



**GEN**

**ADAPT**

**Turning promises into progress:**

**How the UK can realise the potential of  
gender-just climate action**



# Turning promises to progress: How the UK can realise the potential of gender-just climate action

## Acknowledgements

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## About Gen Adapt

You've heard of Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z. Now, meet GenAdapt: a new generation of women and girls who are the first to have to adapt to a new tougher climate reality in order to survive and thrive. Through our Gen Adapt campaign, CARE is elevating the voices of women and girls impacted by the climate crisis. Together, we are calling for world leaders to commit to meaningful climate financing to reach women-led organisations, more women at decision-making tables when it comes to the issues that disproportionately affect them, and to take steps to reduce the worse impacts of climate change in future, through a rapid and fair transition away from fossil fuels to clean and renewable energy.

Front cover image: Mable and her daughter Lumuno tending to their farm in the Southern Province of Zambia.  
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Image: Virginia, indigenous farmer from Ecuador, taking care of her agro-ecological garden.  
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## Executive summary

Jerin, a 16-year-old from Bangladesh, is passing on knowledge she has gained from CARE's SUFAL II project, inspiring others in her community to take measures to adapt to the reality of climate change  
© Asafuzzaman Captain / CARE

The impacts of the human-induced climate crisis have never been more apparent and the needs of those affected have never been more urgent. Unprecedented floods, wildfires and heat waves over the past two years have shown that no part of our planet is protected. Slow onset disasters caused by rising temperatures are also on the increase and are, at times, exacerbating existing fragility. But while climate change touches all of us, it is those who are marginalised and discriminated against who suffer the most.

Women and girls living in low- and middle-income countries, who have contributed least to the climate emergency, are bearing the brunt of its impacts. As droughts, extreme weather and temperature shifts disrupt livelihoods, women and girls face increased vulnerability to displacement and gender-based violence. They are also shouldering more domestic and caregiving responsibilities even while their livelihoods are being destroyed. These are a generation of women and girls who are being forced to adapt to climate devastation.

However, women and girls on the frontlines of the climate crisis also have the power, expertise, resilience and potential to adapt. Engaging women in a full and meaningful way, and supporting their leadership, increases the quality of decision making around climate change and helps to ensure that the needs of women and girls are met.<sup>1</sup> The failure to consider and respond to gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities undermines effectiveness, can deepen gender inequalities and risks doing harm. In turn, this creates a vicious cycle where the impacts of climate change are driving vulnerability, poverty and marginalisation. At the same time, the people who are most impacted are being excluded from decision making, they are not able to access resources and their needs are being ignored.

The climate crisis demands innovative thinking, cross-sector collaboration and locally led solutions. Proven approaches focus on long-term, forward-looking responses to build resilience and adapt to climate change, at the same time as transforming gender relations and women's meaningful participation and leadership. Women's rights and women-led organisations<sup>2</sup> are key agents of this work. They are often best placed to deliver context-specific and long-term interventions and to build the agency of women and girls. Women's equal participation and leadership in climate negotiations also needs to be realised – only 37% of national delegates at last year's United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) were women, lower than the percentage in 2021,<sup>3</sup> while men took up 74% of speaking time in plenary discussions.<sup>4</sup>

The UK Government has the opportunity to implement effective, gender-just climate action and to be a leader in addressing the double injustices of gender inequality and the climate crisis. However, CARE International UK's report, released on Gender Day at COP28, finds that, despite promising commitments that recognise this, the UK is not yet making the urgent progress needed to ensure that women and girls are able to lead climate solutions in their communities.

Key findings from our research highlight that:

- Less than 1% of UK bilateral climate finance targeted gender equality specifically last year, despite evidence that addressing climate and gender justice together is effective and necessary.
- Less than 0.2% reached the hands of women's rights organisations last year, even though they are recognised as crucial agents of change in gender-just climate action.
- The UK would also have to redouble its efforts to ensure it meets the target of mainstreaming gender equality in 88% of bilateral international climate finance, as demanded by women's rights organisations,<sup>5</sup> as only 47% of spend between 2015-2022 did so.

Our research also found that gender equality is not being consistently applied to UK Government policies guiding efforts towards a green transition, which presents economic opportunities as new sectors and roles are created in efforts to shift to a low-carbon economy. However, without specifically addressing the barriers that women and girls face, particularly for marginalised groups, there is a risk that they will miss out on these opportunities, further deepening inequalities. Furthermore, the potential transformative role of the care economy in a future green economy is often ignored. Integrating a gender lens into the green transition at the outset can create a virtuous circle that improves women's access to decent work, builds resilience and leads to better environmental outcomes.

The UK is not alone in making slow progress to ensure climate action is gender-just. Many other donors are also making slow progress on these metrics. Action is needed by all stakeholders involved, including international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). However, following a commitment from the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to "use the full weight of our diplomatic and development offer to put women and girls, in all their diversity, at the heart of everything we do,"<sup>6</sup> and as political parties in the UK scope out their agendas ahead of a general election, we are calling for these promises to translate into more rapid progress for the women and girls on the frontline of climate change.

As well as gender-specific policies and programmes, gender-just climate action also requires leadership to ensure that: overall climate finance commitments are ambitious

and that promises are kept; the Global South has the resources it deserves for adaptation and loss and damage; and action is taken to rapidly meet the globally required targets for reducing emissions by 2030.

Recent choices by the UK to change what it counts as climate finance instead of increasing funding to meet commitments,<sup>7</sup> and a rollback on domestic policies to meet net zero<sup>8</sup> show worrying trends that the UK is stepping back from leadership on climate action. If action is not taken urgently, the poorest women and girls around the world stand to suffer the most.

## Recommendations

**The UK Government must act on its promises, and accelerate support for the women and girls being forced to adapt to climate change through:**

### **Advancing the integration of gender equality into climate finance by:**

- Setting a specific target of 88% of marked climate bilateral finance mainstreaming gender equality aims by 2026, as per the recommendations of the Generation Equality Forum Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition, increasing from the 47% average between 2015-22.<sup>9</sup>
- Integrating rapid, robust gender analysis in all climate finance programming.
- Increasing the amount of climate finance that targets gender equality specifically – for example, investing in programmes that tackle the links between gender-based violence and climate change.
- Working with multilateral and development finance institutions through which the UK channels climate finance to scale up and improve the integration of gender equality into their practices.
- Stepping up systematic collection, analysis and use of gender, age and disability disaggregated (SADD) data to ensure interventions across all sectors are needs based and identify how specific groups are impacted differently by crisis and the coping mechanisms they use.

### **Increasing the quantity and quality of climate finance reaching women's rights organisations and women-led organisations by:**

- Actively designing programmes that would support the leadership of women's rights organisations and women-led organisations, seeking them out as partners and consulting with them to design opportunities.
- Increasing the quality of funding through longer-term, multi-year commitments and flexible grant-based funding. Where funding is managed through a fund manager, the fund should be set up according to feminist funding principles.
- Removing the barriers that women's rights organisations face in accessing climate finance, across bilateral and multilateral mechanisms, including through consultation on identifying these barriers, which include complex procedures, language barriers and annual budget requirements.

- Specifically designing strategies to seek out women's rights organisations and women-led organisations that represent marginalised women and girls.
- Funding existing mechanisms that directly support community-level, women-led climate action, such as women's funds and the *Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA)*.<sup>10</sup>
- Operationalising the principles of locally led adaptation and resilience-building – for example, climate adaptation in which local communities, community-based organisations, citizen groups, local government and local private sector entities at the lowest administrative structure are included as decision-makers in the interventions that affect them.<sup>11</sup>
- Using their influence within multilateral financial institutions to create mechanisms with conditions and reporting requirements tailored to women's rights and women-led organisations.

### **Amplifying women's voice and leadership in climate policy and negotiations by:**

- Increasing support for the implementation of the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan – for example through dedicated funding allocated to its implementation, and demonstrating political support.
- Continuing to advocate for gender parity and women's leadership in international climate spaces, and supporting the inclusion of multiple, diverse perspectives. Using diplomatic influence to highlight and put pressure on processes that are not reaching gender parity.
- Funding the participation of women from low- and middle-income countries in international climate negotiations, including technical and working level meetings.
- Supporting the inclusion of women-led organisations as key stakeholders in climate negotiations.
- Building internal expertise on the intersection of climate and gender across FCDO, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.
- Ensuring gender equality is mainstreamed into negotiations and is a priority for UK negotiators at the UNFCCC including negotiations on adaptation, finance, loss and damage, mitigation and the just transition.

### **Accelerating a gender-just green transition**

- Ensuring that all UK strategies for accelerating the green transition include gender equality aims and specific measures to ensure that marginalised women and girls can benefit from new economic opportunities – for example, through:
  - upskilling women and girls for green and higher-skilled jobs.
  - tackling the structural barriers that women face in the world of work, e.g. through building caring economies in line with the "5 Rs" (of recognition, reduction, redistribution, representation and reward).
  - using quotas, specialised recruitment and engaging with women's rights organisations.

- promoting decent work in line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition.<sup>12</sup>
- Collecting, analysing and using sex-, age- and disability- disaggregated data to assess the green transition's impact on gender equality.
- Broadening the definition of green work to encompass mostly low-carbon to carbon-neutral sectors that are dominated by women, such as care and social work.
- Increasing women's participation and leadership in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of green transition measures, including by consulting women's rights organisations on strategies and priorities.



Image: Hanh, 12, from Vietnam worries about the impact of climate change on women, especially farmers like her mother.  
© CARE/ Vu Ngoc Dung





# 1. The case for gender-just climate action is clear

Image: Mamata has learned about sustainable farming techniques through a CARE project in Bangladesh © Asafuzzaman Captain/CARE

The impacts of the human-induced climate crisis have never been more apparent and the needs of those affected have never been more urgent. Unprecedented floods, wildfires and heat waves over the past two years have shown that no part of our planet is protected. But while climate change touches all of us, it is those who are in vulnerable and marginalised situations who suffer the most. Women and girls living in low- and middle-income countries, who have contributed least to the climate emergency, are bearing the brunt of its impacts. The ‘business as usual’ approach of big promises and little action has created a vicious cycle where the impacts of climate change are driving vulnerability and marginalisation, while those most impacted are excluded from decision-making, not able to access resources and their needs ignored.

*“You can’t have gender justice in a world that is ravaged by climate chaos. You have to deliver climate action to achieve gender justice.”*

Tara Daniel, Senior Program Manager, Women’s Environment & Development Organization (WEDO)

The impacts of climate change are making people’s lives harder and less secure, and women have fewer resources to cope and recover. This unequal distribution of risk and vulnerability is deeply rooted in long-standing gender inequalities and the social and cultural norms determining women’s role in society. Unequal access to resources, lack of decision-making power and gendered social norms leave women and girls specifically vulnerable to the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change.

Women are more likely to work in natural resource-dependent sectors like agriculture, fisheries and forestry, but are less likely to own the land<sup>13</sup> and are less able to access

credit.<sup>14</sup> So while women are more reliant on natural systems for their livelihoods, they have fewer resources to recover when disaster strikes. At the same time, the gendered nature of care means crises increase the demands on women and girls' time – making them less able to take paid work or attend school and perpetuating inequalities. In turn, this further hinders their ability to recover from the impacts of crises. Women and girls are responsible for 75% of unpaid care work, including collecting water and fuel.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, women and girls are more likely to be energy poor and lack access to clean cooking fuel.<sup>16</sup>

*“Right in front of us, we are seeing the devastation of women’s livelihoods and the deepening of poverty.”*

Titilope Ngozi Akosa, Executive Director, Centre for 21st Century Issues

Women and girls are less safe in a crisis. Crises increase tensions within communities and households and can exacerbate gender inequalities or upend traditional gender norms, creating conditions that perpetuate gender-based violence, including human trafficking and forced marriage.<sup>17</sup>

Despite these challenges, women are actively responding to and adapting to the climate emergency. Women have the knowledge, skills and lived experiences that improve climate outcomes. The participation and leadership of women and women’s groups improve the effectiveness and efficiency of development and climate funding.<sup>18</sup> Despite women leading climate adaptation solutions in their communities, however, they are often prevented from engaging in climate-related decision-making processes at all levels. In many cases, they are excluded because social norms dictate that women’s voices are not relevant or permissible. Women have the resilience and the potential to adapt to climate change, but structural inequalities limit that potential from being realised.

Integrating gender into climate action contributes to developing better-informed, more effective and targeted programmes and projects. The failure to consider and respond to gender-specific needs and vulnerabilities undermines effectiveness, can deepen gender inequalities and risks doing harm. The way forward is to address gender inequality and the impacts of climate change in tandem.

## Box 1: What is gender-just climate action?

Gender-just climate action signifies a fundamental commitment to addressing the intertwined issue of climate change and gender equality. It recognises that climate change affects different genders in different ways and that their different perspectives and experiences should be central to climate policies and actions. For example, this means:

- Including women and other marginalised groups as key decision-makers in all climate discussions. For effective and sustainable decision-making, they have to be part of the planning, implementation and monitoring of global and national climate efforts.
- Integrating gender considerations into all aspects of climate policy and financing, by ensuring that a significant share of climate finance goes towards gender equality goals.

- Collaborating with women-led and women's rights organisations, both at the local and international level, is key.
- Making gender impact assessments for climate action mandatory, creating a systematic framework to measure and monitor progress.

The UK Government has historically championed gender equality in its approach to international development and foreign policy, and has previously played a positive role in elements of global climate action. However, the Government's actions in recent years have called into question their continued commitment. Successive rounds of aid cuts that have impacted funding for gender equality,<sup>19</sup> the weakening of domestic net zero commitments<sup>20</sup> and changes to international climate finance calculations<sup>21</sup> are all steps in the wrong direction. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the UK's current commitments on the intersection of gender and climate, framed by what women's rights activists and organisations find important. The authors also give an indication of performance as well as making recommendations for going further.

The research was conducted between August and October 2023 through a literature review of primary and secondary sources, including relevant UK and international strategies, programmes and action plans. The research included a quantitative assessment of the UK's integration of gender into climate finance conducted by Development Initiatives.<sup>22</sup> The literature review was supplemented by targeted interviews with four climate and gender justice activists, and an FCDO representative.<sup>23</sup>

Four key areas of intersection have emerged from conversations conducted with gender and climate activists for this project:

1. Integrating gender into climate finance
2. Making sure climate finances reach women's rights organisations and activists
3. Improving women's participation and leadership in climate policy and negotiations
4. Accelerating a gender-just green transition

Delivering progress on these areas must be underpinned by strong overall leadership from the UK Government on climate justice, including making and keeping ambitious climate finance commitments and ensuring a rapid, just and equitable global phase-out of fossil fuels.



Josselyn tends to a coriander plant at her agro-ecological farm.  
© CARE/Ana María Buitron

## Box 2: Gen Adapt – Josselyn’s story

Meet a generation of women and girls who have been disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, who we are calling ‘Gen Adapt’, as they are forced to adapt to climate devastation.

Josselyn, a smallholder farmer from San Isidro in Ecuador, is the president of the Association of Organic Producers and Entrepreneurs of Cotopaxi. She is also part of a group called Andean rural women against climate change.

CARE International works with the community through the Lamuru Kawsay Agroecology School. The association Josselyn leads is a partner on gender and climate. She spoke to CARE about her experiences, hopes and fears around climate change:

*“We are affected by drought and frost. We are in a very dry season. We don’t have enough grass for the animals. In Ecuador, the impact is severe on farming women. Today, 88% of agriculture is in the hands of women. Climate change affects women because of the inequality gap in farming production. Women are in charge of the farm. We take care of our family, feed the population.*

*My grandmother has always sowed and farmed in the same way. The only fertiliser she used was collected from the animal stall. When we were in the oil boom, people abandoned the land. Everything was filled with weeds. When the oil era ended, they returned to farming. They wanted to poison the land with harsh chemicals, to kill mother earth.*

*It is worrisome because we are running out of time. Our land is being exploited because it needs to keep producing and we do not realise that it is a living being. It needs to rest, to nurture itself.*

*I worry a lot. I feel scared that my children will feel this need to perhaps escape from this. Right now, we are killing the earth, we are depleting our natural resources. We are ending our mother earth's life. We have to think and take action so that our children will not suffer in the future.*

*We, the small producers, are paying for all the consequences generated by industrialised countries. We must raise awareness and have climate justice, for them to assume their responsibility and help those of us who are most affected by the situation. We need to make our voices heard for authorities and institutions to take action. We need support, policies to protect us and we need to adapt to what we are already experiencing. We need to be strong. We have to improve our living conditions.*

*Everyone should know that women are not just victims. We are strong and intelligent and able to contribute to the solutions to climate change. But we need the world's leaders to take action on climate change because it affects us all. Tomorrow may be too late."*



## 2. Existing international and national frameworks governing the UK

Phong, a farmer from Vietnam, has learned how to adapt her farming techniques to climate change impacts through a CARE project  
© CARE/Vu Ngoc Dung

The intersection of gender and climate justice has become more prominent in international and national policy agendas since the 2010 Cancun Agreements acknowledged the importance of gender equality and women's effective participation for addressing climate change. Gender was established as a standing item under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2012.<sup>24</sup> The first Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG) was agreed in 2014.<sup>25</sup> The following year, gender equality and the empowerment of women were incorporated as core principles in the Paris Agreement, which also mandated gender-responsive adaptation and capacity building.<sup>26</sup> In 2019, the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and supporting gender action plan was agreed.<sup>27</sup> These were subsequently reviewed and amended at COP27. Parties to the Conference have focused on two complementary goals:<sup>28</sup>

- Improving the gender balance and increasing women's participation in UNFCCC processes, including in delegations and constituted bodies.
- Increasing awareness and support for the development and effective implementation of gender-responsive climate policy and action at the regional, national and local levels.

There is now widespread recognition that gender equality and climate action are interlinked, that pre-existing inequalities increase women and girls' vulnerabilities to climate-related disasters and that gender-just climate action is needed. Global gender climate policy and action plans have proliferated.<sup>29</sup> However, despite the increase in policies and action plans, gender is still treated as an 'add on' in most climate spaces and discussions. Overall existing measures have yet to deliver a step change in the gender responsiveness of the climate funds' programmes and projects.

*“A normative shift has taken place. There is strong recognition that gender and climate are interlinked, but there isn’t a lot of clarity about what that means. This is leading to reductionist, siloed approaches. Reductionist in the sense that they talk about women’s economic empowerment but not gender equality. Or siloed, in the way that the ‘gender and climate change’ negotiations are a separate agenda item in the climate negotiations.”<sup>30</sup>*

Tara Daniel, Senior Programme Manager from the Women’s Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

Progress has been hampered by a lack of funding and expertise,<sup>31</sup> as well as the framing of climate change as a technical issue that is best remedied by scientific and economic fixes.<sup>32</sup> State support has also been lacking. The number of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) with references to women or gender increased from 64 (out of 190) to 71 between 2016 and 2020, fewer than a quarter consider gender as a cross-cutting issue.<sup>33</sup> Only 15 NDCs refer to women as important decision-makers and just six refer to women as drivers of change.<sup>34</sup> The Green Climate Fund’s much-delayed gender policy contextualised the implementation of the gender mandate in national policies and cultural understandings in order to secure the support of its developing country board members.<sup>35</sup> There remains a greater focus on gender issues in adaptation than mitigation.

As a party to the UNFCCC, the UK has undertaken commitments on climate and gender. The five-year Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its corresponding Gender Action Plan set out five priority areas:

1. Capacity building
2. Knowledge management and communication
3. Gender balance, participation and women’s leadership
4. Coherence
5. Gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to their commitments as parties to the UNFCCC, the UK has joined the Generation Equality Forum, making commitments on Feminist Action for Climate Justice with respect to gender-responsive climate finance, women and girls’ resilience, women and girls’ leadership in the green transition and data on gender and inclusion climate data.<sup>37</sup>

## Box 3: FCDO commitments on Feminist Action for Climate Justice in the Generation Equality Forum

### Commitment on Gender-Responsive Climate Finance

*The UK will deliver gender-responsive climate finance and support access to finance for women and girls at the frontline of climate impacts, including by:*

- Working with international partners to address the barriers to accessing finance faced by local and national civil society organisations, such as women's rights organisations and Indigenous peoples' organisations, as well as championing the Principles of locally led adaptation.
- Working with the private sector and the 2X Gender and Climate Finance Taskforce to build the field of gender-smart investing for climate action.

### Commitment on Women & Girls Climate Resilience

*The UK will work to build the resilience of women and girls in all their diversity to climate and disaster risks and advance gender equality within adaptation action, including by:*

- Developing a new initiative (up to £450,000) to pilot gender transformative approaches to natural resource management under Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, building the evidence-base and developing best practice.
- Supporting inclusive disaster risk financing and early warning/early action that meets the needs and priorities of women and girls, people living with disabilities and marginalised people, such as through our work with the Risk-informed Early Action Partnership and the InsuResilience Global Partnership.
- Investing in research to build the resilience of women and girls, including through the Adaptation Research Alliance.
- Strengthening women's leadership and empowerment within agriculture and food systems, including through our work under the Just Rural Transition and by investing in research and innovation in food system transformation, such as through the CGIAR – (global partnership that unites international organisations engaged in research about food security) and the Supporting Pastoralists and Agriculture in Protracted and Recurrent Crisis (SPARC) Programme.
- Building resilience for children, their families and communities by investing in quality education, especially for girls, including through rallying others behind ambitious global targets of getting 40 million more girls in school and 20 million more girls reading by the age of 10, or at the end of primary school, in low- and middle-income countries by 2026.



### **Commitment on Women & Girls Climate Leadership [linked to just green transition]**

*The UK will champion climate leadership, meaningful decision-making and empowerment of women and girls, including through education, in a transition to an inclusive, green economy, including by:*

- Working to achieve gender parity in the energy sector, including through the 'Equal by 30' campaign.
- Investing in programmes to challenge gender roles, improve access to clean energy and use of clean cooking, such as the UK Transforming Energy Access (TEA) programme and the multi-donor Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme (EMAP).

### **Commitment on Data on Gender, Inclusion and Climate**

*The UK will strengthen collection and use of data on gender, inclusion and climate. This includes working towards disaggregating UK International Climate Finance (ICF) 'people indicators' by gender, age, disability and geography, where this can meaningfully be collected, as well as strengthening analysis and use of this data to understand the inclusivity of UK International Climate Finance (ICF) and inform future programming.*

The UK Government has incorporated these international commitments into their latest international development strategies. The 2022 International Development Strategy has both women and girls as well as climate and nature as thematic priorities. Committing to both “unlock the full potential of women and girls [to] accelerate progress on all [our] global priorities, from economic prosperity to security” and “focus international climate finance on driving the rapid transformation and systematic shifts required to achieve the Paris Agreement goals and deliver the Glasgow Climate Pact”.<sup>38</sup> The International Development Strategy includes specific language on ensuring all new bilateral official development assistance (ODA) aligns with the Paris Agreement by 2023 and a balanced split between mitigation and adaptation.

While the International Development Strategy does not detail how these two priorities are linked, subsequent strategies do. The Women and Girls and International Climate Finance (ICF) strategies acknowledge key linkages between women and girls' rights and climate action and the need for mutually reinforcing solutions. The two strategies establish a basis for incorporating the needs and rights of women and girls into the UK's international climate action. Both strategies commit to gender-marking an increased proportion of bilateral international climate finance using the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC)'s gender marker.<sup>39</sup> This sits alongside a wider commitment to make sure 80% of FCDO bilateral programmes have a focus on women and girls.<sup>40</sup>

The International Women and Girls strategy commits to integrate gender and inclusion objectives into climate finance, programmes and strategies as well as empowering women and girls to engage in decision-making spaces. The ICF strategy reinforces and builds on that commitment. It acknowledges how gender inequality increases vulnerability to climate risks and commits to “increase the gender-responsiveness, as set out in the enhanced Lima work programme on gender and gender action plan”.<sup>41</sup> The ICF strategy

acknowledges the importance of participatory and inclusive approaches, the protection of women's rights and equal access to land, women's leadership and knowledge and the need to address barriers to accessing climate finance.

There are points in the international climate finance strategy where the UK misses opportunities to set out plans to address the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls. For example, the first thematic priority on clean energy acknowledges that women and girls are disproportionately impacted by energy poverty and their gendered role in collecting fuel and water. However, there are no explicit actions to address this. The final pillar on sustainable cities, infrastructure and transport does not address women and girls at all. However, as a whole, the ICF strategy addresses the four priorities identified by women climate activists: namely, integrating gender into climate finance; making sure climate finance reaches women-led and women's rights organisations; amplifying women's voice and leadership in climate policy and negotiations; accelerating a gender-just green transition.

On paper, at least, the UK has the building blocks for a gender-just approach to climate action. The real test will be in delivering it. The following section will look at the UK's current performance and opportunities for improvement across each of these four areas.



Image: Mamata has learned about sustainable farming techniques through a CARE project in Bangladesh © Asafuzzaman Captain/CARE



### 3. How is the UK currently performing and how can ambition be increased?

Feby is working with her community in Zambia to plant and tend to drought-resistant seedlings  
© Peter Caton/CARE

#### i. Integrating gender into climate finance

*“The intersections are so clear when we look at climate change impacts. There is a lot of vulnerability of women and girls, of people with disabilities, marginalised communities coming to the fore. Climate change action plans mostly exclude gender. They exclude social issues. Climate justice demands that we address the inequalities that affect women and girls.”*

Ndivile Mokoena, GenderCC

#### **The current state**

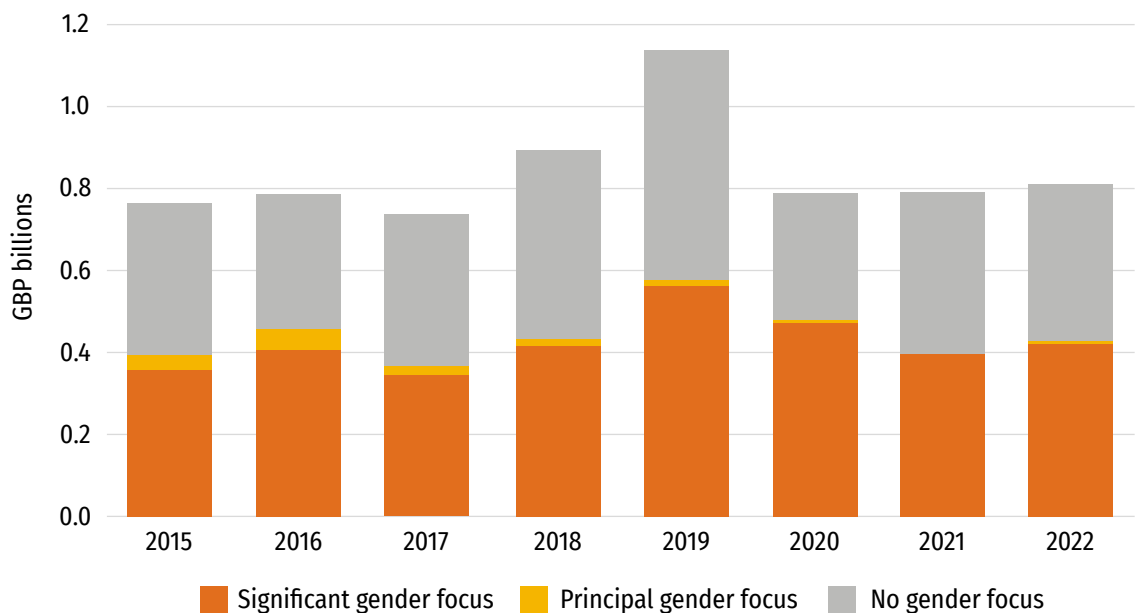
*“We hear a lot about funding mechanisms. The money doesn’t get where it is needed and it doesn’t address women’s needs and priorities. It is a blanket fund that looks in general, and in that way, women are left out.”*

Ndivile Mokoena, GenderCC

The UK has made commitments to increase gender-responsive climate action in both national and international fora. In addition to increasing the percentage of gender-marked, bilateral climate finance, the 2023 International Climate Finance Strategy commits to “integrating gender-responsive and inclusive approaches into the design of ICF programming and investing in research and evidence on the impacts of climate change on women and girls, indigenous and local communities, people with disabilities and marginalised groups, including best practice for gender-responsive approaches”. The International Development White Paper recognises that “effective action on climate change and nature requires the inclusion of indigenous communities, as well as women and girls.”<sup>42</sup> However, there are few specifics or metrics tied to these commitments, which makes it difficult to measure progress, particularly without a baseline.

To get a clear picture of the gender focus of the UK’s climate finance in recent years, CARE commissioned the organisation Development Initiatives (DI) to analyse the UK’s climate funding between 2015 and 2022. The research drew on data from the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), the UK Statistics for International Development and OECD DAC’s creditor reporting system to identify the amount of UK climate finance<sup>43</sup> that had either significant or principal gender equality objectives, measured by the DAC’s gender equality marker. In short, principal objectives are those projects focused on gender equality objectives, and significant are those where gender equality is mainstreamed (see Box 4 for further details).

Development Initiatives’ analysis found that the share of bilateral international climate finance with a gender focus remained relatively stable between 2015 and 2022, averaging 47%. This almost entirely includes projects with a significant gender focus, rather than projects with a principal focus. In 2015, 5.4% of climate finance had a principal gender focus according to our methodology, but this share has steadily declined. In 2021, only 0.1% of climate finance had a principal gender focus. However, in 2022, this rebounded slightly, to around 1%.



The share of climate finance with a gender focus differs markedly between departments. On average, 69% of FCDO's (previously Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) climate finance had a gender focus between 2016 and 2022. This provides an important baseline for the FCDO's commitments to increase the gender focus in their bilateral climate programmes. By contrast, the gender focus of climate finance from other departments has varied between 1% and 26% but has averaged only 8% over the period. Adaptation finance is more likely than mitigation finance to have had a gender focus, averaging 65% and 33% respectively between 2015-2021. The percentage of mitigation finance with a gender component increased throughout this period to 60% in 2020.

For other DAC members, Development Initiatives used the OECD DAC's Rio markers to get a picture of the gender focus of bilateral climate finance for 2017-2020 for DAC members.<sup>44</sup> Using this measure found that 48% incorporated gender equality as a significant objective and 2% as a primary objective.<sup>45</sup> Because of differences in methodologies used, these numbers are not strictly comparable with the UK results. However, they do indicate that the UK's performance in integrating a gender focus into bilateral climate finance is roughly in line with the DAC average.

## Box 4: Understanding the OECD DAC's Gender Equality Marker<sup>46</sup>

OECD DAC markers help to track how much ODA is spent in support of specific policy goals. DAC Members use the gender equality marker to indicate whether a project or programme has gender equality as an objective according to a three-point scoring system. The marker indicates intention rather than outcome. The primary difference between the three scores is in the centrality of gender equality to the project's objectives.

Projects with a **principal objective** are centred on furthering gender equality by empowering women and girls, reducing gender discrimination or inequalities or meeting gender-specific needs. These are more often standalone gender projects that would not exist without a gender equality objective. The DAC's minimum criteria for this score include: completion of a gender analysis and that the findings inform project design, the top-level ambition of the project is to advance gender equality and/or women's empowerment, the results framework measures progress through gender-specific indicators to track outcomes/impact, data and indicators are disaggregated by sex where applicable and there is a commitment to monitor and report on gender equality results achieved by the project. These criteria should be met in full.

Projects with a **significant objective** are designed to have a positive impact on advancing gender equality (Score 1). These are often projects that are described as mainstreaming gender equality. The DAC's minimum standards for this score includes: a gender analysis, that the findings inform project design, the presence of at least one explicit gender equality objective with a related indicator, data and indicators

are disaggregated by sex where applicable and there is a commitment to monitor and report on gender equality results. These criteria should be met in full.

Projects that do not target gender inequality are marked 0. This score is only applied if a project has been screened. All projects are expected to include a gender analysis that has been applied to ensure the project does no harm and does not reinforce gender inequalities. However, projects scoring 0 do not have gender equality objectives or indicators.

Over the past three years, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) has conducted three reviews related to international climate finance. While these reviews cover the period before the ICF strategy, they nonetheless offer some insight into how the UK has historically performed on the inclusion of women and girls in climate-related programmes. ICAI's 2021 review of the alignment of UK aid with the Paris Agreement does not include any findings related to gender or women's meaningful participation and leadership. The 2021 review of UK international climate finance for halting deforestation and biodiversity loss, found that programmes did not consistently understand or engage with the people directly affected and that more could have been done to strengthen the participation of women in forest governance.<sup>47</sup> The 2023 review of UK aid to agriculture in the time of climate change found that, although the portfolio's inclusion of both gender and climate objectives had improved, the intersection between them remained weak.<sup>48</sup> DFID/FCDO programmes performed better on gender inclusion than British Investment International and the Global Challenges Research Fund.

The UK's commitments to increase the percentage of gender-responsive climate finance apply only to bilateral funding. However, the UK spends a significant portion of its climate finance via other institutions, including multilateral institutions like climate funds, multilateral development banks (MDBs) and UN agencies, as well as through British International Investment (BII),<sup>49</sup> formerly CDC, the UK's development finance institution. Since 2011, one third of the UK's international climate finance, an estimated £6.49 billion, has been channelled through multilateral organisations including MDBs, UN agencies and multilateral climate funds.<sup>50</sup> In September 2023, the UK pledged £1.62 billion to the GCF for the 2024-2027 replenishment.

Another significant component of the UK's climate funding is deployed to mobilise private sector investment and "unlock finance for green growth". This is allocated to BII and through the Clean Green Initiative, launched at COP26 as the climate pillar of British Investment Partnerships.<sup>51</sup> BII published a standalone climate change strategy in 2020.<sup>52</sup> The strategy sets Paris alignment as an institutional level ambition. The strategy commits to apply a gender lens where applicable. It also commits to consider gender in its adaptation interventions, primarily through a women's economic empowerment lens. BII's latest technical strategy includes criteria for investments on both climate finance and gender lens investing, including a target of 25% of new commitments to meet any one 2X Challenge gender lens criteria.<sup>53</sup> The 25% target was exceeded in 2021 and 2022.

A recent International Development Committee (IDC) inquiry criticised BII for a lack of baselines, and output or outcome metrics for capital mobilised or jobs created. It found BII's approach to tracking gender lens achievements neither dynamic nor suitably stretching to achieve greater development impact.<sup>54</sup> Further, the IDC found BII lacked a suitably targeted strategy to outline its aspirations and goals for gender equality and its approach to gender investing. A more robust approach to target-setting and impact monitoring with specific and mandatory gender performance targets is needed.

## What does good look like?

The good practices for incorporating the needs of women and girls into development programmes and emergency responses are well established. The first step towards addressing gendered vulnerabilities is to identify them. This starts with a gender analysis, including collecting sex, age and disability disaggregated data.<sup>55</sup> Projects need adequate funding to conduct robust gender assessments, including collecting the necessary data. The findings then need to inform programmes and projects as well as being reflected in the results framework. This requires gender expertise, which needs to be adequately funded. It is also important that the gender risks of the project are incorporated into risk analysis with corresponding mitigations and monitoring frameworks. It is crucial to engage women, girls and other marginalised groups meaningfully throughout this process.<sup>56</sup> Consistency is key, looking at the gender-differentiated impacts across the project and programme cycle and using the learning to make improvements the next time.

These good practices need to be incorporated across the response to climate change in mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage. Given that the impacts of climate change are not gender neutral, the response to climate change cannot be either. The UK Government's commitment to increase the proportion of bilateral climate finance with a gender focus is welcome. This should be clarified with a specific target of 88% of marked climate bilateral finance being targeted towards gender equality aims by 2026, as per the recommendations of the Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition, increasing from the average of 47% between 2015-2022. Steps to increase the mainstreaming of gender across climate projects should be accompanied by standalone gender equality projects. The UK should also develop, publish and report against robust performance and outcomes measures for gender equality.

### **Box 5: Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) and Climate & Development Knowledge Network Framework for Strengthening Gender Integration in Climate Projects<sup>57</sup>**

- Lead with local gender expertise to incorporate local knowledge
- Leverage local women's groups and national gender institutions for data, information and connections
- Collect the right data from the start
- Integrate gender specialists within the team
- Ensure continuity between design and implementation
- Pursue team-wide capacity building opportunities.

Given the scale of climate funding committed through multilateral and development finance institutions, it is important to ensure that those entities have and deliver on ambitious gender commitments as well as on climate commitments. The UK should work with like-minded members/shareholders/parties to ensure:

- The inclusive, transparent and evidence-based monitoring of gender action plans
- Specific and mandatory gender performance targets are set by all climate finance funds and programmes, and these are monitored and reported on
- Funding supports meaningful stakeholder engagement
- Investments in local and national capacity and resources help to implement gender policies and commitments
- Women's rights organisations and women-led organisations are able to access a portion of the funds

The UK must also ensure that climate finance is new and additional to the ODA. CARE's research has found that most climate finance from the Global North, including from the UK, is not additional to ODA.<sup>58</sup> This means that fewer overall resources are available to support people who are living in poverty and impacted by the climate crisis. Recent choices by the UK to change what it counts as climate finance, instead of increase funding to meet commitments, also represent a step in the wrong direction for overall leadership on the quantity and quality of climate finance needed from the UK Government.<sup>59</sup>

## Box 6: Getting gender right in Loss and Damage<sup>60</sup>

The decision to establish a Loss and Damage Fund at COP27 was a watershed moment. It was a long-overdue recognition of the lasting impacts of climate-related emergencies on people's lives and livelihoods, particularly on communities and countries that have contributed least to the climate and environment crises. The new Loss and Damage Fund needs to reflect and address the gendered distribution of harm. The UK should advocate for the new funding facility to embed a gender-just approach from the start, including:

- Ensuring the needs of women and girls alongside other marginalised groups are accounted for in the design and implementation of the fund
- Ensuring women are able to access Loss and Damage finance
- Creating space for women's leadership in Loss and Damage
- Addressing women and girls' disproportionate care burden
- Promoting and accelerating gender-transformative social protection policies and quality public services
- Incorporating protection for women and girls into all loss and damage action
- Supporting women-led agro-ecology during recovery



## ii. Making sure climate finance reaches women's rights organisations

*“Women's rights organisations are underfunded and under-resourced. Gender-just climate finance can't be reduced to sustainable livelihoods projects.”*

Tara Daniel, Senior Program Manager, Women's Environment & Development Organization, WED

*“Women and girls are the ones that contribute the least to climate change, YET they are the ones leading climate action in their communities, and YET they are the ones that face most barriers to access climate finance.”*

Stephanie Eyrum Akumah, Founder and Director of the Centre for Green Growth

Women's rights organisations are the most effective agents of change in achieving gender equality.<sup>61</sup> They are also key actors in climate change mitigation and adaptation, and their expertise can and should be pivotal to gender mainstreaming in climate projects and ensuring more robust climate action, initiatives and results.<sup>62</sup> Women's organisations have been leaders in designing and implementing climate solutions directly, as well as ensuring that gender is integrated into climate mitigation and adaptation policies and programmes. They play an important role in holding governments accountable. However, despite their contribution to the climate response, women's rights and women-led organisations have struggled to access climate finance at sufficient scale.

### The current state

The UK's women and girls strategy includes a commitment to increase support for grassroots women's rights organisations and movements.<sup>63</sup> This was also reiterated in the International Development White Paper, which states “locally-led women's rights organisations should be at the heart of setting development priorities in



Image: Virginia, indigenous farmer from Ecuador, with her granddaughter Samantha  
© CARE/Ana Maria Buitron

their communities.”<sup>64</sup> While neither explicitly link climate finance to women’s rights organisations, elsewhere, as part of its climate-focused Generation Equality commitments, the UK pledged to work with partners to address the barriers to accessing finance faced by local and national civil society, including women’s rights and indigenous organisations, as well as pledging to champion locally-led adaptation.<sup>65</sup> During COP26 Gender Day in 2021, then Secretary of State for International Trade Anne-Marie Trevelyan said:

*“The UK is committed to addressing this dual challenge head on, committing new funding to empower communities and women’s groups to take locally-led action, to build local, national and global resilience. I urge more countries to make commitments to implement the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan and deliver the goals of Feminist Action for Climate Justice.”*<sup>66</sup>

These recent commitments are all the more important as Development Initiatives was only able to trace a negligible amount of climate funding going to women’s rights organisations in 2022 – less than 0.2% of the total.<sup>67</sup> This is an assessment based on funding assigned to purpose codes for both women’s rights organisations and violence against women and girls, as there can often be women’s rights organisations funded through both. In contrast, research by Carbon Brief found more than 10% of UK foreign aid spent on climate-related projects since 2010 has been channelled through private consultancies.<sup>68</sup>

Furthermore, the UK has interpreted what counts as a women’s rights organisation broadly. In practice this purpose code includes several international organisations that may not ordinarily be considered as women’s rights organisations. Of the £1.6 million of climate finance that went to the women’s rights organisations purpose code between 2017 and 2021, 77% went to UN organisations.

The limited evidence that UK climate funding is reaching women’s rights organisations is, sadly, in line with global trends. Analysis of philanthropic funds for climate action found that just 0.2% went to women environmental activists.<sup>69</sup> Overall, women’s rights organisations receive 0.13% of ODA and just 0.4% of all gender-related aid.<sup>70</sup>

The lack of evidence that UK climate funding is reaching women rights organisations is symptomatic of a system that is not prioritising the direct funding of local and national organisations and is currently unable to trace indirect funding flows beyond first-order recipients. Only 10% of global climate finance reaches the local level, where women-rights and women-led organisations are most likely to operate.<sup>71</sup> The barriers to funding local and national organisations directly include bureaucratic hurdles, complicated applications, language barriers, donor staff capacity to manage smaller grants and donor governments’ approach to risks. Many of these are core features of the UK’s projectised approach to ODA.

### **What does good look like?**

*“We need to get money into the hands of local people. We need this money for locally-led adaptation. This is where you make the impact. We have the solutions already, women-led solutions. Some of the money should go to women SMEs [small and medium-sized enterprises] who need capital to scale up. Some of them just need seed funding.”*

Titilope Ngozi Akosa, Executive Director, Centre for 21st Century Issues

*“At the local level, people have no idea how the money is distributed, how projects are chosen and who is handling them. We feel that the money is just being recycled. It is going back where it is coming from. When the private sector is involved, projects are driven by profits. They need projects that are bankable...There has to be a better way of handling climate change finance. It has to go direct[ly] where it is needed most.”*

Ndivile Mokoena, GenderCC

The climate crisis is global in scale. The amounts of money needed to deliver mitigation and adaptation, not to mention loss and damage, are staggering, reaching trillions of pounds. As we saw in the previous section, the UK is channelling hundreds of millions of pounds through multilateral and development finance institutions. It is understandable that much of the focus is on finding big, one-size fits all solutions. These are undoubtedly needed, particularly to achieve the reduction in carbon and methane emissions needed to stay within the 1.5°C limits set at the Paris Agreement in 2015. However, on the frontlines of the climate and nature emergency where the impacts are already happening, the adaptations needed are often specific and relatively small. This is where many women’s rights and women-led organisations are working, at the community level. Gender-just climate action requires processes and mechanisms that allow funding to reach those organisations.

The thinking around and evidence for community-led and scaled climate adaptations has been developing within feminist climate justice spaces over the past decade. The solutions are there. Since 2015, WEDO has compiled over 150 locally-driven solutions in their Gender Just Climate Solutions (GJCS) directory.<sup>72</sup> They just need to be funded. Overcoming that mismatch of scales is the primary hurdle to increasing access for women’s rights and women-led organisations to climate finance. This problem is not unique to climate finance and good practices around funding local and national organisations are increasingly well established.

The FCDO should:

- Address its own administrative barriers to increasing direct funding of local and national women’s rights and women-led organisations, including staffing, complex procedures, language barriers, annual budget requirements. Where this funding is managed through a fund manager, the fund should be set up according to feminist funding principles.
- Move away from project-based funding and provide core, unrestricted, multi-year funding to organisations working at the intersection of climate and gender justice.
- Reassess funding modalities to ensure flexible funding that is accessible by and responsive to the needs of women and girls in affected communities.
- Invest in building the capacity of communities, women and youth on climate finance.
- Shift risk appetite and approach in ways that share risks more equitably, balances fiduciary concerns with other considerations and addresses the risk of inaction.
- Specifically design strategies to seek out women’s rights organisations/women-led organisations that represent marginalised women and girls.
- Use their influence within multilateral financial institutions to create mechanisms with conditions and reporting requirements tailored to women’s rights and women-led organisations.
- Replicate the ongoing pilot with the Equality Fund to fund women’s climate funds, like the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA), which directly support community-level, women-led climate action (see Box 7).

## Box 7: Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA): Supporting women's funds

GAGGA was founded in 2016 as a consortium led by Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres in collaboration with Mama Cash and Both ENDS. It has created a network of 16 women's funds, 8 environmental justice funds, 28 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 390 grassroots groups in 39 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Since 2016, GAGGA has provided €12 million in 1,742 grants, mainly to women-led community-based organisations.<sup>73</sup>

Women's funds are linchpins for getting money to organisations on the ground. They provide flexible funding through inclusive practices to organised grassroots women by:

- Directly finding and funding a diversity of women environmental defenders
- Focusing on power distribution, particularly land and natural resources
- Providing support and care with deep understanding of the unique experiences of women and girls
- Offering spaces for learning exchanges and opportunities for grassroots women's groups to come together to learn and join forces<sup>74</sup>
- Brokering connections to promote women's visibility, linking local partners with needed resources

GAGGA reports that its work has successfully influenced changes in policy, law and practice, shifted investment practices and funding of donors towards local woman-led climate solutions.<sup>75</sup>

### iii. Amplifying women's voice and leadership in climate policy and negotiations

*"We need equality in decision-making processes. Women are involved in everything – when you look at food, water, health and energy, women are there. They make a contribution in their own way. They should be at the centre of climate discussions and action."*

Ndivile Mokoena, GenderCC

Women's meaningful participation, voice and leadership is vital to all aspects of climate action. The climate crisis demands innovative thinking, cross-sector collaboration and locally-led solutions. Holding space for a diversity of voices and perspectives increases the pool of innovations and possible solutions and improves ownership. Engaging women fully and meaningfully increases the quality of climate decision-making and helps to ensure that the needs of women and girls are met. According to the Commission on the Status of Women, *"the capacity of women and girls to take action and build a resilient future depends on removing structural barriers and gender gaps, while the participation and leadership of this group are critical for making climate, environmental and disaster risk action more effective"*.<sup>76</sup>

Evidence shows that women's engagement and leadership in climate action is associated with better resource governance, conservation outcomes and disaster readiness. Their representation in national parliaments leads to more stringent climate change policies, resulting in lower emissions.<sup>77</sup> Women's participation in natural resource management at the local level improves resource governance and conservation outcomes.<sup>78</sup> Data from the private sector suggests a 1% increase in female managers is associated with a 0.5% decrease in carbon emissions.<sup>79</sup> Long-term, forward-looking work on building resilience and adapting to climate change goes hand in hand with transforming gender relations. However, this will not happen without women's meaningful participation and leadership.

All too often women are still under-represented in decision-making spaces. This is true of international climate negotiations as well as at local and national levels. For example, in many contexts disaster risk reduction programmes are run by security services or military personnel. These are heavily masculinised spaces. This has had a knock-on effect in national climate architecture.<sup>80</sup> The knowledge and experiences of women and girls are consistently deprioritised and undervalued and their voices are unheard. Gender expertise is often treated as an add on.

### The current state

The UK's International Climate Finance (ICF) strategy acknowledges the importance of including *"the knowledge, leadership and rights of women and girls, indigenous groups and marginalised groups"*<sup>81</sup> in climate action. There are references to participative and inclusive approaches and meaningfully engaging women and girls in decision-making and leadership in both the "nature for climate and people" and "adaptation" pillars. In international fora, the UK regularly advocates for the increased engagement and leadership of women and girls.

Looking at their staffing, within FCDO there is one dedicated gender and climate lead, who sits in the team for women and girls rather than the climate team.<sup>82</sup> Others have responsibilities and lead on elements related to gender and climate as part of their wider roles, including COP negotiators, climate advisers, social development advisers and regional gender advisers. The FCDO are able to draw on the expertise of the Department for Energy and Net Zero as well as domestic departments including the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Recently an informal cross Whitehall working group on gender, social inclusion and climate was established to share learnings, expertise and best practice.<sup>83</sup> The UK's delegations for COP 26 and 27 did meet the parity requirements.<sup>84</sup> However it faced criticism during its COP26 Presidency for initially appointing an all-male Ministerial team and not having a gender balance in leadership positions.<sup>85</sup> The UK did however subsequently appoint Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP as International Champion on Adaptation and Resilience for the COP26 Presidency.

The UK often says the right thing and can be counted on to advocate for the meaningful engagement of women in international climate spaces. The global picture shows why this is important; there is a long way to go to achieve gender parity in climate negotiations, for example at COP. Only 37% of national delegates at COP27 were women, which is lower than the percentage in 2021.<sup>86</sup> Women's

participation in national delegations has increased by less than 10% since 2009.<sup>87</sup> At COP26, only 13% of COP26 delegations were led by women and men were the majority of speakers, making up 60% of active speakers in plenary and taking up 74% of speaking time.<sup>88</sup>

### What does good look like?

*“We have a distinct voice as African women. Our needs are not the same. We need to respect women’s diversity. We want the support and solidarity of developed countries’ women’s rights organisations, but we do not want to rely on them. We have our own needs, our own asks, we need more support to attend convenings and speak for ourselves.”*

Titilope Ngozi Akosa, Executive Director, Centre for 21st Century Issues

*“Participation is necessary but not sufficient. There is a danger of tokenism if we conflate the process with the outcome. Creating inclusive spaces – ‘women in all their diversity’, ‘voices from all levels’ – is not the same as implementing gender responsive climate action.”*

Tara Daniel, Senior Program Manager, WEDO

A lot of focus, particularly in international spaces, is on achieving gender parity in international climate bodies and national delegations. Women’s representation at all levels is essential, and it needs to extend beyond the relative numbers of men and women to include an intersectional approach to participation, as well as status within the delegation, visibility and speaking time. Climate spaces need to be inclusive of women in all their diversity. That is really just the starting point. Getting women’s meaningful engagement and leadership right requires actions along three fronts<sup>89</sup> at multiple levels:

- Building women’s agency: Ensuring that women have the right capacities, skills and knowledge to participate and lead meaningfully.
- Changing unequal power relations: Addressing the power imbalances that exclude and silence women, including those based on multiple forms of inequalities.
- Transforming the structures perpetuating inequalities.

Women need the tools for meaningful engagement so that their participation is not tokenistic. They need capacity building to learn the jargon and the rules of the game and how to get the most out of the summits. Women from low- and middle-income countries need funding to participate, not just in major events like COP, but in technical meetings. Important decisions are taken between COPs at the technical level. If women are not able to attend technical, preparatory meetings, they cannot participate in a meaningful way.<sup>90</sup> Women climate activists also need networks and spaces where they can come together to develop messages, support each other and amplify their work.<sup>91</sup> Beyond just including women, space is needed for women’s rights defenders and other gender experts. Gender expertise needs to be valued and included in the same ways as other forms of technical expertise.<sup>92</sup>

*“We have to be challenging power dynamics within communities and within households because there are persisting inequalities.”*

Tara Daniel, Senior Program Manager, WEDO

Building the capacity of women and women’s organisations is not sufficient to address the barriers to women’s meaningful participation and leadership. The power imbalances and structural inequalities need to be addressed as well. These include social norms that limit women’s roles in public spaces, that question their relevance to climate-related issues like land, natural resource management and biodiversity loss, and permit violence and harassment of women at the household and community level. An intersectional approach that recognises women will face different forms of discrimination based on factors including race, class, sexuality and disability must be adopted. Removing these barriers, especially at the local level, is essential for achieving gender equality.

*“The first port of call is always the local. That is where the constituency is and where the issues are biting the hardest. There is no way to shape decisions to help local people without them. And then you ensure you bring the voices of the marginalised and those who aren’t listened to up the chain to the national and international level. That is how you shape policies that work for everyone.”*

Titilope Ngozi Akosa, Executive Director, Centre for 21st Century Issues

The case study in Box 8 looks at how to increase women’s engagement in natural resource management at the local level. To move the dial on women’s meaningful participation and leadership, the UK should:

- Continue to advocate for gender parity and women’s leadership in international climate spaces and support the inclusion of multiple, diverse perspectives, recognising different types of discrimination that women face.
- Fund the participation of women from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in international climate negotiations, including technical and working level meetings.
- Build internal expertise on the intersection of climate and gender across all relevant teams.
- Ensure all UK-funded programmes and projects have the necessary gender expertise at the outset.
- Continue to invest in women’s participation and leadership at local and national level.

## Box 8: Genre+ Gender Transformative and Equitable Natural Resource Management (NRM) for Resilience, Social Cohesion and Peace<sup>93</sup>

CARE and local partner AMAPROS carried out a pilot project to strengthen social cohesion and women's equitable access to natural resources in the circles of Barouéli, Bla and Ségou in Mali. The project was funded by the Conflict, Security and Stability Fund within the FCDO.

An initial gender and conflict analysis revealed that women had very limited access to decision-making spaces, lacked understanding of their rights in terms of access to land and resources, had limited access to resources and skills to become economically empowered and faced discriminatory social norms and practices such as early marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). The findings allowed the project team to design activities using CARE's Gender Equality Framework to address women's lack of agency, the unequal power relations and the discriminatory structures that were perpetuating gender inequality in natural resource management. Working with women's village savings and loans associations, participants attended training sessions on citizenship, leadership and advocacy and participated in dialogues on natural resource management. Men and women farmers were trained in assisted natural regeneration and supported to establish micro projects like kitchen gardens. This increased women's agency by improving their self-confidence, as well as knowledge, skills and capabilities.

The project worked with landowners, community and religious leaders as well as other powerholders on the importance of social cohesion and gender equality to address the power imbalances that exclude women from decision-making at household and community level. The project team successfully advocated with powerholders to include more women and people from marginalised groups in committees and other structures. The micro projects created a new space where people who do not traditionally work together could collaborate. Activities like the consultation frameworks and natural resource management roundtables increased the opportunities for women's participation in peace, cohesion and inclusive management of natural resource discussions.

This combined set of activities increased women's confidence in their knowledge and ability to engage in community and household decision-making. It also improved powerholders' perceptions of women's knowledge and capacity, which further increased the opportunities for women to participate and lead, including on issues of natural resource management. Convening spaces like the roundtables increased the visibility of women as leaders and started to shift perceptions of women's roles within the community.

Structural changes take a long time to achieve, but even over the course of this 8-month pilot, there were indications of progress. Women are invited to meetings more frequently, are accessing new decision-making spaces and being appointed to positions of influence. Another substantive area of improvement is in women's access to land. Early wins are important as they not only increase women's confidence but are also visible symbols of progress.



#### iv. Accelerating a gender-just green transition

*“You cannot exclude the needs, rights and vulnerabilities of half the world’s population if you are aiming for a just transition for the future.”<sup>94</sup>*

##### Green Climate Fund

A gender-just green transition is an opportunity for a “triple win” of tackling climate change, fostering economic growth and accelerating gender equality in the world of work.<sup>95</sup> Estimates suggest that shifting to a low-carbon economy could create US\$26 trillion in growth and more than 65 million new jobs by 2030.<sup>96</sup> However, without specifically addressing the barriers that women and girls face in the economy, particularly for marginalised groups, there is a risk that they will miss out on these opportunities, further deepening inequalities. Integrating a gender lens into the green transition at the outset can create a virtuous circle that improves women’s access to decent work, builds resilience and leads to better environmental outcomes.

Mainstream approaches to the green transition have focused on carbon-intensive male dominated industries, like energy, infrastructure and transportation. Women are often excluded from these occupations by cultural gender stereotypes and gendered patterns of education. Women are more likely to work in the informal sector and have less access to social protection benefits. They may be in lower-paid green jobs. Structural gender inequalities mean that women have less access to land, credit, agricultural inputs, decision-making bodies, technology, social insurance and training. They are also responsible for the majority of paid and unpaid care work. A green transition that works for women will be the true test of gender-just climate action.

##### The current state

The UK’s international climate finance strategy sets out some ambitious top-level commitments on gender-responsive climate action. However, there is a lack of consistency in mainstreaming gender across the strategy’s priority themes. The strategy acknowledges the gendered nature of fuel poverty, as well as the role of women and girls in water and fuel collection, but does not propose actions to address those. The sustainable cities, infrastructure and transport pillar does not address gender, despite the importance of safe, liveable cities and transport for women and girls.

The UK’s approach to these pillars is out of step with its ambitions for gender-responsive climate action, including their Generation Equality commitments to achieve gender parity in the energy sector, and risks leaving women and girls behind. In contrast, the FCDO’s position paper on gender, climate and education<sup>97</sup> lays out both a clear analysis of how gender inequalities play out at the intersection of climate and education and then sets out detailed pathways of change for more resilient education systems that deliver the knowledge, skills and agency to tackle climate change. The position paper includes an action plan with activities to finance, resource (people) and build partnerships. This lack of consistency plays out in implementation as well. Even in areas where the UK has a relatively good approach to gender, like agriculture, the inclusion of the gendered dimensions of climate vulnerability was relatively weak, with little evidence that differential needs were reflected in interventions or monitoring.<sup>98</sup>

The absence of concrete measures to address gender inequalities in two of the four pillars of the UK’s strategy is typical of the mainstream approach to the green transition, as well as mitigation programming. More than anything, this illustrates the pervasiveness of the

norms and assumptions that perpetuate gender inequality. Targeted action is needed to ensure that the green transition does not entrench or even worsen existing inequalities in the world of work, but instead allows women, in all their diversity, to take full advantage of the multitude of opportunities.<sup>99</sup>

### What does good look like?

*“Most of the time what women do is not captured in GDP, and it is what you don’t capture that makes GDP possible.”*

Titilope Ngozi Akosa, Executive Director, Centre for 21st Century Issues

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), *“a just transition involves maximising the social and economic opportunities of climate action while minimising and carefully managing any challenges related to the impacts on the world of work, including gendered impacts, in an effort to facilitate decent work outcomes, ensuring social dialogue and respect for international labour standards in the process.”*<sup>100</sup>

A gender lens needs to be integrated into the green transition from the outset. As with meaningful participation and leadership, it is not enough to increase women’s agency. Gender-just action requires rebalancing power imbalances and addressing structural inequalities, including multiple forms of discrimination. Action is needed to address: the occupational gender stereotypes that prevent women from accessing emerging green occupations; the lack of educational opportunities for girls, particularly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields; the climate-induced impacts of girls’ ability to finish school; the unpaid care burden; violence and harassment in the workplace and public spaces; women’s dependence on the informal economy; patterns of land ownership and access to credit; as well as what counts as the green economy.

Generating equitable green work opportunities for women is key to fostering gender-just economic markets and advancing the shift towards sustainable ways of operating that is so urgently needed. The climate emergency requires rapid action on solutions for renewable or low-carbon energy sources, and there is huge potential for making these green jobs equally accessible to both women and men. This requires opening up higher-end opportunities in male-dominated sectors for women, establishing measures to improve working conditions and/or formalise lower-end green jobs, and facilitating access to green jobs, especially for women facing intersecting forms of discrimination, such as migrant women workers – for instance, through entrepreneurship.<sup>101</sup> One area of focus could be the agricultural sector, where women are highly represented in the workforce but which has received relatively little funding as part of the green transition.<sup>102</sup>

Building the care economy is the final piece of the puzzle. Expanding the definition of green jobs to include a focus on low-carbon, low-impact sectors, like care and social work, rather than just reducing and reforming carbon-intensive industries, holds breakthrough potential for women’s economic justice. Investment in care is also an investment in sustainability. Reframing care, domestic and social work as ‘green work’ could help foster sustainable economies, including by increasing investment in care, as part of countries’ green transition strategies.<sup>103</sup> It may also attract more men to these sectors and help remedy the gender imbalance around care.



## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

Women and girls in the Global South are on the frontlines of adapting to climate change. They are both specifically vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and essential to addressing the causes and consequences of a changing climate. The UK has made some promising commitments on gender equality and women's inclusion in climate action, including on making sure funding reaches women's rights organisations. Now it needs to make progress on these. This will take concerted effort and consistency across departments, teams and climate funding mechanisms.

Gender-just climate action is not only about integrating gender into climate policies and programmes. It is also about ensuring the wider response to the climate crisis is as urgent, just and ambitious as the seriousness of the situation demands. Recent choices by the UK to change what it counts as climate finance instead of increasing funding to meet commitments,<sup>104</sup> and a rollback on domestic policies to meet net zero<sup>105</sup> show worrying trends that the UK is stepping back from leadership on climate action. As a result, the poorest women and girls around the world are likely to suffer the most.

## Recommendations:

**The UK Government must act on its promises, and accelerate support for the women and girls being forced to adapt to climate change through:**

### **Advancing the integration of gender equality into climate finance by:**

- Setting a specific target of 88% of marked climate bilateral finance mainstreaming gender equality aims by 2026, as per the recommendations of the Generation Equality Forum Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition, increasing from the 47% average between 2015-22.<sup>106</sup>
- Integrating rapid, robust gender analysis in all climate finance programming.
- Increasing the amount of climate finance that targets gender equality specifically – for example, investing in programmes that tackle the links between gender-based violence and climate change.
- Working with multilateral and development finance institutions through which the UK channels climate finance to scale up and improve the integration of gender equality into their practices.
- Stepping up systematic collection, analysis and use of gender, age and disability disaggregated (SADD) data to ensure interventions across all sectors are needs based and identify how specific groups are impacted differently by crisis and the coping mechanisms they use.

### **Increasing the quantity and quality of climate finance reaching women's rights organisations and women-led organisations, by:**

- Actively designing programmes that would support the leadership of women's rights organisations and women-led organisations, seeking them out as partners and consulting with them to design opportunities.
- Increasing the quality of funding through longer-term, multi-year commitments and flexible grant-based funding. Where funding is managed through a fund manager, the fund should be set up according to feminist funding principles.
- Removing the barriers that women's rights organisations face in accessing climate finance, across bilateral and multilateral mechanisms, including through consultation on identifying these barriers, which include complex procedures, language barriers and annual budget requirements.
- Specifically designing strategies to seek out women's rights organisations and women-led organisations that represent marginalised women and girls.
- Funding existing mechanisms that directly support community-level, women-led climate action, such as women's funds and the *Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA)*.<sup>107</sup>
- Operationalising the principles of locally led adaptation and resilience-building – for example, climate adaptation in which local communities, community-based organisations, citizen groups, local government and local private sector entities at the lowest administrative structure are included as decision-makers in the interventions that affect them.<sup>108</sup>

- Using their influence within multilateral financial institutions to create mechanisms with conditions and reporting requirements tailored to women's rights and women-led organisations.

### **Amplifying women's voice and leadership in climate policy and negotiations by**

- Increasing support for the implementation of the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan – for example through dedicated funding allocated to its implementation, and demonstrating political support
- Continuing to advocate for gender parity and women's leadership in international climate spaces, and supporting the inclusion of multiple, diverse perspectives. Using diplomatic influence to highlight and put pressure on processes that are not reaching gender parity
- Funding the participation of women from low- and middle-income countries in international climate negotiations, including technical and working level meetings.
- Supporting the inclusion of women-led organisations as key stakeholders in climate negotiations.
- Building internal expertise on the intersection of climate and gender across FCDO, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.
- Ensuring gender equality is mainstreamed into negotiations and is a priority for UK negotiators at the UNFCCC including negotiations on adaptation, finance, loss and damage, mitigation and the just transition.

### **Accelerating a gender-just green transition**

- Ensuring that all UK strategies for accelerating the green transition include gender equality aims and specific measures to ensure that marginalised women and girls can benefit from new economic opportunities – for example, through:
  - upskilling women and girls for green and higher-skilled jobs
  - tackling the structural barriers that women face in the world of work, e.g. through building caring economies in line with the “5 Rs” (of recognition, reduction, redistribution, representation and reward)
  - using quotas, specialised recruitment and engaging with women's rights organisations
  - promoting decent work in line with the International Labour Organization (ILO) definition.<sup>109</sup>
- Collecting, analysing and using sex-, age- and disability- disaggregated data to assess the green transition's impact on gender equality.
- Broadening the definition of green work to encompass mostly low-carbon to carbon-neutral sectors that are dominated by women, such as care and social work.
- Increasing women's participation and leadership in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of green transition measures, including by consulting women's rights organisations on strategies and priorities.

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- <sup>10</sup> GAGGA is a consortium led by Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres in collaboration with Mama Cash and Both ENDS. It has created a network of 16 women’s funds, 8 environmental justice funds, 28 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 390 grassroots groups in 39 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Since 2016, GAGGA has provided €12 million in 1,742 grants, mainly to women-led community-based organisations. See more at <https://gaggaalliance.org/who-we-are/>
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- <sup>12</sup> The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent work as “productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity”. In general, work is considered as decent when: it pays a fair income; it guarantees a secure form of employment and safe working conditions; it ensures equal opportunities and treatment for all; it includes social protection for the workers and their families; it offers prospects for personal development and encourages social integration; workers are free to express their concerns and to organise. See [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/sustainable-growth-and-jobs/employment-and-decent-work\\_en#:~:text=The%20International%20Labour%20Organization%20\(ILO,employment%20and%20safe%20working%20conditions](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/sustainable-growth-and-jobs/employment-and-decent-work_en#:~:text=The%20International%20Labour%20Organization%20(ILO,employment%20and%20safe%20working%20conditions)
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- <sup>106</sup> The Generation Equality Forum Action Coalitions were convened by UN Women to ensure that the bold ambitions of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action on women's rights are finally implemented, and that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are achieved. The Action Coalitions brought together Member States (from the Global South and North), women's movements, youth and civil society actors (from the Global South and North), and private sector entities. The Feminist Action for Climate Justice Action Coalition made a targeted set of concrete, ambitious and immediate actions within the period of 2021-2026 to deliver tangible impact.
- <sup>107</sup> GAGGA is a consortium led by Fondo Centroamericano de Mujeres in collaboration with Mama Cash and Both ENDS. It has created a network of 16 women's funds, 8 environmental justice funds, 28 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and 390 grassroots groups in 39 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America. Since 2016, GAGGA has provided €12 million in 1,742 grants, mainly to women-led community-based organisations. See more at <https://gaggaalliance.org/who-we-are/>
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- <sup>109</sup> The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines decent work as "productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity". In general, work is considered as decent when: it pays a fair income; it guarantees a secure form of employment and safe working conditions; it ensures equal opportunities and treatment for all; it includes social protection for the workers and their families; it offers prospects for personal development and encourages social integration; workers are free to express their concerns and to organise. See [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/sustainable-growth-and-jobs/employment-and-decent-work\\_en#:~:text=The%20International%20Labour%20Organization%20\(ILO,employment%20and%20safe%20working%20conditions](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/sustainable-growth-and-jobs/employment-and-decent-work_en#:~:text=The%20International%20Labour%20Organization%20(ILO,employment%20and%20safe%20working%20conditions)



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