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Abstract

This paper is an extended version of an intervention offered to the ACT Alliance's Side Event on Climate during the United Nations 68th Commission on the Status of Women. The key concern of Climate financing is an invitation for government and multi-national organizations to provide financial support to projects for ensuring sustainable transformation of climate resilient and gender equitable communities. Gender-responsive climate financing ought to take all creation into consideration, as one of the greatest debts to be considered is the earth, consistently and systematically ravaged to satisfy greed and need. The paper highlights the interlocking areas of concern: Land, Labour, and Leadership. It addresses the challenges faced by women in accessing arable land, the impact of industrialization on agriculture and health, and the need for empowering marginalized communities through education and leadership inclusion. Additionally, it emphasizes the vital role of gender-responsive climate financing in addressing the fallout of industrialization and chemical waste, supporting marginalized communities, and promoting inclusive leadership in decision-making processes. The paper concludes by advocating for collaborative efforts to ensure the rights and inclusion of all humanity in climate resilient initiatives.

Key phrases: *Climate financing, Gender-responsive financing, Women, Land, Leadership*

One key concern of Climate financing is an invitation for government and multi-national organisations (MNO) sectors to provide financial support to projects for ensuring sustainable transformation of climate resilient and gender equitable communities. In many such conversations, this involves work with and support of women facing multiple forms of discrimination, and by extension vulnerabilities. The UN Commission on the Status of Women's 68th priority theme was investment, and it is worth considering three interlocking areas of concern: Land, Labour and Leadership. For, the issue at hand is not merely about investing, but how investment is managed and who seeks to benefit from the investment in the lives of communities, particularly women and children.

Land

It is argued that arable land is managed primarily by women, yet for the most part, their access to ownership is restricted. This creates barriers to financial solvency and independence, which contribute to increasing risks to health and well-being, and in some contexts, transactional sexual relationships become part of the economic cycles within the labour force. Not only is the land being dominated and owned, but women's bodies have become another territory to explore and exploit.

Additionally, arable land is sometimes negatively impacted by Industrialization; whereas seepage of chemicals into the water table can render a land unproductive, or worse yet increase risk of disease from land that has now become contaminated. This has also become a concern in regions which manufacture weapons, as chemical spillages, nuclear waste, and noxious fumes from manufacturing plants all have the potential to destroy the environment, endanger physical and mental health, and render soil unproductive. One need only think of the April 26, 1986 disaster in Ukraine, where the Number Four RBMK reactor at the nuclear power plant at Chernobyl, exploded. This sparked a fire that demolished the reactor building, subsequently releasing large amounts of radiation into the atmosphere. The International Atomic Energy Agency states 'safety measures were ignored, the uranium fuel in the reactor overheated and

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melted through the protective barriers.’¹ To date, the extent of such damage to the climate and the communities has not been fully calculated. The report further notes

... over 100 radioactive elements released into the atmosphere when Chernobyl’s fourth reactor exploded. Most of these were short lived and decayed (reduced in radioactivity) very quickly. Iodine, strontium and caesium were the most dangerous of the elements released, and have half-lives of 8 days, 29 years, and 30 years respectively. The isotopes Strontium-90 and Caesium-137 are therefore still present in the area to this day. While iodine is linked to thyroid cancer, Strontium can lead to leukaemia. Caesium is the element that travelled the farthest and lasts the longest.²

While it is correct that the most immediate danger was within a 30 km radius, the contaminants spread across most of Europe, with reports of impact on women’s reproductive health, unborn children and general birth defects included in the documentation. One must therefore ask, ‘how does financing assist such fallouts in relation to women? And what of the subsequent relocation and rebuilding?’ For, often women are also left behind to pick the pieces, to eke living out of barren and unyielding soil, and deal with the impact on their health and that of their families. Gender-responsive climate financing needs to provide for the necessary compensation for the long-term impact of industrialization and chemical waste on habitation and agriculture. Furthermore, there needs to be accounting for (enforced) migration, not only in cases of chemical waste, but also for people on the move - impacted by drought, floods, earthquakes, volcanic action. Relocation, reintegration and remuneration for women and children must be part and parcel of such conversations.

In some countries, some governments have instituted policies to address industrialization, but these are not necessarily Gender-responsive. Land ownership and zoning laws, inclusion of women in decision-making and adherence to various conventions must also be included in the plans, in addition to compensation packages. Mitigation from faith-based organizations have included support for land ownership by women, and advocacy at the highest levels. There are revolving funds as well as other programmes and projects including community gardens and provision of markets and training for women farmers. Several ecumenical organizations provide support for collectives like the Rural Seed Women in Africa, ensuring that these women’s rights are defended, and they have representation as needed.

Labour

A major challenge in addressing climate concerns in any context is the availability of facts to support the claims being made. This is countered by research and the use of specialized technologies. Although this may be used alongside indigenous and traditional knowledge, the keepers of traditions are often excluded from the decisions, or their work is appropriated, without their being credited for same. More so, if this is collated in communities that are not considered literate in official language groups within regions. The 2010 United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Secretariat of

¹ International Atomic Energy Agency *Frequently Asked Chernobyl Questions* The Chernobyl Forum 2003 – 2005

<https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/chernobyl/faqs#:~:text=Iodine%2C%20strontium%20and%20caesium%20were%20the%20most%20dangerous%20of%20the,the%20area%20to%20this%20day.>

² Ibid.

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the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Briefing Notes cites a 2009 study on the right of indigenous people to education. It reports that there is a grave education gap between indigenous peoples and the general population in most countries.

*the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples found that “deprivation of access to quality education is a major factor contributing to social marginalization, poverty and dispossession of indigenous peoples ... In terms of accessing education, indigenous girls tend to be even more disadvantaged than indigenous boys. [Thus], in Ecuador’s rural areas, **48% of indigenous women and 32% of indigenous men are illiterate, compared to 18% of non-indigenous women.** In Guatemala, only **54 per cent of indigenous girls are in school, compared with 71 per cent of indigenous boys.** By age 16, only a quarter of indigenous girls are enrolled, compared with 45 per cent of boys.⁴ In the Somali region of Ethiopia, a recent survey found that the **literacy rate for female pastoralists was 4.8 percent, compared to a 22.7 per cent literacy rate for male pastoralists.**³*

This is a concern when these people are not remunerated for their services (i.e. traditional knowledges), or worse yet, are overlooked in the employment sectors which are mitigating climate concerns, simply because they are not adequately schooled. Not only is this a concern for women, who clearly are below acceptable illiteracy rates, but it also is a concern for marginalized ‘illiterate’ communities. Unfortunately, this is even more compounded if the woman or person in question is one living with a disability.

Financing must include costing for the support needed for STEM education, for traditional knowledge as the ‘raw material’ on which new technologies are developed to counter climate crises, and the building of resilience in marginalized and mainline communities. There is need to work with the 70-80% women in agrarian settings, to get them from farm to market. This may entail gifting (i.e. not lending) Small Island and Developing States – including Caribbean and Pacific nations – with much needed resources for enabling women in those sectors.

Leadership

One must thus critique the processes for leadership - who administrates the support and/or loan programs; based on which qualifications, and who has ultimate decision-making authority. These are not new requests. In just about every sector of society, the request continues – include women and marginalized persons in decision-making. Do not restrict them to merely following orders, they are often leading their families, communities, and societies, without the formal recognition of being perceived leaders. Ensure that the women in the margins, directly impacted by the extremities of the climate crisis, the dispossessed, the ones obliged to walk miles to access water for their crops, the ones obliged to creatively navigate the streets to avoid rape, are among the decision-makers. Let’s not have the conversations about them, but let us include them. Let’s move away from ‘voiceless’ phrasing and be intentional about inclusivity,

³ United Nations Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the Secretariat of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues Briefing Note No. 3, Gender and Indigenous Peoples’ Education p.1 https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/BriefingNote3_GREY.pdf

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and active listening – these voices are often shouting to be heard, to disrupt and shape the policies and practices that govern our lives.

It is so easy to think that this is only a concern for local citizenry, but as more and more organizations are leaning toward litigation on climate justice, we recognize that many MNCs are implicated. The recent landmark [victory in Switzerland](#) was the joint work of several women, whose case at the European Court on Human rights saw an agreement for national governments to honour their obligations to the various greenhouse emissions treaties. The World Council of Churches has been involved in the filing of a similar suit and is also actively involved in a campaign to push global financial institutions toward intentional climate justice through faulty business practices and the perpetuation of climate homicide. In exploring Leadership, there is therefore need to look at who is behind the funding of projects, programmes, and pay-outs, as there are instances when the compensation doesn't include women.

As wars continue to about, and threats of nuclear wars become more likely to become reality, one must also ask whether the actions within the UNSCR 1325 ought also to include conversations around gender responsive climate financing. When decisions being made about Peace treaties do not include women; and when those conversations do not feature the impact on the earth and its inhabitants – human and other – we are already scheduled for even greater challenges than the current wars present. Currently the YWCAs of Korea and Japan are working together to restore dignity and agency for survivors and family of the past war. And, as they work together to realize trauma transformation and reconciliation, war machinery and nuclear weapons continue to be built and maintained as part of the US 'protection' of the Korean peninsula. Is it not ironic that the earth – most often referred to as female – also suffers 'collateral damage' as humans play our power games, with bombs and other weapons of mass destruction (including rape and blockage of food and water sources)? Thus Gender-responsive climate financing needs to take all creation into consideration, as one of the greatest debts to be considered is the earth, consistently and systematically ravaged to satisfy greed and need. This must also be the mandate handed to those in leadership – men and women alike.

The Way Forward

When we continue in our work of activism and advocacy, might we ensure them a place at the table. Of course, it might mean displacing ourselves so that those who are directly affected may speak, and be heard. It may mean a little discomfort, and evoke change, so that others may access the comforts we take for granted. It may mean losing our voices so theirs may be heard. Of course, the work toward healing wounds of war, and the concomitant impact on the earth cannot be restricted to women only, or any one religion. It must be a collaborative effort that includes ALL stakeholders, from all strata of society. This response cannot be merely individuated, but must include a wider swathe of faith-based and secular organizations dedicated to ensure the rights and inclusion of all humanity, regardless of race, class, religion or nationality. When the time comes for holding our governments and organizations accountable, let us do so without fear or prejudice. Our sisters, aunties, mummies, and nieces' lives hang in the balance.