

A Call to Action: Gender transformative approaches to address the intertwined impacts of climate change, land degradation, biodiversity loss and pollution

A report on UNEP's side event at the 66th meeting of the Commission on the Status of Women



Background

The side event sought to address the gendered dimensions of the triple planetary crisis with a particular focus on the gender differentiated impacts and inequalities perpetuated by climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation, as well as impacts of pollution on human life and the environment. The discussions considered gender transformative measures for the sustainable management, use and conservation of natural resources, including the implementation of policies and strategies developed at regional and national levels.

The event was hosted by UNEP in collaboration with the Rio Conventions agencies namely the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) and the Women's Major Group accredited to UNEP.

Format of the event

The event was held on 17 March 2022 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. New York time. It started with a 15-minute opening session which comprised welcoming remarks from UNEP and a keynote address by H.E. Ms. Maisa Rojas, Minister for the Environment of the Republic of Chile.

An overview presentation by UNEP on the gendered differentiated impacts of the triple planetary crisis followed. The presentation paved the way for the in-depth panel discussions on the gender implications of the intertwined impacts of climate change, land degradation, pollution and biodiversity loss that followed. The panel discussions were divided into three 20-minute sessions

for a total of 60 minutes. The opening statements and list of presenters are included in Annex I and II of this document.

Discussions and Key Outcomes

1. Land Degradation, Biodiversity Loss, and Climate Change

This session focused on the differentiated impacts of desertification, land degradation, and drought (DLDD) on women and men, on gender and nature-based solutions and on gendered impacts of climate change, and women's leadership in the COVID-19 green recovery.

Key messages

- i. **Women and other disadvantaged groups are more susceptible to climate shocks due to the lack of diversification** of their assets as well as less access to resources to cope with and recover from the damage.
- ii. **Women face an increased burden of unpaid care and domestic work, compounded by COVID-19.** During droughts, the work of "caring for others" is expressed partly by standing in line and waiting for water, walking long distances, and protecting the sick from unsafe water.
- iii. **Drought-related food scarcity affects intra-family food distribution.** Women tend to eat smaller portions or skipping meals, leading to stomach aches, vomiting, weakness, diarrhoea, and malnutrition. Also, higher incidence of miscarriages, and maternal and child deaths are reported during droughts.
- iv. **Carrying water has a negative effect on the health of women of all ages,** especially young women, girls, and pregnant women. Water-carrying methods impose physical loads that can cause musculoskeletal disorders and related disabilities.
- v. **Climate-related migration increases women's workload and can lead to the reduction of the available resources and labour.** Women left to manage their households may lack the power to make timely farming decisions or to respond to the effects of land degradation and drought or extreme weather events.
- vi. **Gendered division of labour in agriculture as well as gender norms and perceptions can limit access of women** to training necessary to **respond to the effects of climate change,** e.g., related to drought and irrigation.
- vii. **Not having land titles that can be used as a collateral or the lack of secure tenure hinders women's access to loans and credit,** but also limits their access to extension services and training.
- viii. The **lack of recognition of women as farmers** and the **lack of social acceptance of women's involvement in certain agricultural activities** may also lead to their **exclusion from decision making spaces, access to credit, information, and services.**
- ix. Women tend to **adopt Sustainable Land Management technologies** at a rate that is **typically lower and slower than that of men.**
- x. **Women's entrepreneurship in renewables is key to building back better and reducing poverty.**
- xi. **Women are critical players in sectors like agriculture and the informal economy,** providing a ready springboard for selling energy products and services.
- xii. **Women are important consumers and spokespersons for clean energy,** influencing household energy decisions and discretionary spending.

- xiii. **139-170 million small and medium enterprises in developing economies** in the energy sectors have **one or more women owners**.
- xiv. **Women's business success translates into reinvestment in families and communities**, as women entrepreneurs are more likely to spend earnings on children's education and health.
- xv. As **women entrepreneurs grow**, they **often take on leadership roles** in their communities.
- xvi. There are **lower credit risks and greater likelihood of loan repayment among women entrepreneurs** meaning greater return on investment.
- xvii. **Women's experience is precious and instrumental in managing resources (including natural resources) in effective and practical ways.**

Recommendations

- i. Facilitate **women's participation in decisions taken during the design, planning, implementation and evaluation of international conventions** such as the Convention to Combat Desertification.
- ii. **Enhance women's access to improved adaptation knowledge and technologies.**
- iii. **Integrate women's economic empowerment in development activities** to eradicate extreme poverty.
- iv. Support **establishment of legislation** to improve **women's land rights and access to resources.**
- v. Integrate **land tenure into the implementation of the UN Convention to Combat Desertification** and the **Land Degradation Neutrality initiatives.**
- vi. **Support women who are at the centre of localised action to overcome social, cultural and political barriers** as well as to enhance leadership capacity in natural resources and livelihoods management.
- vii. **Empower women in disaster risk management to build community resilience to climate change.**
- viii. Support for **eco-disaster risk reduction projects** can provide income for **local communities** and then to achieve both **ecosystem and community resilience.**
- ix. Provide solutions by **placing gender equality and human rights at the heart of climate change action and disaster risk reduction.**
- x. Adopt an **integrated approach for women's energy entrepreneurship programme to respond to climate change and pandemic recovery** through i) creating entrepreneurship opportunities; ii) sustaining businesses for women in clean energy and iii) upscaling women's energy enterprises.

2. Gender, Waste Management and Chemical Pollution

This session focused on global to local actions addressing gender, chemical waste management and pollution with examples from rural and urban settings.

Key messages

- i. A booming industry, the **global nappy market is expected to exceed US\$71 billion by 2022. Single-use nappies have environmental impacts across their entire life cycle and a**

- leading cost for local authorities.** Consumer behaviour emerges as a key factor in many of the studies regarding both single use and reusable nappies.
- ii. **Women are mostly responsible for “household waste management” and consumption choices,** such as groceries.
 - iii. A study in La Paz, Bolivia, **detected organochlorine pesticide residues in 55% of breast milk samples.**
 - iv. **Indigenous people** in Municipality of Guanay, Bolivia, are starting to get **involved in gold mining for income.**
 - v. **Many pesticides salespersons are women.** Some shops even have children in the store, who are sometimes selling pesticides. And yet 60% of pesticides stored were obsolete (e.g., forbidden, unlabelled, expired). This has negative health impacts on women and children’s health.
 - vi. In many countries, **women represent the majority of the informal waste sector engaged in collecting, sorting and preparing waste** for recycling.
 - vii. **Women tend to earn less than their male counterparts, are more often subject to stigmatization and discrimination, and work in less healthy environments.**
 - viii. **When the waste sector is formalized, women are most times left out** (e.g., “women cannot drive trucks”).

Recommendations

- i. Take **immediate measures to stop the importation and use of mercury and support indigenous women in finding income in something other than gold mining.**
- ii. **Conduct more health studies looking at the impact of mercury import, export, use and pollution as they are needed, especially mercury pollution of fish and other food sources.** As many of the indigenous populations are badly nourished, mercury exposure in their main food source can exacerbate other health issues.
- iii. **Support indigenous people with access to land, and through women’s activities in agriculture, apiculture, and aquaculture.** They should receive training including awareness raising, their local women’s organisation must be supported in addition to supporting the expansion of eco-tourism.
- iv. **Conduct more studies on mercury in water and in fish of rivers to inform indigenous groups** that live along the rivers on the dangers.
- v. **Analyse the possibility of dietary change that does not greatly alter indigenous people’s livelihoods.**
- vi. **Target women during the promotion of the 5Rs (Rethink, Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle),** including by raising awareness on waste segregation at source and rethinking consumption/packaging/etc.
- vii. Promote **women’s participation in the formal waste management sector** and commit to **equal employment opportunities for women and men.**
- viii. Apply **gender mainstreaming in waste management.**
- ix. **Professionalize** street sweeping, waste picking and recycling.
- x. Collect **gender-disaggregated data and implement gender-sensitive policies or reforms** in waste sector.
- xi. Provide **protection for vulnerable and marginalised informal waste workers.**

- xii. Support **gender-balanced deployment in all levels of administration** related to waste management.

3. Going into the Future: A Conversation with Young Environmentalists

This session entailed a conversation with young environmentalists from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, with knowledge and experience in addressing issues related to climate change, land degradation, biodiversity loss, and pollution. They shared their own perspectives and experiences in addressing the issues under discussion.

Recommendations

- i. **Act now**, and with **empathy**, to address the triple planetary crisis. Because if we change nothing, nothing will change.
- ii. Start by **giving women a seat at the table to negotiate decisions and resolutions** that impact their lives.
- iii. Provide **opportunities for women in form of literacy programs** to further **support and empower women to participate and lead on activities** that impact their lives.
- iv. **Bring an end to male-dominated solutions**. Instead, enhance inclusion and diversity to guarantee more wholesome, effective and sustainable solutions to the triple planetary crisis.
- v. **Take into consideration gender disparities** when discussing the triple planetary crisis.
- vi. **Apply local solutions**, they do not require fortunes to be implemented.

Annex I: Opening statements

1. Statement by Ligia Noronha, UNEP

- i. The triple planetary crisis is not just an environmental crisis, it is also an inequality crisis.
- ii. The impacts of biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution are disproportionately impacting women and girls and exacerbating gender inequalities.
- iii. Limited access to biodiversity and other natural resources compromises women's productive roles within households and communities as agricultural producers and energy providers.
- iv. The impacts are even worse for indigenous women, older women and women with lower levels or no education and low social economic status who are limited in diversifying their livelihood activities.
- v. Climate change and biodiversity loss intensifies sexual and gender-based violence, organised trafficking, and child marriages. This is a big issue that needs to be focussed on.
- vi. Women taking action to protect natural resources and defend environmental rights increasingly face risks to their lives.
- vii. Women bear the uneven burden of exposure to pollution and hazardous chemicals. In low income coming, exposure to pollution from solid fuel used in cooking is much higher for women and men. According to WHO, indoor pollution kills 4.3 million people every year.
- viii. Women experience increased harm from poor sanitation and toxic chemicals at work. Some toxics like lead are particularly harmful to women in the childbearing age.
- ix. Women are important environmental stewards and key agents of change in peace processes. And yet wide feminist leadership in environmental management remains underrepresented.
- x. Women are still a minority amongst those making high level decisions, holding a small percentage of key environmental positions.
- xi. Therefore, the response to this crisis has to be a gender-based response.
- xii. Ignoring existing dynamics creates new risks for women and exacerbates vulnerabilities and inequalities.
- xiii. We need an urgent, bold shift in traditional gender norms and structures for women's political and economic empowerment.
- xiv. At UNEP, gender equality and women's empowerment are a key priority.
- xv. Furthermore, the [UN Secretary General's Our Common Agenda](#) articulates transformational shifts that will facilitate women's economic inclusion, investment in green jobs and support for women entrepreneurs and inclusion of voices of younger women in decision making processes.
- xvi. Women's engagement is key in planning for a climate resilient, nature positive and pollution free future.
- xvii. We must invest in strengthening women's resilience and capacity to manage risks stemming from climate change, biodiversity, and pollution.
- xviii. We must frame green economy models outside the conventional gender norms to truly alleviate gender inequality.
- xix. We must secure gender-responsive sustainable finance for intentional integration of gender perspectives in investment and lending processes.

2. Statement by Louise Baker, UNCCD

- i. The priority of CSW66 is not only directly in line with UNCCD's mandate but also close to the heart of the organisation.
- ii. UNCCD deals with the health and productivity of the land, the terrestrial ecosystem.
- iii. We are losing land at a very shocking rate. Globally, millions of hectares are lost every year. Between 20% - 40% of total usable land is already degraded and this process is happening everywhere. This is partly to poor management of the land.
- iv. Climate change and land degradation are changing the water cycle, bringing more torrential rainfall and floods on the one hand and more intense and severe droughts on the other.
- v. Wildfires are scorching the earth and causing irreversible changes to the whole landscape.
- vi. Women and girls everywhere are disproportionately affected by these impacts.
- vii. Women and girls living in rural areas and developing countries are significantly more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men. This is because their livelihoods on those natural resources that are threatened by land degradation.
- viii. Gender discrimination and exclusion, compounded by some traditions, customs and religious practices has marginalised the potential role women and girls could play in better managing the natural world.
- ix. Women's voices are excluded from decision making and policy making spaces.
- x. Women and girls struggle to access resources that are being made available to fight climate change. That must change.
- xi. Women and girls are strategic actors in this space. They have an immensely strong body of knowledge. They should be agents of change for climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- xii. The good news is that progress is happening.
- xiii. UNCCD promotes practices that avoid, reduce and reverse land degradation. For instance, 197 parties to the convention to combat desertification have adopted a gender action plan with four priority areas for work: i) promoting women's participation ii) promoting women's economic empowerment iii) promoting women's land rights and iv) and women's access to technology that is designed for their needs.
- xiv. The parties have also committed to mainstreaming gender in land restoration initiatives. We are in the decade for ecosystem restoration and there is nearly a billion of hectares of land have been pledged to be restored. We need to turn pledges into action because that is what really counts.
- xv. The flagship project called the Great Green Wall shows that it is possible to be wildly ambitious and inherently pragmatic at the same time. Equal rights in this kind of initiatives and national programmes are absolutely necessary.
- xvi. Improving women's tenure provides multiple benefits for economic empowerment and security.
- xvii. This CSW66, UNCCD reconfirms its commitment to collaborate, coordinate, cooperate and strengthen partnerships with other UN agencies, civil society and young people's organisations that want to bring women's voices to the fight against land degradation, desertification, and drought.

3. Statement by Paola Albrito, UNDRR

- i. Human actions are creating greater and dangerous risks. We are pushing the planet towards existential and ecosystem limits.
- ii. The triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution are a result of this. It points to a need for us to change our systems to achieve sustainable development.
- iii. Like any disaster, the triple planetary crisis has gender differentiated impacts and mainly gender inequality.
- iv. This is a reality that we must keep in mind in every step and action that we take in our field of work.
- v. The latest IPCC report warns us that the disasters have doubled over the last 20 years and will conceivably double again.
- vi. Extreme temperatures have doubled, and climate damage could soon become irreversible.
- vii. We are also facing unprecedented biodiversity loss, and yet biodiversity is critical to support human health and wellbeing.
- viii. We have not adequately valued nature in our decision-making processes for the environment and the result is that we have created severe risks across the development system.
- ix. Degraded ecosystems such as disappearing mangrove forests result in hundreds of thousands of lives lost and severe economic damage because they exacerbate vulnerability and exposure to hazards.
- x. Finally, increasing pollution is driving disaster risks especially for new-born babies, children, pregnant women and is a threat to the ecosystem.
- xi. In the face of global systemic risk, we must recognise that the challenge is for the economy, the environment and that inequality can no longer be addressed separately. It has to be part of the solution.
- xii. For the first time, climate change and disaster risk reduction have been considered within the priority theme of CSW.
- xiii. Structural gender inequality is an underlying driver of disaster risk. But gender inequality and disasters do not need to continue exacerbating each other.
- xiv. In a time when gender considerations in disaster risk management are undervalued, it is imperative that disaster risk measures specifically address gender inequality.
- xv. As one of the groups affected by inequality and disasters, women have a role to play in improving their communities' resourcefulness in scaling up solutions that strengthen local capacities to manage disasters and risks.
- xvi. Women's responsibilities in households, communities and as stewards of natural resources make them powerful agents of change with great expertise in nature-based solutions.
- xvii. Women's gender-specific role can be used as a steering point to combat the adverse effects of climate change while also challenging traditional gender roles.
- xviii. For instance, the 2017 Land for Life award granted by UNCCD was won by a project led by UNEP in partnership with the government and local communities including women. They managed important elements such as natural resource management and rehabilitation of the landscape as they fought to improve food security and disaster resilience and reducing community tensions for sustainable management of dryland areas.

- xix. A whole society approach is the only way to ensure that the resilience and wellbeing of future generations is conveyed and generated.
- xx. Three gender-responsive opportunities that would reduce the negative impacts of the triple planetary crisis are:
 - a. We need to work with the communities and women who frequently face the more devastating impacts of pollution, ecosystem degradation and disasters; adopting a rights-based approach is critical to leaving no one behind and having women as part of the decisions ensures that the benefits are for them and having them involved in every stage of disaster-risk reduction provides a win-win situation by reducing vulnerability and sustaining livelihoods.
 - b. It is essential that women and girls are given opportunities to learn new skills and take on leadership roles. Men and boys should also be encouraged to share the burden of unpaid care work with women.
 - c. We must pursue our efforts to encourage the production, analysis and use of qualitative and quantitative gender disaggregated data across all organisations and countries as reliable indicators to inform and monitor gender-responsive disaster-risk reduction policies and programmes.
- xxi. Addressing the triple planetary crisis through gender-responsive nature solutions in disaster risk reduction will allow to simultaneously respond to SDG5 and SDG15 while contributing to the overarching goal of leaving no one behind.
- xxii. Without women's leadership in disaster risk reduction and scale up of actions to address gender inequality in financing policies, women and girls will continue to be left behind.
- xxiii. We really need to work more together, building on each other's strength.

4. Keynote Statement by H.E. Ms. Maisa Rojas, Chile

- i. Climate change and its solution have a face of a woman. Women are vulnerable to climate change but at the same time they are agents of change, of transformation and in many cases also environmental defenders.
- ii. Women's vulnerabilities are due to inequalities in the structural world. Inequalities in care for instance force us to assume huge responsibilities.
- iii. Women are key to so many initiatives as mentioned in previous statements.
- iv. Also mentioned by earlier speakers are challenges like limited access to loans, lack of representation in decision making processes, etc. must be addressed to effectively tackle climate change.
- v. For Chile and its new government, it's paramount to address climate change from a transversal perspective both regarding care of nature and the environment in a sustainable manner in order to achieve the SDGs.
- vi. In addition, Chile is currently Chair of the regional work group on gender and the environment. Participating in this group, which is supported by the environment group in the UN, is voluntary group.
- vii. UNEP and the 18 countries in this group are commended for approving the decision and work plan on promotion of gender equality. So far, implementation of the work plan is at 75%.
- viii. The European Union is also commended for supporting the first on-site event on gender and the environment which was held after the first two years of the pandemic. This is a

regional event that focussed on enhancing capacity in the group and financing a pilot project with women organisations in Chile, Mexico, Costa Rica and Guatemala.

- ix. A network on resilience and climate change is underway.
- x. Today, more than ever, it is important to keep on creating alliances between the environment and women ministries to achieve structural change.
- xi. A gender unit will be created in the Ministry of Environment in Chile to essentialise the gender mainstreaming efforts in the ministry.
- xii. For the first ever, Chilean government has been declared as informative and inclusive. In fact, women are a majority in the current government.

5. Overview presentation by Janet Kabebiri-Macharia, UNEP

- i. UNEP's strategic vision for the triple planetary crisis of nature and biodiversity loss, climate change and pollution and waste places people, prosperity and equity as the central pillars. It is also aligned to the UN General Secretary's messages to the UN and utilises annual assessments for the United Nations System-wide accountability framework for gender mainstreaming.
- ii. UNEP's report, [Making Peace with Nature](#), highlights that the triple planetary crisis caused by unsustainable patterns of consumption and production that are closely connected and putting the wellbeing of future and current generations at unacceptable risk.
- iii. The ongoing pandemic has exposed the numerous challenges in our current global structures. It further highlighted the disproportionate impacts for women and girls which have further reduced their capacity to adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- iv. When it comes to land managed, to iterate the statement from Louise, land is a limited resource. And yet 75% of it has already been altered by human activities and 1 in 5 hectares is no longer usable due to land degradation.
- v. Land degradation affects approximately 3.2 billion people and costs about 10% of global GDP.
- vi. By 2050, 50 – 700 million people would have migrated due to land degradation.
- vii. Around 25% of plant and animal species are threatened.
- viii. 24% of greenhouse gases are from agriculture, forestry and other land uses.
- ix. While women are a majority in the agricultural workforce, they remain minority landholders and decision makers globally.
- x. Women experience vulnerabilities differently. Different groups of women e.g., indigenous women, rural women, elderly women, poor women, etc. experience vulnerabilities differently and are hence impacted differently.
- xi. The Sendai Framework challenges the notion that women are intrinsically disproportionately vulnerable. It emphasises that structure gender inequalities put them at higher risk by limiting their access to resources and opportunities, thus impacting their autonomy to make decisions regarding their lives.
- xii. We must integrate gender perspectives in our multilateral efforts to address the triple planetary crisis. The recently concluded UNEA5 and the upcoming UNCCD COP15, Stockholm@50, UNFCCC COP27, etc., are all opportunities to continue having these discussions to come up with transformative solutions.

- xiii. As a way forward, we must enhance women's and girls' empowerment and strengthen their resilience and build their capacity to deal with the negative effects of the triple planetary crisis.
- xiv. In all our efforts, we must remember the intersectional aspects of inequality that cause different groups of women to be affected differently.
- xv. Gender-responsive finance and green economy and recovery models, as already mentioned by earlier speakers are very crucial.
- xvi. We must consider intergenerational equality. Involve youths in the solutions and discussions on the triple planetary crisis.

Annex II: List of Presenters

1. **H.E. Ms. Maisa Rojas** – Minister of Environment, Chile
2. **Ligia Noronha** – UN Assistant Secretary-General and Head of UNEP, New York Office
3. **Paola Albrito** – Chief Intergovernmental Processes, Interagency Cooperation and Partnerships Branch, UNDRR
4. **Louise Baker** – Director, Global Mechanism, UNCCD
5. **Anh Nguyen** – Director, Centre for Social Research Development (CSRD), Vietnam
6. **Annette Wallgren** – Programme Management Officer, UNEP-Asia Pacific Office
7. **Branwen Millar** – Gender Advisor for the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)
8. **Carmen Capriles** – Co-founder of Reacción Climática, and WECAN Coordinator for Latin America, Bolivia (co-chair of Women Major group on Environment)
9. **Rockaya Aidara** – Gender Policy Officer, UNCCD
10. **Janet Macharia** – Head Gender and Safeguards Unit, UNEP
11. **Kakuko Nagatani-Yoshida** – Chemicals and Pollution Action Subprogramme Coordinator, UNEP
12. **Safia Yonis** – Associate Programme Management Officer, UNHABITAT
13. **Damaris Mungai** – Gender and Youth Officer, UNEP
14. **Kaossara Sani** – Founder, Act on the Sahel Movement, Togo
15. **Ellyanne Chlystun-Githae** – Africa's Young Ambassador for the 'End Plastic Soup' campaign, Kenya
16. **Sneha Shahi** – UNEP Plastic Tide Turner Champion, India
17. **Natania Botha** – Activist on Women's Leadership in Environmental Management, South Africa