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INTRINSICALLY LINKED: GENDER EQUALITY, CLIMATE AND BIODIVERSITY

Concrete proposals for an
integrated policy

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SUMMARY

The climate crisis is the greatest challenge of our time. The recent report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) demonstrates that we have reached a tipping point. If we want to achieve the Paris goal of no more than 1.5 degrees global warming, we must turn the tide right now. Not in 2030 or 2050. To attain these goals everyone needs to be involved.

Women and girls*¹ constitute almost half of the world's population, but their voices are not sufficiently heard in biodiversity and climate policy. For example, only 33 percent of decision-making positions at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are occupied by women², and at the level of governments and other institutions this percentage is even lower. Not only is this unjust, but it is also unwise. Women hold key positions in different activities that directly support agriculture and biodiversity, such as sustainable soil and water management, forestation and the preservation and cultivation of crop varieties. (Indigenous)³ women often lead resistance to fossil fuel projects and degradation of ecosystems. They are knowledge holders and pioneers in major sectors such as sustainable energy, water, forestry, and agriculture. Therefore, it is important that they can participate in decision-making processes and have access to the spaces in which political decisions are made.

The worldwide climate crisis, loss of biodiversity and continuing gender inequality are intrinsically linked. Solving the climate and biodiversity crises and achieving gender equality must go hand in hand. Real change is needed, that tackles unequal power structures and unlimited use of natural resources. The way we have organised the world so far is not going to solve these crises. We desperately need new leadership, new perspectives, and new knowledge.

The Netherlands has a crucial role to play in this regard. For many years already, the Dutch government has shown leadership by focusing on women's rights and gender equality in its Foreign Trade and Development Policy by successfully advocating internationally, for example within the context of the Green Climate Fund (GCF), for climate policy that specifically focuses on gender. The Netherlands has the money, the resources and the track record required to tackle the climate and biodiversity crises inclusively.

This paper explains the intrinsic link between climate, biodiversity, and gender equality, and offers concrete proposals to the Dutch government to implement the following key recommendations:

1. Ensure that trade, agricultural and investment policies are aligned with the climate goals, international goals, and the Dutch commitment to global gender equality
2. Commit, via Dutch policy and programming, to the meaningful involvement of women and gender equality within decision-making processes during international climate and biodiversity conferences in United Nations (UN) and European Union (EU) agencies
3. Prevent that Dutch international climate policy and programming negatively affects the resilience of ecosystems and populations, and that maintains, or even reinforces, existing power structures and exclusion mechanisms.
4. Make sure that climate finance is accessible to local communities and women, who work on ecosystem conservation and repair, and effective climate initiatives, and work to protect and bolster the efforts of women environmental and land rights activists.

THE INTRINSIC LINK BETWEEN CLIMATE, BIODIVERSITY AND GENDER EQUALITY

The climate and biodiversity crises are inextricably connected. Biodiversity decreases faster as the earth warms up. At the same time, biodiversity itself plays an indispensable part in capturing greenhouse gases and combatting climate change. Unfortunately, when it comes to policy, these two crises are largely dealt with separately. They are discussed in separate UN conventions and intergovernmental bodies: The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) for climate; and the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) for biodiversity. This means we risk combatting neither crisis successfully. Indeed, the first joint IPBES-IPCC report from June 2021⁴ recognises this risk. One of the report's main recommendations is that policy needs to tackle biodiversity loss and climate change jointly, as well as acknowledging their social impact.

The consequences of the climate and biodiversity crises aggravate existing inequalities, including gender inequality. Women and girls are often disproportionately affected by the effects of climate change and poorly designed climate measures. Alongside gender, other social factors, such as ethnicity, sexuality, and socio-economic class, also play a role. 80 percent of the people displaced by climate change are women.⁵ Women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die during a climate disaster.⁶ Women work in the field more often than men, and therefore have higher exposure to pesticide residue: pesticides not only harm flora and fauna but can also cause long term health effects. As part of the energy transition, residual products of agricultural production can be used as fuel: biomass. However, these products can contain harmful substances that become carcinogenic when burned. The health damage because of these substances also works through in the reproductive health.⁷

Marginalised groups, such as women, the LGBTQI+ community and Indigenous peoples are also disproportionately affected because of existing inequalities. Through traditional gender roles, women face structural barriers, such as lack of access to credit for disaster responses, gender-based violence, intimidation, and lack of representation in decision-making processes.⁸ This not only relates to gender, but also to social factors such as ethnicity and socio-economic class. An intersectional approach, in which attention is paid to factor such as sex, class, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, skin colour, (dis)abilities and age, is essential to solve the climate and biodiversity crises.

This is also essential considering the crucial knowledge about sustainable wood, water, and land management that women and Indigenous peoples have. With their strong connections to biodiversity, they are often dependent on their natural surroundings and resources and will lead the way in innovative local climate solutions. Although Indigenous peoples make up only 5 percent of the world's population, their traditional territories account for 22 percent of the Earth's land mass, making them de facto stewards of 80 percent of the world's biodiversity.⁹ Damage to biodiversity resulting from climate change directly impacts their living environment. Globally, women own less than 15 percent of all land¹⁰, yet they are responsible for much of the work on this land.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

Despite the Netherlands being an international champion for women's rights, many Dutch policies do not yet address climate change, the biodiversity crisis and gender equality in tandem. We miss achieving real change - or even risk enhancing these problems - through incoherent policies and maintaining unequal power structures. Meanwhile, our climate and biodiversity policies are not always inclusive and sustainable. For example, climate financing rarely reaches women and local marginalised populations in general.

1. Incoherent policy

According to the (reviewed) Action Plan Policy Coherence (Actieplan Beleidscoherentie), Dutch policy relating to trade, climate and investing, amongst others, must not have negative impacts on climate goals and the achievement of global gender equality.¹¹ However, The Netherlands undermines its own efforts in the areas of climate, biodiversity, and gender equality so we continue to put public resources towards intensive livestock farming, fossil fuels and the bio-energy industry. Annually, the Dutch government provides 1.7 billion euros of subsidies for fossil fuels within the Netherlands, and 1.5 billion euros to support fossil exports.¹² Fossil-fuel projects not only generate CO2 emissions, but also have negative impacts on surrounding areas and the people who live there, including rural women and Indigenous peoples. The 'Monitor Brede Welvaart'¹³ shows that our wellbeing in the Netherlands comes at the expense of the wellbeing and biodiversity – and therefore the resilience to climate change – of extremely large populations in other countries. Through our trade agreements and trading relationships, we maintain, for example, an intensive livestock farming and agricultural model which in many countries results in deforestation and damage to ecosystems and is pushing local producers – women in particular – out of the market.



2. Lack of access to decision-making and high-level management positions

There is huge inequality of access to decision-making and top management positions within climate and biodiversity policy and initiatives. Women hold only 15 percent of the world's ministerial positions relating to these matters (such as agriculture, water). The global average of women members of parliament is just 25.4 percent.¹⁴ In addition, men are far more frequently included in (government) delegations at international climate negotiations, such as the Conference of Parties (COP) and CBD.¹⁵ At local levels too, women are not given the opportunity to hold decision-making positions due to traditional gender roles, stereotypes, and discrimination, even though they can contribute significantly to climate and biodiversity policy. Communities become more resilient and improve their ability to combat climate change when women also participate in decision-making and planning.¹⁶ Women more often support nature conservation measures and they are more concerned with issues of inequality.¹⁷ Often, they do not have any formal rights to land or access to capital and technology. This means they are not able to make decisions, even though they take on most of the work in agriculture, swamp areas, coastal regions, and forestry. Effective participation and leadership by women in climate and biodiversity conservation is essential for the political, economic, social, and personal development of women – especially young women.¹⁸ It can also lead to more environmentally conscious decisions at national and household levels¹⁹. Excluding marginalised groups, whether on the grounds of their gender, class, or ethnicity, makes finding sustainable solutions for the climate and biodiversity crises impossible.

3. Lack of sustainability and inclusivity in climate policy

The Netherlands displays international leadership in putting gender equality and women's rights on the agenda. However, reality is not easily changed. Gender and sustainability criteria are not strictly enforced, or they are subservient to economic criteria. Just 31 percent of bilateral ODA earmarked for climate in 2014, also supported the achievement of gender parity. Only 3 percent had gender equality as a principal objective, whereas 28 percent integrated gender equality as a secondary objective.²⁰ Some large-scale climate projects, directly or indirectly co-financed by the Netherlands, such as hydroelectric power stations, biomass, and geothermal projects, are likely to aggravate gender inequality and human rights abuses²¹, or damage ecosystems. A recent report²² by the IPCC and the IPBES issues a strongly worded warning. They indicate that large-scale cultivation of crops for bioenergy, but also the planting of monocultures to compensate for CO₂ and achieve climate goals, worsens the biodiversity crisis. They urgently call on governments and the private sector to combat climate change and the biodiversity crisis in tandem.²³

4. Lack of access to resources and climate finance

Incorporating knowledge about gender inequality and gender criteria into mechanisms for climate financing and strategies leads to better results.²⁴ Nevertheless, women often do not have access to capital (grants or credit), for example for climate adaptation technologies.²⁵ In nine out of ten countries around the world there is at least one law that limits women's access to financing.²⁶ Only 37 countries (of 161) have specific laws that guarantee equal ownership, access and usage of land for men and women.²⁷ These barriers can only be removed by means of deliberate and targeted policies.

Research by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) indicates that just 10 percent of traceable climate financing from international climate funds was earmarked for local activities.²⁸ Within the Green Climate Fund (GCF), 81 percent of financing is distributed through international institutions and only 19 percent through national institutions. How much ends up in the hands of local organisations and groups is unclear, but it seems to be very little. In addition, 54 percent of GCF funding goes to just five international banks and UN organisations.²⁹ Meanwhile, local projects have shown to be more effective and more accessible, especially for women. Within philanthropic financing we also see that the relationship between gender and climate is underemphasised. Just 0.2 percent of all financing goes to projects that specifically target gender and climate.³⁰ Governments and funds give high priority to attracting private equity because they are not willing or able to commit sufficient public resources. Moreover, funds maintain complex accreditation procedures which are much more accessible for large actors than for small ones. The desire for big impact is expressed in large-scale, costly projects, because these are supposedly more 'profitable' and therefore interesting for private parties.³¹ It also offers governments and financial institutes a relatively easy way of allocating large sums of money. This practice contrasts starkly with social expectations concerning the use of scarce public resources. These large-scale projects rarely reach local communities and marginalised groups, while at the same time deeply impacting their living environment and existence.





WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS?

To effectively tackle the urgent challenges of global warming and loss of biodiversity, an integral and inclusive approach, with specific attention to (gender) equality, is needed. The following recommendations for the Dutch government offer several concrete actions and handles to incorporate in Dutch policy, and show international leadership:

1) **Ensure that Dutch policies regarding trade, agriculture, human rights, and investments, are aligned with the Paris climate goals and contribute to achieving gender parity.**

a. The Dutch government must cease all (export) support to oil- and natural gas-related projects. The Netherlands should follow the United Kingdom's example by ending this support before COP26. In the context of Export Finance for Future (E3F), the Netherlands can join forces with the United Kingdom to persuade other countries to do likewise, when it hosts the next international E3F meeting later this year.

b. In its dealings with FMO (The Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank), the Dutch government must insist that FMO's investments – including when these involve financial intermediaries – convincingly demonstrate that they comply with the Paris climate goals and the SDGs 5, 7, 13 and 15.

c. In its trade policy, the Dutch government must prioritise human rights – and women's rights, labour rights, the environment and climate (as common goods) – rather than the rights of investors and the expansion of the free market. The Netherlands should also advocate for this within the EU and the UN.

I. Reviews of the national IMVO policy and the Nationaal Actieplan *Mensenrechten en Bedrijfsleven* (National Plan of Action for Human Rights and Business) must contribute to gender equality. Make companies liable and hold them to account if they violate human rights, including women's rights, and make the companies' obligations binding.

II. At the European level, the Netherlands must advocate for progressive and gender-responsive³² due diligence legislation and at the UN level for progressive and feminist contributions to the negotiations for a Binding Treaty on Business and Human Rights^{33,34}.

2) At international climate and biodiversity conferences, within UN agencies and within the European Union, the Dutch government must explicitly commit to involving women and to advancing gender parity in decision-making about combatting the climate crisis and the loss of biodiversity.

a. Support legislation, policies and strategies which encourage women and girls to take leadership positions and to participate at all levels of decision-making concerning climate action and the protection of biodiversity. This could be accomplished through quota legislation, but also through continued support for the Women Delegates Fund.³⁵

b. Stimulate increased capacity for women's rights organisations that work on climate adaptation and mitigation and the protection of biodiversity. This can be accomplished by provisions such as accessible financing options and training, and by improving access for women to capital, financing, and digital technology.

c. It is important to see more women at the top and in high-ranking decision-making positions, but it must not stop there. Besides appointing Gender Focal Points at Ministries, gender experts should be engaged at all levels of policy development and decision-making.

d. When performing risk analyses and research for policies, commit to an effective gender and intersectional lens. In many studies, including some cited in this paper, the focus is still very much on the male/female binary. It is extremely important not only to generate (quantitative) knowledge about, say, how many women are involved in a particular project. An analysis must also be made of what the (anticipated) effects of the policy will be on gender roles and power relationships, and how these relate to other forms of marginalisation such as discrimination based on class and ethnicity³⁶³⁷³⁸. Encourage consultations with women's rights organisations on issues relating to this. This applies not only to policy in the Netherlands, but also to activities carried out by Dutch Embassies and EU delegations.

Active contribution by women to inclusive National Gender Action Plan in Nigeria

In August 2020, Nigeria became one of the first African countries to approve a Gender Action Plan. Nigeria's National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change is a roadmap for the government and the private sector for integrating citizens' knowledge, experience, needs and concerns into national initiatives relating to climate change. To develop the plan, Women Environmental Programme (WEP) worked together with Nigeria's federal Environment Ministry and it also consulted with the UNFCCC's global Gender Action Plan. This process included input from stakeholders such as the government, women, young people, disabled people, and the elderly. The action plan focuses, among other things, on agriculture, forestry, and land usage; food security and health; and water and sanitation. Various actors will monitor its implementation, including social organisations focusing on women and young people. One of the objectives is to increase local communities' participation in forestry and agricultural programmes, to safeguard women's right to land ownership and to support women's groups in setting up nurseries and planting trees.



@Women Environmental Programme

3) Prevent that Dutch international climate policies and programming lead to negative effects (maladaptation and mitigation) on the resilience of ecosystems and population groups, as well as maintain existing power structures and mechanisms of exclusion.

a. Implement and ensure the implementation of internationally recognised standards as well as undertakings the Netherlands has endorsed, such as the OECD guidelines, the UN guiding principles and commitments and the CEDAW³⁹ recommendations, the UN CBD and UNFCCC (and its Gender Action Plan), the EU Gender Action Plan III⁴⁰ and the conclusions of the *Brede Welvaart Monitor* (Monitor of Wellbeing).

b. Actively follow up on the concrete recommendations of scientists aligned with the IPCC and IBPES⁴¹. For instance, protecting and restoring carbon- and species-rich ecosystems, and bolstering sustainable agricultural and forestry practices. Plus, preventing the emergence of monocultures, the planting of trees that are not indigenous to regions, and land theft, all of which can disadvantage local communities' planting practices.

I. For example, the Dutch government should actively and transparently address and assess all the risks of maladaptation and malmitigation in climate policy by means of an integral sustainability framework⁴¹. Think for instance of large-scale dams⁴², wind farms and plantations that threaten ecosystems and the living environments of Indigenous communities.

c. Investigate and actively monitor whether the Dutch Fund for Climate and Development (DFCD) is producing tangible results in terms of gender-responsivity, reaching and engaging the most vulnerable populations, accessibility for local groups and a sustainable combined approach to climate, ecology, and development (in accordance with the Voordewind c.s. motion⁴³, and the additional conditions subsequently proposed by Parliament).

d. Improve climate funds' complaints mechanisms and instruments to make them properly accessible to local organisations.

e. Ensure that new technologies (e.g., drought-resistant crops, irrigation practices) and information services are attuned to women's needs. Rural women must also benefit from access to agricultural information and climate information services.

Analog Forestry contributes to land recovery, climate mitigation and adaptation, and improves the position of women

Analog Forestry (AF)⁴⁴⁵ is a community-based agro-ecological method developed in the South to restore damaged lands. As such, the International Analog Forestry Network (IAFN) creates an alternative to the current model of exploiting natural resources. For example, IAFN's 2015-2020 project *"Empowering Women through Analog Forestry"* worked with 25 groups led by women in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Through AF, women contribute to climate adaptation and mitigation by planting trees, setting up nurseries and creating vegetable, fruit and herb gardens that not only capture carbon, but also ensure food sovereignty and healthy soil while also protecting floodplains. Local agro-ecological practices like AF are also an important way of improving the position of women, both economically (through additional income) and politically. They feel empowered to lobby and speak with policymakers, academics, and the media, and to demand their land and water rights, and to gain recognition for their specialised knowledge in the areas of forestry and restoration.



@Rainforest Rescue International

4) Make sure that financing is also accessible to local communities and women, who work on ecosystem preservation and recovery, as well as effective climate initiatives and the protection and support of female environmental and land rights activists.

a. Make gender-related objectives in funds and projects explicit and ensure transparent and active monitoring of these objectives by means of strict criteria. This applies to government programmes as well as those of external parties such as instruments or funds implemented by FMO (The Dutch Entrepreneurial Development Bank).

b. As an executive member of international financial institutions and funds such as the GCF, the Dutch government must advocate for improved access to the climate policy it manages for local environmental and women's organisations, by means of things like fit-for-purpose accreditation criteria, as well as through flexibility, active outreach, support for these groups and by making funding available for existing national and regional funds that can very effectively and efficiently reach local groups in their region with smaller sums.⁴⁶

The power of small subsidies

Grassroots organisations can be supported in their work through locally established small subsidy funds or by means of sub-subsidising through larger organisations.⁴⁷ They receive the money directly, avoiding bureaucratic regulations, and are able to use the money where it is most needed according to them. An example of this is the Gender-Just Climate Solutions awards.⁴⁸ These awards are presented annually at the COP to the best locally rooted climate solutions which focus on gender equality. The winners receive €2000 and the mentorship programme offers all winners the opportunity to share knowledge and increase capacity. In Guinea-Bissau, UNIVERSSEL shares French indigenous knowledge about salt extraction with women who are responsible for salt and rice production in the mangroves. Normally, about three tons of wood from the mangroves was used to produce one ton of salt. Now, deforestation is avoided by using solar energy. The female salt producers set up a cooperative to join forces and to share their knowledge. As a result, they gained a better position in their community. International recognition of UNIVERSSEL's project at the COP resulted in access to additional financing. This enabled them to invest in the salt dryers and they reached an additional 500 people.⁴⁹



@ UNIVERSSEL/WECF

ENDNOTES

1. Inclusive language is important: When we mention women* and girls* we refer to women in all their diversity recognising their varied experiences and identities, irrespective of their gender, sex, choice of partner, class, education, ethnicity, race, background or religion. When we cite research in this paper, we often write women and girls without *, because many researchers only collect data sorted by binary sex categories only.
2. UN Women (2020). *Gender Equality: Women's rights in review 25 years after Beijing*. Zie: <https://auth-hq.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/gender-equality-womens-rights-in-review-en.pdf?la=en&vs=934>.
3. We recognise the problematic connotations of the Dutch word 'inheems' (indigenous), which was historically used to mean 'primitive'. The English term 'indigenous' has been internationally recognised since 1989 by the UN Convention for Indigenous Peoples, in which the rights of indigenous peoples are recognised. The Netherlands recognises this convention too. This has given the term 'inheems' (indigenous) a new meaning, acknowledging the unique position of these peoples. We support this and have therefore chosen to use the term 'inheems' (indigenous) in this paper. See: <https://www.oneworld.nl/lezen/opinie/waarom-het-woord-inheems-ook-waardevol-is/>.
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12. See among others: <https://www.mejudice.nl/artikelen/detail/subsidie-voor-fossiele-brandstoffen-ongekend-groot>. ; <https://www.bothends.org/nl/Actueel/Publicaties/The-fossil-elephant-in-the-room/>: From 2012 to 2018, the government provided almost 11 billion euros of insurance and guarantees for fossil fuel related projects (an average of 1.5 billion euros annually)
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36. See the IAK [Integrated Assessment Framework] requirement for gender equality in roadmaps
37. Kenniscentrum Wetgeving en Juridische Zaken, Effecten op Gendergelijkheid (*Knowledge Centre for Legislation and Legal Affairs, Effects on Gender Equality*) <https://www.kcwj.nl/kennisbank/integraal-afwegingskader-beleid-en-regelgeving/verplichte-kwaliteitseisen/effecten-op-gendergelijkheid>
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LIST WITH ABBREVIATIONS

IPCC: The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change.

The Paris Agreement: This is a legally binding international treaty on climate change.

UNFCCC COP: The Conference of Parties is the supreme decision-making body van the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

GCF: Green Climate Fund is a fund established within the UNFCCC as a financial mechanism to assist developing countries in adaptation and mitigation to counter climate change.

CBD: The Convention on Biological Diversity is a multilateral treaty, aiming to develop national strategies for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity.

IPBES: The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services is an independent body to strengthen the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, long-term human well-being, and sustainable development.

LGBTI+: This abbreviation means lesbian women (L), gay men (G), transgender people (T) and intersex people (I). The + (plus) entails the people that are not included under the other labels, such as the people that identify with as queer.

IIED: The International Institute for Environment and Development is an independent research organisation.

E3F: The Export Finance for Future is a coalition to harness public export finance as a key driver in the fight against climate change.

IMVO: International Responsible Business Conduct policies entails how (Dutch) enterprises consider human rights, labour conditions and the environment.

Women Delegates Fund: A fund aimed at addressing a gap in women's participation in climate negotiations.

OECD: The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is an international organisation for collaboration on social and economic policies.

CEDAW: The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discriminations Against Women is an international treaty, described as an international bill of rights for women.

UNFCCC Gender Action Plan: The Gender Action Plan of the UNFCCC sets out objectives and activities that aim to advance knowledge and understanding of gender-responsive climate action.

EU Gender Action Plan III: The Gender Action Plan III provides the EU with a policy framework to meet international commitments on gender equality and women's rights.

Monitor Brede Welvaart: In the Monitor Brede Welvaart & Sustainable Development Goals 2020 the Dutch National Bureau for Statistics (CBS) describes how welfare develops in the Netherlands. This entails economic, ecological, and social aspects of welfare.

DFCD: The Dutch Fund for Climate and Development enables private sector investments in projects aimed at climate adaptation and mitigation in developing countries.

FMO: The Dutch Entrepreneurial Bank invests in businesses, projects, and financial institutions by providing capital, knowledge, and networks to support sustainable growth.