



Women's Resistance to War, Injustice and Environmental Crisis

**Connecting the Women, Peace and
Security Agenda and Environmental
Governance in the Cases of Colombia,
Togo and Zimbabwe**



We are the echo of your voices from one end to the other, from Abya Yala to Palestine and Kurdistan. Every word (and every silence), like seeds, are our legacy. You will know how to offer them to the mapu (earth), care for them, and water them so that they continue to flourish, gule gulistan (a flower that, by fighting, sows a garden of roses), for the bread and roses of each day.



Letter from the Feminists of Abya Yala,
December 2024

We thank WILPF members in Colombia, Lebanon, Spain, Togo and Zimbabwe whose work informed this research.

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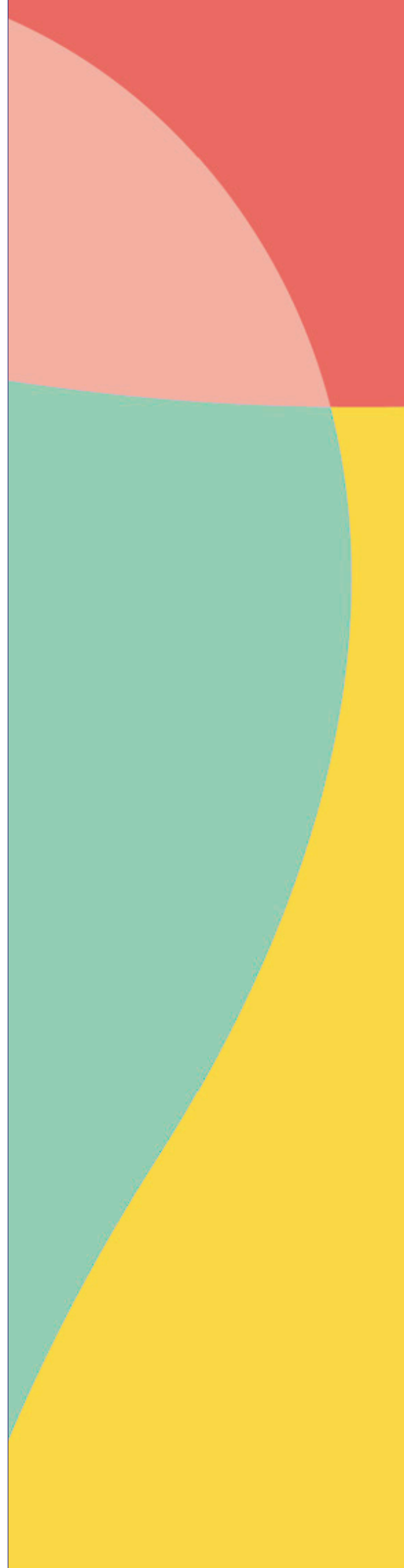
Women's Resistance to War, Injustice and Environmental Crisis. First edition

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Executive Summary

The root causes, manifestations and attempts to mitigate and adapt to the climate crisis all hold profound implications for gender equality and human security. Women, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings, are disproportionately affected by the environmental, economic and social disruptions caused by unsustainable resource extraction. They are already experiencing the impacts of the resultant climate and ecological crisis. Yet not only is current climate action failing to meet the ambition required, but many attempts to address this crisis lack a gender lens.

The WPS agenda, grounded in UNSCR 1325 (2000) and reaffirmed in resolutions like [UNSCR 2242 \(2015\)](#), offers a potential normative framework for addressing the intersecting challenges of gender inequality, violent conflict and environmental degradation. However, its full potential remains untapped in the context of climate and ecological justice. Where climate is addressed in existing WPS efforts, it is often framed as an abstract “threat” rather than a lived, gendered risk that impacts land, water and physical security.

At the same time, feminist movements are already expanding the WPS agenda implementation to include ecological justice – advocating for demilitarisation, land rights and transnational solidarity for women environmental defenders.

This policy brief explores these dynamics through several case studies, namely:

- The gendered impacts of lithium mining in Zimbabwe;
- Local-level water governance in Togo; and
- Ecofeminist organising against extractivism and militarism in Colombia.

Grounded in feminist peacebuilding frameworks, this policy brief highlights the urgent need to integrate climate justice into efforts to implement the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda and vice versa. **It calls for a shift towards understanding the climate and ecological crisis as a gendered risk rooted in systems of inequality, capitalism, colonialism, militarism and extractivism.** It also calls for both structural change and concrete support to frontline communities who are experiencing the impacts of environmental crises, armed conflicts and ongoing denial of their human rights. Drawing on international research and grassroots insights – including from the recent work of WILPF members in Colombia, Lebanon, Togo, Zimbabwe, and Spain at the nexus of WPS and environment – this brief concludes with actionable policy recommendations for policymakers.

To be able to address the ways in which climate change is impacting peace and security, policymakers and WPS actors should:

- Recognise environmental harm and resource extraction as drivers of gendered insecurity.
- Mainstream climate risk across all four WPS pillars: participation, protection, prevention and relief and recovery.
- Ensure women’s full participation in decisionmaking.
- Embed gender-responsive environmental governance in peacebuilding, humanitarian response, and conflict prevention strategies.
- Avoid securitised and militarised responses to the climate and ecological crisis.
- Protect and support women human rights and land defenders and swiftly act in response to threats against them.



Introduction

Climate change is no longer a distant threat but a lived crisis, whose impacts are interwoven with systems of inequality and injustice. Climate-driven extreme weather patterns and events such as heatwaves, droughts, floods and storms are impacting agricultural activities as well as access to land and water. These realities not only impact lives and livelihoods but also can fuel local-level conflicts and violence, exacerbating insecurity for communities. For example, climate change is accelerating conflict over land and water, fueling displacement and destabilising livelihoods and traditional knowledge systems – often hitting women first and hardest.

Policymakers and world leaders are increasingly describing this phenomenon by framing climate as a “threat multiplier”, a phenomenon that impacts underlying dimensions of our social, political and economic realities. However, framing climate solely as a “threat multiplier” fails to capture the structural drivers behind the climate crisis itself, which also in turn are sources of insecurity for communities. These include militarism, extractivism and a development model that prioritises profit over people and healthy ecosystems. The threat multiplier framing also reinforces the harmful – and incorrect – idea that an appropriate way to adapt to the climate crisis is through increased

securitisation and militarisation, rather than using such resources for human security.

Recent research and policy analysis increasingly affirm that the climate crisis is deeply intertwined with gender inequality, human rights violations and armed conflict and violence. Ecofeminist thinkers have long articulated the parallels between the patriarchal oppression of women and the capitalist and patriarchal exploitation of nature, calling for environmental justice in response. In concrete terms, scholars and activists have also demonstrated the ways in which environmental harms can lead to direct consequences for women and girls. In many contexts, women shoulder the burden of food and water provision, care work and household management, often while doing paid work for less wages, leaving them more susceptible to the impacts of climate change. Research by [Castañeda Camey et al. \(2020\)](#) illustrates how gender-based violence is both a driver and outcome of environmental degradation, particularly in contexts of resource extraction and weak governance.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) notes that in fragile and post-conflict settings, climate stress often exacerbates discriminatory structures, reducing women's access to land, water and decision-making spaces – while increasing exposure to violence and displacement.

Studies by the Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security GIWPS (2023) demonstrate that countries with stronger performance on the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Index are also more resilient to climate shocks, outperforming other measures such as GDP as a predictor of environmental and institutional readiness. Meanwhile, empirical evidence from Buhaug (2022), stresses that while climate change may amplify insecurity, armed conflict is itself a greater determinant of vulnerability, undercutting local capacities to adapt and recover.

Statistical and legal analysis from the World Bank (2022), and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (2020) further link natural resource conflicts to gendered human insecurity. They show that women are underrepresented in climate-related decision-making, despite bearing the brunt of displacement, water scarcity and environmental violence. While UNSCR 2242 explicitly recognises climate change as a driver of instability, most National Action Plans (NAPs) on WPS do not meaningfully engage with environmental issues. A review of 80 WPS NAPs (SIPRI, 2020) found that only 17 mention climate change at all – often with no corresponding goals, indicators, or budget lines. It highlights how most WPS National Action Plans neglect the climate-gender nexus, framing women primarily as victims instead of agents of resilience. This mirrors other critiques of WPS

agenda implementation, such as the disproportionate focus on the issue of sexual violence over other issues such as violence prevention and participation.

Although they are often excluded from formal decision-making spaces, women around the world are organising – defending land rights, resisting ecological harm and building peace at the community level. Yet they do so in the face of increasing violence, criminalisation, and underfunding due to the confluence of government and private sector interests that seek to repress their resistance. Notable cases, such as the assassination of Lenca land defender Berta Cáceres in Honduras, exemplify how environmental and land defenders face reprisals for aiming to protect their lands and peoples.

Moreover, militarism – often justified under ideologies that define security in terms of weapons and military strength – is a leading contributor to environmental destruction. The U.S. military emits more carbon annually than many nations (Neimark et al., 2019). These emissions, combined with militarised land grabs and pollution of land, water and air during armed conflicts and military build-up, disproportionately affect women and Indigenous communities. Feminist peace organisations like WILPF have therefore long argued that demilitarisation is a precondition for ecological justice (WILPF, 2015). However, there is limited transparency around military greenhouse gas emissions. States are instead positioning militaries and military alliances as part of the climate solution (CEOBS, 2022).

Proposed solutions to the climate crisis, including those that rely on harmful practices of extraction without accountability, also can perpetuate injustice. Some communities are becoming what the Alternative Information and Development Centre (AIDC) terms a “critical mineral sacrifice zone” – where the burdens of the green energy transition are offloaded onto vulnerable populations in the Global South. Conducted under the banner of sustainability, this can constitute a form of “green colonialism” in which transnational corporations and state elites extract profit while leaving environmental and social destruction in their wake.

In sum, the literature reveals not only the urgency of integrated climate-gender-security policies but also the inadequacy of current frameworks. The ways in which decision-makers understand and implement both the WPS agenda and climate action agendas must evolve to reflect the gendered realities of climate and environmental injustice—especially in regions where natural resources are weaponised, livelihoods are gendered and ecological degradation is both a source and consequence of human insecurity.



Zimbabwe: Lithium Mining and Women's Insecurity

The transition to renewable energy technologies has intensified global demand for critical minerals such as lithium. While this demand is framed as necessary for climate mitigation, its impacts on communities reveal a more troubling picture. In Zimbabwe, a resource-rich country, lithium extraction is unfolding in ways that systematically undermine women's rights, livelihoods and security. This also replicates colonial exploitation.

Research from WILPF Zimbabwe and AIDC highlights that Chinese-owned lithium operations have forcibly displaced families to substandard housing projects without adequate access to clean water, healthcare or schools. These relocations are often conducted without Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) and without fair compensation. Women farmers, whose livelihoods depend on land access and natural water sources, are pushed into food and income insecurity. Those employed in or around mines face exploitative conditions, including wage theft and harassment, while many are excluded from employment altogether due to gender discrimination.

The influx of male-dominated mining labor has also led to a documented rise in gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual exploitation, domestic violence and harassment in both public and private spheres, further fueled by

the proliferation of weapons. According to the IUCN (2020), such patterns are part of a broader trend. Environmental degradation and extractivism are frequently accompanied by an increase in violence, including gender-based violence against women and girls.

Analysis of mining in Zimbabwe by Magidi & Hlungwani (2023) – reveals the long-term ecological costs borne by communities. At the Connemara Mine, for instance, gold mining left behind contaminated soils, poisoned water sources, deforested landscapes and structurally unsafe infrastructure. Despite these impacts, no environmental rehabilitation was undertaken two decades after mine closure. Local women, responsible for collecting water, food and firewood, must now navigate increasingly degraded and hazardous environments.

These dynamics highlight a broader architecture of impunity, whereby communities are positioned as sacrifice zones. Weak legal enforcement, militarised responses to community protests, and marginalisation of women from decision-making processes further entrench inequality. Feminist peacebuilding frameworks – such as the WPS agenda – offer a pathway to change. They call for women's inclusion in governance structures, corporate accountability and gender-responsive environmental policies that aim to mitigate these harms.

Togo: Water Management and Climate Resilience

"Water is life and its absence is a public danger and a public health problem..."
-Midwife from rural Togo, 2024

In Togo, access to clean and safe water is a growing source of community tension, shaped by climate variability, resource scarcity and structural gender inequalities. Togo is increasingly facing extreme climate-driven extreme weather patterns and events, leading to floods, droughts, drinking water shortages, coastal erosion, strong winds and heat waves. In rural areas, where a large portion of the population lives, the water supply still relies largely on boreholes, wells, and rivers, which are often exposed to pollution and periods of drought. In many villages, communities rely on a single water tap – if one exists at all – leading to long queues and limited access to water. Existing facilities are poorly maintained and monitored, exacerbating water shortages. This lack of safe and clean drinking water directly is leading to food insecurity, disease, poor sanitary and hygiene conditions, forced migration and even local-level conflicts. Therefore, the Government of Togo is targeting a rate of 80% access to drinking water by the end of 2025 to address this challenge.

In Togo, as in many other countries – water security is a highly gendered issue. Women and girls are largely responsible for collecting water for family and household needs. Furthermore, women are active in sectors such as agriculture

and market gardening, which also rely heavily on steady sources of water. Due to inadequate access to safe water taps, women and girls often must travel long distances in search of water points. This takes time away from income-generating activities, education and care work.

Grassroots groups in Togo report that access to safe water has a clear impact on education and life chances. There are also clear health and sanitation impacts of water insecurity, such as the inability of hospitals and medical centers to provide adequate care for pregnant and postpartum patients without clean water. Unsafe sources of drinking water can lead to illnesses, impacting the health of students and their academic performance. Further, gendered water collection responsibilities can keep girls out of school if they must travel longer distances and wait at water points due to lack of availability of adequate water sources. This increases the likelihood of early marriage or internal migration to cities in search of work, with all its attendant consequences.

Water is also a peace and security issue for communities in rural Togo. As households face difficulties in obtaining potable water for drinking, cooking, sanitation and washing, providing for animals and watering fields, this reality can increase tension in communities. A survey conducted by Togolese grassroots groups found that 81.6% of the population have identified a weakening of social bonds in their communities due to water stress. Community discussions confirmed that water points (backwaters, rivers, wells, public pumps) are areas prone to conflict. This is due to a range of factors, including:

- Water shortages during the dry season;
- The effects of climate change;
- Limited number of these water points; and
- Overpopulation.

In response to these evolving realities, women have become more aware of their essential roles in adapting to the climate crisis and mitigating its impacts. Togolese women have become concerned about the potential escalation of community disputes and are proactively organising themselves to mediate tensions and ensure equitable access to water. Despite being excluded from formal decision-making processes, they are identifying ways to strengthen community cohesion and engage local and national leaders on questions of water security.

Colombia: Ecofeminist Resistance to Militarism and Extractivism

"Territory begins with ourselves, right? Our own bodies, a struggle that took a long time for us to understand, and many murders, violence, and everything that has happened for us to realise that we ourselves had to value ourselves as a territory, as women."

-Indigenous woman from Cauca, focus group participant, 2024.

Women leaders in Colombia, including in departments such as Caquetá and Cauca, have been resisting an extractivist development model that has promoted fossil fuels and large-scale industrial and infrastructure projects. This form of development has resulted in:

- Land grabbing;
- Displacement;
- Contamination of water sources and ecosystems; and
- Gentrification of urban centers and rural areas.

Due to tremendous community resistance, fossil fuel and mineral extraction has been enforced through militarisation, materialised through the presence of both legal and illegal armed actors, to protect private interests over the public good.

The Colombian state has insufficiently complied with guarantees for the exercise of economic, social, and environmental rights. According to the Global Witness report (2024), Colombia in 2023 was the most dangerous country in the world for environmental defenders, with 40% of the total homicides worldwide. Between 2017 and 2023, 173 leaders were assassinated for territorial defense, 129 of whom were Indigenous and 25 of whom were Afro-Descendant. This reality also reflects the context of environmental racism and

colonialism, with some of the worst impacts in the conflict-affected regions that are home to marginalised groups. For example, the departments of Caquetá and Cauca, located in the south and southwest of the country, were severely affected by the Colombian armed conflict. They now face new and evolving cycles of violence relating to issues such as socio-environmental conflicts, illegal deforestation, land grabbing and drug trafficking. The progress towards the implementation of the 2016 peace agreement has also been insufficient in areas including gender and root causes of the conflict.

Various cases exemplify the complex interplay between these realities. For example, the Truth Commission (CEV) found that there was a confluence between the State's military apparatus, the actions of paramilitary groups and the multinational Drummond to "secure" its extractive project and favor coal exploitation. In addition, the company caused one of the largest environmental accidents in Colombia, when an overloaded barge dumped 500 tons of coal into the sea to avoid sinking. Meanwhile in the Colombian Amazon, the military operation known as "Artemisa," supposedly

designed to protect the rainforest, has resulted in violent evictions of peasant communities, while failing to act against the large land grabbers responsible for large-scale deforestation. Investigations have showed that the military sieges continued and were no longer motivated by the presence of the FARC-EP, but by the deforestation that increased once this group left the territory.

Colombian feminist activists have identified different impacts of the ongoing situation on women environmental and territorial defenders.

These include:

- Environmental damage from extractive industry and mega projects;
- Undermining of community land tenure and planning procedures;
- Shifting local political economies;
- Reduced food sovereignty;
- Effects on sexual and reproductive health;
- Gender-based violence;
- Disruptions to community social fabric and spirituality; and
- Territorial security and militarisation.

Women leaders are organised in resisting this militarisation and extractivism. The Nasa indigenous women from Cauca are engaged in a long-standing collective struggle for territorial and environmental rights. Women in Caquetá have made significant progress in advancing environmental rights against logging and other extractive economies in the territory. Together they have identified three essential areas for an ecofeminist political horizon: demilitarisation, defossilisation, and depatriarchalisation.



Recommendations

As climate impacts intensify, so too must the commitment to gender-just peacebuilding. This is peace that not only ends wars, but also addresses their root causes including exploitation, inequality and repression. To advance feminist, climate-resilient peacebuilding, stakeholders must integrate environmental concerns into the WPS agenda – and vice versa. Based on the cases and literature reviewed, the following policy recommendations are proposed.

Governments and Donors Must Strengthen Women's Participation in Environmental Governance

- Mandate gender-inclusive consultations for all environmental projects and infrastructure developments, and institutionalise principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.
- Include women – especially from affected communities – in decision-making bodies on issues such as mining, water governance and climate policy.
- Ensure protection of women from violence and reprisals.
- Require gender-responsive environmental impact assessments as standard practice in project planning.
- Donors should expand funding for grassroots, women-led environmental initiatives relating to research, community organising, land defense, legal support and resilience.

Improve Corporate and State Accountability

- Governments must require transparency in resource contracts, land use agreements and environmental compliance by companies and governments.
- Governments must strengthen enforcement of human rights protections for women in climate-vulnerable zones.
- Government actors at all levels must ensure access to safe and clean water and sanitation.
- Non-governmental organisations should support strategic litigation and public advocacy to hold corporations accountable for environmental and gender-related harms.
- All relevant actors should advance local-level conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives to prevent violence.

Protect Women's Rights in Climate-Conflict Zones

- Governments and the UN should integrate WPS principles into climate adaptation, humanitarian response and conflict early warning systems.
- Donors should establish and fund GBV protection mechanisms specific to areas affected by environmental degradation and resource conflict.
- Donors should scale up support for women-led climate resilience and peacebuilding programs in fragile settings.

Strengthen International Advocacy and Legal Protections

- Governments should embed gender-environment linkages into WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) and ensure they include actionable, funded targets.
- Governments should expand legal frameworks and implementation to protect Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders (WEHRDs) from violence, criminalisation and reprisals.
- Governments must cease the militarisation of territories and the instrumentalisation of environmental protection to justify militarisation.
- Donors should scale up international programs that enable women's movements to lead sustainable, locally rooted solutions.
- Monitor progress across gender, peace and climate pillars, including, but not limited to, through their reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Promote multi-sectoral collaboration between governments, civil society, Indigenous movements and peace organisations to support systemic change.



Conclusion

The climate crisis is not only an ecological emergency – it is a gendered and political one. Its impacts are felt most acutely in fragile and conflict-affected settings, where women face the compounded effects of environmental degradation, economic displacement and violence. Yet women are not only victims of these crises – they are frontline responders, peacebuilders and defenders of land, water and life.

The WPS agenda provides a powerful framework for addressing the root causes of insecurity. Its implementation must now be expanded to meet the challenges of our time. This means embedding environmental justice across all four pillars of WPS, including through:

- Ensuring women’s participation in climate and environmental governance;
- Protecting environmental human rights defenders;
- Preventing resource conflicts through gender-equitable policies and social justice; and
- Supporting locally-led recovery efforts in the wake of ecological disruption.

Governments, international organisations and corporations must take concrete, urgent steps toward a feminist just transition – one that dismantles extractive violence, centers community sovereignty, and recognises that peace is not possible without ecological and gender justice. Feminist movements across the world are already doing this work. What they need now is support, resources and structural change.

A sustainable future demands not only a shift in how we power our economies, but in how we distribute power itself.

