



Input for the report on violence against women in the context of climate crisis

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[WI-HER](#) – a small, woman-owned business with multi-sectoral development experience in 53 countries – is pleased to provide inputs for the forthcoming report on violence against women and girls in the context of the climate crisis, including environmental degradation and related disaster risk mitigation and response. We urge the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women to incorporate the following evidence into the report for the 77th session of the UN General Assembly.

The impacts of the climate crisis, environmental degradation and related displacement on gender-based violence against women and girls, and on specific groups of women and girls

Not only are the effects of the climate crisis gendered,¹ but climate change, environmental degradation, and related displacement pose new and increased risks for gender-based violence against women and girls.² Just as the climate crisis has adverse effects on health and wellbeing, the physical effects of climate change – including growing air pollution and rising temperatures – also impact the incidence of violent crimes.³

The climate crisis is not felt equally, and women and girls living in the Global South – where climate change is most impactful – face heightened consequences from environmental degradation and related displacement.⁴ With clear linkages between the climate and gender-based violence, it is critical to enhance efforts for gender-based violence prevention and response in the Global South, particularly in rural environments where access to information and services is minimal. For example, in Fiji, women and girls in remote areas have limited awareness of gender-based violence services, and they often do not have the resources to travel to the limited services that are available.⁵

In the wake of environmental degradation, it is likely that natural resources will become scarcer. This disproportionately affects women and girls, who are often responsible for collecting natural resources.⁶ As the climate crisis drives drought and deforestation, women and girls can be forced to travel longer distances for natural resources needed for survival. In Tanzania, WI-HER analyzed qualitative data from communities and key informants to understand the relationship between gender equity, social inclusion, biodiversity preservation, and natural resources management under the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Tuhifadhi Maliasili Activity.⁷ Data indicates women and girls are at risk of experiencing physical and sexual violence when they travel long distances alone to collect water



and firewood, and when income generating activities (like agriculture) are relocated far outside the community.

Intersecting identities can increase vulnerability to gender-based violence, particularly in the context of the climate crisis. Climate disaster response, including infrastructure used to support displaced populations, often excludes persons with disabilities in planning processes and does not fully consider their needs.⁸ Overall, women and girls with disabilities are at a greater risk of experiencing gender-based violence.⁹ Similarly, climate disaster response efforts are often unprepared to support sexual and gender minorities (including lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women and girls). For example, following Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji, sexual and gender minorities reported challenges finding safe places to stay because of their identities, resulting in exposure to violence and harassment.¹⁰ When climate disaster response efforts do not include persons with disabilities or sexual and gender minorities, they may be at risk of gender-based violence when they are left with limited resources and are forced to identify alternative means for evacuation, emergency housing, or long-term recovery support.

The different manifestations or specific types of gender-based violence experienced by women and girls related to the climate crisis, environmental degradation and related displacement

Resource scarcity as a result of the climate crisis and environmental degradation may increase the risk of resource-related gender-based violence. In Rwanda, WI-HER found land-related gender-based violence was commonly described during qualitative interviews on gender norms and gender-based violence under the USAID Adolescents and Children, HIV Incidence-reduction, Empowerment, and Virus Elimination (ACHIEVE) Project.¹¹ Women, girls, persons living with HIV, and orphans and vulnerable children are often denied inheritance, prevented from making or participating in decisions about resources, or are forced to relinquish assets. Denial of inheritance and access to or control of resources, a form of economic violence, is likely to increase as resources become more limited, particularly where economic violence is already prevalent.

Climate change risk mitigation and adaptation approaches can introduce new forms of or exacerbate existing gender-based violence. In Fiji, WI-HER analyzed and addressed linkages between gender-based violence and the environment under the USAID Resilient, Inclusive, & Sustainable Environments (RISE) Challenge.¹² Communities and stakeholders described that women and girls have been subjected to violence as a result of participation in alternative livelihood activities, which are designed to reduce participation in activities that harm the environment. Further, conservation efforts can increase women's access to monetary or non-monetary resources (e.g., through conservation land lease benefits); this may upset exist power dynamics in families and has resulted in threats and experiences of violence. Women have also faced violence after filing complaints about community land use, particularly when reporting a male partner's or family members' violation of land agreements.



Good practices, strategies and challenges in the mitigation and prevention of gender-based violence and in the protection of women and girls in the context of the climate crisis, environmental degradation and related displacement

It will be crucial for actors working in climate change mitigation and adaptation to collaborate closely with stakeholders experienced in gender equity and gender-based violence prevention and response. In Fiji, WI-HER advanced collaboration between experienced actors in gender-based violence to support the Ministry of Forestry to better integrate gender and gender-based violence in the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) Programme. This coordination was critical, as existing Ministry of Forestry staff were not trained with the skills to provide support for gender- or gender-based violence related complaints in the conservation program. Ongoing collaboration can ensure Ministry staff are supported while training programs are expanded to equip new and current staff with gender-responsive skills. This collaboration also mitigates harm by ensuring gender-based violence survivors have access to individuals skilled in gender-based violence support.

Good practices, strategies and challenges related to integrating gender equality and countering gender-based violence against women and girls in climate crisis related disaster risk reduction mitigation and response, including women-led and community-based responses

Climate change adaptation programs often require social accountability mechanisms used to manage complaints related to the programs. In Fiji, WI-HER supported the Ministry of Forestry to integrate considerations for gender-based risk and violence into its existing feedback and grievance redress mechanism for the REDD+ Programme. The updated, gender-responsive mechanism – known as the FGRM+ – incorporates recommendations from REDD+ communities to facilitate community ownership and leadership. For example, women in REDD+ communities advocated for increased awareness about the FGRM+, including positioning trusted individuals in their community as resources on the FGRM+. Additionally, the FGRM+ incorporates innovative screening mechanisms to evaluate all complaints for gender-based risks or violence while applying the principle of do no harm to protect complainants' privacy and autonomy.

The extent to which women and girls are able to, at all levels, access information and participate fully, equally and meaningfully in the mitigation of the climate crisis, including environmental degradation and the sudden onset of disasters, and the response to it, as stipulated by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Gender Action Plan

WI-HER's qualitative analyses in Fiji and Tanzania indicate restrictive gender and social norms still limit women's and girls' participation in climate crisis mitigation and response. In Fiji, community meetings are still most commonly led and attended by men; it is in these meetings where land- and conservation-related decisions are made. As a result, women's and girls' voices are often not heard in land use planning, leaving their priorities and concerns unaddressed. Married women are excluded from decision-making when they move away from their *mataqali* (clan), where they are landowners, and reside in their husband's community, where they do not own land. In Tanzania, women and youth are often excluded from natural resource management because they do not have secure land tenure and



thus cannot participate in land-based conservation activities. While pastoralist groups in Tanzania are rarely included in conservation activities, women and girls from pastoralist communities are further sidelined due to norms discouraging their participation in meetings.

It is necessary for global actors to clearly define and provide guidance on how to ensure and monitor full, equal, and meaningful participation in the mitigation of the climate crisis. Approaches and measures must be flexible and adaptable to different contexts and must also minimize risk of harm to women and girls. For example, in Fiji, women and girls have been threatened with and subjected to violence as a result of participating in and leading conservation efforts.

Any other issue of relevance

Though the focus of this report is on gender-based violence against women and girls, WI-HER advocates for the inclusion of men, boys, and individuals who identify outside the gender binary in all gender-based violence prevention and response efforts. Though gender-based violence against men and boys is less understood, survey estimates in the US indicate around one in three men have experience sexual violence, physical violence, or stalking from an intimate partner.¹³ Because gendered expectations position men and boys as protectors, they have been targeted with gender-based violence in conflicts and wars;¹⁴ as the climate crisis multiplies the threat of conflicts across the world, the risk of gender-based violence against men and boys in conflict may increase.¹⁵ As the climate crisis impacts employment, men and boys who lose jobs or have reduced income may feel less able to fulfill their socially expected role as providers, stimulating violence due to shame or fear. Men's and boys' own experiences of violence can perpetuate the cycle of violence, and interventions must consider the role violence plays for future generations. Men and boys rarely access supportive resources due to stigma, and many gender-based violence programs are not equipped to provide gender-responsive care to men, boys, or individuals who identify outside the gender binary. Furthermore, men and boys are key allies and influencers in gender-based violence mitigation and prevention and in pursuing gender equity.

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- ⁷ *Gender, Youth, and Social Inclusion in Biodiversity Conservation and Natural Resource Management in Tanzania: A Rapid Assessment.* (2021). USAID Tuhifadhi Maliasili Activity. WI-HER. https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00Z7R5.pdf
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- ¹¹ *Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) Analysis to Inform Gender Mainstreaming in ACHIEVE Rwanda.* (2021). USAID ACHIEVE Project. Pact & WI-HER.
- ¹² *Gender and Environment Analysis.* (2020). USAID RISE Challenge. Gender-Based Violence and REDD+ in Fiji: Tackling Resource Conflict and Addressing Gender-Based Risk in the Environment. Marstel-Day & WI-HER. <http://www.wi-her.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/USAID-RISE-Gender-and-Environment-Analysis-Fiji.pdf>
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- ¹⁴ Barbelet, V. (n.d.). *Male gender-based violence: a silent crisis*. ODI. <https://odi.org/en/insights/male-gender-based-violence-a-silent-crisis/>
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