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## SUCCESS STORY

# Climate Justice and Gender Justice: An Essential Pairing to Get Resilience Right

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Young women activists from around the world have been leaders in the movement to combat climate change — organizing protests, rallies, strikes, sit-ins and lawsuits to fight for political and social change. As Ugandan climate activist Vanessa Nakate said in NDI's [Changing the Face of Politics podcast series](#), "It is a surprise to them to see young women coming up, and demanding for climate action. This is the norm of the society, but we, as young women, we have learned to go against what the society thinks is normal, because when we see that something is wrong, then we have to speak up to correct it."



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## Climate Justice Through Good Governance

NDI knows that inclusive, representative democracies and political processes are key to resilience from shocks -- including natural and man-made disasters which have increased in frequency and severity due to climate change -- and lasting peace. That is why NDI recently launched the Environmental Governance and Resilience initiative, connecting decades of experience in good governance and strengthening political institutions to sustainable environmental policies and practice.

Climate justice, which calls for addressing inequity and responding to the unique challenges and opportunities for different groups of people, is vital to effective environmental governance. According to the Mary Robinson Foundation, [climate justice](#) “links human rights and development to achieve a human-centered approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable people and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its impacts equitably and fairly.”

## Women and Girls Most Impacted, Least Represented

Gender equality is a central element of climate justice. Women and girls are, and will continue to be, more vulnerable to the effects of climate change and environmental degradation. The facts are irrefutable:

Women and children [are more likely to die](#) than men in natural and man-made environmental disasters;

When resources are scarce due to drought or deforestation, [women have been subjected to sextortion](#) in order to gain access to water or firewood; and

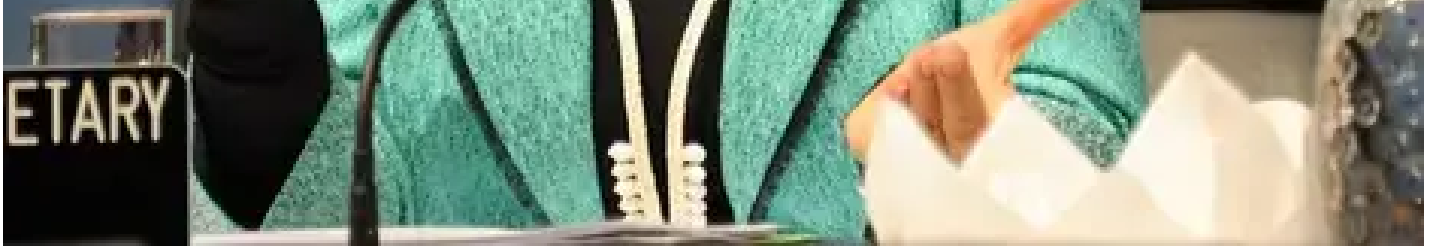
According to the [World Economic Forum](#), less than 20% of land in the world is owned by women. As a result, women’s livelihoods [take longer to recover](#) after economic and climate

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Because women are often poorer, have less access to education, and are frequently excluded from decision-making processes, they are left with fewer coping resources at their disposal. In addition, women's needs, priorities and knowledge are often ignored or overlooked when it comes to climate policy, undermining both their agency and the effectiveness of sustainable management solutions. The health, economic and societal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have further put women's inclusion in environmental governance at risk.

Environmental and resilience programs and policies that impact women, but are not created by them, can run "[the risk of giving women responsibility for 'saving the environment' without addressing whether they actually had the resources or capacity to do so.](#)" [Data shows](#) slow progress of women in top jobs as ministers in environmental sectors. In 2015, only 12% of 881 environmental ministries across 193 countries were led by women, five years later, this only increased to 15%. If women and girls are not included in decision-making and mitigation leadership on climate change, democratic solutions to this problem will not be possible.



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*Christiana Figueres Photo: UNclimatechange.*

## When Women Lead...

Where women are involved in politics, they are often already leading the fight against climate change. [Research by the IPU in 2020](#) identified that environment and energy portfolios were now the primary ministerial portfolios held by women. A broad body of research suggests that women's political leadership is tied to positive environmental outcomes. For example:

At the national and international level, countries with more women parliamentarians are [more likely](#) to ratify environment treaties and set aside more land for conservation.

At the community level, in India and Nepal, forest management groups that included women showed [better resource governance and conservation outcomes](#).

[Recent studies](#) have illustrated that when men and women jointly manage resources, better governance and improved conservation outcomes emerge.

Similarly, [experts believe](#) that incorporating a gender-focus may increase the efficiency of climate change policy development.

[Data shows](#) that in countries where women have higher political participation, greenhouse gas emissions per capita are lower, and the governments in those countries are more likely to conserve protected land areas and endorse international environmental treaties.

## What Needs to be Done

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involvement in politics and activism results in positive gains for environmental outcomes. However, democratic policies and institutions -- key to delivering on climate justice -- need to better account for women's experiences; make investments in the women leaders and activists at the forefront of this movement; and purposefully shift the existing levers of power and inequities at play to fully and sustainably address the climate crisis. Since 2008, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Commission has made the case within the UN and to other intergovernmental bodies that [“gender equality is essential to the successful initiation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of climate change policies.”](#)

Democracy and governance organizations including NDI must therefore work to ensure inclusive environmental governance and political processes, by prioritizing women's political leadership and [accelerating the pace of change](#) in achieving political parity. To this end:

Parties, parliaments and environmental governance organizations should conduct gender audits in parties, parliaments and environmental governance organizations to understand the barriers to and opportunities for gender inclusion. These assessments should inform the development and implementation of policies and action plans that will support women's inclusion in leadership and decision-making.

Policymakers should center local, Indigenous knowledge to ensure equity in environmental governance, and they should build climate resilience and adaptation models based on what women know and see in their communities. [Community mapping exercises](#) that ask men and women separately about natural resources and management in their communities can lead to richer data on environmental degradation, resource use and effective adaptation. Gathering and assessing this data in a gender-informed way helps uncover how [“knowledge and information...often differs between women and men”](#) and can inform more sustainable climate solutions and effective policy-making.

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are already participating in climate activism, young women are among the most underrepresented groups in politics. Gaps in confidence and a decline in political ambition happen early for girls. In many parts of the world, women do not see a role in politics as a viable option from the time they are young. Building the political skills, confidence and aspirations of girls at a young age is therefore key to ensuring that there is a new generation of women political leaders who are able to engage fully in democratic processes and create responsive policy.

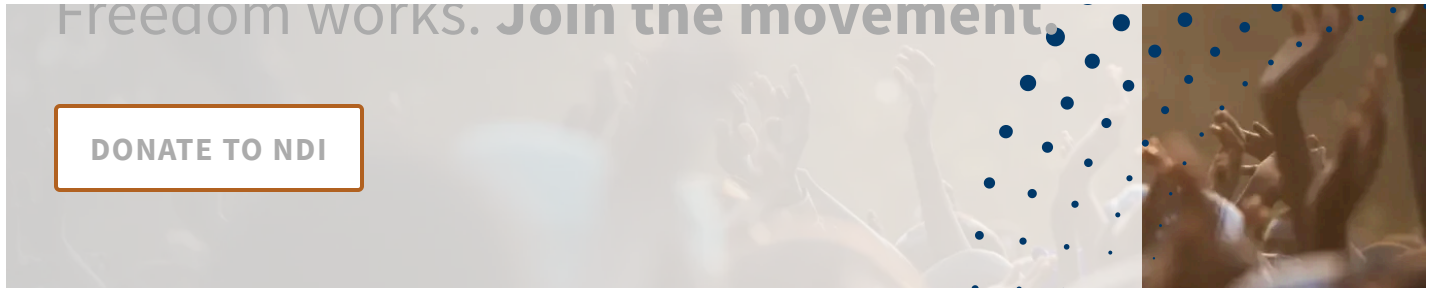
The [agreed conclusions](#) of the United Nations' 65th session on the Commission on the Status of Women in 2021 acknowledge the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls, as well as the necessity of their involvement in leading its mitigation. NDI must work to ensure that women and girls are central to the development of environmental governance and resilience, as decision-makers and leaders, and also as beneficiaries. This inclusive democracy in action is the only way climate justice and gender justice can be achieved.

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