

Outcomes of the Regional Consultations of Feminist movements on Climate Change

(Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Russia region, WBT region and Central Asia)

Olga Djanaeva

Structural barriers

- One of the biggest structural barriers identified during the discussions level of awareness around climate justice and its connection with women's rights. Illiteracy and the current economic situation only aggravate the problem further.
- Climate change exacerbates existing inequalities all over the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Russia region, WBT region and Central Asia. Great parts of the population live in regions affected by climate change.
- The most marginalized groups in society are often also the most affected, living in polluted areas. In the future, natural disasters will become more frequent, and will lead to increased internal and eco-migration. Existing gender norms and other forms of discrimination lead to a lack of access to information and other resources. This gives women and girls less time to successfully evacuate in cases of climate emergency.
- Communities' and women's awareness on using alternative eco-friendly sources of power (solar, wind energy, etc.) is also very low. At the same time, there are plenty of successful projects and organizations advocating renewable energy in the entire region.
- Women do not have opportunities to meaningfully engage in climate policy and decision-making processes.
- Our current economic model depends on continuous oil extraction and the corporate power that goes with that. While they talk about reducing carbon and developing eco-friendly approaches, they continue to profit of the environmental degradation of the earth.
- In order to achieve climate justice, these polluting industries need to be held accountable for their role in exacerbating climate change.
- Within the region, warzones are a threat to water reservoirs and electricity plants. Rivers are polluted. The chemical industry and mining industry located in conflict-affected areas are a threat to the local population in case military action leads to destruction of industrial infrastructure.
- Gender- and socially-blind emergency plans and no system in place to provide gender responsive support for people affected by natural disasters and conflicts, particularly for women and girls with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ and ethnic minorities who face intersectional discrimination and violence.
- Lack of access of rural women to modern farming technologies and practices on climate change resilience and adaptation, strong patriarchal culture and practices limit women's rights and opportunities, which also contribute to an increase in gender-based violence (GBV). Rural women's incomes stay very dependent on natural resources and climate conditions and climate change such as a reduction in water resources, due to glacier melting as well as changes in temperature, impact seriously their livelihoods.
- Absence of information exchange channels as well as joint practices of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and conflict prevention, of the population, living in the inter countries' pre border territories as well as in mountain regions, there is no single channel of dissemination of information among governmental structures and the population of rural areas. It creates risks of normalizing inequality, discrimination, and can potentially lead to conflict situations.

- Availability of National Action Plans (NAPs) on gender equality, UNSCR 1325 'Women, Peace and Security', and other does not guarantee their implementation, since the monitoring and evaluation systems with specific indicators are not elaborated and do not have accompanying budget and resources.

Legal environment and barriers

- Climate and environmental policies in the region often lack a gender lens. International conventions do give guidelines and requirements regarding integrating gender, such as the Gender Action Plan within the Paris Agreement, but there is lack of implementation. Climate Change Strategies have been adopted, though these are often not gender-sensitive.
- Regarding a toxic-free environment, most countries in the region have signed and ratified international conventions such as the Stockholm Convention. However, the political will to properly research climate change and analyze it from a gender equality perspective is absent. Investments in fossil fuels and petrochemical industries continue, while investments into climate solutions, especially those that take gender equality into account are lagging behind. Lack of regulations, in particular gender-sensitive ones, on GMOs, usage of chemicals, pollution, etc. on local and national levels is a common trait in all the target countries. There are some conventions signed and ratified, such as the Chemical
- Conventions and the Stockholm Convention, but overall women are not engaged in decision-making processes and marginalized groups are not even considered in legal documents, e.g. eco-migrants.
- A lot of young people and activists are mobilizing to clean up plastic, which on the one hand is a positive gesture, yet on the other hand, from a global perspective, leads to fragmental mobilization of different groups. This is not enough, as the collected garbage is stored somewhere out of sight and not taken care of properly, due to the lack waste management infrastructure. This kind of approach does not solve the systemic problems of lack of proper recycling and waste management policies and strategies to reduce the consumption of plastic.

Key concerns:

- How to push governments to prepare and enforce a gender- inclusive climate action policy? The majority of governments only focus on the vulnerability of women in cases of natural disasters. How can we shift the focus from disaster risk reduction strategies, to a more comprehensive, holistic approach over climate change? Who are the stake-holders?
- What are the biggest barriers before and best practices of climate activism led by women and youth?
- There is very little ecofeminism mobilization in WBT sub-region. Very few groups are exclusively focusing on feminist climate activism. Also, legal and strategic frameworks regarding climate justice and environmental protection are fairly new and incomplete in the WBT sub-region. A push is needed to speed up mobilization.
- Definition of ecofeminism as the ideological and conceptual driver of feminist action in climate & environmental justice needs an update. Feminists need to rethink and reclaim ecofeminism. Also, there is a need to have a more intersectional and holistic approach while fighting against structural barriers.
- The main obstacles and structural barriers regarding climate justice and gender equality are: Militarism, neoliberal Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Extractivism.

- Feminist actions to shift to transformative actions that address root causes by deconstructing and destabilizing the restraining factors and away from predominant focus on the consequences of environment change and climate injustice. Governments, in most cases, are part of the problem. COVID-19 teaches us how important it is to shift the narrative and practice from hard infrastructure to economy of care (elderly care, transport, public health services) to address broader more holistic landscape of different needs of different groups of women, and of different generations.
- CSO and governments in WBT must address the growing inequalities, along with the local and regional impacts of the crises. Rural women and women with disabilities must not be left behind throughout climate risks discussions. Social injustice must be at the core of climate justice discussions.
- In WBT policy, women are only mentioned in the context of disaster risk reduction, and they are depicted as potential victims. In reality, women play a leading role in mitigating impact of climate change. Local level actions related to DRR should be taken into account in bigger policy-making, since local approaches in DRR have a better understanding of vulnerable communities' needs. A more prominent role is needed for local governments.
- Other stakeholders, including private sector actors and media must be involved in activities for climate justice.
- Women need to build solidarity with youth. Increased funding for women's organizations, youth organizations, sustainable agriculture and renewable energy sources is a way to speed up and deepen change. Climate budgeting ought to be restructured in order to dedicate funds for solving and preventing the problems.

Recommendations

- Develop laws and implement international conventions on chemicals.
- Advocate locally for EU directives on climate change solutions.
- Introduce legally binding principles of big polluters pay.
- Support green energy alternatives rather than existing fossil fuel systems.
- Regulate GMOs by law, banning plastic bags, enforce laws on water sanitation, and impose relevant regulations to ensure better health of the local population.
- Connect local to global and vice versa – strengthen the interconnection between the feminist and environmental justice movements. Recognize that the feminist agenda is integral to achieve climate justice.
- Ensure that climate funding, from local to national levels, reaches local communities and especially women's organizations that have experience with gender-just climate solutions. This includes setting ambitious gender criteria in funding.
- Advocate with national governments to specifically provide funding for women's leadership and engagement in the energy transition.
- Strengthen and develop women's leadership and capacity building for better understanding of issues of climate change, risks of natural disasters, peace and security. Enhance women's resilience to climate change as well as their ability to manage the risks related to climate change.
- Create conditions for the active participation of women in the processes assessing the current situation and risks, ensure their engagement in the elaboration of policy and planning at every level: local, national, regional, and global.

- Introduce environmental education and research on environmental protection measures with a gender perspective to contribute to preservation, restoration, and expansion of planted forests and biodiversity protection.
- Establish an early warning and response system for natural disaster risks and conflicts on community level with the participation of women and youth.
- Support to women's participation in the water resources management. Develop women's inter regional cooperation on efficient and inclusive water resource management.
- Strengthen the role of local authorities in joint situation analysis with community outreach, including active participation of women and youth, in climate change response as well as "Women, Peace and Security" programs.
- Invest in the social and economic advancement of women by creating opportunities for income-generating activities and the development of new professional skills and competencies.
- Realize behavioral change programs in families and communities through women and girls, i.e.: water- and energy-saving, switch to alternative energy sources, non-usage of plastic, recycling of household waste, organic waste processing (composting), consumption of local products, etc.