Briefing note on Gender and Climate Change for SB64

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1. Background

Climate change affects women, men, boys and girls and gender-diverse people in different ways. Entrenched and systemic discrimination can lead to gender-differentiated impacts of climate change with respect to health, food security, livelihoods and human mobility, among other issues.[1]

COP 30 marked a pivotal moment for advancing gender equality in climate action. Previously, at COP29, following intense negotiations and strong advocacy from civil society, Parties agreed to extend the Lima Work Programme on Gender for another decade and set out a roadmap for creating a new Gender Action Plan (GAP) that was adopted at COP30 in November 2025, where parties adopted the nine-year GAP (Decision 7/CP.30). The plan is designed to drive sustained, long-term gender-responsive climate policy and action, through its 27 activities and 98 deliverables to drive concrete action at every level. It calls on governments, UN entities, civil society, and other relevant organizations to work collectively to drive implementation – from the global to the local level.

Given that climate change disproportionately impacts women, girls, and gender-diverse people, especially those in vulnerable contexts, the new GAP should translate human rights commitments into practice throughout the nine years. This includes, amongst others, gender equality, decent work and meaningful participation.

[1] Also acknowledged in Decision-/CP.29.

2. Definitions

Gender is a concept that allows to understand and confront structural inequalities of power between men, women, and persons with diverse gender identities. Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Human rights-based, gender-responsive approaches are tools that address how these inequalities operate on an economic, political, social and cultural level. If we change "gender-responsive" to an expression like "equality between men and women", we are setting aside precisely this structural approach.[2]

Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group and age. **Intersectional forms of discrimination,** based on diverse factors such as social status, gender, race, caste, national or ethnic origin, age, language, religion or belief, migrant status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, sex characteristics, poverty levels and access to resources, exacerbate the often disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls and affect their ability to adapt. Meanwhile, the exclusion of women and girls from climate action and decision-making inhibits its effectiveness and further exacerbates climate harms.

Gender equality is a human right. Women and girls, especially those in already vulnerable situations. are among the most impacted by climate change. These disproportionate and gendered impacts of climate change necessitate that human rights-based, gender-responsive approaches must be integrated into climate action.[3]

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is achieving gender equality. [4]

Gender balance refers to the equal and inclusive representation of women in all decision-making systems. Achieving this balance requires ensuring both men and women have equal opportunities and access to resources, education, health, and decision-making positions.[5]

Gender-responsive approaches require intentionally employing gender considerations to affect the design, implementation and results of programmes and policies, including by recognizing and addressing the distinct needs, experiences, and vulnerabilities of women, men, and gender diverse people to achieve gender equality.

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[2] https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsandefinitions.htm
[3] https://gendercoordinationandmainstreaming.unwomen.org/gender-mainstreaming-global
[4] Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997 (A/52/3, 18 September 1997)
[5] CEDAW GC 40

Gender-transformative approaches aim to tackle structural and social root causes of inequality, thereby reshaping institutions and norms to achieve long-term, equitable outcomes.[6] This includes the co-development of solutions with women, girls and gender-diverse people on the basis of their lived experiences and distinctive understandings of systemic change and effective and fair climate solutions.[7]

3. International Standards

In its recent *Advisory Opinion on the Obligations of States in Respect to Climate Change*, the **International Court of Justice** unequivocally affirmed the applicability of human rights law to all climate action, reinforcing that states must uphold their human rights obligations when taking climate action.[8]

Under international human rights law, States have binding obligations to advance gender equality, meaning measures that systematically integrate gender perspectives at all levels of decision-making to ensure women's and girls' meaningful participation and achieve equitable outcomes.[9]

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) all **prohibit discrimination against women and girls**, requiring States to refrain from discriminatory practices and guarantee equal enjoyment of rights. Under CEDAW, gender equality is understood as **substantive equality or equality of results**, which goes beyond formal legal equality to address the socially and culturally constructed differences between women and men.[10] It requires the transformation of opportunities, institutions, and power structures to ensure women's equal participation, decision-making, and influence in all areas of life.[11]

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change first acknowledged the gender–climate nexus through **Decision 36/CP.7**[12] which aimed to enhance women's representation and participation. The **Paris Agreement** significantly expanded on this by calling on states to "respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights (…) as well as gender equality" when taking climate action. Article 7 (5) of the Paris Agreement[13] calls for **gender-responsive climate**

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[6] UNICEF Gender Policy and Action Plan 2022-2025, Background Paper Series

[7] General recommendation No 40. on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems, para. 8.

[8] ICJ Advisory Opinion on Obligations of States in Respect to Climate Change (23 July 2025), paras 145, 172.

[9] For a comprehensive overview of obligations and the role of intersectionality in climate action, see the 2024 Scene-Setting Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change and Human Rights. The report summarizes evidence and guidance from UN human rights bodies: A/HRC/56/46: Scene-setting report - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change

[10] General recommendation No. 25, on article 4, paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, on temporary special measures, paras. 8-10.

[11] Ibid. Pursuant to CEDAW Article 2, States Parties agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical realization of gender equality. Article 7 guarantees women, among other things, the right to participate in the formulation and implementation of government policies.

[12] https://unfccc.int/files/bodies/election_and_membership/application/pdf/decision_36_cp7.pdf

[13] Art. 7(5) Paris Agreement: "Parties acknowledge that adaptation action should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach, taking into consideration vulnerable groups, communities and ecosystems, and should be based on and guided by the best available science and, as appropriate, traditional knowledge, knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, with a view to integrating adaptation into relevant socioeconomic and environmental policies and actions, where appropriate."

adaptation, while article 11 (2)[14] requires **gender-responsive capacity-building**. This laid the groundwork for the subsequent adoption of the **Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan (Decision 3/CP.25)**, at COP25 in 2019. Together, these commitments establish that gender-responsive and gender-transformative approaches are not only a moral and ethical imperative but also a legal obligation.

The provisions of the Paris Agreement were, likewise, cited in the recent **ICJ Advisory Opinion on Climate Change**, where the court referred to the need to take into account gender equality when addressing climate change.[15]

4. OHCHR Recommendations for the GAP before COP30

In order to protect, promote, and advance the rights of women, girls, and gender-diverse people and promote cooperation and justice in climate action, the new GAP should:

1. **Anchor gender equality as a legal obligation**
   - Frame gender equality not just as an aspirational goal but as a concrete legal responsibility, referencing binding international human rights instruments (CEDAW, ICCPR, ICESCR), the recent ICJ Advisory Opinion on Climate Change, CEDAW General Recommendations, the Paris Agreement, and the human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment across the GAP.

2. **Mainstream intersectionality across all GAP priority areas**
   - Design policies and programs that address specific barriers faced by different groups, including the lack of gender-, disability-, and age-responsive care and support systems with full respect for human rights.
   - All measures in the GAP should be "gender, care, age and accessibility-responsive."[16]

3. **Enhance the availability of gender-disaggregated data**
   - Expand the basis of data disaggregation to disability, ethnicity, geographic location, income, and migratory status, in line with SDG 17 17.18 to better inform implementation of gender-responsive climate policies, plans, strategies and actions. Such data should be made publicly available and used to inform gender-responsive national legislation, policies, programmes and budgets.
   - Provide capacity building to national institutions so they can reinforce capacities to collect, consolidate and analyse disaggregated data, including at the local level.
   - Develop, on the basis of disaggregated data, specific and gender-responsive indicators and monitoring mechanisms to enable States parties to establish

[14] Art. 11(2) Paris Agreement: "Capacity-building should be country-driven, based on and responsive to national needs, and foster country ownership of Parties, in particular, for developing country Parties, 10 including at the national, subnational and local levels. Capacity-building should be guided by lessons learned, including those from capacity-building activities under the Convention, and should be an effective, iterative process that is **participatory, cross-cutting and gender-responsive.**"

[15] ICJ Advisory Opinion on Obligations of States in Respect to Climate Change (23 July 2025), paras. 1, 255, 374, 382, 383.

[16] "Care-responsive" measures will take into consideration care and support responsibilities women and girls may bear, but with caution that such measures will not enhance gender stereotypes that imposes primary care and support responsibilities on women and girls. "Accessibility" includes physical, economic, and information accessibility of the participation in the processes and accessibility for persons with disabilities. "Age responsiveness" includes arrangements for child-rights friendly participation in line with para. 28 of CRC GC 26.

baselines and measure progress in areas such as the participation of women in initiatives relating to climate change and in political, economic and social institutions.

4. **Commit to strengthen participation of women as agents of change**
   - Strengthen requirements for participation of women as agents of change by establishing clear standards for equitable participation in decision-making processes, including promoting women´s participation in all UNFCCC delegations. This requires technical capacity and the provision of adequate resources for that purpose.
   - Ensure the access to information of women and girls' organizations and networks, and equal access to resources, services and technologies.
   - Promote and strengthen women's knowledge and experience, particularly at the local level in areas such as agriculture, conservation, and natural resource management, including in rural areas.
   - Provide guidance for States on how to ensure a safe and enabling environment for women environmental human rights defenders to operate.

5. **Integrate just transition explicitly into the GAP**
   - Mainstream gender equality in the context of a just transition, including through specific gender policies related to gender-responsive workforce training, promoting women's access to and ownership of land and resources, and respecting the knowledge of Indigenous women.
   - Require economic transformation and climate adaption plans to be gender-responsive and gender-transformative, including gender equality in decent work, care and support work, access to natural and productive resources, sustainable clean energy, and financing,[17] and to education adapted to the changing social needs.

6. **Advance gender-responsive and gender-transformative capacity-building and finance**
   - Address specific impact areas where women face disproportionate impacts, including food security, women's physical and mental health, economic impacts and access to financial assets and services, education, land, resources, and decision-making processes.
   - Provide technical support to national government / gender and climate focal points on how to incorporate gender-responsive action into NDCs and NAPs and provide capacity building on public finance, including gender-responsive budgeting.
   - Develop guidance to public and private financial institutions to make climate finance and budgeting gender-responsive and gender-transformative, with clear monitoring and accountability mechanisms, meaningful stakeholder consultation, funding access for women's organizations, and capacity-building programs, inter alia.
   - Share resources, knowledge and technology, including across civil society, grassroots and scientist communities, and sub-national governments, to build capacity related to climate change among women and girls.

7. **Strengthen monitoring, accountability, and access to justice**

[17] A gender-responsive just transition for people and planet | Publications | UN Women – Headquarters.

- Develop guidelines on how to conduct gender impact analyses of laws and policies regarding climate change to assess their effect on women.
- Update all UNFCCC reporting guidelines to include clearly defined gender qualitative and quantitative indicators, robust learning mechanisms to enable institutions to establish baselines and measure progress in areas such as the participation of women.
- Develop guidance on robust protection mechanism for those most at risk, particularly women environmental human rights defenders (WEHRDs) and Indigenous women. This includes proactive policies, as well as access to justice and remedies for rights violations.

5. COP30's Belem Gender Action Plan (GAP)

At COP30, parties adopted the new Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP) for 2026-2034. The adopted plan **reflects a number of important advances** in integrating **gender** considerations into climate action and was a pivotal moment for gender equality but remains limited in several key areas.

The new GAP strengthens attention to women's participation and leadership as agents of change. It includes measures to support **meaningful participation** through capacity-building, networks, and access to resources, as well as provisions on safety, protection, and support for **women environmental defenders**. While these elements represent important entry points for addressing barriers to participation and enabling more inclusive climate governance, it is concerning that several key issues were not adequately addressed in the new GAP. Intersectionality was not explicitly referenced, though references to **"multidimensional factors"** and the inclusion of structurally excluded groups across activities reflect a growing awareness of diverse experiences. The integration of **gender- and age-disaggregated data** throughout the framework, combined with efforts to strengthen capacity for data collection and analysis, further contributes to building a stronger evidence base for gender-responsive climate policies.

Progress is also evident in relation to **gender-responsive finance** and **capacity-building.** The GAP promotes the use of gender-responsive budgeting and financial instruments, alongside knowledge-sharing and dialogue among key stakeholders, including **multilateral climate funds.** In addition, it introduces measures to strengthen monitoring and reporting, including through the gender composition report, enhanced data collection, and capacity-building for tracking progress. Together, these elements provide a foundation for improving transparency and implementation.

The GAP does not, however, anchor gender equality as a binding legal obligation. While it encourages enhanced cooperation across UN entities and Rio Convention secretariats, it does not explicitly align with international human rights frameworks, including CEDAW. The GAP introduces elements related to monitoring and reporting but the predominantly **voluntary language** of these provisions may limit accountability. In addition, access to justice and effective remedies for women and girls affected by climate change, as well as for women environmental human rights defenders, remain largely unaddressed. This weakens the **human rights foundation** of the GAP and limits its potential to deliver transformative outcomes.

Overall, the Belém **GAP provides important entry points,** particularly in relation to participation, data, finance, and monitoring, that provide **a basis to further strengthen human rights integration**, including through clearer legal grounding, enhanced intersectional approaches, and stronger accountability mechanisms. In this case, SB64 represents a crucial moment to define the direction of the Belém GAP and the way foward.

6. SB64 and the Belem Gender Action Plan (GAP) : What now?

One of the main challenges to implementing the previous GAP was the lack of adequate technical and financial resources (see FCCC/SBI/2024/11). A critical step in moving from planning to implementation of the Belém GAP is to strengthen access to gender-responsive climate finance for National Gender and Climate Change Focal Points (NGCCFPs), government officials, and other relevant stakeholders[18].

SB64 represents a critical moment to shape how the Belém GAP will be operationalized in practice. A key question is whether the GAP will continue being primarily a facilitative framework focused on knowledge exchange or transform into a more accountable and resourced mechanism capable of advancing gender equality and human rights within global governance. It is important that the GAP not be siloed but rather serve as a vehicle for supporting effective measures to integrate gender equality across the UNFCCC, that there is adequate financial and technical support for National Gender Climate Focal Points and the implementation of the GAP, that data collection is strengthened, rights-based, participatory and disaggregated by gender, and that women environmental human rights defenders and their organizations are supported in their efforts to advance human rights, including gender equality. In other words, the implementation of the GAP is critical and must move away from business as usual and toward transformative change.

Upcoming events at SB64:

• Workshop on best practices and tools for strengthening the role of NGCCFPs (A.2.1)

• Expert dialogue on relevant issues in gender and age-disaggregated data and gender analysis (D.5.2)

• Invitation to the operating entities of the FM, MCFs and NGCCFPs to engage in an interactive dialogue on progress in the delivery of gender-responsive climate finance (D.4.3)

7. Resources

- Key Message on Human Rights, the environment and gender equality (2021)
- Key Messages on a Just Transition and Human Rights (2023)

[18] UNFCCC: Financing implementation of the Belém Gender Action Plan at the national level

- Key Messages on Loss and Damage (2023)
- Briefing Note on Climate change: Protecting Women's Rights
- OHCHR submission to SB62
    - Including overview of rights-related language relating to gender action plans (GAPs) under different multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs)
    - And overview of gender-related language at recent COPs of different MEAs
- A/HRC/56/46: Scene-setting report - Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of climate change
- Analytical study (2019) on the integration of a gender-responsive approach into climate action at the local, national, regional and international levels for the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of women
- A Study on Women, Gender Inequalities and Climate-Induced Migration in East Africa
- Guidance note for UN Resident Coordinators and Country teams on Environmental Human Rights Defenders (2023).
- UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40 on the equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems
- CEDAW General Recommendation No. 37 on gender-relate dimensions of climate change
- CEDAW General Recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women
- CRC General Comment No. 26 (2023) on children's rights and the environment, with a special focus on climate change
- UNGA Resolution 76/300 on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment

UNFCCC:

- Lima Work Programme on Gender (2014)
- Gender Action Plan (2017)
- Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and Gender Action Plan (2019)
- GAP Synthesis Report (FCCC/SBI/2024/11) (2024)[19]
- SBI 62 Informal Note on Gender and Climate Change (25 June 2025)

[19] Areas of improvement identified in the report include developing "an understanding of the intersections between gender, climate change and human rights and social justice issues, such as sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence, health, care, social protection, just transition, land tenure rights and land governance, migration, and environmental and climate rights, including the rights of environmental human rights defenders." (p. 144)