**UN Special Rapporteur report on women, girls, and the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment**

**Response Submitted by Fòs Feminista**

**October 14, 2022**

Fòs Feminista is grateful for the opportunity to submit this contribution to the UN Special Rapporteur report on women, girls, and the right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment. Fòs Feminista is an intersectional feminist international alliance for sexual and reproductive health, rights, and justice that collaborates with 170+ partner organizations globally to expand access to rights-based sexual and reproductive healthcare, education, and advocacy.

Though all populations are affected by climate change,[[1]](#footnote-2) the effects of climate change do not affect all people equally. People who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally, or otherwise marginalized are disproportionately affected by climate change.[[2]](#footnote-3) This is the product of intersecting social processes, including: discrimination based on race, gender, sex, class, ethnicity, age, or (dis)ability, migratory and/or refugee status, and other factors that result in inequalities in socioeconomic status and income, as well as differences in exposure to the effects of climate change.[[3]](#footnote-4) Those who have contributed the least to climate change are often the most vulnerable to and most impacted by climate change, including women and children, gender-diverse people, and indigenous peoples.[[4]](#footnote-5) A person’s sexual and reproductive health (SRH) and wellbeing is inextricably linked to the health of the environments and communities in which they live.[[5]](#footnote-6)

Foundational human rights documents related to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD),[[6]](#footnote-7) call for the analysis of the structural links between SRHR, gender, and climate change as well as for measures to enhance the full participation of all relevant groups, especially women, at all levels of population and environmental decision-making.[[7]](#footnote-8) The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action identifies three strategic objectives for government action on the Women and Environment strategic objective, including involving women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels, integrating their concerns and perspectives in policies and programs, and establishing ways to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women.[[8]](#footnote-9)

Evidence indicates that 80% of those displaced by the effects of climate change are women.[[9]](#footnote-10) Generally, women are among the most at risk of adverse health effects from climate change due to existing socioeconomic inequalities and cultural norms.[[10]](#footnote-11) For example, women and girls have limited access to resources and decision-making power, which inhibits their ability to withstand and recover from climate-induced disasters and access basic services, including healthcare, education, housing, and other recovery services.[[11]](#footnote-12) Periods of climate disasters, such as drought, and the resulting food insecurity in agricultural communities reliant on subsistence farming, have been shown to lead to increases in high-risk sexual behaviors (e.g., transactional sex, early sexual debut), sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and HIV prevalence among young women.[[12]](#footnote-13) Because women and girls’ needs are often not prioritized in climate-induced disaster responses, they lack access to vital health services, including contraception, comprehensive abortion and post-abortion care, post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV infection, and counseling and psychosocial support services in cases of SGBV.[[13]](#footnote-14) Additional information is available in Fòs Feminista’s factsheet that outlines climate change as a SRHR issue.[[14]](#footnote-15)

Climate change also threatens the rights to life, decent work, the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, self-determination, water and sanitation, food, housing, education, information, culture, public participation, and development.[[15]](#footnote-16) States are obligated through the International Covenants, and other Human Right treaties, including the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, to promote, protect and fulfil these rights threatened by climate change.[[16]](#footnote-17) For example, States have an obligation to promote, protect, and fulfill the rights of women and girls facing multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination as enshrined in international human rights conventions, particularly the CEDAW.[[17]](#footnote-18)

Additionally, the outcome document of the 66th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women “acknowledges that achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls and women’s full, equal effective and meaningful participation and decision - making in the context of climate change, environmental degradation and disaster risk reduction is essential for achieving sustainable development, promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies, enhancing inclusive and sustainable economic growth and productivity, ending poverty in all its forms and dimensions everywhere and ensuring the well-being of all. It recognizes that women and girls play a vital role as agents of change for sustainable development.”[[18]](#footnote-19)

Finally, existing frameworks and agreements related to climate change, biodiversity, desertification, environment, and disaster risk reduction, such as the Rio conventions, the Paris Agreement, the Glasgow Climate Pact, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, include gender and the principle of gender equality, emphasize the effective participation of women, and call for the integration of a gender perspective in climate policy and action.[[19]](#footnote-20)

Further research, policies, and programs at the intersection of climate change, gender, and SRHR is necessary. These efforts must be evidence-based, gender transformative, and based in human rights and equity.[[20]](#footnote-21) Funding gender-transformative, equity-based policies and programs is necessary to mitigate the disproportionate impacts that climate change will continue to have on the health and well-being of all persons, particularly those who experience inequality due to gender, class, ethnicity, race, age, or other socio-economic factors.[[21]](#footnote-22) Including women, girls, and gender-diverse people in the response to climate change will increase the likelihood that these policies and programs are effective. Gender responsive programs are not enough to combat the disproportionate impacts of climate change on women, girls, or LGBTQI+ persons, as these do not challenge deeply rooted gender norms or patriarchal ideologies and structures that limit their social status.

Global North countries that contribute the most to climate change must allocate funding to implement gender transformative programs that mitigate the impacts of climate change on women, girls, and gender-diverse people. They must also invest in intersectional[[22]](#footnote-23) feminist research to document the impacts of climate change. Engaging and funding of feminist movements and climate justice organizations, particularly from the Global South and the most affected countries, is vital to ensuring that these efforts are gender transformative and responsive to the needs of women and girls and others who are disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Corporations must also acknowledge that their actions are directly causing climate change and then develop corporate social responsibility initiatives to fund climate justice movements and foster intersectional collaboration with activists working across all areas of social justice.

As a global organization, Fòs Feminista is reviewing, revising, and drafting internal policies that consider the organizational impacts on climate change.

1. World Health Organization (WHO), Climate Change and Health Factsheet (2018), *available at* <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2014) 793–832, *available at* <https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/WGIIAR5-PartA_FINAL.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Kristen Zimmerman and Vera Miao, Fertile Ground: Women Organizing at the Intersection of Environmental Justice and Reproductive Justice (2009) *available at* <https://movementstrategy.org/b/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/MSC-Fertile_Ground.pdf> [hereinafter Zimmerman and Miao, Fertile Ground (2009)]; *See also* Leon Sealey-Huggins, *The climate crisis is a racist crisis: structural racism, inequality and climate change*, The Fire Now: Anti-Racist Scholarship in Times of Explicit Racial Violence (Azeezat Johson, Remi Joseph-Salisbury, Beth Kamunge eds., 2018). 99-113; *See also* Bernadette P. Resurrección, et al., *Gender-Transformative Climate Change Adaptation: Advancing Social Equity*, The Global Commission on Adaptation 4 (2019) [hereinafter Resurrección et al., *Gender-Transformative Climate Change Adaptation* (2019)]; *See generally* IPCC, Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability, Summary for Policymakers 6 (2014), *available at* <https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/ar5_wgII_spm_en.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL), Rights in a Changing Climate: Human Rights Under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change 2 (2019), *available at* <https://www.ciel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Rights-in-a-Changing-Climate_SinglePage.pdf> [hereafter CIEL, Rights in a Changing Climate (2019)]. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. Zimmerman and Miao, Fertile Ground (2009), *supra* note 3; *See generally* Carmen H Logie et al., *Exploring linkages between climate change and sexual health: a scoping review protocol,* 11BMJ Open (2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 4-5, 108 (20th Anniversary ed., 2014), *available at* https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/programme\_of\_action\_Web%20ENGLISH.pdf. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. UN Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women 103-105 (Beijing: United Nations, 1995), *available at* <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf> [hereinafter UN Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995)]; *See also* UN Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and Beijing +5 Political Declaration and Outcome 163 (1995), *available at*

   <https://beijing20.unwomen.org/~/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/pfa_e_final_web.pdf>; *See also* Post-2015 Women’s Coalition, An Advocacy Brief: Climate Change and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights 1 (2015), *available at* <http://feministallianceforrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Climate-Change2.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. UN Women, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995), *supra* note 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. United Nations Development Programme, Gender and Climate Change: Overview of linkages between gender and climate change 5 (2016), *available at* <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNDP%20Linkages%20Gender%20and%20CC%20Policy%20Brief%201-WEB.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. Nick Watts, et al., *Health and Climate Change: Policy Responses to Protect Public Health*, 386 The Lancet

    Commission 1 (2015), at 1865; *See also* Cecilia Sorensen et al., *Climate change and women's health: Impacts and policy directions*, 15 PLoS Med (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. CARE International, Evicted by Climate Change: Confronting the Gendered Impacts of Climate-Induced Displacement (2020) 4, *available at* <https://careclimatechange.org/evicted-by-climate-change/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Andrea J. Low et al., *Association between severe drought and HIV prevention and care behaviors in Lesotho: A population-based survey 2016-2017* 16 PLoS Med (2019); *See also A*drienne Epstein et al., *Drought and intimate partner violence toward women in 19 countries in sub-Saharan Africa during 2011-2018: A population-based study,* 17 PLoS Med (2020)*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Asian-Pacific Resource and Research Centre for Women (ARROW), Identifying Opportunities for Action on Climate Change and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines 9 (2014), *available at* <https://arrow.org.my/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/accessible%20pdf-1496/index.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Fòs Feminista, Climate Change is a Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Issue (2022), *available at* <https://fosfeminista.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/FOS-FEMINISTA-FACT-SHEET-CLIMATE.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. Paris Agreement to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, T.I.A.S. No. 16-1104, Preamble (2015) [hereinafter Paris Agreement (2015)]; *See also* UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Report of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement on the third part of its first session, FCCC/PA/CMA/2018/3 (2018); *See also* CIEL, Rights in a Changing Climate (2019), *supra* note 4, at 2; S*ee also* UN Human Rights Council, Human Rights and Climate Change, A/HRC/RES/44/7 (2020); *See also* Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), The climate crisis is a human rights crisis (2018), *available at* <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/FactSheetClimateChange.pdf>; *See also* UN General Assembly, Declaration on the Right to Development, A/RES/41/128 (1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (3 September 1981), <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. Economic and Social Council Res E/CN.6/2022/L.7 (29 March 2022). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. United Nations Conference on Environment and Development Res 44/228 (22 December 1989); *See also* U.N. Conference on Environment and Development, *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development,* U.N. Doc. A/CONF.151/26/Rev.1 (Vol. I), annex 1 (12 August 1992); *See also* Paris Agreement (2015), *supra* note 15; *See also* U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Report of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement on its third session, held in Glasgow from 31 October to 13 November 2021,* U.N. Doc FCCC/PA/CMA/2021/10/Add.1 (8 March 2022); *See also* UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015-2030* (18 March 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Ann M. Starrs et al*., Accelerate progress—sexual and reproductive rights for all: report of the Guttmacher-Lancet Commission,* 391 The Lancet Commissions 2642, 2646 (2018), at 2649; *See also* Resurrección et al., *Gender-Transformative Climate Change Adaptation* (2019), *supra* note 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. Resurrección et al., *Gender-Transformative Climate Change Adaptation* (2019), *supra* note 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,* 1989 University of Chicago Legal Forum (1989); *See also* Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Leslie McCall, *Toward a field of intersectionality studies: Theory, applications, and praxis,* 38 Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)