

# Intersecting Priorities: Advancing the Women, Peace and Security Agenda through Climate Security Initiatives

by Sophia Papastavrou



The intersectionality of gender, peace and security has emerged as a critical area of inquiry within both academic scholarship and policy discourse. The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, anchored in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and subsequent resolutions, emphasises the importance of including women in all aspects of conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, the escalating impacts of climate change pose significant challenges to global security,

exacerbating conflict dynamics and increased forced migration. In recent years, scholars and policymakers have increasingly acknowledged the intersection of these agendas and the potential synergies between advancing the WPS agenda and addressing climate security challenges.<sup>2</sup> Recognising the interconnections between these issues is essential for developing holistic approaches to address contemporary security challenges, as initiatives aimed at mitigating the security risks associated with climate change can

<sup>1</sup> UN Security Council, *Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security*, 31 October 2000, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325(2000)).

<sup>2</sup> Lukas Rüttinger et al., *A New Climate for Peace. Taking Action on Climate and Fragility Risks*, Berlin [etc.], adelphi [etc.], 2015, <https://climate-diplomacy.org/node/5080>.

*Sophia Papastavrou is a Gender Technical Specialist with World Vision Canada based in Cyprus and a member of the Mediterranean Women Mediators Network (MWMN) and the Women, Peace, Security Network Canada.*

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also serve as vehicles for advancing the WPS agenda.

### *Women as disproportionately affected agents of change*

Integrating gender perspectives can enhance the effectiveness of climate resilience strategies, conflict prevention efforts and peacebuilding interventions. Climate change exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and can act as a threat multiplier, intensifying socio-economic inequalities, resource scarcity and competition over natural resources. These environmental stressors often intersect with pre-existing political, social and economic grievances, contributing to heightened tensions and conflict risks. Moreover, climate-induced displacement and migration further strain resources and exacerbate social tensions, potentially leading to violent conflict. Women are disproportionately affected by the adverse impacts of climate change and armed conflict due to existing gender inequalities, harmful gender norms and socio-economic disparities. Women often bear the primary responsibility for household food security, nutrition and water provision, making them particularly vulnerable to climate-related shocks in these areas.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, women face increased risks of sexual and gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and trafficking, in conflict-affected settings, exacerbating their insecurity and their health impacts.

<sup>3</sup> Water.org website: *A Woman's Crisis*, <https://water.org/our-impact/water-crisis/womens-crisis>.

Despite these challenges, women are agents of change and resilience in their communities, possessing valuable knowledge, skills and perspectives for addressing climate-related risks and building peace. Women are actively participating in climate change adaptation, conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts that are essential for achieving sustainable and inclusive solutions. In Colombia, women have played critical roles in mediating peace during and after the decades-long armed conflict. The Organización Femenina Popular (OFP) is one such group where women mediate conflicts within their communities, often related to land disputes and resource allocation exacerbated by climate change. OFP was selected as a 2022 recipient of Global Affairs Canada's WPS Civil Society Leadership Award for its Guardianas de la Vida (Guardians of Life and Nature) programme. Operating in the Magdalena Medio region, the programme built the capacity of women through training and resources, to protect the environment and address the impacts of climate change.<sup>4</sup>

In the Philippines, women are integral to community-based early warning systems for natural disasters, which are becoming more frequent and severe due to climate change. Women monitor environmental changes and disseminate warnings. Their involvement ensures timely and effective responses, reducing the

<sup>4</sup> Canada Government website: *Women, Peace and Security Awards Program*, [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/gender\\_equality-egalite\\_des\\_genres/wps-fps-award-prix.aspx](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/wps-fps-award-prix.aspx).

potential for conflict over resources in disaster-stricken areas.<sup>5</sup>

By recognising and amplifying women's voices, promoting gender-responsive policies and investing in women's education and leadership, the foundation for a more resilient, equitable and peaceful framework is possible.

### *Women mediators at the forefront of climate change and security*

Women mediators are essential in addressing the intersection of climate change and conflict, leveraging their unique perspectives, skills and experiences to foster sustainable solutions. Through inclusive decision-making, women mediators prioritise diverse voices, including those of the most vulnerable women along with marginalised groups, to be heard and represented in climate change and conflict resolution processes. By incorporating a range of perspectives, they promote more holistic and effective solutions that address the needs and concerns of all stakeholders.<sup>6</sup> The Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) in Kenya supports women in pastoralist communities in taking leadership mediator roles in natural resource management and conflict resolution.

<sup>5</sup> Clara Aranda and Eugenie Humeau, *Early Warning Systems in the Philippines: Building Resilience through Mobile and Digital Technologies*, London, GSMA, June 2022, [https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-for-development/gsma\\_resources/ews-philippines-mobile-and-digital-technologies](https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/mobile-for-development/gsma_resources/ews-philippines-mobile-and-digital-technologies).

<sup>6</sup> Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) website: *Peace Building and Wildlife Protection*, <https://www.nrt-kenya.org/peace-and-security>.

Women belonging to their community conservancies created the Women Peace Council to advocate for and become champions of peace. These women play a crucial role in preventing planned attacks and fostering dialogue with the Morans (the name given to young men warriors), contributing to peacebuilding and community resilience.<sup>7</sup>

Women mediators also work towards building trust in their communities, between conflicting parties and to facilitate constructive dialogue. For example, Liberia's Women's Peace Huts, initiated by the Women's NGO Secretariat of Liberia (WONGOSOL), served as platforms for women to engage in peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Women trained in these huts mediate local disputes, including those related to resource scarcity worsened by climate change. Their work has been crucial in maintaining peace and fostering community resilience. Peace Huts have evolved into platforms that have filled critical gaps in terms of consolidating peace, facilitating reconciliation and mediation, and promoting women's empowerment at the community level.<sup>8</sup> By creating safe spaces for open communication and mutual understanding, women mediators foster cooperation in

<sup>7</sup> NRT, *Armed Conflict in Communities: How Women in Northern Kenya Are Creating Pathways for Peace*, 22 September 2023, <https://www.nrt-kenya.org/news-2/2023/10/16/armed-conflict-in-communities-how-women-in-northern-kenya-are-creating-pathways-for-peace>.

<sup>8</sup> Abraham Bility, *National Peace Hut Women of Liberia. An Account of Support Provided by UN Women (2009-2018)*, UN Women, June 2019, <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/node/6797>.

addressing the root causes of conflict and environmental degradation.

Women mediators advocate for sustainable development initiatives that address both the immediate impacts of climate change and the underlying drivers of conflict, such as resource scarcity, inequality and displacement. Recognising the differential impacts of environmental degradation and violence on women and men, it is imperative that policies and interventions consider gender-specific vulnerabilities and empower women in their communities. Subsequently, support can be provided to local initiatives that strengthen adaptive capacities, enhance natural resource management and promote sustainable livelihoods to ensure communities can withstand environmental shocks and mitigate the risk of conflict.

The potential synergies between advancing the WPS agenda and addressing climate security challenges can be found in some key projects initiated by World Vision International.<sup>9</sup> Women in Bangladesh are often at the forefront of managing natural resources and are key to promoting peace in their communities. World Vision conducts awareness programmes to educate communities about the importance of ecosystem restoration and

environmental conservation to ensure sustainable peace. Women provide leadership due to their central role in managing household resources and their influence within the community. First, women are actively involved in planting and maintaining mangroves, gaining employment and skills in the process. World Vision's initiative then leverages this by empowering women to take on leadership roles in peacebuilding efforts. The initiative promotes the inclusion of women in local decision-making bodies and processes related to environmental management and conflict resolution.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, in Sierra Leone, World Vision has strengthened the institutional capacity of women-focused civil society organisations through coordinated efforts to sustain peace and enhance the safety and security of women and girls in Sierra Leone before, during and after elections. Women who participate in peace processes tend to represent broader and more diverse constituencies, ensuring that a range of views and interests are represented and peace processes are fully democratised.<sup>11</sup> Integrating gender perspectives into natural resource management and peacebuilding efforts has contributed to conflict prevention and sustainable peace.<sup>12</sup> Women's

<sup>9</sup> World Vision International is a global humanitarian organisation dedicated to improving the lives of children, families and communities around the world, particularly those living in poverty and facing various forms of hardship. Founded in 1950, World Vision operates in nearly 100 countries, providing assistance through a comprehensive approach that includes emergency relief, development programmes and advocacy initiatives.

<sup>10</sup> World Vision International, *Eco-friendly Villages: World Vision's Initiative to Restore the Ecosystem*, 4 June 2021, <https://www.wvi.org/node/96726>.

<sup>11</sup> World Vision Sierra Leone, *Women as Agents for Sustainable Peace Before, During, and After Elections*, 21 June 2023, <https://www.wvi.org/node/120096>.

<sup>12</sup> UNEP et al., *Women and Natural Resources. Unlocking the Peacebuilding Potential*, November 2013, <https://www.undp.org/node/237021>.

participation in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction processes has led to the inclusion of gender-sensitive provisions in peace agreements and the establishment of mechanisms to address women's rights and needs.

### *Integrating gender perspectives into climate security initiatives*

To effectively address the intersecting challenges of climate change, conflict and gender inequality, it is therefore crucial to integrate gender perspectives into climate security initiatives. This requires mainstreaming gender considerations across all stages of policy development, implementation and evaluation. Policy makers and government officials need this approach to create inclusive policies that address the unique vulnerabilities of different gender groups affected by climate change. NGOs and international development agencies can use intersectional strategies to ensure their programmes are equitable and effectively support marginalised communities. Academics and researchers studying climate impacts can integrate intersectional analysis to produce comprehensive data that highlights the varied experiences of men, women and non-binary individuals. Community leaders and grassroots activists can benefit from understanding intersectionality to better advocate for those whose voices are often unheard in climate discussions. Finally, private sector companies, particularly those in industries related to agriculture, energy and infrastructure, should incorporate these perspectives to enhance corporate

social responsibility and contribute to sustainable, equitable development.

At all levels, gender-responsive climate policies should firstly prioritise the needs and priorities of women and marginalised groups, ensuring their active participation in decision-making processes. Secondly, gender-sensitive climate adaptation and resilience strategies should recognise and build upon women's roles as stewards of natural resources and caretakers of their families and communities. This involves providing women with access to resources, technologies and capacity-building opportunities to enhance their adaptive capacity and resilience to climate-related risks. Thirdly, efforts to address climate-induced displacement and migration should adopt gender-sensitive approaches that recognise the specific vulnerabilities and protection needs of women and girls. This includes ensuring access to safe and dignified shelter, healthcare, education and livelihood opportunities for displaced women and girls. Moreover, gender mainstreaming in climate security initiatives requires fostering inclusive and gender-responsive institutions and governance structures. This involves promoting women's representation and leadership in decision-making bodies, including climate adaptation planning committees, disaster management agencies and peacebuilding processes.

Despite growing recognition of the intersection between gender, climate and security, significant challenges remain in mainstreaming gender perspectives into climate security initiatives. These include inadequate funding and resources for gender-

responsive programming, limited capacity and expertise in gender analysis and mainstreaming, and entrenched gender norms and power dynamics within institutions and societies.

The important role of women mediators cannot be overstated. Their unique perspectives, collaborative approaches and dedication to inclusivity make them invaluable agents of peace and catalysts for positive change in conflict resolution processes worldwide. The intersection of women, peace and security with climate security initiatives offers a transformative opportunity to address interconnected challenges and advance sustainable peace, resilience and gender equality. For example, inclusivity in policy and decision-making ensures that women, particularly those from marginalised and vulnerable groups, are actively included in climate security policy and decision-making processes at all levels.

It is imperative that in the development and implementation of gender-transformative climate adaptation and mitigation, strategies address the specific needs and contributions of women. The integration of WPS principles into climate security frameworks requires further commitment to fully address conflict prevention and peacebuilding efforts: for instance, ensuring that women mediators are leading in conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives related to climate-induced resource conflicts; additionally, supporting community-based conflict resolution mechanisms that empower women as mediators and leaders and fostering

partnerships between climate security initiatives and WPS programmes to leverage resources and expertise.

By integrating gender perspectives into climate policies and practices, we can enhance conflict prevention, peacebuilding efforts and sustainable development. The support of research initiatives that explore the specific impacts of climate change on women and their roles in peace and security is vital to inform policymaking and programme design, and to lead evidence-based interventions. Through collaboration and investment in women's leadership and empowerment, we can address the interconnected challenges of conflict and climate change, advance gender equality, and promote lasting peace and security in the face of the climate crisis.

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Via dei Montecatini, 17

I-00186 Rome, Italy

Tel. +39 066976831

[iai@iai.it](mailto:iai@iai.it)

[www.iai.it](http://www.iai.it)

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