



Answer to the call for input for the upcoming OHCHR report on “Human rights and climate change”

Make Mothers Matter (MMM) is an international NGO that since its creation in 1947, has been advocating for the recognition and support of mothers as key actors for social and economic development. This answer to the call for input focuses on the specific impact of climate change, notably in terms of loss and damage, on women/mothers and on their ability to care for and educate their children. It also highlights the multiple connections between climate change and women’s unpaid work of caring.

Question 1 – What experiences and examples are you aware of that are being faced by particularly individuals and communities in vulnerable situations (as identified above) that have suffered loss and damage due to the adverse impacts of climate change?

Our response to this question largely draws on the lived experiences and actions of Friendship NGO, our grassroots member in Bangladesh, who states: **“climate change undermines basic human rights and amplifies difficulties in accessing the right to life, health, housing, education, water, sanitation, access to legal or financial services, and finally, for the most vulnerable communities, it increases the inability to restart life”¹.**

Women are disproportionately affected by the adverse effects of climate change, which, like most crises exacerbates existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, in particular gender inequality. Because they are often confined to roles and jobs that make them more dependent on natural resources; because they face barriers to financial and technical support; because they are denied land ownership, women are hindered in their adaptation to climate change and in their ability to cope with a climate disaster.

Women and children also suffer disproportionately from loss and damage, which is not always quantifiable.

The experience of the people served by Friendship, who are living in rural and remote areas of Bangladesh, provides concrete examples of the cascading consequences that climate change can have on the lives of women and their children.

- **Impact on livelihood and food security:** in Bangladesh like in many low and middle-income countries, people earn a living in the food system – from farmers to processors, cooks, and vendors, and they are all struggling with growing climate change-driven risks of poverty, food insecurity and hunger. The majority of these workers are women, who are also often engaged in subsistence farming; climate change threatens their ability to feed themselves and their families.

For those living in coastal areas, the salinisation of soils, a major process of land degradation which

¹ See Friendship NGO’s input to the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on Human Rights and Climate Change which was presented at the 50th session of the Human Rights Council https://makemothersmatter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Questionnaire-on-CC-and-HR-ENG-to-UN_NHRIs_NGOs-contribution-by-Friendship.pdf

results from climate change-induced floods, means loss of fertile land for farmers and directly translates into **loss of livelihood** and increased poverty

- **Impact on access to clean freshwater:** whether because of salinization or desertification, climate change threatens access to clean freshwater – the basis of life – forcing families to look elsewhere to get water. For women it means walking longer distances, which means losing time and opportunities. Loss of fresh water for agriculture and loss of drinking water often forces families to relocate altogether and restart a new life from scratch, leaving everything behind
- **Impact on nutrition and health:** the increasing food and water insecurity has in turn a direct impact on the nutrition and health not only of women, but also children and other members of the household. For children, malnutrition leads to stunting growth, with devastating effects on their physical, cognitive and emotional development. In other words, climate change is ruining the future of these children, a **non-quantifiable and unacceptable loss** for themselves but also for their community and country
- **Impact on unpaid care work:** climate change increases the time women have to spend on unpaid family care work. The links between climate change and unpaid care work have been largely overlooked; but they are described in detail in a 2022 Oxfam report². This foundational work is mostly done by women, and is already a cause of economic injustice and hardship for them, especially when they are mothers. Climate change only makes matters worse.

The impact of climate change on food security, access to clean water, or on health, all increase the time and effort women must put into unpaid care work. For example, climate change-induced desertification makes women walk longer distances to fetch water and cooking fuel. Rising temperature has an effect on children's health, requiring mothers to do more care work. Recurring floods force mothers to flee with their children and to repair damages when water recedes.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown how crises increase the level of care work required while reducing the number of people who are able to undertake this work. Women's unpaid care work has regularly acted as a shock absorber for all sorts of threats and crises.

It is not different with the Climate crisis: "Climate change intensifies the work involved in caring for people, animals, plants, and places. It reduces the availability and quality of public services in marginalised communities and directly compounds the unfair distribution of unpaid care work that sustains gender inequality."³

Increasing women and girls' unpaid care work translates into further **losses of opportunities for them**, including income earning and education opportunities. It exacerbates existing inequalities and unbalanced power relations with men, undermining any progress towards Gender Equality, at a **great cost for society and the economy**.

² MacGregor, Sherilyn, Arora-Jonsson, Seema and Cohen, Maeve "Caring in a changing climate - Centering care work in climate action," Oxfam Research Backgrounder series (2022):

<https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/researchpublications/caring-in-a-changing-climate/>

This report defines the unpaid work of caring as 'both direct and indirect care for people as well as for living environments', where 'direct care refers to hands-on care for people; indirect care refers to provisioning of necessary goods and services for people. By environmental care work we mean activities that take place outside the household that are necessary for provisioning and subsistence (including caring for animals, plants, and common spaces on which households depend'

³ Ibid.

Question 2 - Please describe any relevant quantitative and qualitative data as well as mechanisms and tools to measure, monitor, report on, and evaluate the impacts of loss and damage, including from extreme weather and slow-onset events, on the full enjoyment of human rights. Please take into account, inter alia, the disproportionate effects on women and girls, children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, migrants, persons living in poverty and others in vulnerable situations.

Unpaid family care work is indispensable and foundational work that sustains society and the economy; it is in particular essential to raise and educate the next generation of citizens and workers⁴. Yet, its inequitable distribution is a cause of economic hardship and poverty for women, in particular when they are mothers, and a root cause of Gender inequality.

As highlighted above, climate change has a direct or indirect negative impact on this work, increasing the time and effort it requires—mostly from women. In fact, it only exacerbates pre-existing inequalities and the global care crisis⁵.

In addition, as highlighted in Oxfam’s 2022 report⁶, women not only care for people, they also care for the environment—at least in rural settings.

A “Care-sensitive approach”⁷ is therefore key to redress, or at least mitigate climate change impacts on women, and the loss and damage they suffer.

The Paris Agreement within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) requires that climate intervention strategies be “gender responsive” and that they contribute to supporting women as “agents of change”. However, in the process of designing climate actions that are responsive and sensitive to gender, governments and other actors have focused primarily on women’s economic activities and overlooked how paid work and unpaid care work are intertwined.

Analysing the specific impacts that climate change has on time-use, in particular for unpaid domestic work, caring for children and dependent persons, subsistence farming, fetching water and cooking fuel, especially in underserved and vulnerable rural areas, could help design policies and programs that seek to mitigate these negative impacts in terms of loss and damage.

Such analysis can be drawn from Time-Use Surveys data, which should already be used to track progress on SDG 5/Target 5.4 on unpaid domestic and care work, and which could be very relevant in particular to measure the impact of slow-onset climate change related events.

Question 3 - Please describe any specific measures, including public policies, legislation, practices, strategies, or institutional arrangements that your Government has undertaken or plans to undertake at a national, sectoral or sub-national level, in compliance with applicable international human rights law, to avert, minimize and address loss and damage, including equity-based approaches and solutions. Please also identify any relevant mechanisms for ensuring accountability, including means of implementation.

⁴ Its importance is recognised in the 2030 development agenda with a specific target in SDG 5 on Gender Equality - Target 5.4: ‘recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate’.

⁵ See for example: https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_633115/lang--en/index.htm

⁶ See also Oxfam’s 2022 report “Caring in a changing climate - Centering care work in climate action” already mentioned <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/explore/researchpublications/caring-in-a-changing-climate/>

⁷ Ibid.

An increasing number of countries have realized the importance of addressing the issue of inequitable distribution of care work in relation to Gender Equality, in particular in Europe and in Latin America, and have started to take measures—although very few countries have so far tackled the problem in a comprehensive and cross-cutting manner through national cross-sectorial Care Policy⁸.

Fewer still seem to have made the connections between caring for people and caring for the environment. Still, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has taken the lead by promoting the notion of “**Care society**”, which includes caring for people and the planet from a gender and human rights perspective⁹. The notion of *Care society* has emerged from the successive Regional Conferences on Gender Equality, and is part of the *Buenos Aires Commitment*, adopted in the November 2022 regional conference¹⁰.

The *Care Society* is presented as an “alternative to the current development pattern, which places no value on essential life-sustaining activities, reproduces gender, socioeconomic, ethnic and territorial inequalities and has a deleterious socioenvironmental impact”¹¹—including loss and damage induced by climate change. “It is a proposal for organizing society in such a way that the sustainability of life is the priority objective. To achieve this objective, it is essential to recognize the irreplaceable value of care for both people and the planet, and to distribute care provision on the basis of social and gender co-responsibility”¹².

The *Care society* has yet to become a reality, but the first steps are clear.

- *Empowering women by addressing the inequitable distribution of unpaid care work*

Given the interconnections between gender equality, unpaid care work and climate change, Target 5.4 of the 2030 Agenda must be reprioritized, and Time-Use Surveys conducted more systematically and regularly¹³.

The 3R framework (Recognize-Reduce-Redistribute) provides useful avenues to guide policymaking towards a *Care society*¹⁴. In particular, 1) recognizing care as work, valuable work, which benefits everyone and should therefore be a collective responsibility, and (2) redistributing this foundational and indispensable work more equitably between men and women and across society are both key.

- *Involving women in leadership and decision making*

While women, in particular mothers, are among the most affected by climate change, they must not be considered only as victims. In fact, they are best positioned to take action to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change, and minimize loss and damage—if only they are educated, informed and involved, both in devising solutions and in decision making.

⁸ Examples of such countries are Uruguay, and more recently Argentina. Both countries have been building comprehensive national care policy.

⁹ The care society: A horizon for sustainable recovery with gender equality, ECLAC, November 2022—Available on <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/48362-care-society-horizon-sustainable-recovery-gender-equality>

¹⁰ See <https://conferenciamujer.cepal.org/15/en/documents/buenos-aires-commitment>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ This particular target is unfortunately among the most off track as less than half of Member States have conducted at least a Time-Use Survey – See MMM 2022 HLPF statement on this topic—Available on <https://makemothersmatter.org/prioritising-sdg-5-target-5-4-to-recognize-the-work-of-mothers-and-advance-all-the-sdgs>

¹⁴ Read more in MMM Op-ed on the OECD Forum Network: <https://www.oecd-forum.org/posts/268-years-to-close-the-economic-gender-gap-it-is-time-to-consider-care-as-a-human-right>

It is crucial to **involve women in decision-making** concerning choices in policies, climate change mitigation and adaptation projects and allocation of resources. This must be done at every level, not just at the international and national levels, but also at the local level (inside communities and villages), so that their on-the-ground knowledge, know-how and experience can be fully harnessed, and that the policy or program best serves their needs and challenges to face climate change.

- *Harnessing women's knowledge, skills and experience to adapt and innovate*

Women have traditionally had the knowledge to harvest and store water, to preserve food, to ration when needed, particularly when disasters arrive¹⁵. They have the knowledge, skills and the determination to find new ways of farming and living. This **capacity to adapt and innovate** is transmitted from one generation to the other. It must be used to find new ways to mitigate the impacts of Climate Change on the most vulnerable populations and minimise loss and damage.

Scientific assessments by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)¹⁶ and the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES)¹⁷ are clear: traditional stewardship and nature regeneration practices in forests, grasslands and other ecosystems managed by indigenous peoples are key assets in the fight against climate change. **indigenous women** are key players who also have the most to lose.

- *Transforming our economic system*

The economy shapes how we organise societies. But driven by the GDP growth mantra and short-term profits, our current economic system not only completely ignores the contributions of nature and women's unpaid care work, but considers them as unlimited and free resources. In fact, most of the major crises we face today - whether climate change, environmental damage, loss of biodiversity or increasing inequalities - have their roots in an economic system that exploits both women and nature.

Our current economic and social systems are based on now obsolete assumptions (e.g. the male breadwinner model, infinite planet and endless natural resources...). Women have tried hard to adapt, often to the detriment of their health, juggling to reconcile care work and responsibilities with their other lives. This logic must be reversed: new systems must be designed to face the realities of care needs and women's lives, as well as the imperative to reverse environmental degradation, loss of biodiversity and climate change.

In order to transition to a *Care society*, our economic system must be transformed, so that it prioritises the sustainability of life and serves the well-being of all people and the planet in a just and sustainable manner - instead of prospering at their expense. While consensus is growing on the imperative of moving *beyond GDP*, it is now urgent to agree on an alternative model and repurpose our economic system so that we recognise, value, and support the work of caring for each other and for the planet.

A few governments are showing us the way: Canada, Finland, Iceland, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, forming the Wellbeing Economy Government partnership (WEGo)¹⁸, have committed to implement wellbeing economies, i.e. economies which are "in service of life", and share their expertise and transferrable policy practices.

¹⁵ See <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/womenin-shadow-climate-change> and <https://womendeliver.org/investment/invest-women-tackle-climate-change-protect-environment/>

¹⁶ <https://www.ipcc.ch/2021/08/09/ar6-wg1-20210809-pr/>

¹⁷ <https://ipbes.net/fr>

¹⁸ <https://weall.org/wego>