

TAKING A GENDER SENSITIVE APPROACH TO CLIMATE CHANGE PREVENTION, MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION

IWDA POLICY POSITION PAPER ON CLIMATE CHANGE

IWDA's vision of gender equality for all requires a gender responsive approach to climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation. This paper looks at climate change in the Pacific and Asia, the gendered impacts of climate change, and how Australia's policies and approaches influence these issues.

ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE IS AN IMPERATIVE FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The impacts of climate change are gendered—meaning that people are impacted in different ways by climate change based on their gender and other factors.¹ Gender norms often constrain women's, trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people's leadership and contribute to their marginalisation. These same norms also increase risk from climate change: "high levels of sexual and gender based violence, low levels of decision-making, strong gendered social norms, high levels of gender discrimination and poverty all exacerbate climate change risks for women and girls of all ages."²

Women and girls are often responsible for gathering and preparing household food, water and fuel. As water, fuel, fish and other food sources become scarcer, women and girls must spend more time on these aspects of unpaid domestic labour, increasingly risking exposure to environmental and interpersonal hazards. The time spent on these activities and the risks faced in undertaking them uniquely affect women's capacity for economic empowerment.³ Further, the food shortages and financial hardship associated with climate change can increase violence against women and LGBTQIA+ people. Increased gender-based violence in the aftermath of natural disasters is well documented.⁴

IWDA AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change presents a global threat: while climate change is not restricted by borders of sovereign states, its effects are felt differently by individuals and it is experienced differently based on geography. Climate change prevention, adaptation and mitigation is part of a comprehensive approach to advancing gender equality, especially in the Pacific and Asia which are among the regions most heavily impacted by climate change.

IWDA's Strategic Plan 2020-23 identifies Gendered Climate Justice as a key area of focus, committing us to supporting work at the intersection of climate justice and gender equality, and leveraging our locational power for advocacy. This advocacy is informed by the work of the Women and Gender Constituency, which works to ensure women's rights and gender justice within the United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change, as well as feminist and environment movement actors from Australia, the Pacific, Asia and beyond.

CLIMATE CHANGE IN THE PACIFIC AND ASIA

Anthropogenic climate change, meaning climate change caused and accelerated by humans, is one of the most pressing issues of our time.⁶ Climate change is rooted in an economic model that causes damage to people, societies and the planet, as well as compounding existing inequalities and violence within and between states.⁷ The high levels of air pollution, rapid deforestation and urbanisation in Southeast Asia are not only contributing to global climate change, but are exacerbating the symptoms of climate change, such as unpredictable weather patterns and rising seas, that are threatening states throughout the Pacific and Asia region.

1

THE PACIFIC AND ASIA IS ONE OF THE MOST CLIMATE-VULNERABLE REGIONS IN THE WORLD

Climate change in the Pacific and Asia is a particularly pressing issue. The University of Notre Dame's Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) conducts an annual survey to rank 181 of the world's countries on their vulnerability to climate change and readiness to adapt. This demonstrates that countries in the Pacific and Asia are some of the worst affected due to both geographic features, and the ongoing legacy of colonisation and global inequality.⁸ Issues such as increasing frequency, severity and unpredictability of storms, increasing salination of the groundwater, rising temperatures and severe air pollution affect the region as a whole, while the Pacific faces specific and immediate threats such as rising sea levels, reduced biodiversity and the loss of coral reefs due to heat-induced mass coral bleaching.⁹

Changes in weather patterns mean that the agricultural industries upon which the majority of people in this region depend are no longer reliable while severe weather events, such as Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, cause billions of dollars of damage and result in significant loss of life.¹⁰ As noted by Oxfam, extreme events have become the norm for farmers in this region.¹²

Pacific Islanders are responding to these challenges and demanding immediate, progressive action on climate change prevention. Through intergovernmental mechanisms such as the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), and civil society mechanisms like the Pacific Feminist Forum, representatives from all over the Pacific come together to call out powerful western governments for their inaction on climate change.¹³

People living in the Pacific and Asia are five times more likely to be hit by a natural disaster than those living in other regions, and the region lost more than \$USD1.3 trillion in assets between 1970 and 2016 due to natural disasters.

2

PACIFIC ISLAND NATIONS ARE THE LEAST RESPONSIBLE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND EXPERIENCE SOME OF THE MOST SEVERE CONSEQUENCES

Pacific Island nations bear a very small portion of the responsibility for climate change, yet are burdened with an enormous proportion of the consequences because of their geographic location and topography. Though the Pacific Islands have long endured cyclones, floods, droughts and heatwaves, many traditional coping strategies that were in place to mitigate these challenges were eroded through colonisation.

This erosion of coping strategies includes importation of food and crops to replace adaptable indigenous food sources, and individualisation that has led to a thinning of traditional community networks.¹⁴

The loss of these traditional practices and knowledge combined with the increasing frequency and severity of catastrophic events has made it harder for Pacific Islanders to prevent, mitigate and adapt to today's climate-related challenges.

“Climate change remains the single greatest threat to the livelihoods, security and wellbeing of the peoples of the Pacific” - Boe Declaration, Pacific Islands Forum, 2018

“[It is time] for the polluters to take main responsibility [for climate change], according to common but differentiated historical responsibility for imperial, colonial and other inequalities” - Pacific Feminist Charter for Action 2019

UNEVEN IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

No one is exempt from the consequences of climate change: floods, fires, droughts and tropical storms can happen to anyone. The world's medical, food and economic systems are already strained by the impacts of climate change. We are seeing an increasing spread of vector-borne illnesses, more heat-related deaths, higher rates of lung disease and illnesses caused by air pollution, and increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events that cause billions of dollars of damage.¹⁵ While we will all bear the cost of climate change, the impacts on women and LGBTQIA+ people are exacerbated by their gender roles.

1

THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ARE FELT DIFFERENTLY BASED ON GENDER

Women are often dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, for example through their reliance on small-scale or subsistence farming. Women undertake the vast majority of unpaid domestic labour, including collecting food, fuel and water.¹⁶ Climate change and associated climate variability affect all of these activities negatively.¹⁷ Women face greater impacts from the unavoidable loss and damage that is already occurring due to climate change, because they are more likely to be economically, socially and politically marginalised, making it harder for them to access the resources needed to recover and rebuild.

Further, LGBTQIA+ people - especially those with disabilities - are even more acutely impacted by extreme weather events: research, such as the 'Down by the River' report, demonstrates that disaster risk reduction (DRR) and humanitarian response do not meet the most basic requirements of gender diverse peoples.¹⁸ This means that women living in developing countries, and especially in rural areas of developing countries, are some of the most vulnerable people to the effects of climate change.

Women may experience increased domestic violence as a result of climate-change related water and food shortages

LGBTQIA+ people, and people with disabilities are at greater risk of marginalisation, violence and 'falling through the cracks' during disasters and response

2

WOMEN ARE LARGELY EXCLUDED FROM THE DECISION-MAKING BODIES THAT DEVELOP CLIMATE CHANGE RELATED POLICIES

Women, especially women from marginalised groups, are underrepresented in all formal decision-making bodies from the local to multi-national level—including within climate change policy development.¹⁹ This is important, because women play particular roles in societies and therefore have both specific concerns and insights relating to climate change. Without women's participation in formal policy development, these unique concerns and solutions are invisible.

Despite these barriers, there are women who are leading climate change adaptation and mitigation (including DRR) in their communities and at the global level. For instance, femLINKpacific's 2017 regional radio campaign 'Women's Weather Watch' promotes gender inclusive DRR in Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. DiVA for Equality

Women are underrepresented in formal decision-making bodies at the global, national and local level

Women's diverse knowledge and concerns are excluded from the development of climate change policy

Most DRR responders are men—who often only consult with male community leaders and members

organised the first International Women’s Day march on Taveuni Island, Fiji, to prioritise women’s roles within climate justice. Women in Labutta and Pakokku townships of Myanmar are leading adaptation committees to develop adaptation shelters and conduct vulnerability mapping.²⁰ Diverse women are deeply involved in the production of knowledge regarding climate change, and are using this knowledge to fortify their communities against the harmful effects of climate change on a grassroots basis.²¹

3

INCLUSION OF DIVERSE GROUPS IN FORMAL DECISION-MAKING BODIES RESULTS IN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS AND BETTER CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

Globally, Indigenous women have long played a central role in environmental knowledge management, including ways in which communities have traditionally responded to environmental challenges.²² Despite the numerous challenges women face in accessing decision-making spaces, women can, and do, play critical roles in response to climate change. Women’s knowledge of, and leadership in, sustainable practices at the household, community and national levels, as well as their roles in unpaid care work and sustainable resource management are invaluable.

Women are capable change agents, and should be included in the development of all stages of climate policy. Promoting women’s leadership in traditional and formal arenas, giving due consideration to Indigenous knowledge and explicitly including the concerns of women are the first steps in creating gender-responsive climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation.

Women have important knowledge about resource management in their communities

**“Women’s participation at the political level can result in far greater responsiveness to the needs of diverse individuals”
(DiVA 2017)**

More diverse women in government means climate change policy will make use of diverse women’s traditional knowledge—and include the concerns of diverse women

GENDER, CLIMATE CHANGE AND AUSTRALIAN POLICY

Climate change is not isolated within a state's borders: Australia's energy policies impact its own territory as well as the air, ocean, land and livelihoods of its neighbours, and beyond. Under the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR), Australia is responsible for a reduction in greenhouse gases and emissions that is proportional to our historical and current levels of pollution. CBDR was first identified within the context of climate change in the 1990s, as research demonstrated that a significant part of our current climate and environment related challenges are directly linked to the manner in which the western world had industrialised and practiced resource extraction.²³ The countries that have suffered the most from these industrialisation practices are also among the countries that are most vulnerable to climate change. Australia should therefore take responsibility for its role in climate change by adopting domestic and foreign climate change policies in line with our international commitments.

1

AUSTRALIA'S DOMESTIC CLIMATE CHANGE POLICIES INFLUENCE OUTCOMES FAR OUTSIDE OUR BORDERS

In accordance with the CBDR principle, signatories to the Paris Agreement developed Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) plans.²⁴ Australia's "emissions have been rising since the Government repealed the carbon price and replaced it with the Direct Action scheme" in 2013, and rose for four consecutive years before falling in 2020 due to pandemic related restrictions.²⁵ Curbing emissions will be critical for Australia if we are to meet our Paris targets.²⁶ A critical source of Australia's continued failure to bring down emissions is in the continuation of policies that prop up the coal industry, such as the provision of floor prices and loans. Multiple international studies have reiterated the immediate importance of reducing global reliance on coal and the need for a complete phase out of coal by 2050 and an ultimate transition to a carbon neutral economy.²⁷ Unless Australia reforms its energy sector, we will continue to harm our economy, our society, our neighbours, and our planet.

Australia will not meet its 2030 emissions reduction targets under current policies

Under current policies, Australia's emissions will increase by an annual rate of ~0.3%

Pacific Island nations face an existential threat due to climate change and the continued burning of fossil fuels by developed countries

2

AUSTRALIA MUST INVEST IN GENDER-RESPONSIVE CLIMATE FINANCING

In a 2018 evaluation of 26 of Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA) climate change investments, a mere 23% demonstrated evidence of gender-related outcomes.²⁸ According to the evaluation, a number of projects that did not demonstrate gender-related outcomes had explicitly included gender in the design of the project. The gender-specific features of the project, such as a gender impact assessment or gender action plans, were not implemented or were inadequate.²⁹ This was partially explained by the way in which DFAT engages with its investments: gender processes "are less likely to be considered when DFAT is not actively involved in the management of the investment."³⁰ It is clear that DFAT must closely monitor its climate change investments to meet gender targets and outcomes and invest in new initiatives which prioritise gender responsive climate change solutions. As part of this, Australia should prioritise funding for ecosystem-based approaches as defined by the Convention on Biological Diversity: "the conservation, sustainable management, and restoration of ecosystems to help people adapt to the impacts of climate change."³¹

Only 23% of 26 ODA-based climate change interventions demonstrated gender-related outcomes, even when projects had gender-specific targets

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 1: Act to limit global warming to 1.5° C by transitioning to 100% renewable energy through a 'Just Transition' that addresses inequalities in power and wealth while transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.

Recommendation 2: Recommit to the Green Climate Fund at COP26 and scale up Australia's climate finance in line with our fair share commitment:

- a) Immediately double Australia's current climate finance to \$3 billion over 2020-2025.
- b) By 2023, shape regional and global climate responses by committing an additional \$700 - \$990 million to the Green Climate Fund.
- c) By 2030, scale up Australia's climate finance to meet its fair share of \$12 billion annually.

Recommendation 3: Support a standalone finance arm for loss and damage in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to provide public finance and compensation to marginalised communities who are already experiencing loss and damage, in line with human rights principles.

Recommendation 4: All climate actions respect human rights and promote gender equality in line with the UNFCCC Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan activities.

Recommendation 5: Diverse women, trans, non-binary and gender nonconforming people - including Indigenous communities and people with disabilities - should be central to Australia's climate change, disaster prevention, preparedness, adaptation and recovery efforts.

Recommendation 6: Ensure that the rights of Indigenous peoples are upheld, the leadership of Indigenous Peoples is respected and included in decision-making processes at the national and international levels and that all climate action is informed by Indigenous knowledge systems.

Recommendation 7: Ensure women's full and equal participation and leadership in climate change decision-making at local, regional and global levels by including quotas for diverse women, trans, non-binary and gender nonconforming people in decision-making bodies.

Recommendation 8: Allocate new and additional ODA funding for feminist climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation projects and programs to women's rights organisations from the Pacific and Asia.

Recommendation 9: Require intersectional feminist analysis (that considers impacts of sexuality, race, nationality, class, disability and other identifiers) of all climate investments across design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

ENDNOTES:

¹ IWDA refers to 'women,' 'women in all their diversity,' and 'diverse women' throughout this paper. We mean these phrases to include women of all ages, races, ethnicities, locations, levels of ability, religions and of all sexual orientations, gender identities and sex characteristics.

² DIVA for Equality 2017a

³ Women and Gender Constituency 2018

⁴ Dwyer and Woolf 2018

⁵ For instance, Climate Council, Climate Action Tracker, SEED, AYCC, CANA, Action on Climate, Climate for Change and more.

⁶ Parker 2018; Pacific Islands Forum 2018

⁷ We Rise Coalition 2017, 8

⁸ University of Notre Dame 2019

⁹ Weir, Dovey, and Orcherton 2017, 1019

¹⁰ Eckstein et al. 2018; Richards and Bradshaw 2017; Myanmar Climate Change Alliance 2019

¹¹ ReliefWeb 2017

¹² Richards and Bradshaw 2017

¹³ Pacific Feminist Forum 2019; Amnesty International et al 2018; Pacific Islands Forum 2018

¹⁴ Weir, Dovey, and Orcherton 2017, 1021; Fletcher et al. 2013

¹⁵ WHO and UNFCCC 2015; Pierre-Louis and Popovich 2019

¹⁶ DIVA for Equality 2017b; 2017a

¹⁷ Terry 2009, 3; DIVA for Equality 2017b

¹⁸ Dwyer and Woolf 2018; CBM Australia 2019; CBM Germany 2019

¹⁹ Eastin 2018; UNISDR, UNDP, and IUCN 2009

²⁰ FemLINK Pacific 2017; DIVA for Equality 2018; MCCA 2016

²¹ Weir, Dovey, and Orcherton 2017; Charan, Kaur, and Singh 2016

²² Mcleod et al. 2018

²³ Williams and Montes 2016, 116

²⁴ Government of Australia 2015

²⁵ Murphy and Cox 2019; Climate Council 2018

²⁶ Climate Action Tracker 2018a; Climate Council 2018; Stock 2018; Kilvert 2018

²⁷ Climate Action Tracker 2018b

²⁸ Gayfer et al. 2018, 40

²⁹ Gayfer et al. 2018, 40

³⁰ Gayfer et al. 2018, 41

³¹ Women and Gender Constituency. 2021. Updates and key considerations for the May–June 2021 Climate Change Conference – sessions of the subsidiary bodies. <https://womengenderclimate.org/key-considerations-for-the-upcoming-may-june-2021-climate-change-conference-sessions-of-the-subsidiary-bodies/>

³² World Resources Institute, Waslander, and Amerasinge 2019; World Resources Institute, Waslander, and Vallejos 2018

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