



Anklamerstr. 38
10115 Berlin, Germany
secretariat@gendercc.net
+49(0)30 21980088

gendercc.net

Shifting the narratives: climate justice and gender justice

Helpful principles and practices for writing and talking about gender and climate change, June 2021

Women are [disproportionately](#) affected by climate change [all over the world](#). They are also [indispensable actors](#) and leaders of [just and effective](#) solutions to the climate crisis. Yet, in both of these assigned roles – as “[vulnerable or virtuous](#)” – public and media narratives are rife with gender stereotypes and assumptions, and lack the voices of women themselves. If certain narratives continue to dominate while others fail to be picked up, [real progress](#) on understanding, and thus addressing, both climate change and gender inequality could be hindered.

Simplistic media narratives and stereotypes include (but are not limited to):

- Viewing gender justice and climate justice as two wholly separate issues.
- Treating women as one homogenous group.
- Assuming that all women are [intrinsically connected](#) to nature, and that they are fundamentally more caring, nurturing and vulnerable than men.
- Perpetuating the myth that women are either victims of the climate crisis (and not agents of change) or are all ['virtuous'](#) climate champions and protectors.
- Supporting [the notion](#) that gender equality is only a women's issue, and understanding gender in reductive and binary terms.
- Silencing and erasing the perspectives and voices of women, especially from marginalized groups.
- Reducing the conversation to being only about the Global South, and not acknowledging that gender [norms affect](#) everyone, everywhere.
- Failing to consider the role of masculinity in all aspects of climate change, including attitudes, contributions to climate change, and responses and institutional settings.

Journalists, political actors and activists need to recognise that gender and climate issues are intrinsically linked - and that how we tell the story of these linkages is important. This briefing provides some tools for writing and talking about gender and climate change, and provides a starting point for further discussion on narrative creation and framing. It is based on input and advice from topic and communications experts in the fields of climate change and gender advocacy.



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What are helpful ways to report on climate change and gender?

Good gender reporting recognizes the nuance of the topic and adopts an inclusive, intersectional, and locally grounded understanding of gender and climate change. This begins with breaking down harmful stereotypes and disrupting assumptions by recognising, critiquing and testing them, [a study](#) in Nature Climate Change concluded this year. The researchers looked at how assumptions are hindering real world climate policy and practice, and outlined that persistent stereotypes are disrupting projects.

For example, essentializing women as one vulnerable group that share the same experience of climate change has led to well-intended but failed development projects. In Tanzania, for instance, marital status impacts the way in which women access climate information. As a result, younger or widowed women were unable to access climate adaptation strategies that were available to married women, according to a [2016 study](#).

This briefing presents articles that discuss climate change and gender well. These case studies highlight how complexity and nuance can be incorporated into reporting, and represent narratives that could be helpful in shifting the way that gender and climate change are discussed.

The articles are assessed against a set of four broad criteria, proposed as guiding principles for journalists writing about climate change and gender:

1. **Recognize local factors and avoid generalising.** The way in which individuals experience or influence climate change is affected by many intersectional factors, including race, class, caste, power and poverty. For example, a woman who depends on subsistence farming in rural Uganda will be much more at risk from extreme weather impacts than a woman in Canada, Scandinavia or the US. This, however, does not mean that gender is not a factor in how people experience the climate crisis in the Global North. In the US, for example, the Feminist Green New Deal [coalition argue](#) that the majority of “transitioning workers” - from the fossil fuel industry to the clean energy economy - are men, and that societies risk perpetuating gendered power dynamics if care workers are not also respected and supported to transition. In Canada, a legacy of colonisation and marginalisation has put Indigenous women [at increased risk](#) of health inequalities as a result of climate change.
2. **Elevate the voices of affected gender groups and impacted communities.** Including diverse voices is a key way to disrupt gender homogeneity and give space and respect to diverse communities. The way in which climate change is talked about varies by people and location. Climate change discourse is dependent on local contexts and



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understanding, according to a 2019 [study](#) interviewing people in Brazil, China and South Africa. The authors say that the key to talking with local communities is acknowledging their framings. Centering the most marginalized voices is key to socially just climate action. Elevating diverse voices and advocating for intersectionality is already - and has been for a long time - [inherent](#) to many social movements. The [history of intersectional](#) organising stretches back several decades and is the legacy of Black feminists and feminists of color who have sought to elevate those voices largely ignored, silenced and sidelined.

3. **Use a broad and inclusive definition of gender.** Gender justice and climate justice are broad movements that include people of all gender identities, gender expressions and sexual orientations. Using a gender lens in this way reveals how marginalised people in general, including LGBTQIA+ people, are [more likely to](#) live in areas vulnerable to climate change, to be poor, and to be denied resources and assistance. For example, during [Hurricane Katrina](#) in New Orleans, marginalisation was exacerbated when transgender people faced discrimination and were even turned away from emergency shelters. Another example of compounded crises was seen [after tropical Cyclone Harold](#) in Fiji, where LGBTQIA+ people and sex workers were disproportionately impacted, with their safety hubs and centres wrecked by the storm.
4. **Focus on structural issues.** Good gender reporting avoids oversimplified explanations and reductive framings. Confusing cause and effect is one way in which gender assumptions can be oversimplified. For example, [several studies](#) have shown that women are more likely to be abused in the aftermath of crises, making it a risk-multiplier. But the reason why women are more likely to be abused is due to existing patriarchal structures that are [exacerbated in times](#) of crises - abuse is not the result of climate change alone. Gender inequality also shapes the way in which we experience interacting and compounding crises, like the economic fallout from [COVID-19 and climate change](#). Together these crises are leading to an increased risk of gendered violence around the world, [according to](#) UNEP. Reporting on climate activism has often been [misogynistic](#), [reductive](#), and [racist](#). The overt focus on individual activists rather than the causes they are fighting for is an example of how diverse voices in the climate movement are suppressed and silenced.

Articles: examples of helpful climate change and gender reporting

1. [Women moving Nepal's climate activism](#), Sewa Bhattari, **Nepali Times**, Mar 2021: Nepali climate activists discuss how they are informing and supporting communities facing the impacts of climate change. Recognising the local context, the author acknowledges that rural areas are more severely impacted by climate change but are the



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least empowered, while women in urban areas are both more active in advocacy and more aware of the impacts of climate change. The author highlights collective efforts, as well as those of individuals.

2. [On a Philippine island, Indigenous women get their say on marine conservation](#), **Jen Chan, Mongabay, Oct 2020**: This article investigates a project where Indigenous women are participating in conservation. It includes community interviews and links issues of nature, livelihoods and gender roles, showing how addressing climate change and gender at the same time is a win-win.
3. [‘Boys and their toys’: how overt masculinity dominates Australia’s relationship with water](#), **Anna Kosovac, The Conversation, May 2021**: An opinion piece exploring how dominant, stereotypical masculinity is limiting the response to water issues in Australia. The piece is written by a woman who has spent over ten years in the industry, and it acknowledges that masculinity impacts several marginalised gender groups (e.g. LGBTQIA+). The article attempts to address both the social and political issues at play, and shows how these disrupt more sustainable approaches to water management.
4. [Climate crisis poses serious risks for pregnancy, investigation finds](#), **Emily Holden, the Guardian, Jun 2020**: Coverage of a study that finds women are more at risk from negative pregnancy outcomes if exposed to heat and air pollution. By applying an intersectional lens the article is able to highlight how certain groups - like Black mothers and those with asthma - are more at risk.

More examples of helpful climate change and gender reporting
Recognise local factors and avoid generalising
Why female farm workers’ nutrition levels drop during peak agricultural seasons , Sahana Gosh, Mongabay, May 2021
Climate Change Is Making Women’s Chores Deadlier , Lauren Evans, Vice, Dec 2020
How one woman is leveraging renewable energy to lift other women , Sharon Kantengwa, The New Times, Oct 2020
Climate woes growing for women, hit worst by displacement and migration , Megan Rowling, Reuters, Jul 2020
Climate Change Is Creating a New Atmosphere of Gender Inequality for Women in Malawi , Melissa Godin, Teen Vogue, Dec 2018
Elevate the voices of affected gender groups and impacted communities
The Black Eco List: Black Women Making Environmental History Now , Sydney Clarke, Refinery 29, April 2021
Feminist perspective needed in environmental studies to combat climate crisis.



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say scientists , The Economic Times, Mar 2021
'COP26 must have more women in top roles', global voices tell Boris Johnson , Xander Richards, The National, Dec 2020
Welcome to the Feminist Climate Renaissance , Brianna Baker, Grist, 22 Sept 2020
DATA: Why Aren't Broadcast Networks Covering the Climate Crisis? And Where are the Women? , Ms. Magazine, Feb 2020
Use a broad and inclusive definition of gender
How climate change is affecting the LGBTQIA+ community , Anuj Behal, Down to Earth, Jan 2021
Neglecting the Ones Most Affected: Climate Change & Disability , Saakhi Chadha, Bloomberg Quint, Dec 2020
Climate crisis policies must be inclusive , Rabiya Jaffery, The Ecologist, Oct 2020
The Misogyny of Climate Deniers , Martin Gelin, The New Republic, Aug 2019
es, trans rights are an environmental issue, too , Justine Calma, Grist, Oct 2018
Avoid oversimplified explanations and reductive framings
Don't Blame Babies (or Their Mothers) for Climate Change , Anne Hendrixson and Jade Sasser, Ms. Magazine, May 2021
Sexual violence is a hidden impact of the climate crisis that's not discussed enough , Nylah Burton, Vogue Singapore, May 2021
These Women Are Transforming What Climate Leadership Looks Like. Here's What They Learned From the Pandemic , Naina Bajekal and Elijah Wolfson, TIME, Apr 2021
The eco gender gap: why is saving the planet seen as women's work? , Elle Hunt, the Guardian, Feb 2020
In Northern Kenya, the Climate Crisis Shifts Gender Roles , Lauren Evans, Foreign Policy, Oct 2020
Yemen's 'microgrid girls' power community amid war and COVID-19 , Veronique Mistiaen, Al Jazeera, Oct 2020
The term "Mother Nature" reinforces the idea that both women and nature should be subjugated , Sarah Milner-Barry, Quartz, Dec 2015

Useful resources, advocacy and research organisations:

Resources

- [Gender-based Violence and Environment Linkages: The Violence of Inequality](#), International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2020
- [Gender Climate Tracker](#) - website tracking progress on mainstreaming gender equality in climate policy at global and national levels
- [Report Card: Where is Gender Equality in National Climate Plans? CARE International, 2020](#)
- [The Link Between Climate Change and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights: An Evidence Review](#), Women Deliver, 2020
- [Coalition Principles](#), Feminist Green New Deal, 2019



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- [Gender Just Climate Solutions: Examples of Best Practice, Women Engage for a Common Future, Women and Gender Constituency, 2020](#)
- [Gender aspects of energy poverty in Europe, Women Engage for a Common Future, 2020](#)
- [Discussion paper gender and Corona and climate crises, GenderCC, 2020](#)
- [Gender and Urban Climate Policy](#) Guidebook, GenderCC, 2015
- Gender Assessment and Monitoring of Mitigation and Adaptation methodology guidebook, GenderCC, forthcoming
- [Women Stand their Ground against BIG Coal: the AfDB Sendou plant impacts on women in a time of climate crisis](#), Gender Action, 2019
- [Gendered and Racial Impacts of the Fossil Fuel Industry in North America and Complicit Financial Institutions](#), Women's Earth and Climate Action Network, 2021
- [Women Hold Up Half the Sky](#) (film), WoMin, 2021

Organisations / Collectives

- [Intersectional Environmentalism](#) - Instagram, YouTube and social media profile.
- [All we can save project](#) - book project, arguing that the climate crisis is a leadership crisis.

Contacts

GenderCC-Women for Climate Justice: secretariat@gendercc.org

GenderCC Southern Africa: ndivile@gendercc.org.za

Global Strategic Communications Council: georgi.york@gscnetwork.org

LIFE e.V.: bohland@life-online.de

Women's Environment and Development Organization: wedo@wedo.org