

INTEGRATING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION INTO CLIMATE ACTION

THREE SIMPLE TIPS FOR PRACTITIONERS



Climate change is one of the most pressing global emergencies of our time, with devastating social, cultural, economic, health and human rights impacts that affect people across every region of the globe.

As climate change and environmental degradation increase, so too do incidents of violence against women and girls (VAWG). Extreme weather and climate events drive economic instability, food insecurity, displacement and mental stress, while also disrupting infrastructure and public services. These stressors heighten the likelihood of men perpetrating gender-based violence, including rape, sexual assault and harassment, intimate partner and family violence. They also lead to an increase in child marriage, trafficking and sexual exploitation. Pressures on the environment and its resources exacerbate existing power imbalances in communities and households, with gender-based violence often employed as a means of enforcing and maintaining existing privileges. In turn, violence and gender-based discrimination in social, cultural, legal, economic and institutional contexts worsen the impacts of the climate crisis on women and girls and constrain their ability to safely lead, organize and participate in environmental conservation. This makes potential solutions to the climate crisis less sustainable (and responsive), and undermines environmental progress.

- In **Puerto Rico**, following Hurricane Maria in 2017, there was a 62 per cent increase in requests for services for survivors of gender-based violence.¹
- Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, women who were displaced to trailer parks were 54 times more likely to be raped than those who were not displaced.²
- In **Ethiopia**, the impacts of prolonged droughts in 2010 and 2011 led to an increase in early marriage in exchange for livestock.³
- Between 2016 and 2019, almost 1,700 acts of violence were recorded in **Mexico and Central America** against women environmental human rights defenders.⁴

THREE WAYS TO INTEGRATE GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PREVENTION INTO CLIMATE ACTION:

1 Create an enabling policy and programming environment for the elimination of VAWG in the context of climate change

In many regions, the consequences of climate change are becoming increasingly predictable. Climate adaptation and mitigation policy frameworks, strategies and procedures, and funding instruments (including loss and damage funds) must integrate VAWG prevention and response measures from the outset. This will help ensure their relevance and responsiveness. Critically, policymakers and practitioners working on climate action should partner with women's rights organizations and women's movements to strengthen policymakers' awareness of the relationship between climate change and violence against women and girls.

In **Vanuatu**, Spotlight Initiative worked in coordination with the Ministry of Climate Change Adaptation and the National Disaster Management Office to develop a standard operating procedure for gender-based violence in emergencies. This includes a survivor-centred guide on how to navigate referral mechanisms for women and girls displaced by climate disasters. Additionally, in **Grenada**, Spotlight Initiative has supported women's rights advocates to provide inputs to national government budgeting on climate change and disaster risk mitigation.

2 Strengthen essential services for survivors of violence during climate-induced disasters

For women and girls who experience violence before, during and after environmental crises or disasters, the provision of coordinated, quality and accessible essential services is critical. Addressing survivors' immediate and longer-term needs requires a combination of health, psychosocial, police and justice services. Policymakers should work with providers of essential services to ensure plans are in place for how to comprehensively adapt and sustain these services during environmental crises.

¹ After Hurricane Maria: A hidden crisis of violence against women in Puerto Rico, 2018.

² Climate Change and Gender-Based Violence: What are the links?, GBV AoR Helpdesk, 2021.

³ Horn of Africa: A call for action, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2017.

⁴ Tendencia en defensoras de tierra, territorio y justicia, Iniciativa Mesoamericana de Mujeres Defensoras de Derechos Humanos, 2021.

For example, during a cyclone in **Mozambique** in 2021, Spotlight Initiative set up mobile clinics staffed with health practitioners, social workers and psychologists to guarantee the continued provision of sexual and reproductive health services and gender-based violence case referral in remote and hard-to-reach communities. In **Honduras**, the Initiative provided dignity kits consisting of sanitary products and hygiene necessities, as well as basic food supplies, to nearly 10,000 women and girls housed in domestic violence shelters during tropical storms.

3 Resource and partner with women's movements to design climate resilience programmes and foster whole-of-society advocacy

Women and those directly impacted by gender-based violence are best placed to determine what they require to become more resilient to climate change. Women's rights organizations and women's movements, which are often the first responders in times of crisis, possess important and relevant expertise on addressing violence against women and girls in their local context. They are also invaluable partners for climate change policymakers, practitioners and activists. Climate action practitioners should co-design climate change mitigation and adaptation programmes and initiatives with them. These organizations and movements must be robustly resourced and have participation, leadership and agency at global, national and local levels to guarantee meaningful integration of VAWG prevention into climate response efforts. Centring women's voices in the design of climate resilience programmes increases their agency, and challenges gender power imbalances which put women at risk of exploitation and dispossession in communities and households affected by climate change.

In **Vanuatu**, following a tropical cyclone in 2020, Spotlight Initiative partnered with local civil society organizations to support 400 women market vendors with training on food safety and financial literacy to help them supplement their income where this is disrupted by climate events, helping to ensure this support was relevant. The Initiative also supported the Pacific Feminist Community of Practice to make recommendations at the 2022 Conference of the Parties (COP27) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Spotlight Initiative, the world's largest targeted effort to end all forms of violence against women and girls, is paving the way for working at the nexus of climate change readiness, resilience and response and gender-based violence. Launched in 2017 as an unprecedented global partnership, Spotlight Initiative has pioneered a unique and comprehensive model that addresses all key drivers of violence against women and girls, with remarkable outcomes.

By strengthening institutions, civic space and localization of solutions, Spotlight Initiative is driving progress not only on Goal 5: Gender Equality, but across all the Sustainable Development Goals. Since 2019, Spotlight Initiative's investments ensured that:

- almost 500 laws and policies were signed to end violence against women and girls
- 2.5 million women and girls accessed gender-based violence services
- 2 million men and boys were educated on positive masculinity and non-violent conflict resolution
- 260 million people were reached by gender-based violence prevention campaigns
- 43 countries strengthened their National Action Plans to eliminate gender-based violence.

These transformational results are creating the conditions for acceleration on gender equality in some of the most complex humanitarian contexts, including in regions responding to or at risk of climate events.

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