplified by UN Women having served as a pivotal hub in national and international processes, facilitating connections between governments, civil society, the UN system, and other relevant stakeholders.

UN Women plays key roles in synthesizing thought and action on harnessing the interrelated benefits of climate change adaptation and disaster response, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and gender equality and women's empowerment. Its understanding of these integral synergies will be vital to effectively drive the transformative change required to expedite global advancements in climate action and gender equality.



The Solution

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA FOR PEOPLE-CENTRED CLIMATE SECURITY

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda is the most effective framework for considering and advancing climate, peace and security. As an inherently integrated approach, backed by an accountability framework to ensure women's leadership and participation, WPS makes a critical link between gender equality, the resilience of communities and national and international peace and security.

As a UN Security Council resolution, WPS is legally binding on all Member States. With close to 25 years of implementation, it offers practical means for countries to adapt the agenda locally, including through national action plans. The latter represent particularly promising multistakeholder policy processes, allowing the engagement of various government departments, civil society, and communities on a systematic basis. This approach facilitates the inclusion of women's groups and peacebuilding networks, including those in remote areas affected by climate change, who might not typically be recognized as climate experts.

WPS remains the only viable alternative to militarized approaches to peace and security issues, traditionally serving as a platform for engaging and providing accountability in Security Sector operations and for addressing sensitive human rights, politicized and conflict issues. NAP processes provide a pathway to address the security sector's role in responding and adapting to climate change.

¹⁵ https://womensgenderclimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/TulelePeisa_2015.pdf

¹⁶ https://genderclimatetracker.org/sites/default/files/Resources/Raising_the_Voices_of_Pacific_Women.pdf

The WPS framework helps build an actionable understanding of structural inequalities, gendered vulnerabilities, and coping strategies as well as identify entry points for conflict prevention and peacebuilding.¹⁷ The positive impact of the WPS agenda is evident: countries committed to WPS principles are not only more peaceful but also better equipped to handle climate change challenges.¹⁸

Finally, valuable insights can be gleaned from the implementation of the agenda, particularly in areas of accountability and finance, which encompass direct support to civil society organizations. These lessons are especially pertinent in light of the slow progress in climate finance in crisis contexts.

To effectively promote women's leadership, participation and protection and to foster gender-responsive relief and recovery, the WPS agenda must actively address the ever-present challenges that climate change poses to the region. UN Women can support government efforts to establish inclusive processes for integrating climate considerations in WPS action plans.

DELIVERING ALONG THE HUMANITARIAN, DEVELOPMENT AND PEACE NEXUS

Climate change, natural disasters, poverty, inequality and human security crises are complex and interrelated. As emphasized by the Generation's Equality WPS-HA Compact,¹⁹ the gendered aspects of these crises and the need for women's leadership and participation to address them call for urgent and integrated action on WPS, sustainable development and humanitarian commitments. Given its expansive triple mandate, UN Women is uniquely placed to address climate change across the humanitarian, development and peace nexus. UN Women delivers in situations of initial emergency response and throughout all phases of peacebuilding, recovery and resilience-building, encompassing long-term social and structural change.

INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

Climate, peace and security is an area where inclusive governance — with strong partnerships between civil society and decision makers and accountability to the people and by the people — is crucial for the world to stand a chance against the existential threat of climate change and the crises and conflicts it triggers. This recognition is at the heart of UN Women's 'Regional

Framework towards Peaceful, Inclusive Societies for Asia and the Pacific', which integrates inclusive governance and the WPS agenda to systematically convene stakeholders and facilitate partnerships.

As part of the global WPS ecosystem, UN Women in Asia and the Pacific supports governments and civil society by ensuring coherence on WPS within the multilateral system and facilitates bidirectional connections between global and local initiatives.



Why act now?

A UN WOMEN PRIORITY

The 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action – the most comprehensive and progressive blueprint for women's empowerment to date – and the 25th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, is an exceptional opportunity to renew commitment and to garner political and public mobilization to ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment are front and centre of global agendas, including the emerging climate, peace and security agenda.

The UN Women Regional Framework Towards Peaceful, Inclusive Societies in Asia and the Pacific outlines strategies to tackle the most pressing governance, peace and security challenges in the region, including climate security. UN Women aims to:

- > Ensure that the WPS agenda is understood and used as an important framework for transformative and people-centred approach to climate security.
- > Apply WPS principles to examine less militarized approaches to security.
- > Provide spaces for diverse groups of women and young women to learn, exchange and contribute to decision-making and policy processes.
- > Support women peacebuilders and their networks in addressing climate-related security risks.
- > Document and promote local women-led solutions contributing to conflict prevention and climate resilience.
- > Strengthen the protection of human rights of women environmental human rights defenders.

¹⁷ DPPA, Weathering Two Storms: Gender and Climate in Peace and Security (2022)

¹⁸ <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/GIWPS-WPS-Index-Climate-Brief.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://forum.generationequality.org/women-peace-security-and-humanitarian-action-wps-ha-compact>



Agents of peace and resilience in Lake Sebu, South Cotabato, the Philippines.

EMPOWERING WOMEN AS AGENTS OF PEACE AND RESILIENCE

Climate security discourse and practice are rapidly accelerating. The acknowledgment by parties at the 28th UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) in December 2023 that conflict and fragility are an obstacle to climate action and increase communities' vulnerability to climate change marks an historical development which echoes recent discussions in the UN Security Council, Peacebuilding Commission and the New Agenda for Peace. The adoption of the COP28 Declaration on Climate, Relief, Recovery and Peace²⁰ as well as regional declarations²¹ and dialogues²² are important signals from the international community that climate action in fragile and conflict-affected countries must be adequately supported.

Notwithstanding this momentum, significant gaps persist, with roots causes of conflict and crisis often neglected and the proposed solutions mirroring this narrow perspective. The critical role of local communities, civil society and women's leadership

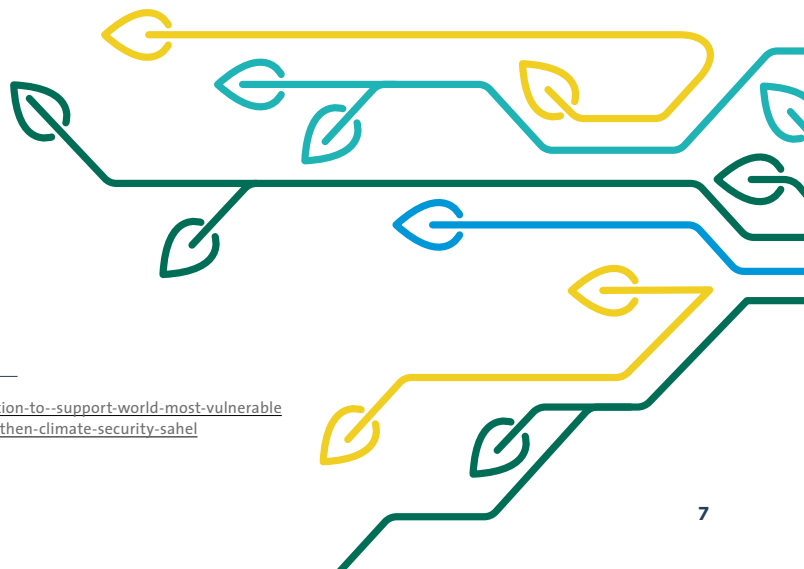
remains inadequately addressed. The vital roles of local communities, civil society, and women's leadership continue to be insufficiently addressed. Key issues like conflict prevention, the role of the Security Sector, securitized approaches, human mobility, environmental justice, and just transitions are often notably absent, despite being primary concerns in frontline countries.

The WPS agenda already addresses many concerns around current climate, peace and security expertise and action, such as centrality of communities and civil society, recognition of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and the importance of rights-based, gender-responsive, and locally-led efforts. It presents considerable advantages in terms of increasing the inclusivity, practicality, and effectiveness of the analyses and actions within the climate, peace, and security field. Moving forward, it is imperative that the WPS agenda informs efforts and empowers women as key agents of peace and resilience.

²⁰ <https://www.cop28.com/en/news/2023/12/COP28-Presidency-host-day-to-drive-action-to-support-world-most-vulnerable>

²¹ <https://www.undp.org/africa/press-releases/landmark-declaration-adopted-strengthen-climate-security-sahel>

²² <https://asean-airp.org/asean-un-regional-dialogue-on-climate-peace-and-security/>



The four pillars of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda as a blueprint for inclusive climate security

Participation

- Recognise and support women's voice and leadership - including women-led civil society - in local, national and regional decision-making, mediation and natural resource-related matters.
- Establish safe spaces for diverse groups of young women to identify their peace and security needs and priorities, and to learn, exchange and contribute to decision-making and policymaking processes.

Prevention

- Value and amplify locally-led solutions where women contribute to conflict prevention, early warning and addressing climate change and natural resource-related challenges and insecurities.
- Support women peacebuilders and their networks in addressing climate-related security risks.
- Encourage gender-responsive measures that enhance resilience to climate-related insecurities and conflict, including advocating for women's equal access to, control of, and ownership over land and natural resources.
- Promote climate-resilient livelihood opportunities for women to support their contributions to household and community resilience, and to protect them from disproportionate impacts of climate-related shocks;
- Document and promote a better understanding of the mutually supportive benefits of climate adaptation, conflict prevention, peacebuilding, gender equality and women's empowerment actions.

Protection

- Ensure due protection of the human rights of women, girls and people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics impacted by unsustainable and harmful natural resource practices and violence.
- Ensure women environmental human rights defenders can operate free from violence and coercion in any form.
- Operationalize and promote environmental justice, including climate justice.

Relief and recovery

- Support women's active participation and activities in climate-related disaster response, relief and recovery.
- Ensure that climate-related disaster relief and recovery initiatives respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, including displaced women and girls, survivors of gender-based violence, women heads of households and those with disabilities.
- Support communities impacted by climate-related land and natural resource disputes and promote reconciliation and social cohesion.

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