

Call for Contribution: Volume 33, Issue 1

Transforming land and water rights, improving rural livelihoods and carving just responses to the climate crisis

About the journal

Gender & Development (G&D) is a unique journal that offers a forum to share experiences and analysis between feminist activists, scholars, and women leaders across the globe working in research, policy, and practice. The March 2025 Issue of G&D will focus on transforming land and water rights, improving rural livelihoods and carving just responses to the climate crisis.

The context

“Farmers and rural populations are indeed at the frontlines of the crisis while barely contributing to climate change” (Pagnon and Bradley 2022)

Women constitute approximately 40 percent of the agricultural labour force in the global South, ranging from 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent or more in parts of Africa and Asia (FAO 2011). Despite women’s overwhelming labour presence in agriculture around the world, a large proportion of women farmers do not own land. According to Landesa (2016), 400 million women are engaged in agriculture. Yet, globally, less than 15 percent of all landholders on average are women with wide regional variations. For example, women in the MENA region own only 4 per cent of agricultural land (FAO 1994), while in Latin America, it is 30 per cent (FAO 2010). In India, 75 percent of the women rural workers are involved in agriculture and only 12 percent own land (Agriculture Census 2015-16 by Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare). In over 30 countries, women and girls do not have the same right to land and property inheritance as men and boys (Landesa 2016), or if they do have these rights, they cannot exercise them because of the overarching systemic patriarchy, or lack of security and threat of violence in regions undergoing war, conflict and/or complex humanitarian emergencies. Thus, even though women may have legal rights over their lands, they are unable to exercise these for example in the Sahel region (IRRC 2022) which is afflicted by conflict and is severely drought prone. Land and environmental defenders in countries across Latin American region live under the constant threat of dispossession and death (Smith and Allen 2023, Vargas and Oviedo 2023, Global Witness 2023). Furthermore, women face barriers in owning livestock, access to financial services and credit, water resources, irrigation programmes and agricultural education and training, as well as basic agricultural technologies (FAO and CGIAR 2018, Huyer 2021).

Existing data on varied patterns of land ownership disaggregated by gender and region is uneven and dated. Applied scholars have called for collecting data on different types of land ownership (joint and sole, private and communal) and assert that joint landownership does not imply equal ownership (Najjar, Baruah and Garhi 2020; Najjar and Baruah 2023; Doss, Meinzen-Dick, and Bomuhangi 2014; Jacobs and Kes 2015). Understanding communities’ relationship to lands such as Afro-descendant communities which exercise right to collective lands requires reimagining capitalistic concepts of ‘ownership’ and ‘property’ while affording policy attention to tenure and decisions related to land use. This inequitable pattern of land ownership, tenure, decision making

and access to resources is deeply gendered and has severe social and economic implications on marginalised women.

Deteriorating climate conditions have further exacerbated land degradation, land dispossession, water scarcity, food insecurity, and livelihood insecurity, all of which affect women living in rural areas the most (Landesa 2023), and particularly the landless and small farm holders, driving them deeper into economic vulnerability. Further, definitional barriers (often related to land ownership and customs) result in women farmers being invisibilised as in the context of India (Agarwal 1995, Bedi 2018). All these factors result in the lack of recognition of women's contributions to agriculture and the rural economy and diminishing of their rights and agency.

Land, water, rural livelihoods and the climate crisis

Climate change results in reduced access to land, water resources, increasing temperatures, and shifts in rainfalls which increases food security risks (Huyer 2021). A study in India found that crop failure, low agricultural production, and poor livestock health related to climate change were some of the problems that affected rural livelihoods (Roy, Kumar and Rahman 2024). In Nigeria, a study looking at climate change, rural livelihoods, and the ecosystem nexus found that there had been slight modifications in cropping schedules, and fishing and hunting had become vulnerable livelihoods over the last 30 years (Fadairo et al. 2021). Climate change is also a driver of migration with men migrating while women are left to take care of farming, resulting in increased burdens on them (Lei and Desai 2021). Further, climate change has pronounced negative impacts for rural marginalised populations including indigenous and black women, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, migrant women, refugees, and those living in disaster prone regions who are more vulnerable to loss of lands and livelihoods due to erratic weather {Explainer: How Gender Inequality and Climate Change Are Interconnected | UN Women – Headquarters 2022}. Marginalised women, in particular, those living in regions that are prone to floods experience loss and damage every rainy season according to Oxfam 2020 report that is based on the lived experiences of men and women in Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste (Wickramaratne and de Silva 2023). According to the UNDP and Climate Change 2021 report (24), climate change accentuates gender-based inequalities, and 80 percent of people who are displaced by climate change are women.

Without equitable access to land rights and ownership, women are often unable to make decisions about agriculture that would optimally enable them to adapt and thrive despite climate change. This can include everything from decisions regarding which food or cash crops to grow, which trees to plant for shade and to prevent soil erosion, how often to leave farms fallow to enable the soil to recover, and how best to use and invest income from agriculture. Women's marginalisation in land and property regimes also translates directly into weaker access to credit and capital, irrigation technologies (including drip), training, and other inputs that influence agricultural productivity, as well as governmental programmes like compensation and crop insurance that might help counteract climate induced losses (Oxfam 2023 report by Wickramaratne and de Silva). Further, they might be reluctant to make investments that strengthen resilience in the long term (Kedia 2020, Wickramaratne 2023). When women own lands, they are more likely to adopt climate-resilient agricultural practices (Vasavada 2024). Studies indicate that "lands managed by local peoples with secure rights experience lower rates of deforestation, store more carbon, hold more biodiversity, and benefit more people than lands managed by either public or private entities" (Zakout and While 2019). Secure community land rights is therefore a crucial yet untapped mitigation strategy for the climate crisis itself.

Climate coloniality and its uneven burden

“Indigenous Peoples are expected to pay the highest price for climate change mitigation, despite having the lowest levels of carbon emissions because of this CO2lonialism” (Chief Ninawa Huni Kui and Dr. Vanessa Andreotti 2022).

Climate coloniality is manifested in diverse forms through structures, systems, epistemologies as well as through fossil fuel capitalism, neoliberal growth, and development models (Gaard 2015). Climate coloniality is ‘more than a metaphor’ (Bhambra and Newell 2023) and it has exacerbated vulnerabilities to climate hazards, in addition to inequity and marginalisation due to gender, ethnicity, disability, age (IPCC 2023). Further, colonial land and conservation policies affect indigenous and Afro-descendants negatively while deepening the climate crisis. Scholars have argued that colonial land tenure systems that place emphasis on individualised land ownership, cultivation, and ‘fortress’ style conservation are problematic (Dominguez and Luoma 2020). Land has played a fundamental part in the story of colonial occupation in many countries and other forms of historic and modern inequality—and inversely, it is key to a fairer society based on the equal sharing of resources (Oxfam 2023). Historically, customary land tenure protected the rights of women through collective land protection, not only spouses but also other women who are not married. These customary tenure systems were delegitimised by the colonialists who went on to promote individual land certificates that weakened community’s rights to land. Climate risks have further exacerbated these colonial land-based inequities. In recent times, large-scale acquisition of lands by countries and corporations in the global South mimic colonialism in new institutional forms, raising questions related to land use and complicate responses to the climate crisis (Táiwò 2019).

Colonial power dynamics continue to be reflected and reproduced in international climate discourse and conventions as the solutions they offer still do not consult or include those most affected such as rural, indigenous and Afrodescendent communities who remain most at risk to effects of climate change. Referring to one of the consultations at the COP 27, Chief Ninawa Huni Kui and Andreotti (2022) explained, “the consensus seems to be that green multicultural capitalism, a carbon neutral and more “inclusive” version of capitalism, will prevent further climate catastrophe.” Though they agreed that spaces like the COP remain important to discuss and debate the drivers and solutions of climate change, a more honest discussion about the historical and current role of rich countries and corporations in the commodification and commercialisation of nature is more necessary than ever. An effective and adequate response to the current climate crisis necessitates an approach that centres perspectives, knowledges, and practices of those at the margins – women, indigenous peoples, refugees, migrants, elderly, people with disability, and those who are racially marginalised. Even as the UN pushes for the Global New Green Deal, Machala (2021) iterates, “A feminist and decolonial Global Green New Deal (GGND) ... recognizes that the ecological collapse we are experiencing in climate change is the direct result of an unequal social contract in which these hierarchies shape our social and economic relations.” A decolonial and feminist approach is therefore critical to address the land, water, and climate crisis.

Recognising women’s collective role in agricultural production, sustainable agricultural practices, land and water preservation, and climate risk adaptation and mitigation strategies

“Rural women farmers might be the world’s most extraordinary unsung agents of change when it comes to climate resilience” (Beltchika 2022).

The role of women’s collective action in adopting climate resilient strategies and climate smart technologies is well documented (Scheuman 2023, Mishra and Gadeberg in CGIAR 2022 provide

examples from case studies in Nepal, Ethiopia, Ghana, Senegal; Srivastava 2023 draws from a case study in India). Women's groups and collective action are critical in adopting and advocating climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, and meeting the targets set by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Huyer 2021). Studies indicate the role of women's leadership and decision making both within the home and in resource management and distribution, climate resilient strategies and conservation (Huyer 2021, Zwarteveen et al 2017, Kulkarni 2016) and that their meaningful participation at the local level is associated with more effective governance, management of resources, protection of women's rights and agency and effective climate action (UNHCR 2019). Furthermore, women's collectives enhance agricultural productivity, improve sustainable rural livelihoods and tackle agrarian stress better through strategies such as pooling land, labour capital and skills. Participation in collectives also strengthens the position of small land holders in labour markets, as per a study in eastern India and Nepal (Sugden, Agarwal 2020 et al). Such alternative land arrangements hold potential to challenge gender and caste-based inequities that are historically embedded within feudal arrangements as seen in Telangana and Kerala in India (ibid, Agarwal 2019). Kulkarni (2016) and Hofstetter, van Koppen and Bolding (2021) through case studies in India and South Africa, illustrate the value of collective forms of water governance and management as pathways out of resource scarcity.

In addition to enabling women to access and own land and other resources, it is important to strengthen and validate women's roles in agriculture. This is critical since women often see themselves and are seen by others as "helpers" rather than farmers (see e.g., Najjar and Baruah 2020). Furthermore, legal literacy and initiatives that raise awareness among women as well as men about the benefits of greater equity and that address fears about undoing customary male privileges are as crucial as policy reforms and state actions that protect women's interests and facilitate their agency. Gender equity goals can only be partially accomplished through legal measures and economic interventions, regardless of how well-intentioned and progressive they may be. Most notably as reported in South Asia and the MENA region, even when women are potentially able to acquire land and property through either inheritance, purchase in the market, or distribution by the state, they are unwilling or hesitant to assert the equal inheritance rights of sons and daughters with the land reverting to sons (Baruah 2010; Agarwal 1995; Najjar, Baruah and Garhi 2020).

Women have been advocating and spearheading movements for climate justice, local and sustainable solutions and gender-equitable land rights. They are asking - what is the future of land, forests, and those dependent on them in a world dominated by the capital interests that are rapidly disrupting social, economic and ecological systems and communities. Despite this, they are often not included in international climate policy discourse. Kulkarni (2016) asserts the need to go "beyond the politics of representation and developing new agendas and creative forms of engagement with people's movements- more specifically women's movements, farmers movements and unions working on the question of growing informalisation of the economy, greater accumulation of capital, increasing injustices and disparities in everyday living- to see the linkages between land, water, rivers, natural resources and livelihoods"(pp 73). This special issue invites contributions on such innovative and ground-up community mobilisation narratives.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the strong tendency to place the burden of cultivating sustainable agricultural and climate mitigation practices on women, without affording them their rightful space in political and policy discussions. This special issue calls for a gendered critique of outsourcing the task of cleaning up after the state, colonial and capitalist forces to the very groups that are most afflicted by them. Centring the interests of rural, indigenous and Afrodescendent women, recognising their knowledge and contribution, and acknowledging the

political and ecological importance of their needs and demands is the only way to move closer to achieving sustainable development goals and a just economic future(s).

Key objectives and themes of the Issue

This special issue aims to:

1. Highlight the inter-linkages between land, water, rural livelihoods, climate crisis and climate justice, through a feminist decolonial lens.
2. Forefront the voices, struggles, and movements of those most affected, specifically rural, indigenous and Afro-descendant communities whose livelihoods are deeply linked to natural resources.
3. Shine light on the valuable (and often unrecognised) contribution made by women to agricultural production, food security, water management, nutrition, climate resilient agriculture, ecological sustainability, tackling rural poverty, and enhancing rural economy and development.
4. Share challenges and learning, related to research, practice, and policy.

This issue will focus on the following sub-themes:

1. In what ways are land, water, and livelihoods being affected by climate change?
2. How are smallholder agriculture practices and livelihoods affected by climate crisis – what are their vulnerabilities, and how are they adapting to the climate crisis, land crisis, and associated insecurities such as food, water and nutritional insecurity?
3. What are the traditional and modern knowledges and technologies (including digital technologies) that communities and women in particular use to sustain their lands and livelihoods in the face of the climate crisis?
4. How can innovative methodological and epistemological approaches be employed to produce climate knowledge and disaggregated data that acknowledge and counter construct hierarchies of racial, gender, class, caste, sexuality, and ability-based inequalities?
5. What is the role of the state, civil society and markets and donor organisations in shaping the rural economy and rural livelihoods?
6. What is the role of farmers, indigenous and Afrodescendent communities, and environmental defenders in climate justice efforts?
7. How can the role of women farmer coalitions, alliances, and groups in voicing the needs and demands of marginalised communities, developing sustainable livelihoods and agricultural practices, carving alternate land, water use and ownership, pooling resources and cultivating community safety nets, tackling food insecurity, accessing markets and credit, and cultivating care in the face of economic and climate shocks; be recognised in policy and practice?
8. What are the ways in which gender, race, caste can be integrated into rural development policies, land and water policies, climate justice policies, and climate investments?
9. What are the ways in which local level practices and policies can be aligned with national, regional and international climate and agricultural policies, gender responsive climate adaptation and mitigation measures, gender-responsive climate finance mechanisms, and the overall achievement of SDGs?
10. Case studies and learnings

Our guest editors: This special issue will be guest edited by Dina Najjar, Naomi Shadrack and Sara Ahmed who have generated knowledge, conducted research, and led advocacy efforts on land and water rights, gender justice and climate change from different disciplinary positions like anthropology, environmental sociology, gender studies, rural and urban planning, and natural resource management.

Dr. Dina Najjar is a social and gender specialist at the International Center of Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA). Socio-cultural anthropologist by training, she focuses on the link between gender equality and policies; agricultural technologies and delivery systems; rural employment and migration; adaptation to climate change and productive assets, including access to land and ownership, in the MENA region. She has also conducted research in Uzbekistan, Kenya, Ethiopia, and India. She's fluent in Arabic and is proficient in French and Swahili. She received her Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Western Ontario, Canada.

Naomi Shadrack is a Women's Land Policy Advisor for Oxfam International. She leads Oxfam's advocacy efforts for women's land rights by leveraging Oxfam's land programmes, research, and diverse women's experiences worldwide. Her efforts have increased attention to securing women's land and property rights in international arenas.

Dr. Sara Ahmed has over 30 years of applied research experience on water, livelihoods and social equity. She has been actively engaged in teaching and mentoring young development professionals in India, managing large and complex regional research portfolios on water, food security and climate change in Asia, and advising a range of development organisations and water networks globally. Sara holds a PhD in Environmental Sociology from the University of Cambridge, U.K. and is currently an Adjunct Professor at the Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER), Pune. In 2017, Sara launched the Living Waters Museum, a digital repository curating visual narratives on India's water heritage. She is on the board of WaterAid, India; Wetlands International South Asia; and a Vice President on the board of the Global Network of Water Museums, supported by UNESCO-IHP. Sara has several peer reviewed publications and her last co-edited book is entitled, *Diverting the Flow: Gender Equity and Water in South Asia* (Zubaan and SaciWaters 2012).

Submissions

We invite contributions from rural practitioners, women environmental defenders, climate justice advocates, community and grassroots leaders, civil society organisations and networks, as well as researchers, academics, policymakers, and practitioners who work on land, water, livelihoods and climate crisis, particularly in the rural context.

Please submit your abstract or proposal using the google form link:

<https://forms.gle/GXpZ4R48SiGLTsNF8>

Please read the [Guidelines for contributors](#) carefully before sending through your abstracts.

Please send any queries to genderanddevelopment.south@gmail.com.

Guidelines for content

- Full research article should be no more than 7,000 words excluding references and abstract and annexures. The annexures can include photographs, maps, images, graphs, etc. Multi-media content can be embedded within the article and should be kept below 500MB file size. Guidelines for contributors can be found here.

- Shorter essays should be 4000 words, and these can include photographs, maps, images, graphs. Multi-media content should be kept below 500MB file size.
- Photo essay and illustrations can be uploaded on Flickr or any other image sharing platforms and then shared with the editorial team.
- All content must be original and authors are responsible for obtaining necessary consent and permission for the use of any third-party material.

For more information on the journal, visit: www.genderanddevelopment.org

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