

Background

The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) confirms the obvious: climate change is already affecting every region on Earth, and its impacts will only increase in coming decades. With 1.5°C of global warming, there will be more heat waves, longer warm seasons and shorter cold seasons. At 2°C of global warming, heat extremes would more frequently reach critical tolerance thresholds for agriculture and health. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres described the report as a “code red for humanity.”

With the current global average temperature now at around 1°C above pre-industrial levels, frontline individuals and communities, in developing countries and in particular those who are most marginalized, already face intolerable devastation, hardships and human rights harm from climate change impacts, amidst other intersecting crises including the COVID-19 pandemic. It is therefore critical and urgent for vulnerable countries and communities to adapt to climate change impacts. But while being prepared for changes in climate and extreme weather events can help reduce the impacts on people’s lives and livelihoods, the intensity and gravity of sudden onset disasters and slow onset events such as sea-level rise and droughts are exceeding people’s ability to adapt.

The IPCC recognizes that there are limits to adaptation, especially where climate change impacts are so severe that countries and communities will simply be unable to adapt. Loss and damage is now part of the reality of climate change that must be addressed. There is no internationally agreed-upon definition of loss and damage from climate change, but there is an emerging understanding that loss and damage relates to those impacts that cannot be avoided through mitigation and adaptation efforts. Loss is often understood as irreversible (e.g., loss of lives, species or habitats), while damages can be repaired (such as roads, embankments etc.) Populations are experiencing both economic and non-economic losses (cultural heritage, indigenous/local knowledge, biodiversity, etc.), and these require resources to repair, rebuild and rehabilitate.

The Women and Gender Constituency is one of the nine stakeholder groups of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), consisting currently of 33 women’s and environmental civil society organizations and a network of more than 600 individuals and feminist organizations or movements focusing on gender equality and women’s human rights to achieve climate justice.

But despite this, loss and damage is one of the most contentious issues related to climate change because of the question of responsibility for covering the costs. From super typhoons, hurricanes, flash floods and massive bushfires, countries hit by climate-related disasters have struggled to find resources to respond to the challenges of rebuilding and meeting the needs, especially of poor communities hit hard. The projected economic costs of loss and damage by 2030 is estimated to be between USD 290 and 580 billion in developing countries alone.

Six years after the adoption of the Paris Agreement, which acknowledged the specificity of loss and damage by granting it a separate article (Article 8), and eight years after the creation of the Warsaw International Mechanism on loss and damage (WIM), progress on ‘addressing loss and damage, including extreme events and slow onset events in developing countries that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change’ has been inadequate. In 2019 at COP 25 in Madrid, the Santiago Network on Loss and Damage (SNLD) was established to catalyze technical assistance to help vulnerable frontline communities impacted by the climate crisis to avert, minimize and address loss and damage. The SNLD, however, is yet to be operational—with Parties unable to agree on vision, mandate and resources needed.

With financial and other support, vulnerable communities and countries can properly assess the impacts of climate change and identify gaps, enhance their climate change risk management, and recover and be compensated from loss and damage they experience due to climate impacts. But the insufficient climate finance mobilized remains highly skewed toward mitigation instead of adaptation activities. Worse, there is no system or mechanism to mobilize dedicated finance for loss and damage, apart from the existing inadequate humanitarian aid. To this end, Parties need to engage in a full-fledged discussion on catalyzing action and mobilizing finance and other support to address loss and damage beyond adaptation and similar finance provided.



Gender Perspectives

Climate-induced losses and damages dramatically multiply the social crises in societies that are already struggling with multiple injustices. The impacts of climate disasters particularly threaten women’s rights and human rights. Over 80% of people currently displaced by climate related events are women and girls (UN). Women, especially across the Global South, are hugely impacted due to the structural inequalities they face, in large part due to the prevalence of women’s unpaid care and domestic work. Because their contributions to the economy and society are not measured in monetary terms, women are more prone to be economically and politically marginalized. Cultural norms that give men and boys priority means women, girls and gender diverse peoples face greater risks of hunger and lack of shelter, education and employment opportunities.

Women, girls, and gender diverse peoples often end up trying to find jobs in urban settings where they can only work as domestic workers, often undocumented, most vulnerable to abuse and without any legal protection. Disaster relief and post-disaster rehabilitation set-ups often increase gendered dimensions of violence and social injustice, and prevent them from gaining income security and social protection. Women are often refused access to land and assets ownership after a disaster hits. Financial support schemes often lead to an increase of discriminatory practices and to increased indebtedness of women. It is especially women, girls and LGBTQIA+ people who face a high risk of being trafficked or sexually abused in post-disaster settings either because of no protection systems (e.g., shelters) or because they have to leave their homes in order to survive.

However, just as women, girls and gender diverse peoples are most impacted by ecological devastation and the climate crisis, they are also leading on climate action, and their participation in all aspects of decision-making in relation to how loss and damage is addressed, averted and minimized—and more broadly in climate-related decision-making—is thus fundamentally important. The structural barriers to women's access to participation thus need to be abolished.

There is a lot of room for improvement in data collection and analysis around loss and damage, which often ignores or marginalizes gender-disaggregated data collection efforts. Hence, assessing the gendered dimensions of loss and damage related-data, including a way of raising the voices of women and LGBTQIA+ individuals in this field is critical. There is a need to collect more disaggregated data in order to more precisely map, in gender-just ways, the disproportionate impacts of the climate crisis and related needs.

Demands

Therefore, the WGC highlights the following key demands at COP26:

- ➔ **Parties must elevate the issue of loss and damage by making it a permanent agenda item under the COP and the SBs.** So far, loss and damage under the UNFCCC is only discussed on a technical level, but some of the technical discussions will not advance without political decisions. Establishing loss and damage as a permanent agenda item under the SBs and the COP would allow for political consideration of the issue and allow Parties to discuss their challenges and needs in addressing loss and damage and how to mainstream the topic into other processes (e.g., financial support, capacity building, and technology transfer.)
- ➔ **Parties must agree to sufficient and needs-based action on loss and damage that supports the most marginalized people and communities in addressing unavoidable climate impacts. This must include the provision of new and additional finance from COP 26 onwards as well as in the post-2025 climate finance target, in addition to the USD 100 billion per year committed for mitigation and**

adaptation, on the basis of equity, historical responsibility and global solidarity. In order to have a reliable assessment of loss and damage, finance needs and existing funding, Parties should call for the publication of a Loss and Damage Gap Report—similar to the Adaptation Gap or the Emissions Gap Report. There are no official UN estimates of loss and damage finance needs and the existing estimates, based on different methods, vary significantly. The method of the Gap Report for assessing finance needs could follow the successfully tested structure of the Technology Needs Assessment. A strong focus on assessing the gender dimensions in such a loss and damage Gap Report must be secured. In addition, Parties must provide a clear governance structure for this work, including the full rights-compliant operationalization of the Santiago Network. We support calls for Parties to ensure that the network goes beyond technicalities and being just a website, and fosters a genuine space for exchange of strategies and support for solutions. It must be given sufficient resources and empowered to support concrete gender-just and rights-based solutions and mechanisms for effective remedies at scale, to address loss and damage at the country level.

- ➔ **Parties must establish a process to identify the scale of funding needed to address loss and damage** as well as suitable mechanisms to deliver the finance to developing countries. The outcome must be presented at COP27 to start delivering loss and damage finance.
- ➔ **Parties must support developing countries in enabling national-level systems to distribute loss and damage finance to ensure country ownership, gender responsiveness and self-determination** over how finance is used, and so it reaches the populations that are most marginalized and in need. This could be facilitated by the aforementioned Santiago Network for Loss and Damage.

References:

- [Climate change widespread, rapid, and intensifying – IPCC](#)
- [Loss and Damage: Climate Reality in the 21s Century](#)
- [Climate and Gender Justice: What’s needed to finance loss and damage?](#)
- [A Study on The Gender & Social Impacts of Climate Migration](#)
- [General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change](#)

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