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Intersectional Approaches to Climate Justice: Examining Gendered Environmental Labor through the Lens of Equity and Sustainability

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Abstract: Climate crisis is both an environmental challenge and a social one, deeply rooted in systems of inequality and oppression. Addressing this crisis requires a holistic approach that recognises the intersectional nature of vulnerability and resilience. By centring the experiences of those who perform gendered environmental labour—often the most affected yet least heard, we can develop more equitable and sustainable solutions that truly leave no one behind. This research examines how intersecting social inequalities exacerbate climate vulnerabilities for women in the Global South, focusing on the undervaluation of their environmental labor. The research addresses the critical questions of how gender, race, and class shape women's disproportionate climate burdens and how intersectional approaches transform climate governance. Using feminist political ecology and case studies from agrarian and Indigenous communities, the study critiques technocratic climate solutions that neglect structural inequities. It reveals how women's roles as caregivers, smallholder farmers, and resource managers intensified by droughts and deforestation remain systematically invisible, perpetuating cycles of exploitation. The paper aims to center gendered labor in climate justice advocacy by proposing three objectives, which are analyzing policy gaps in recognizing women's ecological work, demonstrating the efficacy of women-led conservation initiatives, and advocating for participatory policymaking that addresses intersecting oppressions. Findings underscore the need to dismantle extractive systems and redistribute power through reparative finance, land rights reforms, and inclusive governance. Equitable sustainability requires embedding intersectionality in climate action from local adaptations to international treaties to align environmental goals with social justice

Keywords: climate justice; climate policy; gender equity; gendered labour; intersectionality

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1. Introduction

There is no single definition of environmental justice, but at its core, it embodies the principle that all individuals—regardless of background—should have equal access to environmental benefits and protections while also bearing a fair share of risks and responsibilities. Climate justice expands this concept to a global scale. Climate change effects are disproportionately felt by those countries and communities who contribute least to the problem, mainly the poorest and most vulnerable (Olsson et al. 2014). Climate justice seeks to address the unequal distribution of climate change impacts and the ethical responsibility of mitigating these disparities. However, existing frameworks often overlook the gendered dimensions of environmental labour, which disproportionately affect women due to entrenched social and economic inequalities.

Climate change is seen as one of the planetary emergencies of our time, threatening ecological stability, economic security, and social justice- demanding innovative responses at every level of human organisation.[1] Its impacts are not distributed equally. Marginalised communities, particularly women and gender-diverse individuals, often bear the brunt of environmental degradation and climate-related disasters (Sultana 2022). This disproportionate burden is deeply intertwined with existing social, economic, and political inequalities, necessitating an intersectional approach to understanding and addressing climate justice (Islam and Winkel 2017). The concept of climate justice seeks to frame climate change not merely as an environmental issue but as a social and ethical one, emphasising the need for equitable solutions that prioritise the rights and well-being of the most vulnerable. Within this framework, the role of gendered environmental labour—the often invisible and undervalued work performed by women and gender-diverse individuals in managing natural

[1] United Nations. Global Issues: Climate Change. https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/climate-change

resources and sustaining communities—emerges as a critical area of inquiry. This article explores the intersection of climate justice, gendered environmental labour, and sustainability, arguing that an intersectional perspective is essential for developing equitable and effective responses to the climate crisis.

The intersectional approach, rooted in Black feminist thought and critical race theory, provides a powerful lens for analysing how multiple axes of identity—such as gender, race, class, and geography—intersect to shape experiences of environmental labour and vulnerability (Crenshaw 1989). Women, particularly those in the Global South, are often primary caregivers and resource managers within their households and communities (Sultana 2022). They are responsible for tasks such as the fetching of water, agriculture, and fuel gathering, which are increasingly threatened by climate change.[2] Yet, their contributions are frequently overlooked in policy-making and resource allocation, perpetuating cycles of inequality and environmental degradation. Moreover, gender-diverse individuals and those at the intersections of marginalised identities face unique challenges, including discrimination, resource inequities and participatory exclusion in governance frameworks (Arora-Jonsson 2013). By centring these intersectional experiences, this article seeks to illuminate the ways in which gendered environmental labour is both a site of vulnerability and a source of resilience in the face of climate change.

The concept of sustainability, often framed in terms of environmental preservation and economic development, must also be reimagined through an intersectional lens. Traditional sustainability discourses have frequently failed to account for the social dimensions of environmental issues, particularly the ways in which gender and other identity markers shape access to and control over natural resources (Wolfram and Kienesberger 2023). Achieving meaningful sustainability demands an integrated approach that harmonises ecological integrity with principles of distributive justice. This necessitates equitable allocation of the benefits derived from environmental protection while ensuring that the costs of climate mitigation and adaptation do not fall unduly upon historically marginalised populations (Whyte 2017). This article argues that recognising and valuing gendered environmental labour is a crucial step toward achieving this vision. By integrating intersectional perspectives into climate justice frameworks, policymakers, activists, and scholars can develop more inclusive and effective strategies for addressing the climate crisis.

This article investigates the nexus between climate justice and gendered environmental labour, arguing that achieving true sustainability requires addressing the structural inequities that shape women's roles and vulnerabilities in the context of climate change. This article is structured to first provide a theoretical foundation for understanding intersectionality in the context of climate justice and gendered environmental labour. It then examines the legal framework for gendered climate justice and case studies from diverse geographic and cultural contexts to illustrate the ways in which gender and other identity markers intersect to shape experiences of environmental labour and vulnerability. Finally, it explores the implications of these findings for policy and practice, offering recommendations for integrating intersectional approaches into climate action and sustainability initiatives. Through this analysis, the article aims to contribute to a growing body of scholarship that seeks to bridge the gap between environmental justice and social justice, highlighting the interconnectedness of equity and sustainability in the transformation towards climate resilience. This research calls for a paradigm shift in how we conceptualise and respond to climate change, one that prioritises justice, equity, and inclusion at every level of decision-making. Only by embracing intersectional approaches can we hope to build a future that is both environmentally sustainable and socially just.

2. Overview of Gendered Environmental Labour

Gendered environmental labour describes the socially constructed and systematically undervalued ecological work disproportionately performed by the female gender globally, particularly in the Global South. This includes unpaid or under-compensated activities such as water collection, fuelwood gathering, subsistence farming, and household waste management - roles entrenched in patriarchal norms that designate women as primary caregivers and resource managers (Arora-Jonsson 2011). Climate change intensifies these burdens, as droughts and deforestation increase time spent on survival tasks. According to Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations, Women now expend an estimated additional 200 million hours daily collecting water compared to men.[3] Despite constituting approximately 80% of smallholder farmers in Africa and producing more than 70% of food in developing countries,[4] women own less than 20% of agricultural land and receive disproportionately low climate adaptation funding.[5] In India and Nepal, for instance, forest management groups with 33% of women members show 30% higher conservation outcomes, yet women remain excluded from 70% of climate policy consultants (Agarwal 2009). Feminist political ecology research demonstrates how this paradoxical situation persists. Women's ecological labour sustains communities while being excluded from policy recognition, fair compensation, and decision-making forums (Elmhirst 2023). This structural inequity highlights the urgent need to formally recognise, equitably redistribute, and properly remunerate gendered environmental labour as fundamental to achieving climate justice and resilience.

3. Climate Change and Gendered Vulnerabilities

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2 ibid

3 United Nations Development Programme, 2022. *Beyond scarcity: Water security in the Middle East and North Africa* https://www.undp.org/publications/water-security-menaregion.

4 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations,2023.*The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems*. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc5343en

5 Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2023. *SDG Indicator 5.a.1: Women's ownership of agricultural land."* Data portal tracking gender disparities in land rights. https://www.fao.org/soodustainable-development-goals-data-portal/data/indicators/5a1-women-ownership-of-agricultural-land/en.

Climate change is exacerbating existing gender inequalities, as women face greater risks due to limited access to resources, education, and decision-making power. Natural disasters, shifting agricultural patterns and resource scarcity disproportionately impact women, who are often responsible for ensuring household survival. This section examines case studies from the Global South to illustrate how climate change amplifies gendered vulnerabilities and reinforces cycles of poverty and marginalisation.

Climate change refers to the long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, driven largely by human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas). These activities have resulted in severe consequences: droughts, water scarcity, wildfires, rising sea levels and flooding.[6] This is disproportionately exacerbating the vulnerabilities of marginalised groups in many regions. The impact of climate change is not limited to its effect on the natural environment but produces a chain reaction that affects social systems such as health, livelihood, and food production, among others. As the consequences worsen, so do already existing inequalities, placing vulnerable groups such as women and girls in even more disadvantaged positions.

According to the World Bank Group, some populations are more vulnerable to climate change than others.[7] Among them are women and girls, often categorised as a socially marginalised group due to gender differentiated roles, limited decision-making power and insufficient access to resources needed to cope with or recover from the risks associated with climate change and its consequences.[8] The reasons vary from region to region but are rooted in systemic discrimination linked to financial, cultural, socio-economic and social inequalities. These pre-existing systemic inequalities, which include lower income, inadequate health care, lack of access to education, unpaid care work, etc., position women and girls to bear more of the brunt of climate change, limiting their ability to adopt adaptive or mitigating strategies.

Due to gender differentiated roles of men and women linked to cultural and socio-economic inequalities in various parts of the world, it has been said that climate change affects both genders differently (Kangas et al. 2014). In developing countries, more women engage in subsistence agriculture, which means they are heavily dependent on the natural environment and its resources and, mostly affected by climate related disasters such as drought, wildfire, and erratic rainfall.[9] Research indicates that women and girls are 14 times more likely to be harmed during disasters (TechnoServe 2024). An example is the case of women, particularly in rural regions, engaging in unpaid domestic and care work, needing to work twice as hard to acquire basic resources to carry out their responsibilities. This includes trekking far distances to fetch water due to drought, thereby exposing them to health (TechnoServe 2024) and security risks such as communicable diseases, gender-based violence and exploitation, further magnifying the already existing inequalities they face. Women who lack access to adequate shelter suffer the risk of being injured or killed in cases of flood, hurricanes and heat waves.

In Bangladesh, women face numerous challenges due to multiple intersectional vulnerabilities magnified by the impacts of rising sea levels, increased frequency and intensity of cyclones, and erratic rainfall patterns, among other impacts of climate change in the country (Al Zabir 2023). Research shows that due to customary limitations on female mobility and limited access to information on emergency preparedness, women in Bangladesh did not leave their houses during flood and those who did, were not able to swim (Tanny and Rahman 2016). Following such natural disasters, the women, particularly those from rural Bangladesh who do survive, are exposed to violence within and outside their homes as the rate of domestic violence from males increases (Tanny and Rahman 2016).

Women's limited ability to employ adaptive or mitigating strategies against the adverse and disproportionate impact of climate change also stems from constrained financial and limited educational access and restricted decision-making power of women in the households, communities and at policy levels to influence climate change issues specifically as it affects women and girls. Small scale women farmers in developing countries often have limited access to financial resources and with little or no education, lack the information that could help them adapt to the conditions (Tanny and Rahman 2016). Examples of such resources essential for women to be climate resilient include land ownership, easy access to financial credit support, climate adaptive technology. Although 60% of the women in low-income countries are said engaged in agriculture as food producers, they own less than 10% of the agricultural land due to legal and social norms (Sharma et al. 2022).

Across civilisations, domestic laws often reflect and sustain entrenched power structures and societal conventions that restrict women's economic empowerment, preventing them from achieving full economic empowerment. What began as informal social restrictions gradually hardened into the mortar of legal systems, with the bricks of bias laid differently in each nation's foundation (Puh et al. 2022). The World Bank's latest data exposes how legal systems continue to disadvantage women: From gender-based job bans in 20 countries to unequal inheritance laws in 43 nations, these sanctioned discriminations create tangible economic ceilings for half the world's population (Sharma et al. 2022).

According to A. O Akinola, the right to own land encompasses both "rights and legitimacy to access, use, own, control, enjoy and exploit land," including the authority to determine its use and reap its economic, social, and cultural rewards (Akinola 2018). In rural parts of Nigeria, land ownership transfer is regulated by customary law instead of the statutory law. This poses challenges to women due to the customary practice of preference for male heirs and not female heirs. Therefore, women run the risk of losing inherited lands if they do not bear male children and girls if they have male siblings (Akinola 2018). In Kenya, despite existing laws such as Articles 40 and 60 (f) of the Kenyan Constitution (2010), which allows all Kenyans to own property and the elimination of gender discrimination in land and property, respectively, statistics show a decline in women's land ownership (KIPPRA 2024). The number of women not owning lands rose from 61% for women between 15-39 years of age to 75.0% for agricultural land and 93.3%

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6 United Nations. What is Climate Change? https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change

7 World Bank Group, 2025. Social dimensions of climate change. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-dimensions-of-climate-change

8 ibid

9 United Nations Women, 2022. Explainer: How gender inequality and climate change are interconnected. https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/explainer/2022/02/explainer-how-gender-inequality-and-climate-change-are-interconnected

for non-agricultural land in 2022(KIPPRA 2024). This implies that Kenyan women have less access to credit because they often lack collateral for formal loans.[10]

These pre-existing situations of women not being able to access essential resources in addition to the consequences of a continuous changing climate puts them at greater risks of remaining marginalised and more vulnerable. This is based on the reality that out of the 1.3billion people living in poverty, almost 70% of women are further pushed below the poverty line due to the inability to recover from the shocks caused by climate adversities (Merrow 2020). As a result, gender plays a significant role in determining the vulnerabilities of climate change.

4. International Legal framework for gendered climate

a. *The UN Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)1979* [11]

Article 1 of the convention defines discrimination against women as any "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field".[12] States signatory to the convention commit themselves to integrating gender equality into national laws by repealing discriminatory legislation,[13] establishing judicial bodies and public institutions to enforce women's rights and ensure that individuals, organizations and businesses comply with anti-discrimination measures, eliminating all forms of bias against women in society.[14]

Article 14 addresses women's rights by guaranteeing the rights to land, credit and infrastructure which are critical for climate resilience,[15] while article 12, 11 and 13 ensures access to healthcare, including maternal services which climate disasters disrupt; ensures gender equality in employment by guaranteeing equal rights, opportunities, pay, training, social security and health protections addressing women's vulnerability to climate-related economic shocks. [16] While CEDAW lacks explicit climate provisions, its principles are increasingly applied to climate justice through shadow reports and Committee recommendations (Rodenberg 2023). Feminist groups advocate using CEDAW alongside other frameworks (e.g., UNFCCC Gender Action Plans) to strengthen accountability.[17]

b. *The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (1995)*

This declaration adopted by 189 countries is the most comprehensive transformative global agenda providing a clear roadmap for women's empowerment, crucial for equality, development, and peace.[18] It Identifies 12 key gender-related issues, with actionable steps for governments, UN agencies, and other stakeholders including ending violence against women, economic empowerment and political participation (Equality Now 2025). The platform calls for women's inclusion in environmental decision-making recognizing their roles in resources management e.g. water, forest etc. It aligns with UNDP's goals, supporting women's advancement.[19] It Promotes gender mainstreaming, requiring impact assessments on policies for women and men. UNDP's dual focus includes empowering women and building national capacity, with progress reviewed in 2015 since Beijing 1995.[20]

c. *UN Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCC)*

The 2010 Cancun Agreements established during the UN Framework for Climate Change COP-16 in 2010, marked a milestone as the first global climate change policy to emphasize gender equality(UNFCC 2011).[21] Since then, progress has been made in increasing women's involvement in negotiations and embedding gender equality into UNFCC outcomes, including national adaptation plans, mitigation strategies, capacity building, technology and REDD+ safeguards(UNFCC 2007).[22] Additionally, gender perspectives have been incorporated into key funding mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund, the Adaptation Fund and Climate Investment Funds. At COP-18 in Doha (2012), a decision was approved to advance gender balance and boost women's participation in UNFCCC negotiations and party representation across related bodies. (UNFCC 2012a)[23].

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10 IUCN, 2018. Twende* Towards Ending Drought Emergencies: Ecosystem based Adaptation in Kenya's Arid and Semi-Arid Rangelands Annex-6-a. Gender Assessment Kenya. (IUCN & Austrian Development Agency, 2018), 15 www.entwicklung.at

11 UN Women,1979. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, (CEDAW) 1979, https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/

12 Article 1, CEDAW 1979

13 Article 2 CEDAW 1979

14 Article 3- 4 CEDAW 1979

15 Article 14 CEDAW 1979

16 Article 12, 11 & 13 CEDAW 1979

17 UN Women Watch. Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change, Information and Resources on Gender Equality an Empowerment of Women.

18 UN Women, 2025The Beijing Declaration and platform for Action at 30, and why that matters for gender equality. https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/explainer/the-beijing-declaration-and-platform-for-action-at-30-and-why-that-matters-for-gender-equality

19 UNDP.What is Beijing Platform for Action. https://www.undp.org/ukraine/publications/what-beijing-platform-action

20 Ibid.

21 UNFCCC, 2011. *The Cancun Agreements*. FCCC/CP/2010/7/Add.1.

22 UNFCCC. 2007. *Decision 2/CP.13: REDD+ Demonstration Activities*. FCCC/CP/2007/6/Add.1

23 UNFCCC. 2012a. *Doha Decision on Gender and Climate Change*. FCCC/CP/2012/8/Add.3.

5. Women as Agents of Environmental Conservation

While women bear the brunt of climate impacts, they are also pivotal in ecosystem protection and climate resilience efforts. From grassroots movements to traditional ecological knowledge, women play a central role in sustainable resource management and community resilience. This section highlights examples of women-led initiatives that demonstrate the transformative potential of integrating gender perspectives into climate action.

With the severe impact of climate change on the natural environment, which is the main source of livelihood for women in the global south and LMICs, environmental conservation is a vital tool in alleviating the deepening inequalities and injustices. Environmental conservation embodies the protection and revival of Earth's life-support systems—safeguarding clean air, fresh water, fertile soils, and biodiversity while healing damaged ecosystems. It demands both shielding nature from irreversible harm and stewarding its gifts wisely for generations to come (Edwin 2023). This involves efforts by individuals, communities, corporations, governments, and other groups to reduce the disproportionate gendered experiences threatening the survival and empowerment of women in climate change (Denny 2024).

As key stakeholders in the environment, women at all levels in the global north and south play major roles in conservation efforts aimed at safeguarding resources from loss, wastage or exploitation through national use and ensuring their use or availability.[24] Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, 1992, states that 'Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development'.[25] Their gendered differentiated roles, reliance on nature, intimate knowledge of local ecosystems and experience with environmental changes often make them the first to notice the impact of climate change such as deforestation, pollution, or droughts (Ehtisham 2025).

The role of women in environmental conservation cannot be disputed; however, it is often not taken into consideration in terms of decision and policy making for environmental sustainability and development of adaptive and mitigating strategies for climate change. This is largely because there are gendered differentiated interactions between the environment, men and women which affect their contributions to its sustainability as well as the impacts of its sustainability of them. The 1995 Beijing conference identified the environment as one of twelve critical areas for women. Section K, paragraph 246 of the Beijing Platform for Action, on women and the environment, asserted that "women have an essential role to play in the development of sustainable and ecologically sound consumption and production patterns and approaches to natural resource management".[26] Yet, according to Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO), the representation of women in climate and environmental negotiation bodies is said to be stagnant.[27]

In Nigeria, women are underrepresented in environmental decision-making bodies. This limits the ability of women to contribute towards overcoming gendered environmental challenges and the ability to ensure that future generations of rural and urban women are able to meet their own environmental conservation and sustainability needs.

Environmental sustainability is the ability to use environmental resources over time and this cannot be guaranteed unless development policies inclusively take into cognisance equitable access of women to these resources and the fair distribution of the costs and the benefits (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2014). This involves institutionalising gender responsive policy making actively centring women's lived realities alongside men's at every stage of the programme development, from design to impact assessment. Rather than gender-blind approaches that perpetuate inequity, this paradigm ensures policies actively redistribute power and opportunities to achieve substantive equality across political, economic, and social domains.

Despite the limitations, women are uniquely demonstrating the transformative potential of integrating gender perspectives into climate action; acting as drivers of environmental conservation and sustainability. Examples of such women in the global south are Wangari Maathai, a Kenyan environmentalist who mobilised women to plant over 50 million trees to combat deforestation, soil erosion, and desertification; Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim, a climate activist for Indigenous land rights and environmental conservation in Chad, who uses traditional conservation knowledge to improve adaptation strategies; María Margarita Ruíz, a mangrove conservationist leader in Mexico who trains women in local fishing communities on sustainable fishing practices and climate change adaptation to protect marine biodiversity. These reveal the undeniable gendered perspectives in environmental sustainability not only in terms of women being a vulnerable and marginalised group but also as leaders of sustainable environmental development.

Furthermore, the long-term impact of climate change and its threats to the local and global environment has triggered the need to develop adaptive ways to cope with and mitigate the effects. One of the ways employed particularly by women from the Global South is the use of indigenous knowledge. African rural communities are rich with traditional ecological knowledge on various survival tactics, which have been passed down from one generation to the other and have, over time, brought about notable development (Aluko 2018). This indigenous knowledge involves traditional methods of farming, fishing, herding, etc., all of which are dependent on the environment for their existence and sustainability and, therefore, work for the sole purpose of preserving the resources and securing provision.

According to Olatokun and Ayanbode, (2009) individuals, particularly rural Nigerian women, are blessed with vast indigenous knowledge of traditional medicine, land use management, seed preservation, breeding of food crops species, etc. Similarly, rural

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24 *FCT Education Management Information System (EMIS)*. Environmental Conservation," https://fctemis.org/notes/925_ENVIRONMENTAL%20CONSERVATION.pdf

25 *International Association of Universities – Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development* ,1992.Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. https://www.iau-hesd.net/sites/default/files/documents/rio e.pdf

26 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2009. *Gender and Environment: A Guide to the Integration of Gender Aspects in the OSCE Environmental Projects*.

27 Raja Foundation, 2024. Underrepresentation of women in decision-making on climate and environmental issues within international bodies (WEDO). https://www.fondation-raja-marcovici.com/en/uncategorized/underrepresentation-of-women-in-decision-making-on-climate-and-environmental-issues-within-international-bodies-wedo.html

women in India are often able to extensively identify and are more knowledgeable of different species of trees and their uses than forestry professionals (Adebobola 2009). This knowledge can play a major role in preserving the environment and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. Their inclusion in projects and policymaking on sustainable agricultural production and biodiversity conservation can help ensure environmental security. This would require involving indigenous people, specifically rural women, who can identify effective traditional practices, which can then be documented and integrated into formal adaptation strategies and made accessible to policymakers. An example of the inclusion of global south Indigenous women in environmental conservation projects can be drawn from the Inclusive Conservation Initiative (ICI) sub-projects in Nepal, Congo and Sotz'il, which sees Indigenous women involved in the coordination and decision-making bodies of projects, a higher ratio of Indigenous women to men, and the strengthening of their capacities at the local, national and international levels.[28] This way, the distinct vulnerabilities, experiences and cultural setting of global south women in climate change can be addressed.

6. An Intersectional Approach to Climate Justice: Addressing Structural Inequalities in Climate Policy

This section emphasises that climate change impacts are not experienced uniformly across populations. Rather, they are shaped by intersecting social identities such as gender, race, class and geography. It argues that climate policies must incorporate intersectional perspectives to ensure they are equitable and effective. It also discusses the need to include marginalised communities in the decision-making process, as they bear the brunt of climate impacts but are frequently excluded from conversations about solutions

The concept of intersectionality originates in black feminist thought. It is defined as, "the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (Adaptation Fund Board 2022).

Applying Crenshaw's argument in relation to intersectionalities in climate vulnerabilities, women in the Global South and LMICs are faced with a lot of inequalities and injustices which render them invisible- legally, economically and socially. These cannot be reduced to gender alone as they emanate from a myriad of intersections, i.e., gender, race, social class, socio-economic status, disabilities, geography, etc. These intersections help to analyse how the inequalities faced by individuals and groups of women culminate into climate injustice. Therefore, the concept of intersectionality provides the opportunity to create a clear picture of and understand how these intersections interact with climate change to shape the disproportionate vulnerabilities of women and their capacities to respond to it.

An intersectional approach to climate justice recognises that gender intersects with other axes of inequality, such as race, class, and geography, to shape experiences of climate change (Crenshaw 1989). This section argues for the inclusion of intersectional perspectives in climate policy, ensuring that marginalised voices are heard and that solutions address the root causes of inequality. An intersectional approach to climate justice acknowledges that these overlapping identities compound vulnerability, exposing marginalised groups—particularly women, Indigenous communities, and low-income populations in the Global South—to disproportionate harm (Sultana 2022). For example, while climate change is a global crisis, its burdens fall disproportionately on marginalised communities who contribute least to carbon emissions—a dynamic rooted in colonial exploitation, neoliberal economic policies, and entrenched social hierarchies (Whyte 2017). Also, women in agrarian economies face heightened risks due to gendered labour roles, restricted land ownership, and limited access to credit, technology, and climate information (Arora-Jonsson 2013). At the same time, racialised urban poor communities endure extreme heat and pollution without adequate infrastructure (Bullard and Wright 2012). Indigenous peoples, whose livelihoods and cosmologies are tied to ecosystems, confront dual threats of climate disruption and land dispossession, often exacerbated by extractive industries operating with state complicity.[29]

Current climate policies often fail to address these structural inequities, instead adopting "one-size-fits-all" frameworks that perpetuate exclusion (Djoudi et al. 2016). Carbon offset schemes, for instance, may displace Indigenous forest-dwelling communities under the guise of conservation (Fairhead et al. 2012) while "green growth" initiatives prioritise corporate profits over equitable transitions for workers in fossil fuel-dependent economies. Such approaches perpetuate what Tuana (2019) terms "epistemic injustice," silencing the knowledge and agency of frontline communities.

To dismantle these structural inequities, climate justice must centre intersectionality in three key ways, which include amplifying marginalised voices in decision-making, i.e. decision-making spaces from international climate negotiations to local adaptation planning must include women, Indigenous leaders, youth, and displaced communities as equal partners, not tokenised stakeholders (Whyte 2017). The second will be targeting root causes of inequality (e.g., bcolonial legacies, economic disenfranchisement), which means that policies must address historical injustices, such as colonial land grabs or racialised zoning laws, that underpin climate vulnerability. This includes reparative finance (e.g., loss-and-damage funds for Global South nations), land restitution, and dismantling neoliberal austerity regimes (Maldonado et al. 2013). The third is equitable resource allocation, i.e. allocating resources to communities most affected but least responsible for climate change (Roberts and Parks 2009). For instance, community-led renewable energy projects and universal social protection systems must be guided by the principle of distributive justice (Caney 2014).

Without intersectional policies, climate action risks replicating the very power imbalances it seeks to rectify (Tuana 2019). As feminist political ecologists argue, justice is not an add-on to sustainability—it is the foundation (Nightingale 2019). Therefore, by embedding intersectionality into climate governance, we can move beyond symptom-level fixes to transform the systems that produce vulnerability in the first place.

7. Policy Implications and Recommendations

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28 *International Union for Conservation of Nature* , 2023.Earth Day 2023: Inclusive Conservation Invests in Indigenous and local women. https://iucn.org/blog/202304/earth-day-2023-inclusive-conservation-invests-indigenous-and-local-women

29 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021*Challenges and Opportunities for Indigenous People's sustainability*.

To address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on marginalised communities, policymakers and practitioners must adopt intersectional approaches that recognise overlapping identities and structural inequalities. The paper recommends evidence-based approaches to embedding intersectionality into climate and sustainability initiatives as follows;

a) Disaggregated Data Collection and Analysis

Because climate vulnerability is not uniform, aggregate data hides how marginalised groups face compounded risks. Climate vulnerability assessments should systematically collect race, gender, class, and disability data to reveal inequities (Rao et al. 2019). The U.N. emphasises intersectional indicators (SDG 5, 10, 13) to track disparities in climate resilience.[30] Therefore, participatory methods, e.g., community surveys, should be used to capture nuanced vulnerabilities (Rao et al. 2019).

b) Inclusive Policy Co-Design with Marginalised Groups

Traditional climate policymaking often excludes vulnerable communities despite their critical ecological knowledge, leading to ineffective or harmful outcomes like climate resilience projects that displace marginalised groups (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014). Key approaches to inclusive co-design will include participatory frameworks such as community-based Adaptation that empowers communities to lead vulnerability assessments and design context-specific solutions (Djoudi et al. 2016). For example, in Bangladesh, CBA workshops with women farmers led to flood-resistant crop strategies later adopted in national policies (Ayers et al. 2014). Also, adaptations that integrate traditional knowledge with scientific data (Ford et al. 2016). Other approaches include developing a structural mechanism for the inclusion of marginalised groups, replacing extractive "consultations" with long-term partnerships and addressing power imbalances through Payment of marginalised participants for their time and expertise to counter economic barriers (Ayers et al. 2014).

c) Capacity Building and Decolonial Climate Education

A transformative approach to climate governance requires fundamentally reimagining how we educate policymakers and legal practitioners. Training policymakers in intersectionality theory provides essential tools to analyse how race, gender, class and colonialism compound climate vulnerabilities, moving beyond superficial awareness to practical policy analysis (Crenshaw 1989). The Feminist Green New Deal demonstrates how centring marginalised women's leadership yields more equitable solutions (Rao 2021), a model that should inform mandatory legal education. Simultaneously, there is a need for dismantling Eurocentric sustainability models through decolonial pedagogies that prioritise Indigenous knowledge, expose colonial roots of climate crises, and create space for community-led learning (Whyte 2020). Successful examples like the Abya Yala Network (Ulloa 2022) show how traditional ecological knowledge can inform modern policy, suggesting law schools should develop Indigenous partnership clinics (Ulloa 2022).

d) Intersection of climate justice into legal frameworks

Modern environmental law is increasingly adopting intersectional approaches to address how climate vulnerabilities disproportionately affect marginalised groups. Bolivia's *Law of Mother Earth* (2010) exemplifies this by linking ecological protection with social equity (Radcliffe 2015). Legal reforms now call for intersectional equity assessments to prevent climate policies from worsening inequalities—e.g., evaluating Indigenous land displacement by renewable projects (Ajibade et al. 2023). Courts in India and South Africa have set precedents by applying intersectionality to climate-related rights, acknowledging layered discriminations in environmental harm (Bhattacharya and Saha 2021). These developments highlight the imperative to embed intersectional analysis in climate governance for true justice.

*e) **Targeted Funding for Intersectional Vulnerable Communities***

Current climate finance systems inadequately address intersectional vulnerabilities, disproportionately excluding high-risk groups like women smallholder farmers (receiving <10% of funds despite comprising 60-80% of Africa's agricultural workforce) and coastal migrant workers.[31] The Green Climate Fund's Gender Policy and Action Plan (2021) presents a legal blueprint for reform through (1) mandatory inclusion criteria, (2) dedicated funding for marginalised groups, and (3) community-led monitoring.[32] These mechanisms should inform national legislation, including standardised vulnerability indices, to rectify systemic funding inequities. Such targeted approaches align with international climate justice frameworks like UNFCCC Decision 2/CP.24,[33] transforming finance into a tool for restorative justice rather than perpetuating existing disparities (Nightingale et al. 2020).

8. Conclusion

The intersection of climate justice and gendered environmental labor reveals an urgent truth: environmental sustainability cannot be achieved without addressing systemic inequities. Women, particularly those from marginalized communities in the Global South, bear the heaviest burdens of climate change. Managing dwindling resources, sustaining households, and preserving traditional ecological knowledge—yet their labor remains undervalued, and their voices excluded from policy decisions. This paper has demonstrated how intersectional feminist frameworks expose the compounded vulnerabilities shaped by gender, race, class, and geography, challenging dominant technocratic approaches that ignore structural inequalities.

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30 United Nations Women, 2020. *Intersectionality in Climate Action.*

31 Food and Agriculture Organization, 2021.*The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems*.

32 Green Climate Fund, 2021. *Gender Policy and Action Plan 2.0* .

33 UNFCCC, 2018. *Decision 2/CP.24: Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.* https://unfccc.int/decisions?f%5B0%5D=conference%3A4202&f%5B1%5D=session%3A4116

The disproportionate impacts of climate change on women—from increased labor burdens to heightened risks of displacement and violence—are not inevitable but are products of historical and ongoing injustices. Conversely, women's roles as primary environmental stewards offer transformative potential. Case studies from Kenya to Bangladesh illustrate how women-led conservation initiatives, rooted in Indigenous knowledge and community resilience, provide sustainable alternatives to top-down climate interventions. However, without formal recognition, equitable resource distribution, and meaningful participation in governance, these efforts remain fragmented and underfunded. Therefore, to advance climate justice, there is a need for reimagining climate justice that prioritises equity, recognises the value of gendered labour, and empowers women as key stakeholders in the fight against climate change. Ultimately, sustainability must be redefined as inseparable from justice by embedding intersectional equity into climate action—from grassroots movements to international treaties.

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