



Benjamin Von Wong's Biodiversity Jenga, Cali, Colombia

IN BRIEF

# ADVANCING GENDER-RESPONSIVE SYNERGIES ACROSS THE RIO CONVENTIONS

*Gender Equality at the Intersection of Climate Action, Biodiversity Protection and Sustainable Land Management*



This brief is based on the forthcoming UN Women working paper on Rio Convention synergies and gender equality.

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# NOW IS THE TIME FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RIO CONVENTIONS

Synergies, not siloes, create solutions. Synergies represent the greater power of working together rather than separately. Nowhere is this more evident than in the three Rio Conventions – the treaties designed to protect life on earth. The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the UN Framework Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC) were adopted at the [Earth Summit](#) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 to address global environmental challenges and provide solutions. These solutions are only viable if they are grounded

in gender equality and human rights, including the [right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#) for all.

This brief highlights the urgency of addressing gender inequalities across the Rio Conventions, provides examples of where progress has been made and identifies clear entry points for addressing gender equality considerations across the Conventions. It makes recommendations for actions to accelerate the synergistic implementation of the gender provisions and action plans of the Conventions.

## INTERLINKED CRISES, INTERLINKED SOLUTIONS

The cascading crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation has accelerated and intensified over the past thirty years, underscoring the need for concerted action. Human pressures are pushing [one million species](#) to extinction in the coming years, with the catastrophic risk of losing 30-50 per cent of all species by 2050. Rising greenhouse gas emissions, largely produced by burning fossil fuels and unsustainable land use, are more than [60 per cent higher](#) than when international climate negotiations began in 1990. Human influence has unequivocally heated the atmosphere, oceans and land, while climate change exacerbates poverty and inequalities, especially those of gender, race, class, caste, age, Indigenous status, migration status and disability, putting at risk all human and non-human life on earth.

Because the crisis exacerbates [underlying gender inequalities](#), women, girls and gender-diverse people are disproportionately affected, undermining their rights, resources and resilience and pushing them and their communities further behind. Changes to ecosystems affect women and men in different ways, with gender inequalities rooted in social, economic and legal norms shaping roles and responsibilities related to environment and natural resources and to decision-making and participation. This can affect how women and men access and benefit from resources, affecting livelihoods and resilience. Women worldwide are often among the first to experience the devastating impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation. The lack of social protection, public services and sustainable infrastructure across urban, rural and remote areas compromises women's and girls' ability to provision food, water, energy and care for their families and communities.

In contexts of drought, water scarcity and eroding resources, women and girls are forced to spend more time traveling [greater distances to collect water](#) and biomass for fuel and to forage for food and medicine. This, in turn, sets them further back in having the time and resources to [go to school](#) and earn an adequate income and makes it harder for them to have a say in the conservation and management of community natural resources.

It is important to remember, however, that women are not only vulnerable to extreme weather and heat events and environmental degradation, but they are also effective agents of change. Women often have a strong body of knowledge, expertise and practice that can be applied for climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity protection, sustainable land management and disaster risk reduction.

Despite significant steps forward in acknowledging women's contributions to climate action, biodiversity conservation, and land management, women's leadership and participation are not systematically integrated into efforts at the grassroots, national, or multilateral levels. But when women have access to resources, including climate and environmental finance, when their rights to land and other resources are secure, and their leadership and participation in public and political life and movements for change are recognized and valued, it leads to more effective climate and environmental policies and impacts, more efficient and sustainable management of resources, improved food systems and food security as well as increased empowerment to make decisions and effect change.

## FOCUS ON GENDER-RESPONSIVE ACTION

Each of the Rio Conventions has set significant milestones in addressing gender equality, and the realization of the empowerment and rights of women and girls. Adopted in 2022 under the UNCBD, the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#) (KMGBF) and the Gender Plan of Action emphasize the critical role that women play in advancing a holistic approach to biodiversity conservation, sustainable development, and global prosperity. In 2014 under the UNFCCC, the [Lima Work Programme on Gender](#) launched, and in 2015, the Paris Agreement integrated gender equality as a preambular principle for all climate action. The UNCCD [Gender Action Plan](#) places gender equality firmly at the core of its mandate as a vital catalyst of environmental progress.

The implementation of the Rio Conventions, including gender provisions and action plans, remains largely siloed,

reducing opportunities and generating inefficiencies that stretch government capacities and budgets. Current coordination mechanisms fall short and capacity is insufficient. Parties to the Rio Conventions, as well as their Secretariats and stakeholders at all levels, urgently need to overcome these silos by focusing on the interlinkages and collaborating on a strategic approach that builds [gender-responsive synergies across all processes](#) – from meetings, to negotiations, to finance, to capacity development, implementation, monitoring and reporting. Identifying and implementing synergies would not only advance the mutual goals of the Rio Conventions [but also increase efficiencies](#) across policies, programming and financing.

Box 1 provides some examples of progress in overcoming silos towards a gender-responsive approach. Much more, however, remains to be done.

### BOX 1

#### Promising Examples Linking Gender Equality and the Rio Conventions

- The September 2024 report of the [UN Secretary General's Panel on Critical Energy Transition Minerals](#) calls for protecting women's human rights in a just sustainable energy transition, clearly linking climate action, the goals of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and the principles of the UNCCD, including land rights and tenure security of Indigenous peoples and local communities.
- In July 2024, the [Rio Convention Secretariats joined with the Women's Land Rights Initiative \(WLRI\)](#), TMG Research and the Robert Bosch Stiftung to bring together 50 women on advancing synergies across the Rio Conventions through the intersecting issue of women's land rights and tenure security, with the aim of increasing overall collaboration, innovation, effectiveness, and efficiency in expenditures.
- In 2018, Costa Rica established the [For All Coalition](#), which gathered key champions from governments, UN entities, international and regional organizations, think tanks and research institutions, civil society and grassroots organizations to ensure systematic, timely and strategic action to integrate a gender perspective in multilateral environmental agreements, including the three Rio Conventions.

# KEY ENTRY POINTS FOR GENDER EQUALITY ACROSS THE RIO CONVENTIONS

The 1992 Earth Summit saw the adoption of [Agenda 21](#), which called for “Global Action for Women Towards Sustainable and Equitable Development,” seeking to “establish mechanisms at the national, regional and international levels to assess the implementation and impact of development and environment policies and programmes on women and to ensure their contributions and benefits...” This formed the basis for the interlinked and gender-responsive implementation of the three Rio Conventions in concert with one another.

Over the next three decades, Rio Convention Secretariats and national governments acted to achieve these goals by leading numerous collaboration and coalition building initiatives and engaging in research and analysis on the

linkages between gender equality and better environmental, economic and social outcomes, as well as the adoption of gender action plans in all three Rio Conventions. The launch of key surveys on Rio Conventions synergies in [2010](#) and in [2017](#) on gender across the Rio Conventions provided further evidence of collective will, including amongst nations, to harmonize implementation of the Rio Conventions in a gender-responsive manner. But despite these efforts, as of 2024, there is no formal umbrella mechanism to ensure a coordinated, gender-responsive approach to the implementation of the Rio Conventions. However, the collective efforts to date do provide the basis for identifying entry points for pursuing a synergistic approach (please see Box 2).

## BOX 2

### Ten Key Entry Points for Gender-Responsive Implementation of Rio Conventions

#### Human rights, gender equality and environmental sustainability

- The [UN General Assembly recognized the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#), which spans the three Rio Conventions.
- Without access to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, women and girls are disproportionately vulnerable to poverty, loss of livelihoods, hunger, poor health, gender-based violence, including child, early and forced marriage, displacement and conflict.

#### Women environmental human rights defenders

- As of January 2022, [some 3,500 socioenvironmental conflicts worldwide were documented, of which almost a quarter involved women environmental human rights defenders and 81 led to their assassinations](#).
- The link between protection for women environmental human rights defenders and gender-responsive implementation must be mainstreamed across the Rio Conventions.
- By linking gender-responsive representation and protections for women environmental human rights defenders, the Rio Conventions can lay the groundwork to formally address this intersection in the implementation of NBSAPs, NDCs, NAPs and other national mechanisms and plans.

### **Women's full, equal and meaningful participation in public life and decision making**

- Women's and girls' voice, agency, leadership and participation continue to be under-represented and under-valued in climate and environmental policies and decision-making processes. At the national level, the [proportion of environmental ministers globally who are women has increased but remains well under 30 percent](#). At the local level, [41 percent of 68 countries have quotas for women's participation in land governance, and only 22 percent of 104 countries](#) have high levels of women's participation in integrated water management.
- The Rio Conventions provide key opportunities to increase women's voice, agency and leadership across all areas of climate and environmental action, from local to global, and for their engagement in decision making processes.

### **Women's land and resource rights and tenure security**

- Women's land and resource rights are critical for their empowerment, livelihoods, resilience and participation in sustainable natural resource management.
- About a [quarter of employed women worldwide work in agriculture, forestry and fishing](#), demonstrating their dependency on healthy ecosystems, and comprise [38 per cent of all workers in these areas, but less than 15 percent of agricultural landholders globally are women](#). They are therefore excluded from decisions regarding sustainable land management and sustainable natural resource use, which can exacerbate environmental crises.

### **Environment and women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work**

- [Women's and girls' unpaid care, domestic and communal work](#) is an issue that cuts across objectives of all three Rio Conventions. Integrated efforts to [recognize, reduce, redistribute, and in the case of paid work, represent and reward it appropriately are necessary. Its role in building climate and environmental resilience](#) is fundamental.

### **Gender-responsive financial mechanisms to implement the Conventions**

- The main climate and environmental finance mechanisms now integrate gender equality considerations, including often requiring gender action plans when deciding on funding, but performance indicators and assessment of benefits for women and girls is lacking.
- Climate official development assistance (ODA) with gender equality as a principal objective, as designated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), [has declined since 2015](#) when the Paris Agreement was signed. [In 2022, just 2 per cent of mitigation ODA and 4 per cent of adaptation ODA had a principal gender equality objective](#).
- Out of the [\\$2.4 billion of climate ODA channeled via civil society organizations, mostly in donor countries, only \\$43 million went to feminist and women's organizations](#) and movements.
- Ensuring more public finance and resources go to gender equality, mainstreaming gender considerations in new funds, and directly funding women's rights and grassroots organizations is necessary.
- While private finance is important, it must be seen as a supplement to public finance and must not be relied upon to the extent that it detracts from the urgency of meeting environmental goals and the full inclusion of those who are affected by the implementation of and benefits from these goals.

### Gender-responsive just transitions

- [Over 1.2 billion jobs worldwide are dependent on environments at risk from human activities](#), and women are at risk due to their high dependence on sectors especially vulnerable to climate change related disasters, land degradation and biodiversity loss – like agriculture and care work.
- Estimates indicate that with supportive policy measures, a shift to low-carbon and circular economies could create some [100 million jobs by 2030, although mostly in male-dominated sectors, and some 80 million jobs could be lost](#) due to intensifying impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution.
- Just transitions can rectify such gender inequalities in the labour market through the creation of decent jobs for women in the green, blue and care economies more broadly, accompanied by gender-responsive social protection to support climate and environmental resilience.
- The Rio Convention gender plans provide for women and girls at all levels to have access to finance and resources that support their capacity to participate in and shape just transitions.

### Gender, health and environment

- Well-functioning ecosystems provide goods and services essential for human health. Increasingly unsustainable practices are placing pressure on natural resources resulting in soil, water and air pollution, increased emissions of greenhouse gases, deforestation and land use change, expanded urban areas, introduction of non-native species, inadequate water resources and food insecurity. These changes are having disproportionate impacts on women's and girls' health.
- [Ambient outdoor pollution and household air pollution together lead to 6.7 premature deaths annually. Every year 3.2 million deaths, disproportionately women and children, are attributable to household air pollution](#) produced by inefficient and polluting fuels and technologies.
- Concerted efforts are needed across the Rio Conventions to strengthen collaborative, cross-sectoral research to address the impacts of the environmental crisis on women's and girls' health.

### Gender and environment data

- The absence of gender and environment data, information and statistics has been identified as a key constraint to gender-responsive implementation and reporting of the Rio Conventions.
- Gender and environment data is impossible to silo, as it reveals the intersections between gender inequalities, biodiversity loss, land degradation and climate change. This is especially evident in issues such as food system sustainability, which is closely related to women's limited land rights and tenure security. Integrated data collection across the gender and environment nexus is needed.

### Disaster risk reduction

- It is critical to leverage synergies and align policy objectives to build on the Rio Conventions and their gender action plans and the [Gender Action Plan to Support Implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030](#) to address women's resilience to disasters.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION ON RIO CONVENTION SYNERGIES AND GENDER EQUALITY

A gender-responsive and human rights-based approach is fundamental to identifying and advancing synergies across the Rio Conventions and their implementation. These synergies protect women's human rights, including Indigenous women's rights, in biodiversity and climate action, and promote women's land rights and tenure security across the Rio Conventions. Governments should build upon progress towards this synergistic approach that began with the Earth Summit in 1992 and include women and girls and their organizations at all levels in this process. Substantial commitments and resources for capacity development will help ensure effective and long-lasting impacts in the gender and environment nexus.

Formal, coordinated leadership and action across Rio Conventions would be cost-effective and efficient, bringing multiple co-benefits for women and girls. Globally, the Rio Conventions Secretariats and the UN system are identifying concrete areas of cooperation to advance gender issues across the Conventions. At the national level, there is a clear benefit to enhancing collaboration among Rio Convention

national focal points and other national officials. This allows for knowledge sharing, complementary programming, stakeholder engagement and gender-responsive reporting, including in alignment with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

National Focal Point coordination will strengthen outreach and interaction with relevant national ministries, including those representing women and gender issues, and women's organizations on integrating gender considerations in the Rio Convention processes and decisions, gender action plans and gender-responsive national implementation. This will also facilitate implementing, financing and monitoring mechanisms, such as the UNFCCC National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), UNCCD National Action Programmes (NAPs) and Land Degradation Neutrality Targets, and the UNCBD Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). Please see the Annex for global opportunities to advance Rio Convention synergies with gender-responsive approaches.



Photo: UN Women / Ryan Brown



## **1. Foster long-lasting leadership and capacity for the Rio Convention Secretariats, Parties, National Focal Points, and stakeholders to build gender-responsive synergies.**

- Promote women's and girls' voice, agency, leadership and participation, including grassroots women, Indigenous Peoples, youth and rural, urban and local communities, to foreground their lived experiences across the Rio Conventions.
- Convene Parties, partners and stakeholders to review challenges and barriers to gender-responsive synergies and undertake concrete measures to overcome them.
- Leverage Parties' collective voice as champions of gender equality to integrate and implement cross-cutting gender perspectives.
- Secure commitments at the highest level to devote capacity, staff, communications and time for Rio Conventions Secretariat coordination and stakeholder engagement.
- Ensure National Focal Point capacity, coordination and exchange of information, including with relevant national ministries and women's groups, to integrate gender-responsive objectives in the Rio Conventions processes and implementation.

## **2. Establish a formal coordination mechanism to support synergistic planning, implementation, monitoring and reporting.**

- Identify and integrate common gender equality goals and language in Rio Conventions negotiations and decisions.
- Ensure the integration of gender action plans with overall implementation of the Rio Conventions.
- Generate comparable and gender-responsive indicators for monitoring and evaluation.
- Coordinate with National Focal Points to identify opportunities to increase efficiency and improve gender integration in national plans and programmes.

## **3. Engage financing mechanisms to enable synergies and gender-responsive action.**

- Increase finance from all sources for gender-responsive initiatives that cut across the Rio Conventions, ensuring that public finance is primary and private finance supplementary.
- Develop national capacities to finance gender-responsive initiatives across the Rio Conventions.
- Fund gender and environment constituencies to work jointly across the Rio Conventions.
- Increase financing and direct access to funding for women in all their diversity and their organizations at all levels.

## **4. Harmonize communications, outreach opportunities and advocacy.**

- Build momentum and support for cohesive and gender-responsive implementation of the Rio Conventions.
- Develop and apply a coordinated communications and advocacy strategy and common messaging that highlights intersecting and recurring gender inequalities in sectors covered by the three Rio Conventions, as well as measures to overcome them while enhancing environmental outcomes.
- Create a communications, outreach and advocacy platform in collaboration with civil society and other partners and stakeholders on gender-responsive Rio Convention synergies, offering data, evidence, knowledge and tools.

## Annex

# ADVANCING GENDER-RESPONSIVE ENVIRONMENTAL SYNERGIES IN KEY GLOBAL FORUMS THROUGH 2025

Global Forum	Key Opportunities	Dates
UN Convention on Biological Diversity - 16 <sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (UNCBD COP16)	<p>COP16 considered steps to advance synergies in <a href="#">draft decisions</a>* on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation with other conventions and international organizations (CBD/COP/16/L.30) invites Rio Convention Parties to strengthen synergies and cooperation in implementation.</li> <li>• Biodiversity and climate change (CBD/COP/16/L.24) invites Parties to consider integrating nature-based solutions, ecosystem-based and non-market-based approaches and Mother Earth-centric actions to climate change adaptation and mitigation and disaster risk reduction in revised NBSAPs through national coordination, planning, review and reporting processes, in a complementary and synergistic manner.</li> <li>• Programme of work on Article 8(j) related to indigenous peoples and local communities to 2030 (CBD/COP/16/L.5) implementation should follow a gender-responsive, human rights-based approach. Establishment of the subsidiary body on Article 8(j) (CBD/COP/16/L.6) offers opportunities to embed synergies and harmonized approaches.</li> <li>• Multi-year programme of work of the Conference of the Parties (CBD/COP/16/L.23) to consider the midterm review of the Gender Plan of Action (2023–2030) at COP17 in 2026 which will provide an entry point to discussing synergies across Rio Convention gender action plans.</li> </ul>	October–November 2024
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change - 29 <sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (UNFCCC COP29)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 5-year <a href="#">Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan (GAP)</a> will undergo a final review: opportunity to discuss harmonization with other Rio Convention gender plans.</li> <li>• Link discussions on capacity and finance to the GAP, which calls for capacities to be strengthened for governments and other stakeholders in mainstreaming gender equality, gender-responsive budgeting, accountability and NDCs.</li> </ul>	November 2024
UN Convention to Combat Desertification - 16 <sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (UNCCD COP16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Land Degradation Neutrality</a> targets linked to gender equality and women’s land rights to be updated and implemented.</li> <li>• Discussions on strengthening relationships with Rio Conventions: link with GAPs and harmonize gender integration.</li> </ul>	December 2024

69 <sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 69)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thirtieth anniversary of <a href="#">Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action</a> (Beijing+30) review assesses gender equality in context of climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation and implementation of the SDGs and Rio Conventions.</li> </ul>	March 2025
13 <sup>th</sup> Session of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HLPF to review: SDG 3 on health; SDG 5 on gender equality; SDG 8 on decent work and sustainable economic growth; SDG 14 on oceans; SDG 17 on partnerships, cutting across climate change, biodiversity loss and land degradation.</li> <li>• Reviews through an environmentally synergistic and gender-responsive lens will enable stronger solutions.</li> </ul>	July 2025
UN Framework Convention on Climate Change - 30 <sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (UNFCCC COP30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan (GAP) are due for renewal by Parties, building on their review at COP29 in 2024.</li> <li>• Opportunities to discuss increased financing and strengthened coordination in the GAP for Rio Convention synergies on key common issues: human rights, inclusive processes and capacity, land rights and tenure security, care and climate, gender and environment data, sustainable food systems, gender-responsive financing, peace and security and gender-based violence.</li> </ul>	November 2025

\*Please note that decisions on these points are pending adoption and may change by the time of publication of this brief.

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A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND  
GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED  
TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON  
MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.



220 East 42<sup>nd</sup> Street  
New York, New York 10017, USA

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