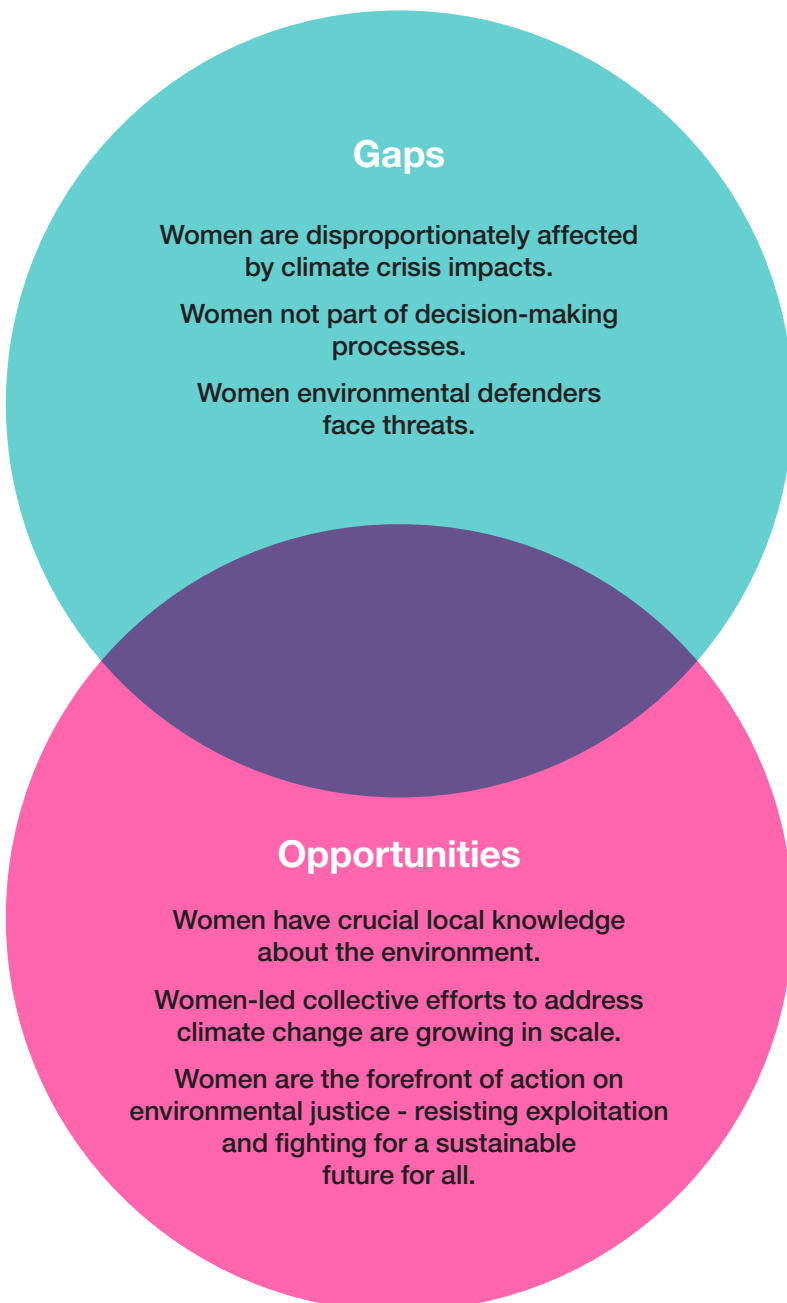


# Why the environment is a women's rights issue

Climate change is not gender neutral. Gender equality and women's rights must be at the heart of climate justice efforts. When women, girls, and trans and intersex people across the world fight for their rights, this includes the right to water, food, and a healthy environment.



Women have critical knowledge about the environments being damaged by the climate crisis and how resource extraction affects their lived realities.

**Evidence shows that a greater presence of women in community decision-making bodies leads to a better protection of common property (land) resources.<sup>1</sup>**

A significant body of work highlights the gaps to be filled (largely as a consequence of institutional and structural inequities) when it comes to supporting women environmental defenders. There are important opportunities to support them given their custodianship of valuable resources and their unique expertise and know-how, as well as roles played as care givers. **Yet less than 1% of all international philanthropic funding goes to women's environmental action.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Nazrul Islam, S. (2015). Inequality and Environmental Sustainability, Working Paper No. 145. New York, NY: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved from [https://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2015/wp145\\_2015.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2015/wp145_2015.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> This analysis is from a 2018 report by Global Greengrants Fund and Prospera - International Network of Women's Funds entitled, "Our Voices, Our Environment: The State of Funding for Women's Environmental Action." It is based on 2014 grantmaking data, the most current year available at the time of the analysis. The data set is comprised of 269 institutional donors, including private foundations, public foundations, women's funds, and other grantmaking organisations. It does not include organisations that may provide funds but for whom grantmaking is not a primary focus.

“People don’t get all of the connections [when] they say the environmental is over there, the civil rights group is over there, the women’s group is over there... Actually all of them are one group, and the issues we fight become null and void if we have no clean water to drink, no clean air to breathe, and nothing to eat.”

**Activist Cora Tucker at a conference held in 1987**

Climate change is not just about levels of greenhouse gasses, but often first of all about the bodies, lives, and livelihoods of women, girls, and trans and intersex people and their communities across the world.

The deep interrelation between women’s human rights, gender justice, and climate and environmental justice is the consequence of an economic system based on the exploitation of people and the planet. In it, both nature and marginalised groups are seen as disposable for the profit and accumulation of a privileged few. This means it is not a coincidence that rural women across the world are bearing the burden of increasingly difficult and dangerous care work, in the context of climate impacts that they are not responsible for, including:

- deforestation;
- increased droughts and floods;
- the contamination of waterways;
- land erosion and degradation;
- changing and disappearing agricultural cycles;
- air pollution; and
- toxic chemical exposure.

**Greater presence of women in community decision-making not only leads to greater protection of the environment. When gender inequality is low, forest depletion, air pollution, and other measures of environmental degradation are also lower.<sup>3</sup>**

These differentiated impacts can be linked to gender roles and women’s care work in:

- direct dependence on natural commons;
- unequal access to land and water;
- the increasing number of women-headed rural households, across regions, due to urbanisation;
- gender-based disparities in access to health, education, financial services and more;
- fewer resources with which to face environmental impacts;
- limited political voice; and
- systematic sexual and physical violence against women’s bodies and exploitation.

In this context, women’s movements and women’s groups, are at the forefront of change. For this, they often face severe retaliation, and find their safety and health threatened. Despite this, they protect, defend and advance the sustainability of their communities, and our planet.<sup>4</sup>

Since 2016, GAGGA has supported the Indonesia Water Community of Practice (IndoWater CoP), which is a consortium including Ecological Observation and Wetlands Conservation (ECOTON). ECOTON strengthens the participation and leadership of women in water pollution control in Indonesia, in particular contamination from endocrine disrupting chemicals. ECOTON also supports women in defending their rights to clean water and a healthy environment, including through litigation. Photo courtesy of ECOTON.



To learn more, see: [gaggaalliance.org](http://gaggaalliance.org)

<sup>3</sup> Elwell, N. and Y. Williams. (2016, March 7). If You Care About the Environment, You Should Care About Gender. World Resources Institute [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.wri.org/blog/2016/03/if-you-care-about-environment-you-should-care-about-gender>.

<sup>4</sup> Text on page 2 is based on Mama Cash analysis and experience working with Women’s Funds through GAGGA.