WOMEN GENDER CONSTITUENCY



## False Solutions and Feminist Climate Justice

# WHY NUCLEAR POWER CANNOT DELIVER A JUST TRANSITION

October 2026

# INTRODUCTION

The Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) advocates for a feminist approach to climate justice that places human rights, gender equality, care, participation and ecological integrity at the centre. This means recognising that the climate emergency is rooted in economic models that treat people, ecosystems and natural resources as commodities to be exploited. A just transition is therefore not simply about replacing one energy source with another, but about transforming the systems that perpetuate exploitation and inequality. Moving beyond fossil fuels must not reproduce extractivism, environmental degradation, discrimination or unequal access to resources and decision-making. Climate action must instead advance more equitable societies, respect planetary boundaries and challenge colonial patterns of development.

The Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan (GAP) recognize that gender-responsive climate action strengthens the effectiveness, inclusiveness and sustainability of climate policies. The GAP emphasises women's leadership and participation, human rights, the rights of Indigenous Peoples, just transition and the meaningful engagement of civil society. These principles provide a framework for assessing not only how climate policies are developed, but also which technologies and pathways are promoted under the UNFCCC.

Nuclear power is increasingly presented as a climate solution that can support the transition away from fossil fuels. In its 2021 report Nuclear Energy for a Net Zero World, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) presents nuclear power as an important contributor to decarbonisation and the achievement of global climate goals.[1] However, claims that nuclear power is a low-carbon climate solution remain contested. Assessing its climate impacts requires considering the entire nuclear chain, including uranium mining, processing, enrichment, reactor construction, operation, decommissioning, and radioactive waste management, rather than focusing solely on emissions during electricity generation.

It is also necessary to consider the energy system as a whole. Research comparing national energy strategies has found that greater reliance on nuclear power is not associated with significantly lower carbon emissions, while greater deployment of renewable energy is associated with lower emissions.[2] Nuclear expansion can also compete with renewable energy development for investment, infrastructure and policy support, potentially delaying the transition away from fossil fuels. Given the urgency of the climate crisis, the long construction times, high costs and uncertainties associated with nuclear projects raise serious questions about their contribution to meeting near-term emissions reduction targets.

Crucially, however, climate solutions cannot be judged by emissions reductions alone. They must also advance justice, protect human rights and Indigenous Peoples' rights, safeguard biodiversity and avoid creating new environmental and social harms. This distinction is critical. Technologies that rely on extractivism, create long-term environmental burdens, divert resources from more equitable solutions or reinforce militarisation and exclusion cannot

[1] https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/21/10/nuclear-energy-for-a-net-zero-world.pdf

[2] https://www.nature.com/articles/s41560-020-00696-3

deliver the transformative change the climate emergency demands. The question is not only how to decarbonise, but who benefits, who bears the costs, and whose voices shape the transition.

This paper assesses nuclear power against these principles of feminist climate justice. It argues that nuclear power perpetuates extractive development, diverts resources from people-centred climate solutions, exposes people and ecosystems to risks from radioactivity across its lifecycle, creates long-term burdens for future generations and reinforces militarised systems. Measured against the principles of a just transition, nuclear power is a false climate solution.

## 1. Nuclear Power Perpetuates Extractivism and Human Rights Abuses

Nuclear power depends on uranium, a finite resource whose extraction has caused significant environmental and social harm in many parts of the world, especially the Global South.[3] Uranium mining has disproportionately affected Indigenous Peoples and local communities[4] and has often taken place on or near traditional lands without their free, prior and informed consent (FPIC). Communities living near uranium mines have experienced contamination of land and water, long-term health concerns, and the disruption of livelihoods and cultural practices.[5] Indigenous women, who frequently hold central roles in protecting land, water, food systems, and cultural knowledge, often experience these impacts in particularly acute ways while facing barriers to participation in decisions affecting their communities. The gendered impacts of nuclear power therefore begin long before electricity is generated, at the point where uranium is extracted and processed.

> ***Especially environmentally minded people think nuclear is benign, and so when they don't see the front end of the nuclear fuel chain — the uranium mining, the milling, the processing, the transportation — they don't see us. They don't see the death and destruction and the sickness and all the harms it has caused.***
>
> LEONA MORGAN, **INDIGENOUS ACTIVIST FROM DINÉ (NAVAJO)** IN NEW MEXICO

Uranium mining reflects longstanding patterns of colonial and neo-colonial resource extraction[6] in which the lands and resources of Indigenous Peoples and communities in the Global South are exploited to meet the energy demands of wealthier nations. These patterns reinforce historical injustices, concentrate environmental risks in already marginalised communities and undermine the equitable and rights-based development that feminist

[3] https://www.greenpeace.org/africa/en/blog/61392/kenyas-nuclear-plant-in-siaya-how-asking-questions-became-terrorism/

[4] https://hibakusha-worldwide.org/ https://www.dont-nuke-the-climate.org/reports/CEDAR.pdf

[5] Mining and Environmental Health Disparities in Native American Communities
https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40572-017-0140-5

[6] https://www.nuclear-free.com/uranium-atlas.html
https://thebulletin.org/premium/2020-12/2012-an-elemental-force-uranium-production-in-africa-and-what-it-means-to-be-nuclear/
https://gabriellehecht.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Hecht2012-ILWCH-Work-of-Invisibility.pdf
https://gabriellehecht.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/hecht-cssh-09.pdf

climate justice seeks to advance. According to the World Nuclear Association's 2024 production figures, Kazakhstan, Canada and Namibia together accounted for roughly three-quarters of uranium mined worldwide. This concentration illustrates the importance of scrutinising whose lands bear the impacts of uranium extraction and who benefits from the energy produced.[7]

The health and environmental impacts of uranium extraction extend beyond individual mining sites. Mining and processing uranium generate large volumes of radioactive pollution that affects human health, and radioactive waste that requires long-term management and can contaminate surrounding ecosystems. These activities place additional pressure on biodiversity through habitat destruction, water pollution, and landscape fragmentation. As demand for uranium grows, new mining projects risk expanding extractive frontiers into ecologically sensitive areas and customary land/territories belonging to Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Nuclear power also depends on large volumes of water for cooling, placing additional pressure on rivers, lakes, and coastal ecosystems already under increasing stress from climate change. Heated water discharged from nuclear facilities can alter local aquatic ecosystems, affecting biodiversity and species sensitive to temperature changes.[8] At a time when the world's oceans are absorbing most of the excess heat generated by climate change and providing one of the planet's most important climate-regulating functions, climate solutions should reduce pressure on marine and freshwater ecosystems rather than add to it. Climate change is also making nuclear power itself more vulnerable. Rising water temperatures, droughts and heatwaves can disrupt reactor cooling and force reductions in electricity generation, while hurricanes, flooding and other extreme weather events threaten nuclear facilities and their supporting infrastructure. In France, high river temperatures have repeatedly constrained nuclear operations, including during the heatwaves of 2022 and 2026.[9] In August 2026, record-low water levels in the Danube forced Hungary's Paks nuclear plant to reduce operations, while also raising concerns about cooling-water availability at Romania's Cernavodă plant.[10] Hurricanes have similarly disrupted nuclear operations in the United States, including at Florida's Turkey Point plant[11]. These examples demonstrate the growing challenges of relying on infrastructure that is itself vulnerable to the intensifying impacts of climate change.

Extractivism is not only about the removal of natural resources.[12] It is also about unequal relationships of power. Decisions about energy infrastructure are often made far from the communities most directly affected, while the environmental, health and social costs are borne

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[7] https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/nuclear-fuel-cycle/mining-of-uranium/world-uranium-mining-production

[8] https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1859093/FULLTEXT01.pdf
https://thebulletin.org/2026/09/climate-change-is-exposing-nuclear-powers-reliability-problem/
https://entrevue.fr/en/europe/secheresse-en-europe-des-reacteurs-nucleaires-contraints-a-larret-faute-deau/
https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/record-low-danube-exposes-climate-risk-hungarys-romanias-nuclear-power-2026-08-13/
https://www.nrc.gov/docs/ML1036/ML103620081.pdf

[9] https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/record-summer-nuclear-disruptions-push-edf-fast-track-climate-measures-2026-10-13/

[10] https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/hungarians-curb-power-use-record-low-danube-waters-trigger-energy-crunch-2026-08-05

[11] https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=32992

[12] https://www.beyondextraction.ca/

locally and the benefits are distributed elsewhere. This pattern reflects the same structural inequalities that feminist climate justice seeks to transform. Climate action should empower communities, respect collective rights and strengthen democratic participation rather than concentrating power in the hands of governments, corporations and technical elites.

Replacing fossil fuels with another extractive energy system does not constitute a just transition. It requires changing our relationship with nature and with one another. Renewable energy systems must also be implemented responsibly, with strong environmental safeguards and respect for human rights, including the rights of women in all their diversity, but renewable energy offers far greater opportunities for decentralised, community-led and less resource-intensive approaches to energy production than nuclear power.

## 2. Nuclear Power Reinforces Inequitable Development Pathways

Climate finance is not only about how much money is available. It is about political choices and priorities. At a time when countries have committed to accelerating climate action while responding to growing adaptation needs, widening inequalities and escalating climate impacts, every investment decision matters. Public resources should be directed towards solutions that deliver rapid emissions reductions while strengthening adaptation, reducing inequality and supporting communities on the frontlines of the climate emergency.

Increasingly, nuclear power is being promoted in Africa, Asia and Latin America[13] as part of "climate action and sustainable development". As nuclear markets stagnate or decline in many higher-income countries, the Global South has become the primary focus for future expansion. Through initiatives such as the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Atoms4NetZero[14] programme and related partnerships, countries are being supported to explore the role of nuclear energy within their climate and energy strategies. Governments including Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Nigeria, Indonesia and the Philippines are among those engaging with new or expanded nuclear programmes.

While technology as part of international cooperation is recognised under the UNFCCC as an important means of implementation, a feminist approach to climate justice emphasises cooperation that strengthens local capacity, supports women-led locally determined priorities and enables communities to shape their own energy futures. Climate cooperation should expand countries' choices, not steer them towards particular technologies or create new forms of technological dependence.

The growing visibility of nuclear power within UNFCCC spaces reinforces this trend. At successive COPs, nuclear energy has gained prominence through pavilions, side events and institutional partnerships. While negotiations remain Party-led, these spaces also shape which ideas, technologies and pathways are perceived as legitimate climate solutions. The increasing prominence of nuclear power can therefore confer a legitimacy that, as this briefing argues, is not justified when assessed against the principles of feminist climate justice. This is

[13] https://www.dont-nuke-the-climate.org/reports/the-alarming-rise-of-false-climate-solutions-misadventure-final.pdf

[14] https://www.iaea.org/atoms4netzero

particularly concerning as countries in the Global South make critical decisions about their future energy pathways and raises questions about whose visions of the energy transition are being amplified.

Nuclear power is among the most expensive forms of electricity generation. New nuclear projects are characterised by high upfront costs, lengthy construction periods and frequent cost overruns, often requiring substantial public subsidies and long-term financial commitments. Large-scale nuclear projects frequently rely on external financing,[15] imported technologies, fuel supply agreements and long-term technical support. This can create economic and political dependencies on Global North countries that persist for decades, limiting energy sovereignty and constraining future policy choices. At the same time, these investments divert scarce public resources away from renewable energy, energy efficiency, adaptation, resilient infrastructure and the care economy, all of which can deliver faster and more equitable benefits for both climate action and sustainable development. The World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2025 found that reactors connected to the grid during 2015–2024 took an average of 9.4 years to construct, and that 23 of the 63 reactors under construction as of mid-2025 had documented delays.[16] The World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2025 records an average construction time of 9.4 years for the 69 reactors completed worldwide between 2015 and 2024. It also identifies documented delays at 23 of the 63 reactors under construction in mid-2025. These figures highlight the difficulties of relying on new nuclear capacity to deliver rapid emissions reductions.[17] A June 2025 report prepared by African and international civil society organisations documents proposed nuclear projects across the continent and highlights the risks of long-term financing dependencies. It describes Egypt's El Dabaa project as a US$25 billion development financed by a Russian government loan, illustrating how nuclear expansion can involve substantial external borrowing and long-term commitments.[18]

For many countries facing severe climate impacts, constrained public budgets and growing debt burdens, the opportunity costs are significant. Every investment in expensive, centralised energy infrastructure is an investment that cannot be made in locally led adaptation, public health, education, social protection, disaster preparedness or community-owned renewable energy systems. A feminist approach to climate justice recognises that these choices have gendered consequences. When investment in essential public services falls short, women and girls in all their diversity often shoulder increased unpaid care work, experience greater economic insecurity and face heightened vulnerability during climate-related disasters. Before confirming any investment in energy infrastructure, a clear socio-economic cost-benefit analysis, including a climate gender-responsive approach, must be carried out.

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[15] Debt, Delays, Dependencies: Why Public Banks Should Not Support Nuclear Power
https://www.urgewald.org/sites/default/files/media-files/Urgewald%20-%20Debt%2C%20Delays%2C%20Dependencies%20Report-April-2026.pdf

https://www.sortirdunucleaire.org/Le-subventionnement-de-nouveaux-reacteurs

[16] Schneider, Mycle, et al. (2025), World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2025, "Construction Times" and "Overview of Current Newbuild".
https://www.worldnuclearreport.org/World-Nuclear-Industry-Status-Report-2025-HTML-version

[17] https://www.worldnuclearreport.org/World-Nuclear-Industry-Status-Report-2025

[18] 360 Human Rights et al. (2025). The Alarming Rise of False Climate Solutions in Africa: The Nuclear Energy Misadventure. Prepared by African and international civil society organisations, June 2025.
https://transformdefence.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/the-alarming-rise-of-false-climate-solutions-misadventure-final.pdf

> ***Nuclear energy is a huge distraction from directing our energies – and our public money – where they should be going: into clean sustainable renewables.***
>
> ***Just as we found the courage and the strength to push back the nuclear energy plans for South Africa, my dear colleagues in countries across the continent are taking these same issues to their own communities, raising awareness, informing, educating, presenting the clean energy alternatives, challenging relevant authorities, reaching the media with their messaging.***
>
> ***I believe they can win these arguments, just as we did.***
>
> MAKOMA LEKALAKALA, GOLDMAN ENVIRONMENTAL PRIZE RECIPIENT FOR AFRICA, 2018

The financial implications of nuclear power extend well beyond construction. Governments and taxpayers remain responsible for the costs of waste management, decommissioning and, where accidents occur, environmental remediation and long-term recovery. The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster demonstrated that these costs can continue for decades, placing substantial financial burdens on future generations while disrupting communities, livelihoods and local and neighbouring countries' economies until today.

A just transition requires climate finance and international cooperation to support equitable, democratic, locally determined energy systems. Renewable energy, energy efficiency and decentralised energy systems can be adapted to local contexts, create skilled employment, strengthen domestic expertise and expand affordable energy access while supporting democratic participation and community ownership. Combined with investment in care systems, public services and climate adaptation, these approaches contribute to a transition that is not only environmentally effective but also socially just.

Climate finance and technology cooperation should reflect feminist climate justice principles. Rather than reinforcing unequal development pathways or locking countries into costly and centralised technologies, they should support energy sovereignty, democratic participation, local capacity and women/community-led solutions that reduce emissions while strengthening equality and care.

## 3. Nuclear Power Creates New Burdens for Current and Future Generations

Climate action should reduce environmental burdens, not pass them on to future generations. A feminist approach to climate justice recognises that decisions made today will shape the wellbeing, opportunities and environmental integrity of generations to come.

Nuclear power produces radioactive waste that remains hazardous for periods far exceeding human timescales. High-level radioactive waste must be safely managed and isolated from people and the environment for thousands of years, placing an unprecedented responsibility on future generations to maintain systems that they did not choose and from which they may

derive little or no benefit. No country has yet demonstrated a fully operational, long-term solution for permanently disposing of high-level radioactive waste at the scale required for a global expansion of nuclear power. The International Atomic Energy Agency estimated that the global inventory of spent nuclear fuel had reached approximately 430,000 tonnes of heavy metal by the end of 2021. This cumulative inventory illustrates the scale of the long-term management challenge.[19]

The responsibilities associated with nuclear power extend well beyond radioactive waste. Nuclear facilities require costly decommissioning at the end of their operational lives, while contaminated sites may require monitoring and remediation for decades. These long-term obligations create financial and environmental liabilities[20] that continue long after electricity generation has ceased, diverting public resources that could otherwise support future social and environmental priorities.

Climate change itself also creates new risks for nuclear infrastructure. Rising sea levels, more frequent flooding, extreme storms, droughts and heatwaves can threaten the safe operation of nuclear facilities by damaging infrastructure, disrupting electricity supplies or reducing the availability of cooling water. As climate impacts intensify, maintaining the safety of ageing reactors may become increasingly complex and costly.[21]

The health impacts of ionising radiation are not distributed equally. Research, including from the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, indicates that biological sex and age can influence vulnerability, including heightened risks of certain radiation-related health effects among women and girls.[22] [23]

The Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster also illustrates how the long-term social and economic consequences of nuclear disasters can disproportionately affect women and children. Displacement, family separation, loss of livelihoods, increased unpaid care responsibilities, and uncertainty about future health have placed lasting burdens on women. Inequalities in access to compensation and participation in decisions about evacuation and reconstruction have compounded these impacts. The costs of nuclear disasters therefore extend far beyond radiation exposure and financial losses, affecting families, communities and future generations.[24] Approximately 160,000 people were displaced in the aftermath of the Fukushima disaster, and Fukushima Prefecture still recorded 22,625 evacuees in May 2026.[25] These figures indicate the enduring disruption to homes and communities, although they do not, by themselves, measure gender disparities.

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[19] https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/iaea-releases-first-public-tool-to-map-the-worlds-spent-nuclear-fuel

[20] https://www.sortirdunucleaire.org/Le-nucleaire-va-ruiner-la-France

[21] See the sources on cooling-water stress, drought and nuclear operations already cited in footnote 5, including U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Reuters (13 August 2026).

[22] https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/genetics/articles/10.3389/fgene.2019.00260/full

[23] https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Gender_and_ionizing_radiation_web.pdf

[24]Greenpeace Japan (2017), Unequal Impact: Women's & Children's Human Rights Violations and the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Disaster. https://www.greenpeace.de/publikationen/20170303_greenpeace_report_fukushima_women_unequal_impact_engl.pdf

[25] https://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/site/portal-english/en-1-4-1.html

*Fifteen years after the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the crisis remains unresolved, and there are still areas where people cannot return to their homes. The government and TEPCO have escaped responsibility, while contaminated water and soil, damaged reactors, nuclear fuel and other radioactive waste remain.*

*The fear of the disaster, the hardships of evacuation, divorces, families torn apart and divisions among those affected have left deep emotional scars. People continue to worry about the long-term effects on their health, but a government-led reconstruction programme that bears little relation to their actual needs is silencing their anger and concerns.*

MUTO RUIKO, CHAIR OF THE FUKUSHIMA NUCLEAR DISASTER PLAINTIFFS

A feminist approach to climate justice is grounded in care and responsibility across generations. Where the consequences of failure may be irreversible and persist for centuries, climate policy should be guided by the precautionary principle. Rather than assuming that future generations will develop the technologies, resources or institutions needed to manage today's environmental burdens, decisions made today should avoid creating risks that cannot easily be reversed.

Intergenerational justice is not only about preventing harm. It is also about leaving future generations with greater choices, healthier ecosystems and stronger communities. Creating environmental burdens that will remain hazardous for centuries or longer is fundamentally incompatible with a feminist ethic of care and intergenerational justice.

A feminist just transition must protect both people and the planet over the long term. It should seek to restore rather than deplete, regenerate rather than burden, and ensure that future generations do not inherit risks, costs and responsibilities they had no part in choosing.

## 4. Nuclear Power Reinforces Militarised Systems

Civilian nuclear power cannot be viewed entirely separately from the wider nuclear system. Although civilian nuclear programmes do not inevitably lead to nuclear weapons, civilian and military nuclear programmes have historically developed through interconnected technologies, industries and institutions. As they draw on overlapping expertise in research and depend on overlapping supply chains, as well as sharing enrichment and so-called reprocessing technologies, every nuclear energy facility can be a decisive step towards the development of nuclear weapons where they do not yet exist, and the wider civil nuclear systems and facilities sustain nuclear weapons in states that already have them.

Expanding nuclear power therefore also sustains institutions and infrastructure that are closely intertwined with the wider nuclear weapons complex.

Nuclear power also depends on highly centralised systems of control. Managing radioactive materials and nuclear facilities requires extensive state oversight, restricted access,

surveillance and, in some areas, secrecy. While such measures are intended to prevent accidents, theft or misuse, they also concentrate authority over energy infrastructure and decision-making. This sits uneasily with a feminist vision of climate justice based on democratic participation, transparency, community leadership and locally determined energy systems.

Armed conflicts[26] involving nuclear facilities have further exposed the vulnerability of this infrastructure.[27] Events in Ukraine and Iran have demonstrated how nuclear facilities can become entangled in military operations, creating risks that extend far beyond the immediate conflict. Damage to nuclear infrastructure, disruption of cooling or electricity supplies, or loss of effective oversight could have severe humanitarian and environmental consequences. Expanding reliance on infrastructure with the potential to create far-reaching and long-lasting harm during armed conflict introduces risks that a just and peaceful energy transition should seek to reduce, not reproduce.

## Recommendations

To ensure that climate action advances feminist climate justice rather than reinforcing inequality and environmental harm, the Women and Gender Constituency calls on **Parties and the UNFCCC secretariat, within their respective mandates, to:**

- **Reject the promotion of nuclear power as a climate solution** and ensure that climate policies and implementation prioritise renewable, rights-based and equitable energy pathways.
- **Direct public climate finance towards renewable energy, energy efficiency, sustainable transport, adaptation, resilient public services and the care economy**, rather than nuclear power and other costly, centralised technologies that divert resources from urgent climate action.
- **Ensure that UNFCCC spaces reflect diverse, rights-based perspectives on the energy transition**, including the voices of women, Indigenous Peoples, affected communities and civil society, and do not confer undue legitimacy on technologies simply through their prominence within these spaces.
- **Prioritise renewable, rights-based and democratic energy systems** that strengthen energy sovereignty, women's leadership, community participation and equitable access to energy.
- **Promote equitable technology cooperation** that strengthens local capacity, supports women-led initiatives and locally determined renewable energy pathways, and avoids long-term technological, financial and political dependency.
- **Protect the rights of Indigenous Peoples and affected communities** through free, prior and informed consent, respect for land rights and safeguards against environmental injustice throughout the energy transition.

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[26] https://www.worldnuclearreport.org/World-Nuclear-Industry-Status-Report-2022
https://www.worldnuclearreport.org/IMG/pdf/wnisr2022-v3-lr.pdf (244 pp)

[27] https://peaceandhealthblog.com/2022/08/12/physicians-call-for-a-ban-on-military-attacks-on-nuclear-installations/

- **Apply feminist climate justice principles across climate policy**, ensuring that mitigation, adaptation, finance and technology cooperation advance gender equality, intergenerational justice, ecological integrity and human rights.

**The transition away from fossil fuels must also be a transition away from the systems of extraction and inequality that have driven the climate emergency. A feminist approach to climate justice calls for energy pathways grounded in human rights, ecological integrity, democratic participation, cooperation and care for people and the planet.**

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