



Women's Rehabilitation Centre



Towards Climate Justice Rooted in Gender Equality and Community Leadership

A Position Paper

Introduction

Nepal's fragile mountain ecology has long shaped the lives and livelihoods of its people. Today, the accelerating climate crisis is altering these landscapes at a pace that outstrips traditional knowledge and adaptation capacities. From the recent glacial lake outburst floods in the Himalayas to protracted droughts and increasingly erratic monsoons, climate-induced disasters are becoming both more frequent and more devastating. These shifts are not merely environmental; they are political, social, and deeply gendered. Women, who have long been the primary stewards of land, water, seeds, and community well-being, now face compounded vulnerabilities as both caregivers and food producers. Yet their voices remain underrepresented in the national and global decisions that shape climate policy and resource allocation.

A Crisis with Colonial Roots

The current emergency is inextricably linked to the legacies of colonial extraction and centuries of fossil-fuel-driven industrialization in the Global North. Wealthy nations built prosperity by externalizing ecological costs, while countries like Nepal, contributing minimally to global

emissions, bear the heaviest impacts: melting glaciers, erratic rainfall, and more frequent landslides and floods. This is climate injustice in its starkest form: those least responsible are among the most gravely affected.

International climate frameworks from the 1992 Rio Earth Summit to the Paris Agreement have repeatedly promised ambitious action. Yet global emissions continue to rise, and the gap between pledges and reality widens. The Conference of the Parties (COP) process has provided important spaces for dialogue, but its reliance on voluntary commitments and market mechanisms has allowed high-emitting countries to avoid binding reductions while shifting responsibility to developing nations. Even as recent COP decisions acknowledge gender equality and indigenous rights, these remain largely rhetorical without adequate financing or mechanisms for implementation.

The loss and damage fund agreed at COP27 marks progress, but the amounts pledged fall far short of the trillions needed to address climate impacts in vulnerable countries. The long-promised \$100 billion per year in climate finance has not been met, and much of what is delivered comes in the form of loans, adding debt burdens to nations already struggling with climate-related shocks. This financial architecture reproduces patterns of dependency that mirror colonial relationships of resource extraction.

Domestic Realities: Migration, Agriculture, and Care

Within Nepal, the climate crisis is driving new forms of displacement and labor migration. As rains fail or arrive violently late, subsistence farming falters, forcing men of working age to migrate for precarious work abroad. Women, left behind to maintain households and farmlands, shoulder an increasingly burdensome unpaid care: tending fields, collecting water and firewood, caring for children, and the elderly.

This care crisis extends beyond individual households to the broader work of social reproduction, the invisible labor of nurturing communities and sustaining cultural practices that make society itself possible. Women's contributions to food security through seed saving, the preservation of

medicinal plant knowledge, and the maintenance of rituals that strengthen community resilience remain largely unrecognized in climate adaptation planning or economic calculations.

Meanwhile, families displaced by floods, landslides, or drought often end up in informal settlements or on urban peripheries, lacking secure housing, clean water, and access to basic services. These displacements exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly for women and marginalized groups who face heightened risks of gender-based violence, economic exploitation, and political exclusion.

Knowledge and Leadership Beyond Technocratic Fixes

Current climate strategies—both national and international—remain largely top-down and technical, prioritizing engineering solutions and market-based mechanisms. Such approaches often ignore the wealth of indigenous knowledge and women's ecological practices that have sustained communities for generations. Women's intimate understanding of soil fertility, seed diversity, and watershed management is too often dismissed in formal climate discourse, despite its proven capacity to foster resilience.

Sustainable agricultural practices such as bio-intensive farming exemplify how traditional knowledge can be strengthened through ecological innovation. These methods, which emphasize deep soil preparation, composting, companion cropping, and intensive planting, can produce high yields on small plots while conserving water and building soil fertility, critical advantages for women farmers working marginal lands with limited resources. By relying on locally available materials rather than expensive external inputs, such practices strengthen women's autonomy and food sovereignty.

Genuine climate justice requires a reorientation of power: from expert-driven, centralized models to participatory approaches that recognize women and indigenous peoples as knowledge holders and leaders. Women are not merely victims of climate change; they are natural custodians of

biodiversity and catalysts of community resilience. Policies that overlook their agency risk reinforcing the very inequalities that make societies vulnerable.

Pathways Toward Climate Justice

For WOREC, climate justice demands transformative changes in how societies organize economies, distribute resources, and relate to nature. It is fundamentally a question of justice—who caused the problem, who bears the costs, and who has the power to shape solutions. Our vision calls for:

Centering Affected Communities. Climate responses must prioritize the leadership and knowledge of those most affected, particularly women, indigenous peoples, and marginalized groups, ensuring meaningful participation, not mere consultation, in all climate-related policies and programs.

Economic Justice. Addressing vulnerability means tackling economic inequality, insecure land tenure, and lack of access to productive resources. Redistributive policies must strengthen social protection systems, guarantee secure land rights for women, and support local economic alternatives to extractive industries.

Care and Social Reproduction. Climate policies must recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work while investing in public services such as healthcare, education, childcare, and elder care that support community resilience and ease the private burden on women.

Knowledge Justice. Indigenous and local knowledge systems must be recognized as equally valid to Western science. Community-controlled research and protections for traditional knowledge are crucial for developing hybrid knowledge systems that integrate diverse ways of knowing. Supporting sustainable agricultural practices such as bio-intensive farming can empower women farmers while building climate-resilient food systems.

Feminist Climate Diplomacy. International climate governance must be democratized to ensure equal participation of women and marginalized groups. Climate finance should prioritize grants over loans, support locally led initiatives, and include dedicated funding for women's organizations and indigenous groups.

Just Transition. Moving away from fossil fuel dependence must not place the costs of transition on workers and communities already facing marginalization. A just transition requires decent work opportunities, retraining programs, and social protection for affected communities while ensuring energy democracy and community ownership of renewable systems.

Our Demands

WOREC calls upon governments, international organizations, and civil society to act with urgency:

Immediate Actions

- Ensure women's equal representation in all climate decision-making bodies at local, national, and international levels.
- Allocate at least 50% of climate finance to locally led initiatives with dedicated funding for women's organizations.
- Recognize and protect indigenous and community land rights as fundamental to climate resilience.
- Integrate unpaid care work into climate policy analysis and develop policies to reduce and redistribute care burdens.
- Invest in training and resources for sustainable agricultural methods, including bio-intensive farming, that enhance food security while empowering women farmers.

Systemic Changes

- Transform international climate finance from debt-creating loans to grants and reparations that acknowledge historical responsibility.
- Establish binding commitments for emissions reductions by high-emitting countries with enforcement mechanisms.
- Create legal frameworks that recognize the rights of nature and of future generations.
- Develop climate policies grounded in ecological limits and principles of sufficiency rather than endless economic expansion.

Long-term Vision

- Build economic systems that prioritize well-being and ecological health over profit maximization.
- Establish global frameworks for climate migration that protect the rights and dignity of climate migrants.
- Create educational systems that integrate indigenous knowledge and ecological wisdom.
- Develop governance structures that enable democratic participation in decisions affecting our shared planetary home.

Conclusion

The climate crisis calls us to reimagine our relationships with each other and with the natural world. It demands that we move beyond technical fixes and market solutions toward systemic transformation. For WOREC, climate justice is inseparable from gender justice, social justice, and the broader struggle for human rights and dignity.

The women and communities we work with are not passive victims of climate change but active agents of resilience and transformation. They hold knowledge, skills, and visions essential for creating sustainable futures. Climate justice requires amplifying these voices, redistributing power

and resources, and building movements capable of creating the systemic changes our world desperately needs.

As we face an uncertain future in a changing climate characterized by shifting seasons, glacial outbursts, droughts, and climate-induced migration, we must choose between paths that perpetuate injustice and those that lead toward more equitable and sustainable ways of living. WOREC stands committed to the latter path, working alongside movements worldwide to build climate justice from the ground up. The time for incremental change has passed; the transformation our planet needs demands collective action with urgency and vision.

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