
ISF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

Gender-differentiated security impacts of environmental degradation

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The Women Peace and Security Helpdesk, managed by Saferworld in partnership with Conciliation Resources, GAPS UK, University of Durham, Researchers Without Borders, and The Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance was established in December 2021 to increase capability across the UK Government on WPS policy and programming in order to make its work on conflict and instability more effective. If you have an enquiry about the helpdesk or this report, please email us at wpshelpdesk@saferworld.org.uk

Direct Audience and suggested Internal Distribution: cross government teams working on nature, conflict, gender and security, including Integrated Security Fund (ISF) policy and programme teams and ODA-programme teams in priority regions

Confidentiality Status: Official



Task Overview

Title of Task:

Gender-differentiated security impacts of environmental degradation

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Background to assignment

There is growing international recognition that biodiversity loss, ecosystem degradation and the risk of ecosystem collapse are not only environmental challenges, but can act as **systemic threat multipliers**, exacerbating fragility, insecurity and violence. Recent international discussions, including at COP30, have increased attention on the **gendered impacts of nature loss**, alongside wider debates on conflict prevention, resilience and security.

While a substantial body of research exists on the social and economic impacts of environmental degradation, there is currently **no consolidated, policy-ready evidence base** that examines how ecosystem degradation and collapse **translate into gender-differentiated security risks**, particularly for women and girls. Existing work often stops short of analysing how impacts such as livelihood loss, food and water insecurity, displacement and governance erosion escalate into heightened exposure to insecurity, including gender-based violence, exploitation, organised environmental crime and conflict dynamics.

Understanding gendered security risks arising from ecosystem degradation is important for UK national security because these impacts often shape how environmental stress escalates into instability, conflict, displacement and transnational crime in regions of UK strategic interest. These dynamics can affect UK diplomatic, development and security priorities, including humanitarian demand, migration pressures, organised crime, and the stability of regions and supply chains on which the UK depends.

This gap limits the UK's ability to:

- integrate gendered ecosystem risks into security and early-warning analysis,
- design or adapt international policy and ODA programming to reduce unintended harm,
- and align action coherently across nature, conflict, Women, Peace and Security (WPS), and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) agendas.

The proposed work will address this gap by providing a **foundational evidence synthesis** on the gendered security impacts of ecosystem degradation and collapse, identifying both where the evidence base is strongest and where significant gaps remain. This will support UK policy development and programming across nature, security and gender, without being limited to a single policy framework.

Purpose of assignment

The assignment will deliver a rapid OSINT evidence review addressing the core research question: **How does ecosystem degradation and the risk of ecosystem collapse act as a threat multiplier for gender-differentiated security risks, and what are the implications for UK international policy and ODA programming across nature, conflict and security?**

Scope: The assignment will not be an academic survey, but a review that will result in a policy-usable evidence product. The focus will be 2 priority regions, Latin America and Middle East and North Africa.

Task outputs, presentation and dissemination

1. A **written evidence review/report** (approx. 20 pages), providing:
 - A clear synthesis responding to all core and supporting research questions
 - Key facts and a policy-focused executive summary including relevant policy insights (1-2 pages)
 - Evidence gaps and proposed indicators relevant for early warning
2. A **standalone policy summary** designed for rapid use by policy teams cross-government (1-2 pages).
3. **Presentation** (slide deck) suitable for delivery across government departments enabling wider briefing of policy teams working on nature, climate, gender, conflict, security, resilience and international policy.

Intended audience

The findings will be used by cross government teams working on nature, conflict, gender and security, including Integrated Security Fund (ISF) policy and programme teams and ODA-programme teams in priority regions, to inform policy development, programme design, and bilateral and multilateral engagement.

The analysis is also intended to provide a shared evidence base that could support future UK–EU dialogue and collaboration on gender, nature and security, should that strand be taken forward.

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Acronyms

AGENT	Advancing Gender in the Environment Programme
AMCAT	Amazon Catalyst for Forest Communities
CBD	UN Convention on Biological Diversity
CEWARN	Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism
COMESA	Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa
COMWARN	COMESA Early Warning System
COP	Conference of Parties
CRFM	Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism
CSW	Commission on the Status of Women
Defra	UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DTM	IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix
EA\$E	IRC's Women's Economic and Social Empowerment Programme
EcoWARN	ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
eEARTH	Early Action and Risk Tracing Hub
ENPAX	Environmental Peacebuilding Association
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
FIAP	Feminist International Assistance Policy
GAGGA	Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GBF	Global Biodiversity Framework
GPA	Gender Plan of Action
ICF	UK's International Climate Finance
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ISF	Integrated Security Fund
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature

IWM	International Water Management International
LGBTIQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and questioning
MEL	Monitoring, evaluation and learning
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NAP	National Action Plan
NORAD	North American Aerospace Defense Command
ODA	UK's Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIA	Inter-American Programme
RISE	Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Environments Challenge
RQ	Research question
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence
SRH	Sexual and reproductive health
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
SUIS	UN Situational Awareness Interface
UNDCCD	UN Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAWG	Violence Against Women and Girls
WFP	World Food Programme
WPS	Women, Peace and Security

Executive summary

Environmental degradation is increasingly shaping patterns of instability, conflict, and insecurity, acting as a threat multiplier that intensifies existing social, economic and political vulnerabilities. This report finds that these dynamics are not gender-neutral: they produce distinct and often heightened security risks for women and girls. Yet, despite a growing body of research on environmental degradation and conflict, there remains no consolidated, policy-ready evidence base that systematically explains how environmental degradation and potential ecosystem collapse, which is when ecological damage is so great that ecosystems lose their defining characteristics and ecosystem services, translates into gender-differentiated security outcomes, nor how policy and programmes can effectively mitigate these risks.

The UK's recent 'Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security'¹ identifies global ecosystem degradation and collapse as a UK national security threat; however, it does not explore the potential gendered drivers and impacts of this degradation and collapse. For the UK, these gaps have direct implications for national security, international development, and diplomatic priorities. Gendered insecurity linked to environmental degradation influences displacement, humanitarian demand, organised crime, and instability in regions of strategic importance. Addressing these risks requires moving beyond siloed approaches to integrate gender equality, environmental governance and security within a coherent policy and programming framework.

Key Findings

Pathways from environmental degradation to gendered insecurity

Environmental degradation contributes to gender-differentiated security risks through a set of interlinked and mutually reinforcing pathways – particularly livelihood loss and resource scarcity, forced displacement, and weakened governance. Fragility and conflict dynamics reinforce and intensify these pathways, as environmental degradation drives economic insecurity, increases women's presence in unsafe or contested environments, and erodes access to services and social support networks. At the same time, these conditions increase care burdens and reduce women's agency, collectively heightening their exposure to violence, food and economic insecurity, exploitation and other forms of insecurity. Pre-existing gender inequalities intensify vulnerability, limiting women's ability to adapt, recover or access protection and increasing risks of dispossession, long-term insecurity and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Displacement represents a critical escalation point and exacerbates gendered security risks for women and girls. Environmental stress compounded or driven by conflict forces displacement into settings characterised by weak governance, reduced service provision and increased competition for resources. In these contexts, SGBV, exploitation, exclusion, malnutrition and food insecurity and limited or absent protection systems are heightened and concentrated for women and girls.

Loss of livelihoods and resource insecurity from environmental degradation interacting with conflict dynamics have direct gendered health impacts, including malnutrition, heat stress and exposure to diseases, and destruction or deterioration of key health and sanitation services. A critical health impact in these conditions is the increased risk of various forms of SGBV, including

¹ HM Government (2026)

sexual violence and harassment, physical violence, emotional violence, child marriage, and intimate partner violence.

Environmental degradation and conflict reshape gender roles in ways that increase women's exposure to insecurity by expanding unpaid labour responsibilities, limiting economic agency and opportunities, and reinforcing harmful gender norms in fragile and conflict-affected settings. Women often absorb additional unpaid labour and enter precarious or high-risk livelihood activities to support their livelihoods, which can increase exposure to harm while constraining agency and mobility. In displacement settings, women and men face job and livelihood loss and limited access to resources and services, which can force women into exploitative labour and increase household tension and intimate partner violence from economic stress and shifting gender roles.

Environmental degradation and conflict erode social structures and norms, including the networks and essential services community members are dependent on for maintaining health, protection and well-being. The loss of these networks reduces women's and girls' coping capacity; creates conditions in which they face increased insecurity due to isolation, reduced protection and limited access to resources; and contributes to social isolation, grief and mental health impacts of migrants.

Contexts where risks are most acute

Gendered security risks linked to environmental degradation are most pronounced in fragile and conflict-affected settings, where governance is weak, institutions are under strain, and protection systems are limited or absent, and resource-dependent communities. Weak and fractured governance structures and social services leave women and girls vulnerable to numerous risks, including SGBV, with limited avenues for seeking recourse and support.

Displacement and humanitarian contexts concentrate environmental, economic and social pressures. Both displaced and host communities face heightened insecurity, increasing the likelihood of conflict and violence. Women and girls face unique and disproportionate risks due to social, economic and political gender inequalities in accessing land, resources, services, education and employment.

Who is most affected

Intersecting forms of inequalities and marginalisation, including poverty, indigeneity, ethnicity, age, disability, sexuality and gender identity, shape exposure to gendered security risks. Women in rural and resource-dependent communities and Indigenous women are particularly vulnerable due to their reliance on degraded ecosystems and limited access to alternative livelihoods. Increased attention and emerging evidence show that women environmental defenders, particularly Indigenous defenders, face heightened and often targeted violence linked to land and resource conflicts and extractive activities to silence and dissuade advocacy.

Displaced and migrant women and girls experience compounded vulnerabilities including limited access to services, legal protections, and economic opportunities. Across all contexts, poverty, ethnicity, age, disability and social exclusion further constrain access to protection, grievance, and resilience mechanisms.

What works—and what harms

Gender-responsive approaches in programme design and implementation are central to effective environmental, equitable and peacebuilding outcomes. Interventions that are grounded in a context-specific gender and social analysis, promote women's participation, engage women's groups and Indigenous women, and incorporate safeguards against SGBV are more likely to deliver sustainable environmental outcomes and reduce insecurity. Effective approaches share common characteristics: they are context-specific, support women's economic and political participation, and strengthen community-level governance and accountability mechanisms.

Conversely, gender-blind or technocratic interventions risk exacerbating harm. Programmes that do not account for power dynamics, increase labour burdens, or expose women to unsafe conditions can reinforce inequality and undermine both environmental and security outcomes. Similarly, enforcement-led or securitised approaches without safeguards can increase risks of exploitation and violence.

Priority evidence gaps

While the evidence base is growing, it remains fragmented, insufficiently reflecting the integrated intersection of the gender-environment-security nexus, and thus limiting operationalisation for policy and programming. There is limited systematic evidence on how environmental degradation translates into gendered insecurity and conflict outcomes, and on which interventions are most effective in mitigating these risks.

Key gaps are concentrated in high-risk contexts where policy and programming demand is greatest. These include specific gendered security risks in frontier and resource-dependent economies where environmental stress and conflict converge; and community-level governance systems, where evidence on effectiveness remains limited.

There is also limited evidence on women's roles within environmental and illicit economies, and on the gendered impacts of loss and damage, including impacts on cultural heritage and ecosystems. Evidence on gender-responsive recovery pathways remain underdeveloped, particularly in post-conflict settings and how these can support women and communities in restoring ecosystems, cultural heritage, and nature-based livelihoods.

Significant gaps persist in analysing intersectional security risks, particularly for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, or questioning (LGBTIQ+) individuals and persons with disabilities, and in understanding how multiple forms of marginalisation shape exposure to environmental and conflict-related insecurity and how to support these groups in accessing and rebuilding sustainable and safe nature-dependent livelihoods.

At the systems level, there is a lack of integrated, gender-disaggregated data linking environmental, conflict and SGBV indicators, constraining early warning, programme design and evaluation. Addressing these gaps will require targeted investment in mixed-methods and longitudinal research, embedded within programming.

Recommendations

Environmental degradation, gender inequality and insecurity are **mutually reinforcing and cannot be effectively addressed in isolation**. Current approaches that treat these issues separately risk limiting impact and, in some cases, exacerbating harm. The UK is well positioned

to lead in advancing an integrated approach that aligns environmental sustainability and resilience, gender equality and security priorities across policy and programming. By shifting from discrete interventions and embedding an integrated gender–environment–security approach within International Climate Finance (ICF) and the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA), the UK can enhance resilience, reduce instability and support more sustainable and inclusive outcomes in fragile and environmentally-degraded contexts.

Policy

ICF and ODA frameworks should more systematically incorporate gender–environment–security analysis, including explicit consideration of SGBV risks, displacement dynamics and conflict pathways. **This will require strengthening guidance, standards and accountability mechanisms**, ensuring that gender equality and safeguarding are embedded as core requirements within environmental, biodiversity, (and climate) investments.

Greater coherence across UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and multilateral engagement is also needed, including alignment with Women, Peace and Security (WPS) commitments. This would enable UK environment and nature finance to contribute more directly to conflict prevention, protection and resilience outcomes.

Programming

Integrated gender and social equality analysis should be standard practice, combining gender, conflict and political economy perspectives at design stage. Programmes should be designed to address both environmental drivers, social inequalities and security risks, with clear pathways to reducing risk and strengthening resilience.

Locally led and women-led approaches should be prioritised, including working with women's groups, recognising their role in strengthening governance, accountability and community resilience. Community-based monitoring, dispute resolution and resource governance mechanisms established with programming from the outset are particularly relevant in fragile contexts.

Economic interventions should focus on **safe and sustainable livelihood transitions** for all people, such as access to alternative income sources, with specific efforts to address gendered inequalities and security risks and particularly in contexts where environmental degradation is linked to exploitative or informal economies.

Understanding, addressing and mitigating SGBV risks should be treated as core programme requirements, with explicit measures to ensure safe participation and address harmful norms with women, girls, men, and boys.

Stronger integration with early warning and risk monitoring systems is required, including the use of gender-sensitive and environment-linked indicators in existing platforms to support anticipatory action.

1 Introduction

Environmental degradation contributes to loss of livelihoods and income, food and water insecurity, and forced displacement and migration, and declining ecosystem health is both a driver and is exacerbated by conflict, reinforcing cycles of instability. Research has shown, for example that diminished access to water and food played a significant role in social unrest in Syria and extreme drought increased violent conflict in Somalia.² Environmental degradation from conflict includes direct impacts, such as intentionally destroying or using natural resources to finance conflict and contamination of resources from military actions. For example, initial estimates in 2024 found that conflict and explosives generated more than 42 million tonnes of debris in the Gaza Strip,³ exposing internally displaced Palestinians to hazardous and polluting materials,⁴ and by September 2024, 67% of Gaza's cropland had been damaged from the war.⁵ Conflict can also have indirect impacts on the environment and degrade natural resources used by communities coping with and surviving conflict, such as unsustainable use of natural resources, environmental damage due to population displacement, and environmental crime. For instance, one study on conflict in Colombia found a strong positive correlation between natural capital loss and forced displacement resulting from conflict.⁶ Violent conflict and social unrest weaken environmental governance structures, policy coordination, and law enforcement.⁷ Furthermore, the impacts of environmental degradation disrupt and undermine efforts for peacebuilding and stability and prolong conflict.⁸

While a substantial body of research exists on the social and economic impacts of environmental degradation, there is currently no consolidated, policy-ready evidence base that examines how environmental degradation and potential ecosystem collapse, which is when ecological damage is so great that ecosystems lose their defining characteristics and ecosystem services, translates into gender-differentiated security impacts, particularly for women and girls.⁹ The UK's recent 'Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security'¹⁰ identifies global ecosystem degradation and collapse as a UK national security threat, however does not explore the potential gendered drivers and impacts of this degradation and collapse. Existing research and analysis often stops short of analysing how the social impacts of environmental degradation, such as livelihood loss, food and water insecurity, displacement and forced migration, and negative coping strategies, escalate into women and girls' heightened exposure to insecurity, including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and health impacts, exacerbated gender inequalities and gendered care burdens, and loss of support networks.

Understanding gendered security risks and impacts arising from environmental degradation and potential ecosystem collapse is important for UK national security because these impacts often shape how environmental stress escalates into instability, conflict, displacement and transnational crime in regions of UK strategic interest. These dynamics can affect UK diplomatic, development and security priorities, including humanitarian demand, migration pressures, organised crime, and

² Csevár (2021)

³ UN-HABITAT, UNEP, and UNOSAT (2024)

⁴ Walsh, Watson, Darbyshire, and Weir (2024)

⁵ FAO and UNOSAT (2024)

⁶ Ruiz-Agudelo, Suarez, and Gutiérrez-Bonilla (2025)

⁷ UNDRR and ISC (2025)

⁸ DCAF (2022)

⁹ Boyer, Meijer, and Gilligan (2020); Carr (2020); Oudraat and Brown (2022); Smith (2022); UN Women (2020)

¹⁰ HM Government (2026)

the stability of regions and supply chains on which the UK depends. Furthermore, the gap in the current evidence base on environment-conflict-gender security risks limits the UK's ability to integrate gender-differentiated impacts into security analyses; design international policy, frameworks and Official Development Assistance (ODA) programming to reduce risk and harm; and align action across Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), as well as Rio Convention agendas and international fora.

1.1 Purpose

This report is an evidence review of the gender-differentiated security impacts of environmental degradation and potential ecosystem collapse, focusing on two priority regions of Latin America and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), commissioned by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). This evidence review seeks to address the core research question and supporting research questions (RQ) of:

- **Core RQ:** How does ecosystem degradation and the risk of ecosystem collapse act as a threat multiplier for gender-differentiated security risks, and what are the implications for UK international policy and ODA programming across nature, conflict and security?
- **RQ 1:** Through what pathways do the social impacts of ecosystem degradation and potential ecosystem collapse on women and girls escalate into security risks?
- **RQ 2:** Where and under what conditions does ecosystem degradation interact with fragility, conflict and violence to produce distinct gendered security risks?
- **RQ 3:** Which groups of women are most exposed to security risks arising from ecosystem degradation and collapse, and in which priority ecosystems or regions is the evidence the strongest or weakest?
- **RQ 4:** What evidence exists on interventions that reduce gendered security risks linked to ecosystem degradation, particularly where governance is weak or conflict-affected? Conversely, what types of conservation or biodiversity interventions risk exacerbating harm, inequality or exposure to violence when social safeguards are inadequate?
- **RQ 5:** What tangible policy recommendations emerge for strengthening UK WPS implementation, tackling gendered security risks across nature programming, and integrating gendered ecosystem risk into security frameworks?

Additionally, this evidence review aims to identify where the evidence base is strongest and where significant gaps remain to support UK policy development and programming across nature, security and gender.

The findings will be used by cross-government teams working on nature, conflict, gender and security, including policy and programme teams and ODA-programme teams in priority regions, to inform policy development, programme design, and bilateral and multilateral engagement.

It is important to note that while risk of ecosystem collapse is included in the research questions, literature identified and reviewed for this report focused almost exclusively on environmental degradation and spoke on ecosystem collapse as a potential future risk if degradation continues. For this reason, the findings of this evidence review reflect the focus on environmental degradation. This focus is further discussed in the limitations sub-section and in section 3.1 on evidence gaps and remaining questions.

1.2 Methodology

This evidence review uses public source information identified through a desk review of academic and grey literature for the priority regions of Latin America and MENA. The desk review focused on resources and analysis to produce information on gender, security, and ecosystem degradation issues and efforts that are contextual, explanatory, evaluative, and generative to address the research questions.

- The research team used a keyword search via Google Scholar to identify resources from peer reviewed journals and via a general Google search to identify grey literature where relevant. Some of the keywords used are listed in Table 1 below. The team used combinations of these keywords and phrases in Google Scholar and utilised Boolean search techniques to narrow search results. It is important to note that the research team may have used additional keywords during the review process based on reading of initial resources as part of an iterative research process of searching and identifying resources. Additionally, the team identified relevant resources in the reference lists of academic articles. The research team conducted an initial search and selected over 200 resources for potential inclusion based on cursory review of abstracts and executive summaries. Criteria for selecting, reviewing, and including secondary resources for the report are drawn from FCDO guidance, which include the following criteria for assessing credibility of secondary resources as best practice:¹¹ **Currency: When the source was published.** The research team made efforts to identify and include resources published within the last decade (2016-2026), with few exceptions that highlighted important cases. This was to reflect the most current issues and findings available in the literature.
- **Coverage/Relevance: How closely related the source is to the priority regions and topics established in the research questions.** The team utilised keyword search terms to identify studies within the priority regions of MENA and Latin America. Most of the cases and examples included in the evidence review are within these regions. Global and other regional studies were included in the review only where cases are strong and to support background research.
- **Conceptual framing: Resource acknowledges existing research and theory and builds on the context of existing work.** The academic articles identified and included in this review included robust background to support research approaches.
- **Transparency: Clear design and methods employed in the study.** The academic articles included clear methodology sections to support literature review, primary data collection, and secondary data analysis.
- **Authority: Whol/what organization developed the resource and their credibility on the subject.** Many of the resources included are from peer reviewed journals, an important source of academically rigorous data. Grey literature was also included and important to supplement academic research to reflect emerging and under researched issues and community realities, and support policy recommendations. Grey literature selected were from reputable international and regional organisations that have documented experience working on these interconnected issues.
- **Objectivity/Purpose: Whether the source presents a biased point of view or agenda.** The research team reviewed sources through a critical lens and did not include opinion-based pieces not supported by evidence.

¹¹ DFID (2014)

Using these criteria, the research team selected over 150 resources for more in-depth review and inclusion in the evidence review. FCDO contracted an expert on gender, peace, and security with Spanish language capacity to identify and review Spanish language resources for the Latin America region. This expert used the outlined methodology and keyword search to identify relevant resources and provide inputs directly into the document, including examples of interventions from the region. FCDO attempted to contract with an expert to review Arabic language resources but unfortunately was unable to identify a suitable expert in the time allotted for the evidence review.

To ensure a breadth of information the team made efforts to identify peer reviewed articles that synthesised findings from a collection of studies through systematic, scoping, and literature reviews (about 20 identified resources that reviewed over 600 studies). This was in addition to other peer reviewed primary research and grey literature from organisations to provide detailed in-depth case studies and more comprehensive qualitative data analysis. Section 2 details the findings of the review and begins with a table of high and emerging confidence findings based on the identified resources in the review. These labels of high and emerging confidence are drawn from the research teams' understanding of the literature landscape through this evidence review; however, the research team acknowledges that there are potential important findings in resources that were not identified and reviewed for this report due to time limitations.

Table 1: Keywords used for identifying resources for the evidence review	
<i>Gender and social issues</i>	<i>Conflict and fragility</i>
• Child marriage • Gender mainstreaming • Gender roles • Gender-responsive • Human rights • Indigenous peoples • Inequality and inequity • Intimate partner violence • LGBTIQ+ • Persons with disabilities • Sexual and gender-based violence • Violence against women and girls • Women and girls • Women environmental human rights defenders • Women's rights • Youth	• Conflict • Displacement • Extra-legal groups • Fragility • Guerilla groups • Instability • Migration • Security risks
<i>Environmental degradation and ecosystem collapse</i>	<i>Other</i>
• Biodiversity • Conservation • Ecosystem collapse • Environmental crime • Environmental degradation and specific issues (e.g., drought, floods, land degradation, deforestation, etc.) • Extractive industries • Food and water insecurity	• Care work • Health impacts • Labour and time distribution • Latin America (as well as individual countries in the region) • Middle East and North Africa (as well as individual countries in the region) • Social networks, formal and informal

• Illegal mining • Livelihood and income loss • Natural resources (e.g., water, food, etc.) • Pollution (e.g., water, air, soil, etc.) • Resource scarcity • Specific ecosystems - fisheries, forests, coasts, wetlands, drylands, etc.	
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Limitations

It is important to note that **peer reviewed literature on gender (in)equality can be limited on many topics**, including those covered by this evidence review. Peer-reviewed literature is shaped by publication and funding biases, often prioritising issues that are more easily measurable or aligned with donor and research agendas, which can result in underrepresentation of complex, intersectional or locally specific dynamics. Resources that highlight gender issues in security and environmental degradation may not be supported by a large body of peer reviewed evidence and relay anecdotal evidence, which may be context specific. Peer-reviewed research also often underrepresents the lived experiences and perspectives of Indigenous peoples and frontline communities, particularly those in remote or insecure contexts that are less accessible to formal research processes. Additionally, peer-reviewed research often reflects significant time lags between data collection, publication and dissemination, which can limit its ability to capture rapidly evolving dynamics in conflict-affected or environmentally stressed contexts, and while the awareness and research at the nexus of this evidence review exists, it is nascent, and potentially less established due to this constraint. To mitigate these risks and ensure a breadth of evidence was captured in the evidence review the research team also identified and reviewed grey literature from reputable organisations, to ensure emerging issues, community realities, policy recommendations, and programmatic findings, particularly on gender equality and social inclusion, are reflected in the evidence review, as a sole focus on peer reviewed literature can risk overlooking these critical areas of insight. The inclusion of evidence based on single studies or anecdotes are included where relevant and are noted as so in the evidence review.

Research on gender-conflict linkages with ecosystem collapse specifically is limited. When searching “ecosystem collapse” in Google Scholar, many of the articles identified referred to ecosystem collapse as a critical issue that would eventually occur due to continued environmental degradation. This means that articles were focusing primary and secondary data collection on current issues around environmental degradation with mentions of complete ecosystem collapse as a risk of ignoring or failing to address degradation concerns. For example, a study on degradation of Amazon forests proposes solutions to avoid future ecosystem collapse, including reducing deforestation and promoting large-scale landscape restoration, and also notes that certain feedback mechanisms could push ecosystems into alternative degraded, stable states but not complete collapse.¹² This does not mean that there are not certain ecosystems in the focus regions that have reached a tipping point to collapse, but rather suggests that current literature is focusing on environmental degradation instead of ecosystem collapse.

Additionally, any articles that did address ecosystem collapse did not focus on the priority regions and/or did not address gendered risks of ecosystem collapse. For this reason, this evidence review focuses on the gendered security risks of the interlinked issues of environmental degradation and conflict and gender-responsive strategies and solutions to mitigating risk of

¹² Brando et al. (2025)

linked issues. This is further compounded by the way success is measured in this field: where ecosystem collapse has been avoided, this is rarely documented explicitly as “prevention” or “non-occurrence” in the literature. This may, instead, be captured through related concepts (such as restoration, conservation or preservation). As a result, evidence on what works to prevent ecosystem collapse—and its associated gendered security risks—remains limited and is often indirect.

2 Gender-differentiated security risks arising from environmental degradation

Key findings

High Confidence

- ❖ Environmental degradation contributes to gendered security risks by increasing exposure to SGBV and undermining health outcomes through resource scarcity, economic insecurity, displacement, weakened protection systems, and limited access to essential services, all of which are heightened in conflict-affected contexts.¹³
- ❖ Loss of livelihoods and resource insecurity from environmental degradation interacting with conflict dynamics have direct gendered health impacts, including malnutrition from lack of food and women eating less food than their family members, heat stress and exposure to diseases from increased gendered labour burdens, and destruction or deterioration of key health and sanitation services.¹⁴
- ❖ Various forms of SGBV, including sexual violence and harassment, physical violence, emotional violence, and intimate partner violence, are associated with food and water insecurity and livelihood loss due to the interlinked and mutually reinforcing impacts of environmental degradation and conflict.¹⁵
- ❖ Environmental stress—particularly when compounded by conflict—drives displacement that concentrates and intensifies gendered security risks and negative health outcomes, as women and girls face heightened exposure to sexual exploitation, trafficking, violence and malnutrition and food insecurity in contexts of economic insecurity, disrupted services, and weak governance where protection systems are limited or absent.¹⁶
- ❖ Environmental degradation reshapes gender roles in ways that increase women’s exposure to insecurity by increasing and expanding unpaid labour responsibilities, limiting economic agency and opportunities, and reinforcing harmful gender norms in fragile and conflict-affected settings. These precarious situations increase women’s exposure to exploitation, unsafe working conditions and violence.¹⁷

¹³ Castañeda Carney et al. (2020); Elkomy and Jackson (2026); Lin, Yang and Xu (2025); Nuta et al. (2025); Shekhar et al. (2025); Tran and Hanaček (2023); Tran et al. (2020)

¹⁴ Aklan, Fraiture, and Hayde (2019); Anjum and Aziz (2025); FSIN and GNAFC (2025); Litvin et al. (2024); Schillinger, Özerol, and Heldeweg (2022); Sowers and Weinthal (2021); UN Women (2026)

¹⁵ Agrawal et al. (2023); Boyer et al. (2020); Hatcher et al. (2022); Meyer et al. (2025); O’Mullan, Sinai, and Kaphele (2024); Tallman et al. (2022)

¹⁶ Brück et al. (2024); Calderón-Jaramillo et al. (2020); Cherri et al. (2017); De la Parra-Guerra, Truyol-Padilla, García-Alzate, and Fuentes-Gandara (2025); JDC (2021); Smith (2022); HIAS (2022); Woldearegay et al. (2025)

¹⁷ Ayoub, Norman, and Gil (2023); Cortés-McPherson (2020); Ide et al. (2021); Mala, Goyal, and Mondal (2026); Ngum and Barooah (2023); Osman and Abebe (2023); Plá (2025); Smith (2022)

❖ Traditional gender roles can shift because of forced displacement and migration related to the impacts of environmental degradation and conflict, where women and men face job and livelihood loss and limited access to resources and services. This can heighten household tension and contribute to SGBV, and lead women to take low-paying and exploitative jobs.¹⁸ ❖ Environmental degradation and conflict erode social structures and norms, including the networks and essential services community members are dependent on for maintaining health, protection and well-being. The loss of these networks creates conditions in which women and girls face increased insecurity due to isolation, reduced protection and limited access to resources and contribute to social isolation, grief and mental health impacts of migrants.¹⁹
Emerging Confidence
❖ There is increased attention to the specific discrimination and SGBV experienced by women environmental human rights defenders, particularly in Latin America, to silence dissent and discourage advocacy against exploitation of natural resources, but these specific gendered risks are under researched and underreported.²⁰ ❖ There is a growing evidence base suggesting a link between increased child marriage among displaced persons in response to conflict and environmental degradation. Risk of child marriage in these situations is highly dependent on context, traditional and social norms around child marriage, access to education and income, among other complex factors that are not always captured in studies.²¹ More research is needed to overcome limitations of current studies, investigate the particular risks related to interlinked environmental degradation and conflict, and ensure approaches to address this form of SGBV are appropriate to the context.

Environmental degradation, which includes depleting air, water, land, and soil quality and the destruction of ecosystems, significantly reduces the capacity of the environment to meet social and ecological needs. These changes trigger a cascade of interconnected social impacts, such as loss of livelihoods and income, food and water insecurity, displacement and migration, and negative coping strategies that can escalate into insecurity and violence. These social impacts have specific gendered impacts that increase safety risks of women and girls, including heightened exposure to SGBV, restricted mobility, economic coercion, and reduced access to services, alongside, shifts in gender roles and care burdens, and loss of support networks. Environmental degradation is also both a driver and consequence of conflict, reinforcing cycles of instability. When environmental stress interacts with fragile governance, resource competition and conflict economies, it creates conditions in which gendered security risks are intensified, including, exacerbating risks of violence, inequality and exclusion, and loss of livelihoods for women and girls.²²

The following sub-sections provide an overview of some of the gender-differentiated security impacts of environmental degradation and nature loss based on evidence gathered for the desk

¹⁸ Ayoub, Norman, and Gil (2023); Grossman and Post (2019); Mulas (2025); Nassar (2025); Smith (2022); Stojetz and Brück (2024)

¹⁹ Amede, Tesfaye, and Ahmed (2024); Ekoh et al. (2023); Grossman and Post (2019); Stark et al. (2025); Sundvall (2021)

²⁰ Castañeda Carney et al. (2020); Tran and Hanaček (2023); Tran et al. (2020)

²¹ Bartels et al. (2018); Castañeda Carney et al. (2020); Elnakib et al. (2023); Harrison, Casey, and Sadd (2024); Hunersen et al. (2024); Palmer, Danioko, and Koski (2024); Pope et al. (2022); Presler-Marshall et al. (2025); Subramanian (2025)

²² Carr (2020); Csevár (2021); Gaynor et al. (2016); UNDRR and ISC (2025)

review. These impacts are interrelated and often do not occur in isolation from one another. As a result, the sub-sections contain linked discussions on the effects of environmental degradation and conflict, such as loss of livelihoods, resource insecurity, forced displacement and migration, among others.

2.1 Health impacts, including sexual and gender-based violence

Environmental degradation has numerous impacts on physical, mental, and social health and wellbeing.²³ These impacts can increase exposure to harm, reduce access to protection, and constrain women's and girls' agency and mobility. Due to prominent socially constructed gender roles and responsibilities, women and girls are often responsible for caregiving and play a key role in supporting community and family health. In times of disaster and conflict, these responsibilities intensify and leave women directly exposed to environment-related health risks. For example, responsibilities such as water and fuel collection place women and girls in degraded or insecure environmental landscapes, increasing their exposure to violence, and other health risks.

SGBV is a critical concern that disproportionately affects women and girls. Environmental degradation contributes to increased SGBV through multiple pathways: economic stress, displacement, breakdown of services, and increased interaction with unfamiliar or unsafe actors. These dynamics are particularly acute where environmental stress intersects with conflict and fragile states, resulting in detrimental and long-term health impacts and instances of SGBV against women and girls beyond physical impacts.

Loss of livelihoods and resource insecurity

Water and food insecurity due to environmental degradation can cause challenges with sanitation and hygiene and, due to the social and family responsibilities assigned to them, force women and girls to perform additional labour in distance travelled or effort to secure resources. Women and girls suffer from heat stress, fatigue, and contracting waterborne and zoonotic diseases. Women and girls face disproportionate harm in these contexts, particularly to their sexual and reproductive health (including accessing services), as well as maternal health and nutrition, all of which are increasingly shown to inflict prolonged mental health consequences for women and girls.

Food and water insecurity and economic instability have disastrous impacts on nutrition, particularly for women, children, and women-headed households. In rural areas, women's roles and livelihoods are often tied to their interactions with natural resources, such as livestock rearing, agriculture, collection of water and fuel, among others, meaning that environmental degradation directly affects their livelihoods and leads to malnutrition and health risks for women.²⁴ Women and girls are often the first people in families to be negatively affected by food insecurity.²⁵ In many societies, gender norms dictate that women eat last in families or will eat less to ensure their children have more food.²⁶ This means that in resource scarce times, often resulting from environmental degradation and conflict, women and girls go without adequate food and nutrition provision. A study of food and nutrition insecurity in the West Bank found that women and women-headed households are more likely than men to reduce meal frequency and portion sizes to cope

²³ Elkomy and Jackson (2026); Lin, Yang and Xu (2025); Nuta et al. (2025); Shekhar et al. (2025)

²⁴ Nosheen, Iqbal, and Ahmed (2023)

²⁵ Agrawal et al. (2023); O'Mullan, Sinai, and Kaphle (2024)

²⁶ Litvin et al. (2024)

with food insecurity.²⁷ The Global Report on Food Crisis in 2025 found that nearly 11 million pregnant and breastfeeding women faced acute malnutrition in 21 countries, with over one million each in Afghanistan and Sudan.²⁸ Malnutrition and these other health risks can inflict further cycles of violence, harm and health risks for women and girls from their family or household dynamics, as well as the community more broadly.²⁹

Food insecurity driven by environmental degradation and exploitation also increases economic insecurity and social tension. In countries such as Colombia, Argentina, and Brazil, the use of agrochemicals has been linked to forced displacement and the erosion of food sovereignty. As subsistence crops are affected, communities are increasingly compelled to purchase food that they previously produced for their own consumption.³⁰ Similarly, in Colombia, mining activities have affected a Palenque community inhabited by peasant, Indigenous, and Afro-descendant populations. The mining company, Cerro Matoso, has polluted the air and water in surrounding areas and has consistently failed to consider the views of most residents, who oppose the continued exploitation of nickel in the region.³¹

Systematic and scoping reviews identified for this report note that various forms of SGBV are associated with food and water insecurity and livelihood loss due to the interlinked and mutually reinforcing impacts of environmental degradation and conflict.³² Women in areas affected by environmental degradation and conflict face increased risks of SGBV when they lose access to essential natural resources that sustain families and communities.³³ These impacts are particularly of concern for women and girls in rural and remote areas, who have limited access to social resources and services and are highly dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods.³⁴ They may need to travel further from their households to collect food and water resources, moving through insecure or contested spaces, where their risk of harassment, assault and sexual violence significantly increases.³⁵ Women face increased risk of intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic abuse due to the inability to meet household food and water needs and other household responsibilities,³⁶ and from men's frustrations, stress and insecurities from job loss.³⁷ One systematic review and analysis of 38 studies on food insecurity and VAWG in low- and middle-income countries found that food insecurity doubled the odds of a woman reporting that she had experienced violence. This finding is consistent for male perpetration, with men who are food insecure being twice as likely to report perpetrating violence against women.³⁸

Violence against women in households can have intergenerational impacts by perpetrating cycles of violence. Households that are food insecure are more likely to experience other forms of domestic violence, including by in-laws and siblings. For example, research in Afghanistan by the UK-funded What Works to Prevent VAWG programme found that physical violence by mothers-in-law, siblings-in-law and siblings was highest in families with more food insecurity. Women with

²⁷ UN Women (2026)

²⁸ FSIN and GNAFC (2025)

²⁹ Anjum and Aziz (2025)

³⁰ Centro de Derechos Reproductivos (2025)

³¹ Rodríguez Hooker (2024)

³² Agrawal et al. (2023); Daalen et al. (2022); Hatcher et al. (2022); Meyer et al. (2025); Tallman et al. (2022)

³³ De la Parra-Guerra et al. (2024); Walther et al. (2025)

³⁴ O'Mullan, Sinai, and Kaphle (2024)

³⁵ Boyer et al. (2020); Tallman et al. (2022)

³⁶ Tallman et al. (2022)

³⁷ Abusaitan et al. (2026); Agrawal et al. (2023)

³⁸ Hatcher et al. (2022)

a physically violent mother-in-law were more likely to beat their children frequently, thereby contributing to a culture of household violence.³⁹ Intimate partner violence and SGBV can result in depression and other mental health impacts that contribute to loss of appetite and make it more difficult for women to take care of themselves and their children.⁴⁰ Some evidence suggests that resource scarcity forces women and girls into sexually exploitative situations to access food, shelter, or basic services, or to secure financial resources for the household where men's income opportunities have become sparse.⁴¹

There is also emerging literature and increased attention to the specific discrimination and SGBV experienced by women environmental human rights defenders and journalists, particularly in Latin America, advocating against exploitation of natural resources; conflict over natural resources and land grabbing; and human rights abuses by governments, corporations, and extra-legal groups.⁴² SGBV is used to diminish their work and silence their voices, especially in areas affected by conflict where governance structures are weak and natural resources are central to insecurity.⁴³ Women defenders, especially Indigenous women defenders, have less access to legal resources and face compounding discrimination and violence for their advocacy and as women defying discriminatory gender norms.⁴⁴ Women and men advocating for human and environmental rights have been the target of abuses, discrimination and attacks for decades, but reporting on harassment, abuse, and murders of environmental defenders often does not examine the gender differentiated risks and impacts of women in these roles who face violent backlash based on their advocacy and their gender.⁴⁵

Violence against women, including women environmental human rights defenders, can be used as a tactic to discourage participation in conservation efforts and advocacy against unsustainable exploitation of natural resources, which can potentially exacerbate environmental degradation.⁴⁶ One review paper identified for this report notes that SGBV undermines conservation outcomes by limiting women's participation, eroding traditional ecological knowledge, exacerbating resource exploitation, and weakening community resilience.⁴⁷ However, there is limited research on how SGBV can drive environmental degradation, especially in areas affected by conflict, and the vast majority of research on this intersection focuses on environmental degradation as a driver of SGBV. This could potentially be due to a reluctance to discuss SGBV and intimate partner violence due to local taboos, preservation of personal safety, and fear of social backlash, which limits analysis into these connections.

Poor and vulnerable groups are at increased risk of morbidity and mortality from direct violence and deterioration of natural resources, infrastructure, and social systems due to nearby conflict and environmental degradation.⁴⁸ Conflict-driven destruction of key health and water infrastructure and the impact of conflict on governance processes poses a threat for spread of infectious diseases and reduces the availability of vaccinations, sanitation, and safe drinking

³⁹ Jewkes, Corbox, and Gibbs (2019)

⁴⁰ Abusbaitan et al. (2026)

⁴¹ Woldearegay et al. (2025)

⁴² Castañeda Carney et al. (2020); Centro de Derechos Reproductivos (2025); Tran and Hanaček (2023); Tran et al. (2020)

⁴³ Global Witness (2021); Xie (2023)

⁴⁴ Castañeda Carney et al. (2020)

⁴⁵ Tran and Hanaček (2023); Tran et al. (2020); Xie (2023)

⁴⁶ Clugston, Rhodes, Nneli, and Fraser (n.d.); De la Parra-Guerra et al. (2025)

⁴⁷ Kogada and Ondiek (2024)

⁴⁸ Bendavid et al. (2022)

water and weakens the ability of systems to meet the basic needs of communities.⁴⁹ In 2020, Hurricane Iota hit the island of Providencia in Colombia, which is home to Raizal (Afro-Caribbean) communities, and destroyed the already limited health infrastructure, triggered displacement, and significantly increased care burdens for women.⁵⁰ In 2024, there were over 1,600 reported attacks on healthcare infrastructure in 16 countries, including in Sudan and Palestinian Territories, which interrupted essential services and SRH for millions of women.⁵¹ The Islamic State has weaponised water in Iraq, Syria and Yemen to control populations, including by cutting off access to water and purposefully flooding areas to push people out. In Yemen, conflict-related destruction of health, water, and sanitation systems have left 15 million people without access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities.⁵² As women and girls are mainly responsible for household water management, water scarcity from armed groups disproportionately impacts them and their ability to meet household water needs, and puts them at increased risk of SGBV.⁵³

In addition to the direct destruction of water infrastructure, environmental contamination linked to conflict dynamics also generates gendered health risks. In Latin America, the use of agrochemicals in agro-industrial production and in programmes to eradicate illicit crops has been associated with adverse impacts on women's reproductive health, including fertility disorders, miscarriages, and preterm births. In Colombia, aerial spraying linked to the internal armed conflict contributed to the use of 69,862 tonnes of agrochemicals in 2019 alone, highlighting the connection between environmental degradation, conflict dynamics, and their gendered health impacts.⁵⁴ Together, these dynamics not only undermine livelihoods and resource security but also drive patterns of forced displacement and migration.

Forced displacement and migration

Environmental degradation and conflict are major drivers of forced displacement and migration when communities can no longer reliably use land and natural resources in safety, and their security is already at risk. Conversely, forced displacement and migration can also fuel environmental degradation and conflict, particularly with host communities.⁵⁵ Communities that are already facing structural inequalities, poverty, and limited access to key resources (e.g., water, energy, sanitation, healthcare and education) are particularly vulnerable to degradation-driven displacement, especially women in Indigenous communities.⁵⁶ Displaced women and girls often face heightened vulnerability to health and SGBV risks before, during and after migration and forced displacement, including sexual exploitation, trafficking, and forced labour due to economic insecurity and weakened protection systems.⁵⁷ As part of this, displaced women face restricted mobility and have less access to income generating opportunities, education, and key social services, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services and mental health support.⁵⁸ For example, Palestinian girls in refugee camps in Jordan and the West Bank face specific health impacts due to reduced mobility caused by the social environment. When young girls reach

⁴⁹ Aklan, Fraiture, and Hayde (2019); Schillinger, Özerol, and Heldeweg (2022); Sowers and Weinthal (2021)

⁵⁰ Martínez Osorio et al. (2024)

⁵¹ United Nations Security Council (2024)

⁵² Luqman and Al-Sakkaf (2022)

⁵³ Luqman and Al-Sakkaf (2022); Smith (2022)

⁵⁴ Centro de Derechos Reproductivos (2025)

⁵⁵ Chalouhi et al. (2025); Faeren and Aliegba (2022); Maviza, Takaindisa, and Caroli (2025); Schuster et al. (2025)

⁵⁶ Castro Buitrago (2024)

⁵⁷ ACNUR (2022); Calderón-Jaramillo et al. (2020); De la Parra-Guerra, Truyol-Padilla, García-Alzate, and Fuentes-Gandara (2025); HIAS (2022); Smith (2022); UNHCR (2022); Woldearegay et al. (2025)

⁵⁸ Brück et al. (2024); Cherri et al. (2017); JDC (2021)

puberty, families and communities monitor their movement in camps, which limits their access to health services.⁵⁹ Another example from Honduras shows that forced displacement has been linked to the violations of the right to education, which has long-term consequences on children's health, wellbeing and economic potential and deprives them of safe and protective environments in displaced settings, as well as undermines efforts to break cycles of violence and support recovery.⁶⁰

Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) are particularly vulnerable to SGBV due to forced displacement, separation of families, disruption of community structures, and inadequate infrastructure and social services that create situations where SGBV perpetration can thrive and continue with impunity.⁶¹ In transit, as well as once a displaced person has reached an established humanitarian aid sites or settlements, women and girls are at risk of various forms of SGBV, including sexual violence, trafficking, and forced marriage, from various actors exploiting these vulnerable communities⁶², which includes violence from family members and intimate partner violence. Data from the Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela indicate that between January and June 2021 there were 49 femicides and nine attempted femicides of Venezuelan refugee and migrant women reported across the region, with 23% of these crimes committed by partners or former partners.⁶³ Displacement disrupts access to sexual and reproductive healthcare, increasing the risks of maternal mortality and morbidity, and limiting support for survivors of SGBV. The intersection of environmental degradation and displacement has also been linked to broader risks to women's rights. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs has noted that organised crime further exacerbates these risks.⁶⁴

In host areas or countries, a large influx of displaced people stresses local environmental resources and contributes to social unrest, which can manifest in gendered health impacts and forms of violence due to competition, marginalisation and the breakdown of social cohesion.⁶⁵ There are often limited land and natural resources available to displaced populations, which stress livelihoods and can exacerbate environmental degradation as people seek alternative forms of income and stability. For example, a study on IDPs in Somalia found that many people resorted to illicit production and trade of charcoal to support families despite legal restrictions. Dependence on this illegal market contributed to deforestation and risks to ecosystems.⁶⁶ Engaging in illegal economies brings inherent risks to women and men. This can create a compounded risk for women as they face structural and social challenges confronting host communities and legal authorities with resource demands and heightened risk of SGBV as a control tactic.⁶⁷ Food, water and land resources can be strained in host communities due to a lack of institutional mechanisms to ensure reliable resource access and protect against overexploitation of scarce resources.⁶⁸ Social, economic and environmental stress due to displacement can result in an increase in SGBV perpetrated by host communities, refugees, humanitarian workers, armed groups, and family members.⁶⁹ This can be due to the competition over limited natural resources and increased

⁵⁹ Ayoub, Norman, and Gil (2023)

⁶⁰ Tiusabá Gómez and Rodríguez Pastrana (2017)

⁶¹ Castañeda Carney et al. (2020); Wirtz et al. (2014)

⁶² Castañeda Carney et al. (2020)

⁶³ UNHCR (2022)

⁶⁴ UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs (2025)

⁶⁵ Faeren and Aliegba (2022)

⁶⁶ Osman and Abebe (2023)

⁶⁷ Faeren and Aliegba (2022)

⁶⁸ Maviza, Takaindisa, and Caroli (2025)

⁶⁹ Chalouhi et al. (2025); Schuster et al. (2025); Woldearegay et al. (2025)

pressure on local environments. For example, a report from Saferworld of South Sudanese refugees in Uganda found that refugee women and men had limited access to agricultural land due to the influx of refugees and the high costs of renting land from host communities, often resulting in informal agreements with host communities that left refugees vulnerable to land loss.⁷⁰ The research indicated that host community men were more likely to reach an informal agreement to rent land to refugee women due to the perception that it would be easier to evict women from land and because women were vulnerable to exploitation. In some cases, women would engage in sexual relations with host community men to access food and money as an exploitative coping strategy to provide for their families.⁷¹ Displacement settings also create concentrated environments of vulnerability where weak governance, accountability, and inadequate services enable impunity. There are increased risks of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment related to food distribution and food insecurity for displaced populations. For example, research from Lebanon and Uganda found that food distributions were the highest source of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, particularly for adolescent girls and widows, with 73% of women reporting feeling fearful during food distribution processes.⁷² In many cases, women are still expected to collect natural resources for family use, and when these are not available in the immediate area due to environmental degradation, privatisation of land or risks of being exposed to violence and conflict, women will travel further from camps and face increased exposure to SGBV. For example, a rapid assessment by the Danish Refugee Council of a refugee camp in South Sudan found the women reported that the most common forms of SGBV were attempted rape, sexual abuse, and harassment at firewood collections points and sometimes at water collection points.⁷³ Alternatively, if women and girls are unsuccessful in securing the resources for family use, they can face various forms of SGBV from family members.⁷⁴

Another form of SGBV in environmental security situations that is gaining attention is early and forced child marriage, which can be used by families as a survival mechanism when faced with the livelihood, food, and economic stressors associated with environmental degradation and conflict. Resources reviewed suggest that child marriage increases in times of environmental scarcity and conflict.⁷⁵ One example from research in South Sudan found that families use early and forced marriage as a survival strategy during food crises, motivated by the financial gains from bride prices. This practice is more common among girls living with extended families, often initiated by male relatives (uncles and cousins).⁷⁶ A study on child marriage and displacement in Iraq found that displaced populations were worried about economic insecurity and preservation of traditional marriage practices amid losing everything, which drove decisions to marry girls early. Additionally, displaced populations shared that they believed marrying off young girls would lead to their husbands protecting them from potential SGBV from host populations.⁷⁷ Another study of Syrian refugees in Egypt found that some families experienced displacement-specific challenges, such as disruptions to girls' education, protection concerns, and livelihood stress, that exacerbated girls' vulnerability to child marriage. However, other families displaced to urban areas in Egypt experienced erosion of social norms related to child marriage and led to marriage

⁷⁰ Watson and Figueras (2020)

⁷¹ Watson and Figueras (2020)

⁷² Global Women's Institute and International Rescue Committee in Uganda

⁷³ DRC (2012)

⁷⁴ Jewkes, Corbox, and Gibbs (2019); Tallman et al. (2022)

⁷⁵ Bartels et al. (2018); Castañeda Carney et al. (2020); Gaviria Betancur (2025); Hunersen et al. (2024); Pope et al. (2022); Presler-Marshall et al. (2025); Subramanian (2025)

⁷⁶ Lee-Koo (2018); Plan International and Monash (2018)

⁷⁷ Hunersen et al. (2024)

postponement.⁷⁸ For girls that were married off early, they experienced numerous health and social impacts, including disruption of schooling, lack of family planning and SRH care, mobility constraints, and challenges to obtaining marriage and birth registration.

The evidence base on the intersection of child marriage as an adaption and survival strategy to environmental degradation and/or conflict is growing and getting stronger. It is critical to note though that some studies did not find consistent evidence of this link, instead finding it highly dependent on access to education, traditional and social norms around child marriage, and geographic location (with evidence concentrated in South Asia), among other complex and intersecting social, economic, and political factors.⁷⁹ It is important to thoroughly investigate the context- and socially-specific factors that influence child marriage and if these are at risk of worsening due to environmental degradation and conflict. Furthermore, current studies face several limitations and potential biases,⁸⁰ and many do not specifically investigate the interlinked factors of environmental degradation and conflict and focus on these areas separately as potential drivers of child marriage.

2.2 Shifting gender roles and care burdens

The impacts of environmental degradation and conflict can change the ways women and men interact with their environment, communities, and one another. Traditional gender roles and responsibilities that position men as primary income earners and women as caretakers can blur in the face of livelihood stress, resource scarcity, migration, and injury or death because of environmental degradation and conflict. These shifts are not only social impacts but security risks as increased labour burdens, head of household roles without legal documentation, restricted mobility, and economic dependence all heighten women's exposure to violence, exploitation and exclusion. This can then exacerbate both degradation and conflict dynamics in affected communities, further entrenching the gender-differentiated risks for women and girls as a result as they become the new norms, and disturb progress on gender equality that has been made.

Loss of livelihoods and resource insecurity

As resources become scarcer and livelihoods are lost due to environmental degradation and conflict, the unpaid labour often assigned to women increases. Without viable and consistent livelihoods, the shift in economic and caregiving roles can expose women and girls to unsafe and risky work environments, exploitation, and violence, particularly in frontier economies or degraded ecosystems where informal or criminalised economies have taken root. Women may also take on responsibility for earning income to support survival, which is often traditionally associated with men's roles as primary income earners.⁸¹ For instance, in Somalia, conflict and environmental degradation has resulted in some women taking on roles as primary income earners in households as conflict has limited economic opportunities and resources available to men.⁸² However, while empowering for some women, other women faced structural disadvantages and marginalisation outside of their households for going against traditional gender norms and roles. In Colombia, for instance, interviews with displaced women found they faced greater instances of intimate partner violence due to men's underemployment and women's employment outside the

⁷⁸ Elnakib et al. (2023)

⁷⁹ Elnakib et al. (2023); Palmer, Danioko, and Koski (2024)

⁸⁰ Palmer et al. (2024); Pope et al. (2022)

⁸¹ Ide et al. (2021); Osman and Abebe (2023)

⁸² Smith (2022)

home, which was seen as transgressing patriarchal gender norms.⁸³ Additionally, their additional income earning roles added to their double labour burden, as they are often still responsible for unpaid household labour and care work.⁸⁴ Ide et al. (2021) states that women's unpaid labour is often undervalued and invisible despite being essential to the survival of households, and when "resilience and recovery policies fail to acknowledge this labor, they inadvertently also accept the depletion and gender injustice encompassed within this unequal gender division of labor" (p.48).

In times of crisis, opportunities to maintain household livelihoods are limited and insufficient and income-generating activities may become unavailable. Smith (2022) notes that there is a higher risk that people may join armed movements to ensure access to scarce resources and attempt to safeguard livelihoods. Young men, and to a lesser extent young women, may be lured into participating in violent and dangerous activities to supplement household income. In these contexts, women and girls may also be coerced, recruited, or economically pressured into sexual exploitation or trafficking, including being forced or induced to become sexual partners for armed actors,⁸⁵ or those involved in environmental crimes. In Peru's illegal gold mining regions, for example, organised crime networks recruit and traffic young women into "prostibars" (brothels in mining camps). The control and surveillance by criminal networks, highlights how environmental degradation and extractive economies create conditions for gendered violence and exploitation through simultaneous pathways for organised crime.⁸⁶ Women and girls face system sexual exploitation as part of resource-driven conflict economies.

Environmental crime, such as illegal hunting and fishing, have direct impacts on the availability of food, natural resources and legitimate livelihood income for communities. As a result, women have less access to essential livelihood resources. In Ecuador, Indigenous women in the Ecuadorian Amazon are responsible for maintaining food and water security for households, but overexploitation of animal species and deforestation has forced women to spend more time searching for clean water and collect plants for medicine and food. Many women are forced to travel deeper into forests, which are male-dominated and put them at risk of sexual assault and violence. Some women look for domestic work at logging and mining camps to be able to purchase alternative food where they are vulnerable to assault, sexual exploitation and forced labour, particularly in criminally controlled illegal mining operations.⁸⁷

Conflict can also further entrench traditional and harmful gender norms and roles in communities and limit women's opportunities, agency, and mobility.⁸⁸ For instance, in Colombia, men would restrict women's mobility outside the household due to fear of violence from armed conflict and their traditional ideas about women's roles in the household. Prior to conflict, women would work in forests and the countryside for income and to gather natural resources for livelihoods, health and family care.⁸⁹ These strict gender norms hamper women's ability to build resilience to environmental, economic, and social shocks.

⁸³ Hynes et al. (2015)

⁸⁴ Mala, Goyal, and Mondal (2026); Plá (2025)

⁸⁵ ICRC (2023)

⁸⁶ Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (2023); Cortés-McPherson (2020)

⁸⁷ Ngum and Barooah (2023)

⁸⁸ Ayoub, Norman, and Gil (2023)

⁸⁹ Smith (2022)

Forced displacement and migration

Traditional gender roles of men as economic providers can shift because of forced displacement and migration often related to the impacts of environmental degradation and conflict, such as food and water insecurity, livelihood loss, and violence.⁹⁰ Women may continue to provide food and water for households while men experience livelihood and job loss, which can heighten household tension and contribute to SGBV.

Displacement further intensifies these dynamics by placing women in unfamiliar environments where they face structural barriers to employment, increasing reliance on male counterparts or family members, or driving them into exploitative, unsafe, illegal, or insecure income. Some studies suggest that women who migrate face constrained resource access in their host communities may be forced to take low-paying and exploitative jobs.⁹¹ One case study found that Syrian refugee women fleeing to Türkiye were often subjected to exploitation in the agricultural sector by Turkish employers due to their vulnerable situations and status in the community.⁹² In Sudan, women IDPs tend to work more than non-IDP women but are poorer, on average. This is largely due to norms and institutions at their destination that create barriers to women's decent employment due to their status.⁹³ Forced displacement of IDPs can also shift roles and care burdens for women and men in host communities. Research has found that the income of women and men working in agriculture in host communities can decrease due to the increase of available labour from IDPs.⁹⁴ These kinds of dynamics can result in localised conflict and discrimination against IDPs. Additionally, a rapid influx of refugees and IDPs without adequate infrastructure can degrade land, air, water, and forest resources in host countries, further fuelling social unrest and conflict.⁹⁵

Displaced women often must take on more unpaid labour in host communities to support survival, including collecting natural resources, preparing meals, cleaning, childcare, and caring for sick and elderly people which can further harm them.⁹⁶ One study of Syrian refugees in Jordan highlights the importance of middle-aged women in supporting refugee livelihoods. The study explains that many middle-aged women become key members in their kinship networks and many take on roles as primary breadwinners and hold together households when men are killed, incapacitated, or remain in Syria. In addition, they also perform unpaid labour often taken on by women, such as cooking, cleaning, and caretaking.⁹⁷

2.3 Loss of formal and informal networks and services

Social networks and services, such as families, communities, church groups, women's groups, community centres, health centres, infrastructure, and other formal and informal networks and services, are critical for coping with adverse socioeconomic and environmental conditions. However, environmental degradation and conflict driven by this degradation erode these systems, and this erosion acts as a pathway to insecurity by removing protective social structures, limiting access to services, and increasing dependence on unsafe coping mechanisms. This negatively

⁹⁰ Schuster et al. (2024)

⁹¹ Grossman and Post (2019); Mulas (2025); Nassar (2025); Smith (2022)

⁹² Ayoub, Norman, and Gil (2023)

⁹³ Stojetz and Brück (2024)

⁹⁴ Smith (2022)

⁹⁵ Dutta (2022)

⁹⁶ Ide et al. (2021); JDC (2021)

⁹⁷ Sidhva, Zuntz, al Akash, Nashwan, and Al-Majali (2021)

impacts the ability of women and girls to cope with adverse socioeconomic, environmental, and conflict conditions, making them more vulnerable or susceptible to engaging in economies around conflict, that can be environmentally degrading too.

Forced displacement and migration

The loss of networks during displacement increases women's exposure to income insecurity, health issues, including mental health risks and SGBV, and exploitation, particularly where institutional support is weak or inaccessible. In refugee settings, families and women are separated from their informal networks and community support systems and may be unable to recreate them in host countries.⁹⁸ This contributes to social isolation and grief and impacts the mental health of migrants.⁹⁹ Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and anxiety rates are high for displaced persons and increased discrimination, employment insecurity, and SGBV for migrants exacerbates mental health risks, particularly for women and young girls.¹⁰⁰ A study on adolescent girls displaced by the Venezuelan-Colombian crisis found that parental abandonment, violence, and lack of support structures significantly impacted the mental health of young girls and limited their access to psychosocial health services.¹⁰¹ Many of the countries hosting the most refugees are characterised as fragile, meaning that institutional support to supplement or replace lost social networks and services may be inadequate.¹⁰²

An estimated 60% of IDP populations lose personal and civil documentation when forced to flee, which exacerbates marginalisation and vulnerability, especially for women and girls. Without documentation and social networks, women and girls' mobility is more restricted and they may be unable to access critical public services, employment, information and social participation opportunities.¹⁰³ Loss of documentation also undermines the ability of displaced populations to return and reclaim land or property; for women, who often lack formal land titles or recognised ownership rights, this increases the risk of dispossession and land grabbing by armed groups or actors linked to conflict and environmental criminal economies. This not only restricts access to services but also creates long-term insecurity by preventing women from reclaiming land and livelihoods, increasing the risk of dispossession, exploitation and renewed displacement. Evidence from Colombia shows that land inequality, tenure insecurity and land grabbing were central drivers of conflict and displacement, with millions—many of them women—unable to reclaim their land, while violence has been used as a strategy to forcibly displace communities and facilitate land appropriation, disintegrating community networks.¹⁰⁴

3 Discussion

RQ 1: Through what pathways do the social impacts of ecosystem degradation and potential ecosystem collapse on women and girls escalate into security risks?

The evidence demonstrates that environmental degradation acts as a threat multiplier, transforming existing gender inequalities into heightened and distinct gendered security risks through identifiable pathways—particularly livelihood loss, displacement, and weakened

⁹⁸ Amede, Tesfaye, and Ahmed (2024); Ekoh et al. (2023)

⁹⁹ Sundvall (2021)

¹⁰⁰ Stark et al. (2025)

¹⁰¹ Stark et al. (2025)

¹⁰² Grossman and Post (2019)

¹⁰³ Brück et al. (2024); Muhoro (2022)

¹⁰⁴ IDMC (2023); UN Women (2023); World Bank (2019)

governance. These pathways are reinforced and intensified under conditions of fragility, and conflict dynamics, as environmental degradation drives economic insecurity, increases women's mobility in unsafe or contested environments, and erodes access to services and social support networks; while at the same time increasing care burdens and reducing women's agency, collectively heightening their exposure to violence, exploitation and other forms of insecurity. Pre-existing gender inequalities and insecure land and resource rights intensify vulnerability, limiting women's ability to adapt, recover or access protection and increasing risks of dispossession, long-term insecurity and SGBV.¹⁰⁵

Literature tended to focus on the **gendered security risks and impacts of environmental degradation and conflict through worsening livelihood conditions and resource scarcity and forced displacement and migration**. These often represent non-tactical or indirect pathways of environmental degradation and conflict rather than direct impacts from military action and conflict dynamics. There is some evidence of how conflict dynamics, such as warfare, recruitment, and targeted destruction of infrastructure, have specific gendered security risks, but this literature is limited compared to other major pathways. The exception to this is the prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence as a tactic of control, submission, and intimidation in war.

RQ 2: Where and under what conditions does ecosystem degradation interact with fragility, conflict and violence to produce distinct gendered security risks?

Gendered security risks are most acute in fragile, conflict-affected and resource-dependent settings. Displacement is a critical tipping point, where environmental stress—especially when combined with conflict—creates concentrated conditions of insecurity, weak protection systems, and deteriorating health outcomes, including SRH and mental health, reinforcing and driving displacement. Women and girls face heightened exposure to violence and exploitation before, during, and after being displaced from their communities.

Geographically, much of the literature reviewed for the priority regions focused on **Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela** for Latin America and **Yemen, Somalia and Sudan** for MENA. This is not due to limited evidence in other contexts or countries in these regions, but when searching for resources on situations in Latin America and MENA, these countries tended to be used as representative of the regions or as a focus for primary research. For example, studies on SGBV and livelihood impacts for displaced women in refugee camps would focus on a specific camp in a country.¹⁰⁶

RQ 3: Which groups of women are most exposed to security risks arising from ecosystem degradation and collapse, and in which priority ecosystems or regions is the evidence the strongest or weakest?

Gendered security risks are not evenly distributed; rather, they are shaped by these intersectional identities and structural inequalities, which determine exposure, vulnerability and access to protection, restorative justice, and decision-making and governance processes.¹⁰⁷

Women most exposed to gendered security risks from ecosystem degradation are those whose livelihoods depend directly on degraded ecosystems, such as **women in rural and remote communities**,¹⁰⁸ and who face **intersecting forms of marginalisation**, including poverty,

¹⁰⁵ O'Mullan, Sinai, and Kaphle (2024)

¹⁰⁶ Calderón-Jaramillo et al. (2020); De la Parra-Guerra, Truylol-Padilla, García-Alzate, and Fuentes-Gandara (2025); Smith (2022); HIAS (2022); Woldearegay et al. (2025)

¹⁰⁷ Boyer et al. (2020); Carr (2020); De la Parra-Guerra et al. (2025); Echeverry-López et al. (2024); Stark et al. (2021)

¹⁰⁸ Nosheen, Iqbal, and Ahmed (2023); O'Mullan, Sinai, and Kaphle (2024)

indigeneity, ethnicity, age, and gender identity. For instance, in mining-affected regions, environmental harm has been linked to social conflict and rights violations, particularly for ethnic and rural communities.¹⁰⁹ For women in rural and remote communities, including aquatic- or forest-dependent communities, environmental degradation directly undermines livelihoods, food security and wellbeing for themselves and family members, which create unique pathways to insecurity and conflict dynamics.¹¹⁰ This is especially a challenge as women in these communities have little capacity for adjustment and limited alternative livelihood options, which can drive decisions to migrate and increase exposure to exploitation and trafficking, particularly in informal and criminalised economies.

Women environmental defenders, especially Indigenous women, face specific gendered security risks where environmental degradation, extractive industries and armed actors converge, with much of the available research focused on Latin America. They face heightened exposure to nature and biodiversity loss essential to their lives, cultures, and heritage, compounded by violence, displacement and limited access to justice and services. Their roles as land stewards and defenders of territory also place them at heightened risk of targeted violence to silence and discourage dissent.¹¹¹

Displaced and migrant women and girls face elevated risks of economic insecurity, SGBV and exploitation due to disrupted protection systems and limited resources in host areas.¹¹² Evidence from Colombia shows that women experience violence across both conflict and displacement settings, including forced recruitment, early marriage and intimate partner violence linked to livelihood loss, due to environmental degradation and conflict. Migrant women also face barriers to accessing services due to legal status, discrimination and language constraints, and lack of documentation, further exacerbating risk.

RQ 4: What evidence exists on interventions that reduce gendered security risks linked to ecosystem degradation, particularly where governance is weak or conflict-affected? Conversely, what types of conservation or biodiversity interventions risk exacerbating harm, inequality or exposure to violence when social safeguards are inadequate?

WHAT WORKS

Much of the strongest evidence on gender-responsive environmental programming emerges from climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience initiatives, which already encompass natural resource governance, restoration, conservation and disaster risk reduction. The lessons from these interventions are directly transferable to environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and nature-based sectors, as they address the same underlying systems—land use, water access, livelihoods, ecosystem management and community resilience, particularly for marginalised groups. It is important to note that evidence for direct biodiversity and conservation intervention specifically, especially with a gender-responsive approach, in conflict-affected areas is less documented. As a result, many of the following insights are often drawn from climate-focused interventions, where gender-responsive monitoring, learning and adaptation has been more systematically applied.

This sub-section draws on peer-reviewed literature reviewed under earlier research questions, supplemented by a non-exhaustive set of grey literature and programmatic examples. While a

¹⁰⁹ Ruiz-Agudelo, Suarez, and Gutiérrez-Bonilla (2025)

¹¹⁰ Wirtz et al. (2014)

¹¹¹ Csevár (2021)

¹¹² Calderón-Jaramillo et al. (2020); Cañedo-Cázares and Mendoza-Guerrero (2017); Pérez Vázquez (2018); Wirtz et al. (2014)

range of cases are included, these reflect illustrative examples and are not intended to represent a comprehensive assessment of what works. Table 2 at the end of the sub-section highlights some programmatic examples on these issues.

The evidence review emphasised a core conclusion that holds high confidence: **programmes that address gender inequality, safety and participation barriers through gender-responsive approaches are more effective at reducing environmentally damaging practices**, strengthening resilience, and supporting inclusive and stable resource governance. In turn, **these approaches help reduce pathways to gendered insecurity and conflict, breaking cycles of inequality and vulnerability that disproportionately affect women, girls and children**.¹¹³ These approaches include the following bolded points, which are indicated as high confidence to emerging confidence to highlight where evidence is strongest and where research is increasing and needs to be further supported on these important issues.

Women-led and gender-responsive design from the outset of planning and programming should be standard (high confidence). This is one of the most consistent determinants of effectiveness of programmes that alleviate environmental-conflict stressors and drivers, and without it, long-term harm is likely to be inflicted where degradation and/or security risks simmer.¹¹⁴ This is particularly critical in fragile and conflict-affected settings, where weak governance, contested resource access, and the presence of armed or illicit actors can amplify gendered security risks linked to ecosystem degradation. Evidence from peacebuilding and environmental governance literature shows that integrating women's participation in natural resource management, benefit-sharing and dispute resolution can reduce grievances and strengthen resilience in these contexts.¹¹⁵ Programmes that include women's focus groups—representative of women in all their diversity (not treating women as a homogenous group), with women-led planning and activities, along with women technical officers supporting implementation, and raise awareness of grievance mechanisms and reporting lines for stakeholders.¹¹⁶ For instance, a study on women farmers in São Paulo, Brazil noted that women wanted women-only agricultural training to allow a safer and more comfortable environment for discussion, including on sensitive topics related to SGBV.¹¹⁷ Leadership of women and emphasising their important roles in environmental sustainability, resilience, and peacebuilding is critical. For example, in Mexico, media representations, including newspapers, social media, and film, have contributed to reframing the role of women displaced by the Picachos dam in Sinaloa. In a context often associated with hypermasculine identities linked to organised crime, these narratives have positioned displaced women as defenders of their territories, reinforcing their roles in community resilience, justice, and collective decision-making.¹¹⁸

Context-specific gender and social analysis and conflict analysis is necessary (high confidence). This includes efforts to understand gender-differentiated paid, unpaid and care burdens; control over resources; access to decision-making and services; traditional and social gender norms; gendered power dynamics; potential gendered security risks; and other key gender dynamics; alongside how gender interacts with the drivers and impacts of conflict and

¹¹³ Carr (2020); Castañeda Carney, Sabater, Owren and Boyer (2020); Clugston, Rhodes, Nneli and Fraser (2024); Ide et al. (2021); IUCN (2022)

¹¹⁴ Anjum and Aziz (2025); DCAF (2022); Gaviria Betancur (2024); Gaviria Betancur (2025)

¹¹⁵ UNDP (2020); Clugston, Rhodes, Nneli and Fraser (2024); GBV AoR Helpdesk. (2021)

¹¹⁶ Amoroso Galbiati and Tait Lima (2025); Flores et al. (2025); Arana Zegarra (2017);

¹¹⁷ Carvalho and Bógus (2020)

¹¹⁸ Cañedo-Cázares and Mendoza-Guerrero (2017)

insecurity.¹¹⁹ Where gendered dynamics and norms are overlooked, programmes risk reinforcing inequality and undermining outcomes. One example of microfinance tools in rural Bangladesh found that even though a majority of loan recipients were women, gender-blind programming and the inequity in women having bank accounts, led to service providers giving money to women's husbands or fathers, and as a result, many women reported physical violence when asking their male relatives for weekly repayments.¹²⁰ These examples underscore that interventions which fail to analyse or account for gendered power dynamics and roles in resource-dependent or informal economies—including in frontier settings such as agriculture, land conversion or extractive value chains—can exacerbate both environmental degradation and gendered insecurity.¹²¹

Women's meaningful and safe participation is critical (high confidence). Evidence shows that when women are actively involved in environmental governance and decision-making, outcomes improve ecosystem conservation outcomes, inclusive governance mechanisms, sustainability, accountability and conflict mitigation.¹²² Evidence indicates the converse is also true: peacebuilding work that elevates women's participation in resource governance, benefit-sharing and justice processes is critical to reducing grievances and strengthening resilience in conflict-affected settings.¹²³ Multi-country evidence from forest governance contexts demonstrates that higher representation of women in decision-making is associated with improved conservation outcomes.¹²⁴ In Kenya, gender-inclusive grievance mechanisms embedded in water and climate resilience programming enabled women to raise complaints and defend land rights in resettlement and infrastructure processes—strengthening both equity and environmental governance (moderate confidence).¹²⁵ Such mechanisms are particularly important in contexts of large-scale land acquisition, infrastructure development, or resource extraction, where displacement and land disputes are common drivers of insecurity. However, participation must be safe and supported. If restrictive norms, mobility constraints and potential SGBV risks are not addressed, engagement declines and programme effectiveness is reduced.¹²⁶ Strengthening state accountability, including investigation, prosecution, and sanction of attacks against environmental defenders also helps to support women's engagement in governance and decision making by enabling safe spaces and access to justice services.¹²⁷

Addressing gender inequality and SGBV as systemic barriers strengthens programme outcomes (emerging to high confidence). Integrating equality and anti-harassment policies, safeguards, grievance mechanisms and risk mitigation on SGBV and safety risks improves trust and uptake of programmes and women's participation in local governance and tenure mechanisms.¹²⁸ The UK Government has funded programmes to mainstream SGBV into nature-based solutions, including in the MENA region where discussions on power dynamics, gender norms and financial decision-making were held with couples to reduce household intimate partner violence. Additionally, the UK Government supported mainstreaming SGBV in a resilience

¹¹⁹ Kezie-Nwoha, Yoshida, and Bond (2021); Ortiz and Ensor (2023); UN Women (2022)

¹²⁰ Malivel, Huyer, and Seager (2024)

¹²¹ Yahya and Elkareem (2021)

¹²² Amoroso Galbiati and Tait Lima (2025); IUCN (2024); Rodríguez Hooker (2024); UNEP (2024)

¹²³ Guáqueta Solórzano (2024); Pereira, et al. (2024); UNDP (2025)

¹²⁴ Castañeda Carney, Sabater, Owren and Boyer (2020); Clugston, Rhodes, Nneli and Fraser (2024); CIFOR (2016)

¹²⁵ GBV AoR Helpdesk. (2021); World Bank (2020)

¹²⁶ World Bank (2020)

¹²⁷ Amoroso Galbiati and Tait Lima (2025); CIDH/REDESCA (2026)

¹²⁸ Alexander-Scott, Bell, and Holden (2016); Gaviria Betancur (2024); GBV AoR Helpdesk. (2021); Guáqueta Solórzano (2024); FCDO (2026a); Rodríguez Hooker (2024)

building programme in Syria by gaining support from key ministries.¹²⁹ Broader evidence from climate–SGBV programming further demonstrates that failure to integrate SGBV considerations can directly undermine environmental interventions, including those aimed at shifting livelihoods away from environmentally harmful practices. Policy frameworks (national and international) that include gender commitments but omit SGBV considerations illustrate how partial approaches can limit effectiveness in practice.¹³⁰ Additional evidence from conservation contexts shows that violence against women environmental defenders undermines both environmental protection and gender equality, reinforcing the need for safeguarding mechanisms (moderate confidence).¹³¹ Protecting women environmental defenders through establishment of women-led territorial financing mechanisms linked to land rights and community governance structures is demonstrated to build women’s economic agency and influence over land and resource governance.¹³² This is itself a critical intervention for reducing environmental degradation and conflict risk, as they play frontline roles in defending land, water and resources.¹³³

Engaging women’s groups and Indigenous groups and fostering community-based approaches consistently strengthen outcomes (high confidence). Supporting women’s organisations, local knowledge, networks and collective action enhances resilience, strengthens governance and improves programme sustainability, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected settings.¹³⁴ For instance, in Liberia, programmes that supported women’s participation in land dispute resolution—through Peace Huts and community land committees—improved access to justice, strengthened local governance and contributed to more inclusive and conflict-sensitive land management.¹³⁵ In frontier and resource-dependent contexts, community-based approaches that bring women and men together in governance and monitoring roles can also reduce environmental degradation and conflict risks. Examples from Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico highlight the efforts of Indigenous communities to establish social watch groups and mechanisms for monitoring and reporting environmental crimes, which have helped build local capacity, improve conservation efforts and reinforce social cohesion.¹³⁶ Efforts should also include engaging these groups in convenings, leadership platforms, collective agency, and influential decision-making spaces. Interventions that facilitate Indigenous women’s engagement in national and regional decision-making spaces—such as dedicated conferences, regional platforms and mapping of women’s organisations—have been shown to increase visibility, coordination and representation of women’s priorities in land, climate and biodiversity policy processes, enabling their safe participation and empowering them as leaders with voice and agency. The UK-funded Amazon Catalyst for Forest Communities (AMCAT) programme, which runs from 2025-2030, highlights the effectiveness of collective and network-based approaches to women’s leadership, including the formation of territorial funds, legal recognition of women’s organisations, and policy reforms at local governance levels. These mechanisms strengthen women’s ability to influence resource governance, access finance, and shape community decision-making, while reinforcing social cohesion and accountability. The programme will continue to evaluate the outcomes from these activities, but they aim to demonstrate a myriad of social benefits for Indigenous women in

¹²⁹ Bangura and Feather (n.d.)

¹³⁰ Arana Zegarra (2017); Escobar (2024); IUCN (2022)

¹³¹ Arana Zegarra (2017); IUCN (2020); UN Women, UNDP, and WFP (2023)

¹³² FCDO (2026a); Escobar (2024)

¹³³ UNEP (2024)

¹³⁴ Arana Zegarra (2017); Escobar (2024); Gaviria Betancur (2024); Gaviria Betancur (2025); Guáqueta Solórzano (2024); Ngum and Barooah (2023); Pereira et al. (2024); Rodríguez Hooker (2024)

¹³⁵ UN Women, UNDP, & WFP (2023)

¹³⁶ Ngum and Barooah (2023); Rodríguez Hooker (2024)

their communities and households, as participatory stewards and leaders in governance for forest and biodiversity preservation and restoration.¹³⁷

Securing land and resource rights, economic opportunities, and sustainable (alternative) livelihood options reduce both environmental degradation and conflict risk (emerging to high confidence). When women lack access to land, resources or safe income opportunities, they may be pushed into exploitative or environmentally harmful activities. Strengthening land tenure security and alternative livelihoods improves environmental stewardship, reduces incentives for unsustainable practices, and supports conditions associated with reducing vulnerability to conflict and climate shocks.¹³⁸ For example, a scoping review of 49 studies on SGBV in agricultural settings found that women's secure land and resource ownership has the potential to protect against SGBV as these rights are connected to agency and economic dependence.¹³⁹ Complementary evidence from climate adaptation programming shows that adaptive social protection mechanisms, such as cash transfers, can increase women's income, bargaining power and resilience. For example, mobile transfers in Niger reduced travel burdens and strengthened women's control over resources (high confidence for social protection impacts; moderate for environmental outcomes reducing conflict risks).¹⁴⁰ Evidence from United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP), International Organization for Migration (IOM) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) programming further demonstrates that integrating women's economic empowerment into environmental restoration, such as through access to finance, clean energy technologies, and green enterprises, can reduce reliance on environmentally harmful practices while strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity.¹⁴¹ Translating legal standards into practical guidance and actionable measures, enabling States to operationalise human rights and gender approaches in environmental policy, supporting awareness of land and resource rights for women and local communities.¹⁴² Advocating for, raising awareness of, and enhancing progress in these areas, seemingly tangential to environmental resource and land governance, helps to enable transformational shifts in community and national gender dynamics that can help to reduce or lessen the impacts women and girls encounter during insecurity and conflict settings.¹⁴³

Establishing and supporting health, education, documentation and social protection services is essential for strengthening women's and girls' participation and resilience, particularly in displacement settings (high confidence). These services are critical for reducing SGBV, including child marriage, and improving livelihoods for displaced and refugee women and girls, as well as helping families adapt to unfamiliar environments.¹⁴⁴ Lack of documentation, which many displaced persons and refugees experience, and limited access to services exacerbates marginalisation and constrains women's ability to engage in recovery, governance and livelihood activities. Recognizing climate- or environment-related displacement as a legal category can provide resources for documentation and social protections when people and communities are displaced.¹⁴⁵ Evidence from climate-related programming in sub-Saharan

¹³⁷ FCDO (2026a)

¹³⁸ Ngum and Barooah (2023); Escobar. (2024); Gaviria Betancur (2024); Guáqueta Solórzano (2024)

¹³⁹ FCDO (2026b); O'Mullan, Sinai, and Kaphle (2024)

¹⁴⁰ World Bank, (2024)

¹⁴¹ Bradley and Liakos (2019); UNEP (2024); UNHCR (2022); UNHCR (2023)

¹⁴² CIDH/REDESCA (2026)

¹⁴³ DCAF (2022)

¹⁴⁴ Kelly et al. (2021); Klugman (2022); Klugman and Ortiz (2023); Yasukawa (2023)

¹⁴⁵ Castro Buitrago (2024); Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2023)

Africa and Bangladesh suggest that SRH services can strengthen adaptive capacity by improving health, bodily autonomy and women's participation in decision-making, while research from cyclone- and flood-prone communities in Bangladesh and Mozambique shows how climate shocks directly affect reproductive health decision-making and outcomes.¹⁴⁶ However, in many displacement settings, SRH services are not reliably available due to lack of funds, policy issues, training gaps and lack of supplies, as well as overworked health workers struggling to meet demand.¹⁴⁷

Engaging men and boys to address harmful masculinities, patriarchal norms, and pathways of risk supports holistic gender-responsive programming (emerging confidence with need for more research and evidence). This can include separate or sequenced dialogue where appropriate, to address harmful gender norms and stereotypes in shaping gender dynamics and control over land, water and livelihoods or engaging couples in dialogues and convenings. Pressures to conform to harmful masculine ideals is an aggravating factor for SGBV, particularly in sectors traditionally associated with masculinity, such as fishing, forestry and mining. Community-based education to address attitudes, beliefs and behaviours can transform social norms and promote positive masculinities.¹⁴⁸ This gender-transformative practice shows that working with men and boys is important for shifting norms and reducing backlash toward women, which have cascading effects when and where security risks are heightened.¹⁴⁹

WHAT HARMS

The evidence from this review makes clear what harms and potentially undermines gender security, but there is a need for further detailing of examples and synthesis. Programmes rarely monitor and report on gender efforts, especially where gender-responsive programming is omitted or there are negative outcomes on gender. Therefore, reporting on approaches that potentially harm gender equality efforts, and thus the evidence base, is limited. **Gender-blind or technocratic interventions that fail to account for inequality, safety and power dynamics and norms can exacerbate both environmental degradation and insecurity.** These include programmes that increase women's unpaid labour burdens, exclude them from decision-making, disregard gender dynamics and care work, or expose them to violence, and limit or take away rights, land, and tenure.¹⁵⁰ Evidence from environmental crime contexts further shows that militarised or enforcement-heavy approaches without safeguards can increase risks of exploitation, forced labour and sexual violence.¹⁵¹ Weak governance, corruption and limited institutional capacity compound these risks, particularly in resource-rich frontier settings where impunity is high. Exclusion from social protection systems further exacerbates vulnerability: where women, migrants and displaced populations lack access to income support, health care and employment protection, environmental shocks and livelihood loss increase reliance on unsafe or environmentally harmful coping strategies.¹⁵² Across contexts, interventions that fail to address underlying inequalities and safety risks are more likely to deepen vulnerability, undermine environmental outcomes and reinforce conflict dynamics.

¹⁴⁶ Dijkerman, McMullen, Hammond, and SRHR and Climate Justice Coalition (2025)

¹⁴⁷ Ngwibete, et al. (2024)

¹⁴⁸ O'Mullan, Sinai, and Kaphle (2024)

¹⁴⁹ Burrell et al. (2025)

¹⁵⁰ Amoroso Galbiati and Tait Lima (2025); Anjum and Aziz (2025); Arana Zegarra (2017); Guáqueta Solórzano (2024); Ngum and Barooah (2023)

¹⁵¹ Castañeda Carney, Sabater, Owren and Boyer (2020); García (2023); Riccoboni and Dyna (2025); UNODC (2025)

¹⁵² ILO (2026)

One example of a programme not meeting conservation outcomes due to gender-blind approaches is a wetland restoration initiative in Uganda. The initiative aimed to reduce environmentally damaging wetland farming, which is primarily undertaken by women lacking secure land rights, by promoting alternative livelihoods, including livestock provision and facilitated access to leased land. However, the programme failed to account for local gender and power dynamics. This led to unintended and harmful outcomes. In some cases, men appropriated livestock assets, including for dowry payments to take additional wives, while women faced increased risks of intimate partner violence and sexual exploitation by landowners. As a result, many women deemed these alternative livelihoods unsafe and returned to wetland farming, where they retained greater control over income and personal security. The initiative therefore fell short on both environmental and resilience objectives—failing to reduce ecosystem degradation while exacerbating gendered insecurity. This case illustrates how neglecting gender inequality and SGBV risks can undermine programme effectiveness and demonstrates that integrating safeguarding and gender-responsive design from the outset is critical to achieving both environmental and social outcomes.¹⁵³

Table 2: Examples from interventions, platforms and programmes

Promising interventions

MENA (AI Murunah+) – GBV-integrated water and climate programme

A UK-funded programme implemented by International Water Management (IWM) International in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) integrated SGBV prevention into nature-based water and climate adaptation. An initial gender, disability and social inclusion analysis identified SGBV and unequal household dynamics as key barriers to women's participation in water management and household adaptation activities. In response, the program implemented couples-based norm change, adapted from the International Rescue Committees' (IRC) EA\$E (Economic and Social Empowerment) model, which engages couples in structured discussions to address gender norms, power dynamics and financial decision-making within households to reduce the risk of SGBV, alongside asset transfers and business training, to further link the livelihood support.¹⁵⁴ **Outcome:** Early evidence indicates improved household decision-making and increased engagement of women in climate adaptation and resource management (evaluation forthcoming in 2026).

Kenya: Gender-responsive grievance mechanisms in water and climate resilience

The Kenya Water Security and Climate Resilience Project integrated inclusive grievance redress mechanisms, ensuring representation of women and marginalized groups in land and resettlement processes. These mechanisms strengthened women's ability to raise complaints, defend land rights, and engage in decision-making around environmental infrastructure.¹⁵⁵ **Outcome:** Improved access to justice and protection of women's land rights in climate resilience programming (emerging confidence).

Liberia: Women-led land governance and dispute resolution

A joint UN Women, WFP, and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) programme supported women's participation in land governance and dispute resolution mechanisms, including Peace Huts and community land committees. The initiative strengthened gender-responsive local governance, improved dispute resolution, and linked land management to peacebuilding and environmental oversight.¹⁵⁶ **Outcome:** Increased women's leadership and more inclusive, conflict-sensitive land governance (emerging to high confidence).

¹⁵³ Clugston, Rhodes, Nneli, and Fraser (2024)

¹⁵⁴ Bangura and Feather (n.d.)

¹⁵⁵ World Bank (2020)

¹⁵⁶ UN Women, UNDP, and WFP (2023)

Sub-Saharan Africa: Adaptive social protection for resilience

Climate adaptation programmes incorporating cash transfers and economic inclusion—including mobile payments—have improved women’s income, bargaining power, and resilience to environmental shocks. In Niger, mobile transfers reduced travel burdens and enhanced women’s control over resources.¹⁵⁷ **Outcome:** Strengthened adaptive capacity and reduced vulnerability to climate shocks (high confidence for social protection impacts; emerging for environmental outcomes).

Regional framework - Latin America: Gender-responsive regional frameworks

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights developed a set of mandates within the framework of the Inter-American Programme (PIA) and related instruments focused on key priorities of eradicating gender-based violence; universal access to comprehensive health services, including SRH rights; the promotion of women’s economic rights; and the recognition, reduction, and redistribution of unpaid care work, alongside greater support and recognition for caregivers. It emphasises strengthening leadership among women and adolescent girls, particularly those from historically excluded groups, and the integration of a gender perspective across all entities and bodies of the Organization of American States through knowledge production, dialogue, and training.¹⁵⁸ These priorities are particularly relevant in contexts where environmental degradation, displacement, and service disruption converge, increasing exposure to multiple forms of harm, including gender-based violence. **Outcome:** Improved regional coordination on key priority gender security risks.

National policy: Gender-responsive climate coordination institutions and frameworks

Multiple countries globally, have developed national gender and climate strategies, with the leadership of the National Gender and Climate Change Focal Points of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This has enabled strengthening coordination on gender across ministries and sectors and embedding gender equality into cross-sectoral climate and environmental planning, including in food security, water, forests and frontier economies which increasingly include addressing SGBV, and in some countries linking the risks associated with pathways to conflict.¹⁵⁹ **Outcome:** Improved institutional alignment and integration of gender into climate policy (emerging confidence).

Global practice: Gender safeguards in conservation financing and programming

Environmental programmes, including those supported by multilateral financing entities require targeted consultations with women’s groups and gender analysis, with integration of gender action plans, to increase safeguards, and progressive policy and programming, and monitoring and evaluation plans with gender. These organizations are increasingly considering and integrating WPS themes into their analysis and intervention programming. These measures aim to prevent exclusion, reduce harm, and improve programme outcomes.¹⁶⁰ **Outcome:** Strengthened programme design and risk mitigation, though evidence on adequate intervention and long-term impacts remains limited (emerging confidence).

Emerging platforms for evidence and practice: Tracking what works

The **RISE Challenge platform (Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Environments)**, funded (initially) by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) and led by IUCN, provides targeted funding and technical support to locally led organisations to integrate gender-based violence risk mitigation into natural resource governance, conservation, fisheries and climate resilience projects. It functions as both an innovation fund and a structured learning mechanism, enabling grantees to design context-specific interventions while systematically documenting lessons, tools and emerging evidence across diverse

¹⁵⁷ World Bank (2024)

¹⁵⁸ CIM (2024)

¹⁵⁹ NAP Global Network (2025); WEDO (2026)

¹⁶⁰ UNEP (2024); WWF (2021)

settings.

Platform link: <https://genderandenvironment.org/rise-challenge/>

The **Gender, Natural Resources, Climate and Peace Knowledge Platform**—developed through a joint initiative of UNEP, UN Women, UNDP and the UN Peacebuilding Support Office—serves as a global community of practice and knowledge hub. It brings together practitioners, researchers and policymakers to share evidence, tools and case studies on programming at the intersection of gender, environmental governance and peacebuilding.

Platform link: <https://www.gender-nr-peace.org/>

The **Environmental Peacebuilding Association (ENPAX)** platform further complements these efforts by providing a broad repository of research, policy analysis and practitioner resources on environment, conflict and peacebuilding. Notably, it includes a dedicated gender filter, enabling users to identify resources specifically focused on the gender–environment–security nexus, including interventions, case studies and evaluations relevant to fragile and conflict-affected settings.

Platform link: <https://enpax.org/>

Donor-funded comparable programming and policy approaches

Canada – Lake Chad Basin: Gender-responsive environmental peacebuilding

Global Affairs Canada has supported integrated programming in the Lake Chad Basin that combines ecosystem restoration, climate-resilient livelihoods, and community conflict resolution, with a strong emphasis on women's participation. Operating in a highly fragile and conflict-affected region, the programme supports displaced and resource-dependent communities, linking natural resource governance with peacebuilding mechanisms. Women are central to implementation and benefit-sharing, helping to reduce grievances linked to land, water and resource access.

Project profile: Lake Chad Basin – Climate resilience and peacebuilding.
<https://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/project-projet/details/p011862001>

Canada – Women-led climate and environmental action

Through partnerships such as the Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action (GAGGA), Canada funds grassroots women-led organisations working on climate justice, environmental protection and resistance to extractive industries. This model prioritises direct funding to local actors, enabling context-specific solutions and strengthening women's leadership in environmental governance and advocacy.

Program profile: Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action: Women Leading Climate Action
<https://gaggaalliance.org/new-partnership-to-support-gender-just-climate-action-the-government-of-canada-with-the-global-alliance-for-green-and-gender-action/>

2024 Annual Impact Report noting approaches and outcomes of programming for women's rights and environmental justice groups and defenders: https://gaggaalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/GAGGA_Annual-Report-2024_Summary-1.pdf

Canada – Gender-responsive conservation finance

Canada has supported gender-responsive conservation and climate finance mechanisms in the Caribbean, including through partnerships the Caribbean Biodiversity Fund and Caribbean Regional Fisheries Mechanism (CRFM). The programs integrate ecosystem-based adaptation, livelihoods, and women's participation in decision-making. The supported initiatives aim to demonstrate how long-term conservation financing—particularly through national conservation trust funds—can be leveraged to advance gender-responsive natural resource governance. These programs increasingly integrate women's participation, gender analysis and inclusive livelihood support, including just transition pathways such as green technologies, sustainable fisheries practices and alternative income opportunities for communities affected by restrictions on resource use. As trust fund models expand globally, they offer a scalable mechanism for embedding gender-responsive programming within environmental financing architectures. However, evidence on their direct impact on reducing gendered security risks and conflict remains limited, in part because many of these initiatives and trust funds are still in early stages of implementation and evaluation.

Caribbean Biodiversity Fund. Annual report 2023. <https://caribbeanbiodiversityfund.org/reports/>
Global Affairs Canada. Sustainable technologies for adaptation and resilience in fisheries (STAR-Fish) project. <https://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/project-projet/details/p012938001>

Canada – Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP)

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy embeds gender equality as a core requirement across development programming, including climate, environment and natural resource sectors to institutionalize gender-responsive programming. It mandates gender analysis, supports women's participation and leadership, and promotes rights-based approaches to resilience and sustainability. FIAP has influenced the design of climate finance and environmental programmes, ensuring that gender considerations are integrated from the outset rather than treated as an add-on.

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx

USAID – AGENT and RISE Programming

The USAID-funded Advancing Gender in the Environment (AGENT) programme, (implemented with IUCN) focuses on embedding gender within environmental governance systems, strengthening coordination between environment ministries (e.g. forestry, fisheries) and national gender machinery/institutions. It supports the integration of gender analysis, safeguards and inclusive decision-making into policies and programmes across multiple ecosystems, highlighting institutional reform and cross-sector coordination. The RISE Challenge complements this by funding locally led projects that apply these approaches in practice, including integrating gender-based violence risk mitigation and women's participation in resource governance.

Resilient, Inclusive and Sustainable Environments (RISE) Challenge report 2019–2022. https://portals.iucn.org/union/sites/union/files/doc/RISE_Challenge_Report_2019-2022.pdf

Former AGENT program link: <https://genderandenvironment.org/agent/>

3.1 Evidence gaps and remaining questions

While the evidence base on gendered security risks linked to environmental degradation and conflict is growing, it remains uneven and fragmented. Much of the available peer-reviewed literature identifies correlations and emerging pathways, but **there is limited systematic evidence on how these risks translate into conflict outcomes, particularly for women and girls**, and on what interventions are most effective in mitigating them within this nexus. Evidence on what works to prevent or reduce risks, or empower women to strengthen and expand their resilience in the face of conflict-drivers, or support communities and individuals impacted in conflict-inflicted areas, remains especially limited, with examples emerging in grey literature but with relatively few rigorously evaluated programmes that address both environmental degradation and gendered insecurity.

Several thematic areas emerge where evidence gaps are most pronounced in high-risk and high-impact contexts and where the dynamics of the gender-environment-conflict intersections are most acute but least understood and explored in research.

- **Research on gender-conflict linkages with ecosystem collapse specifically is limited.** Resources that referenced “ecosystem collapse” specifically often referred to it as a potential future issue if environmental degradation continues. Additional research is needed to identify if specific ecosystems in the priority regions have already reached a tipping point of collapse and the gendered security risks in those contexts.

- There is limited evidence on the specific gendered dynamics and gendered security risks from interlinked concerns of environmental degradation and conflict in **frontier economies and mining, forestry and coastal and aquatic ecosystems** (e.g., fisheries collapse and blue economy transitions).
- **Women's roles within illicit environmental economies**, including coerced or voluntary participation in environmental crime and the impacts on them if it escalates into violent conflict is a critical gap to understanding gender insecurity pathways. There is also a gap in the literature on the gendered dynamics around conservation, organised crime, and security risks for women, including links between militarised anti-poaching operations and violence against local women.
- **Effective pathways for supporting displaced women and girls and host communities impacted by the intersection of conflict, migration/displacement and environmental degradation.** These pathways need to address livelihoods, environmental resilience and protection risks for both parties, as well as understanding context-specific drivers of gendered security risks in these situations.
- **Community-based governance and justice mechanisms**, where there is emerging but still limited evidence on how local institutions—such as resource management bodies, social monitoring systems and dispute resolution mechanisms—can reduce both environmental degradation and gendered insecurity and empower women's access and use of resources and services for enhanced safety and resilience.
- **Institutional strengthening and cross-sector coordination**, particularly linking environment ministries, gender machinery and justice systems, where there is limited documentation on how integrated governance approaches (bridging all three) can address systemic drivers of insecurity. Bringing together regional and local institutions, as well as donor government entities across the sectors can build capacity on the intersectional and -sectoral issues, build consensus on approaches to more cohesively and comprehensively investigate, respond to and report on the gender-environment-security nexus.
- Significant gaps persist in analysing **intersectional risks**, especially for marginalised groups and individuals, particularly **lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, or questioning (LGBTIQ+) individuals and persons with disabilities**. The gap in analysis leads to limited documentation and understanding of how multiple forms of marginalisation shape exposure to environmental and conflict-related insecurity and how women in these groups can be supported in accessing and rebuilding sustainable and safe nature-dependent livelihoods, in the face of or following conflict settings.
- The **loss and damage of cultural and natural heritage** and its implications for women's livelihoods, identity, traditional knowledge, and resilience remains underexplored, particularly beyond climate-specific frameworks and how post-conflict recovery pathways can support women and communities in restoring ecosystems, cultural heritage, and nature-based livelihoods
- Across all areas, there is a lack of **comparable, gender-disaggregated data** that integrates environmental, conflict and SGBV indicators to inform early warning systems and policy responses.

4 Recommendations

RQ5. What tangible policy recommendations emerge for strengthening UK WPS implementation, tackling gendered security risks across nature programming, and integrating gendered ecosystem risk into security frameworks?

Advancing gender equality, environmental sustainability, and peacebuilding requires a fundamentally **integrated approach that recognises their interdependence**. Evidence demonstrates that ecosystem degradation, gender inequality and conflict dynamics do not operate in isolation; rather, they reinforce one another, shaping pathways of risk and resilience. As such, effective policy and programming must move beyond siloed approaches toward a coherent, systems-based response that is integrated, inclusive, and innovative. This can start with enabling conditions of feminist foreign policy for gender equality, with institutionalising a cross-sectoral and cohesive approach among relevant actors and stakeholders. Only by advancing these priorities together can efforts to strengthen gender equality, environmental governance and peacebuilding be mutually reinforcing and deliver durable outcomes.¹⁶¹

There is a clear opportunity for the UK to strengthen its international leadership at the intersection of nature, gender and security. The UK is well positioned via multiple channels to support and influence international policy agendas, programming approaches, research, and financing to better connect these priorities in international fora, ensuring that gender-responsive, conflict-sensitive and nature-informed approaches are institutionalised and integrated across diplomatic, development, environment, and security efforts.

The following recommendations are based on the literature review and a dedicated review of the UK WPS National Action Plan (NAP) 2023-2027, Rio Convention frameworks and their gender action plans, as well as key security, resilience and early-warning frameworks and systems to provide targeted and tangible recommendations across the three core priorities, with some recommendations coming from existing sources.

4.1 Leveraging UK Environment and Development Finance: Policy and Programming Priorities

The UK's International Climate Finance (ICF) and broader ODA portfolio provide a primary mechanism to operationalise the gender–environment–security nexus. While progress has been made on gender mainstreaming, there is a clear opportunity to integrate gender-differentiated security risks more systematically—particularly those linked to environmental degradation, fragility and conflict—across both policy frameworks and programme delivery. At the same time, considerable evidence gaps remain in understanding the pathways linking environmental degradation, gendered insecurity and conflict, as well as in identifying what works to prevent and mitigate these risks. Addressing these gaps requires coordinated action across both policy and programming.

Policy priorities (ICF, ODA and multilateral engagement)

- **Allocate dedicated funding within ICF and ODA for research and evidence generation** on the gender–environment–security nexus, including in fragile and conflict-

¹⁶¹ COE-CIV (2025); Flach (2026)

affected settings, and identified ecosystems of heightened risk from nature and biodiversity loss, including frontier economies and threatened preserved areas.

- **Strengthen partnerships with multilateral agencies and research institutions** to build a more coherent and comparable evidence base.
- **Embed gender–environment–security requirements within ICF and ODA policy frameworks**, including business case guidance, analysis and risk screening tools and results frameworks, ensuring systematic consideration of SGBV risks, displacement dynamics and conflict pathways linked to environmental degradation.
- **Develop and promote standardised indicators and reporting requirements** that integrate gender, environmental and conflict variables across UK-funded programmes.
- **Strengthen coherence across FCDO, Defra and multilateral climate and environmental funds** by promoting consistent standards on gender equality, safeguarding and conflict sensitivity.
- **Use UK environmental finance to set minimum safeguards and standards**, ensuring that all funded programmes integrate gender analysis (inclusive of determinants of conflict pathways), SGBV risk mitigation, and inclusive participation as core requirements rather than optional components.
- **Prioritise funding allocations toward integrated approaches/programming** that link environmental management, livelihoods, social protection and peacebuilding in fragile and conflict-affected settings.
- **Align ICF investments with WPS and VAWG policy commitments**, ensuring environmental, nature and biodiversity finance contributes directly to reducing gendered insecurity and supporting women's protection, participation, empowerment and resilience.

Programming priorities

- **Require integrated gender, conflict and political economy analysis** (create/update integrated analysis tool) at programme design stage, ensuring interventions reflect local power dynamics, resource access, and security risks.
- **Embed robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems** that capture gendered security outcomes, including SGBV risks, participation, and resilience indicators.
- **Invest in mixed-methods data collection and research within programming** to build the evidence base on the gender-environment-security nexus, enabling analysis of longer-term pathways from environmental stress to insecurity and conflict, to support integration across sectors.
- **Scale support to locally led and women-led organisations**, including flexible and longer-term funding modalities that enable sustained engagement in environmental governance and risk mitigation, through a conflict sensitive approach that co-creates activities and identifies risks and mitigations in partnership with locally led and women led organisations e.g., incorporating local women survivor organisations and their experiences to design effective strategies for SGBV risk mitigation and environmental

degradation; raising awareness (workshops and advocacy) on linkages across environmental degradation, gender inequality and conflict pathways.

- **Invest in local knowledge and community-based governance and monitoring mechanisms**, including social watch groups, collaborative workshops that engage men and boys with women and girls and promote equitable governance structures, grievance systems and environmental crime reporting structures that strengthen accountability and cohesion.
- **Integrate alternative livelihoods, just transition pathways and green technologies**, reducing reliance on environmentally harmful, degrading, or exploitative economies, particularly in critical ecosystems and frontier sectors.
- Strengthen knowledge about and integration of drivers of the gender-environment-security nexus into **foundational rights programming** (e.g., education, water, food, health and reproductive services, etc.) to expand data collection and secure outcomes across sectors.
- **Embed safeguarding, SGBV risk mitigation and safe participation measures** throughout implementation, including engagement with men and boys where appropriate to shift harmful norms.
- **Engage and share programmatic learning through global platforms and communities of practice** in integrated spaces (and where necessary independently), for example, environmental/conservation (Gender–NR–Peace, ENPAX, and RISE), and security and early warning platforms.

4.2 Gender equality and women's rights

Securing and upholding equitable, inclusive and consistent recognition of women in all their diversity within international policy frameworks and as a standard of gender equality is a cross-cutting priority in the recommendations but now requires a dedicated component as well. In light of increasing contestation observed in recent forums, including the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), where attempts have been made to reinterpret previously agreed frameworks,¹⁶² and broader pressures across global negotiations (e.g., UNFCCC Conference of Parties (COP) 30),¹⁶³ the UK should continue to play a leadership role in upholding precedent, promoting consistency, and resisting regression. This includes particular attention to the rights and representation of those most marginalised, including Indigenous women, women from minority ethnic backgrounds, and sexual and gender identity minorities. This necessitates ensuring strong coordination, institutional memory, and diplomatic engagement to protect the integrity of existing gender equality commitments and prevent further rollback across international agreements.

4.3 UK WPS implementation

The UK WPS NAP (2023–2027) provides a strong foundation for advancing gender equality, participation and protection in conflict and fragile contexts, including recognition of evolving transnational threats such as climate change. However, while environmental stressors are

¹⁶² Women's Rights Caucus (2026)

¹⁶³ Climate Home News (2025)

referenced, the role of ecosystem degradation and nature loss as drivers and multipliers of gendered insecurity is not entirely documented and understood, and thus not yet systematically integrated. As the NAP enters the second half of implementation and is undergoing a refresh process, there is an opportunity to build the evidence base, and strengthen coherence and impact by expanding research, addressing gaps, and embedding evidence and action on the gender–environment–security nexus across policy and programming. The following recommendations outline priority areas for consideration.

- **Strengthen implementation of the UK WPS NAP through integration with environmental and security frameworks** by building the evidence base through multi-modal research and incorporating evidence on the gender–environment–security nexus into policy, programming and early warning approaches, including across participation, SGBV prevention and response; sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment safeguards; and humanitarian and crisis response.
- **Strengthen inclusive and representative participation of women and girls, in all their diversity, in WPS relevant programming** by ensuring meaningful engagement in decision-making, early warning, and resilience planning processes, with targeted efforts to include Indigenous women, local and rural women, migrants, women with disabilities, smallholder farmers and environmental defenders, recognising the unique risks they may face due to, and in the face of, insecurity.
- **Scale support for grassroots women’s rights organisations and environmental human rights defenders as key actors in resilience and early warning systems, as well as natural resource and environmental management, adaptation and restoration**, by providing sustained funding and capacity strengthening to enable women’s rights organisations and community women to integrate environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and associated gendered security risks into their advocacy, locally led risk monitoring and response, peacebuilding, and environmental governance. Support women and women’s rights organisations, through specific earmarked funds, to provide economic and technical assistance for building feminist and environmental movements, and for women’s environmental leadership and action in fragile and conflict-affected countries.¹⁶⁴
- **Protect and strengthen women’s land tenure security through integrated programming.** An upcoming review from FCDO on women’s land tenure security and conflict resilience found that women’s land tenure security contributes to more inclusive governance, effective recovery efforts, food security, climate adaptation, and conflict protection for fragile and conflict-affected settings.¹⁶⁵ Importantly, women’s secure land tenure decreases exposure to SGBV stemming from harmful coping strategies and improves agency and access to safer livelihood pathways. Women’s land tenure security is strengthened when programming addresses multiple, overlapping structures, including legal support, governance reform and shifts in social gender norms. The report emphasises that effective approaches include a practical legal framework to help women navigate claims, engagement with customary systems and women’s leadership, strong collective tenure design, accessible dispute resolution systems, and gender-transformative titling, such as joint registration.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ DCAF (2022)

¹⁶⁵ FCDO (2026b)

¹⁶⁶ FCDO (2026b)

- **Prioritise gender sensitive analysis for ensuring context-specific, locally grounded approaches to the gender–environment–security nexus within WPS implementation** by moving beyond universalised assumptions about women’s relationships with the environment. Policy and programming should require place-based analysis that reflects how distinct groups experience environmental degradation and resource insecurity, ensuring interventions are tailored to local realities. This includes developing an intersectional assessment framework and using it to systematically assess who benefits from environmental recovery and resilience efforts and avoiding approaches that seek to restore pre-crisis conditions where these may have reinforced inequality or insecurity. Instead, programmes should support more equitable and transformative outcomes that address underlying drivers of vulnerability and conflict.
- **Further develop and implement the domestic components of the WPS agenda** through engagement of displaced and migrant communities from conflict-affected contexts, strengthening coherence and learning with international programming and transnational networks linked to fragile settings. As stated in the NAP, “Foreign and domestic policy do not operate in isolation and the gender impacts of transnational issues such as migration will benefit from closer cross-government working.”
- **Avoid securitisation or militarisation of environment policy and response.** Specific regulatory and oversight measures need to be in place to prevent intimidation or abuse of communities, and especially of environmental defenders, by public and private security providers.¹⁶⁷

4.4 Rio Conventions

The Rio Conventions have made uneven but important progress in integrating gender equality, with advances over the past 15 years despite ongoing resource and implementation constraints. Much of this progress has centred on climate, with less attention to biodiversity loss, land degradation and ecosystem decline. However, the attention on climate has induced significant pushback in recent years on gender equality, particularly around definitions of women, and for the exclusion of issues on SGBV and SRH rights. As the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) approach key moments in 2026 to review and update their respective [Gender Plan of Action \(GPA\)](#) and [Gender Action Plan \(GAP\)](#), there is a timely opportunity for the UK to strengthen leadership on a more integrated gender–environment–security agenda, and support broader progress on gender equality as necessary to addressing ecosystem degradation and nature loss throughout multilateral environment negotiations. This includes promoting coherence across the conventions, advancing and safeguarding gender equality commitments, strengthening the use of evidence and shared learning, and supporting the meaningful participation of women and girls, alongside empowering Convention gender focal points to influence outcomes and implementation.

Cross-Rio Conventions

- **Strengthen coherence between the Rio Conventions and the WPS agenda** by embedding gender equality, protection and participation as core pillars of environmental governance across biodiversity, land restoration, and climate action. The UK can use its diplomatic leadership to align CBD, UNCCD, and UNFCCC commitments with WPS frameworks, positioning gender equality as integral to environmental resilience, conflict

¹⁶⁷ DCAF (2022)

prevention, and sustainable development and peace. This can be implemented across Defra and other departments.

- **Leverage WPS evidence, standards and practice across the Rio Conventions** to address gendered security risks linked to ecosystem degradation. This includes integrating SGBV prevention, SRH rights, land and resource rights, and support to women's rights organisations—to address gendered security risks linked to ecosystem degradation. The UK should promote the use of WPS-derived data, programming approaches and safeguarding frameworks to inform the conventions' gender action plans (and subsequent national plans), policy, implementation, ensuring that gendered security risks linked to ecosystem degradation are systematically recognised and addressed. This should include reporting to the conventions on the GAP delivery that integrates gender-differentiated security and conflict issues.
- **Strengthen coordinated advocacy to safeguard and advance gender commitments** by building coalitions across conventions and with like-minded partners to counter rollback of gender provisions and elevate the gender–environment–security nexus within international negotiations and implementation processes, including in security, resilience and early warning frameworks.
- **Support and engage with the women and gender constituency groups across the Rio Conventions** by, where feasible, strengthening collaboration with these groups to advance gender equality within convention processes. This includes supporting their advocacy on GAPs and ensuring gender considerations are effectively reflected in subsidiary bodies, negotiations and COP decision-making. (e.g., Women's Major Group, Women and Gender Constituency, Women and Gender Caucus, and any of their focused Working Groups).

CBD

- **Strengthen implementation of Target 22 under the Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) through a security-informed gender approach** by prioritising **delivery of the CBD GPA** in ways that address the links between biodiversity loss, conflict and SGBV. Recognize that CBD is in a unique position, having approved the most recent SGPA in 2024, ahead of more contentious geopolitical forces, and withstood inclusion of SGBV in the Decision. In the lead-up to the 2026 midterm review, the UK should report on, and advocate for stronger integration of these linkages in policy and programming, including safeguards to prevent SGBV and protect women environmental defenders, especially noting Indigenous women and other intersectional marginalised identities.
- Improve gender-responsive data, monitoring and reporting under the GBF by supporting standardised gender-disaggregated indicators and reporting aligned with Target 22. This should include strengthening and sharing data on SGBV risks and threats to women, especially Indigenous women, women in rural and remote communities, and environmental defenders, and promoting data-sharing across biodiversity, climate and security actors to inform learning, early warning assessment, and policy coherence.
- As recommended in the UK's Midterm Review of the CBD GPA (accessible [here](#)), "developing a **toolkit to track progress on gender-related biodiversity targets** and to have greater focus and development on the use of gender indicators" could be supported through allocated funds to develop with the Secretariat, and ensure that relevant indicators can be developed to further the evidence base on the gender-environment-security nexus and be integrated into national reporting mechanisms.

- **Strengthen the role of the UK CBD gender focal point (and other national gender focal points)** by supporting their capacity to address cross-sectoral issues—including gendered security risks—and to build coalitions and influence reporting and implementation under the GPA and across the Rio Conventions.

UNCCD

- **Strengthen reporting on gender and security under the UNCCD GAP** by ensuring that the upcoming first evaluation processes explicitly recognizes the gap and links between land degradation, environmental stress and gendered security risks. Use reporting and dialogues on the GAP to elevate this as a priority area for achieving Convention objectives.
- **Leverage the [UNCCD Gender Road Map](#) to accelerate implementation** by supporting targeted knowledge sharing, capacity-building and resource mobilisation to integrate gender-responsive approaches into land restoration, drought resilience and conflict-affected contexts.

UNFCCC

- **Safeguard and advance women’s participation, leadership and gender equality within the UNFCCC** by upholding existing commitments as a minimum and strengthening their implementation. Building on the COP30 Gender Action Plan, the UK should address gaps, particularly around SGBV and risks to women environmental defenders, by integrating evidence from the gender–environment–security nexus and ensuring environmental degradation is more fully centred in climate policy and practice. In early 2025, the VAWC Helpdesk provided support to FCDO and colleagues at DESNZ who were leading the UNFCCC GAP negotiations. They agreed to add GBV as a priority in the UK’s submission for Bonn (2025) commitment to this priority should be maintained.
- **Mitigate the security sector’s climate and environmental impact** by supporting greater transparency and accountability within UNFCCC processes. While this remains a sensitive and negotiated area, the UK can promote evidence-based dialogue to encourage improved monitoring and reporting of military greenhouse gas emissions and explore pathways to better align security sector practices with international climate commitments.¹⁶⁸

4.5 Security, resilience and early warning frameworks

A range of regional and global early warning and risk monitoring systems already provide critical infrastructure for tracking environmental stress, conflict dynamics and displacement trends, and for informing policy and operational responses. These include systems such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Early Warning and Response Network (EcoWARN), the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) Early Warning System (COMWARN), the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), the IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), and emerging platforms

¹⁶⁸ DCAF (2022)

such as the UN's Situational Awareness Interface (SUIS) and nascent Earth observation initiatives (e.g. the Early Action and Risk Tracing Hub (eEARTH)).

Collectively, these systems support knowledge accumulation by integrating data on climate variability, resource pressures, population movement and conflict risk, enabling real-time or near-real-time monitoring and trend analysis. They are used by governments and regional bodies to anticipate crises, guide humanitarian and development responses, and inform policy decisions related to resilience, food security and conflict prevention.

However, these frameworks remain insufficiently integrated. Environmental degradation and ecosystem stress are not consistently recognised as drivers or threat multipliers of conflict, and they do not systematically integrate gender-disaggregated data or indicators on gendered security risks, excluding data on SGBV, or land rights data.

Strengthening them through the inclusion of targeted gender–environment–security indicators—such as exposure to violence, access to livelihoods, and participation in decision-making—would significantly enhance their policy relevance and predictive value.

There is a clear opportunity for the UK to support more integrated, cross-sectoral approaches that better reflect the gender–environment–security nexus and strengthen anticipatory action and prevention.

- **Integrate the gender–environment–security nexus across key early warning and fragility frameworks** by promoting the systematic inclusion of ecosystem degradation and gendered security risks as core analytical components. This should include budgeted provisions for investigating and developing context-specific interventions for addressing conflict- and environmental degradation-related child marriage. Priority entry points include:
 - The United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 WPS agenda
 - UN Early Warning and Conflict Prevention systems
 - The UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and Responsibility to Protect
 - The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Fragility Framework
- **Strengthen the use of gender-responsive and environment-informed risk indicators and datasets** by advocating for the integration of data that captures gender-differentiated impacts, including SGBV, alongside environmental stressors such as land degradation, water scarcity and forest loss. This should support more accurate identification of escalation pathways and resource-related conflict risks.
- **Promote interoperability and data-sharing across conflict, gender and environmental systems** by supporting more cohesive approaches to risk monitoring, including linking datasets and analytical tools across sectors. This includes advocating for the integration of gender and environmental indicators into emerging platforms such as the Early Action and Risk Tracing Hub (eEARTH), as well as strengthening data integration within regional early warning systems.
 - Key regional conflict early warning systems for integration (e.g., CEWS, CEWARN, ECOWARN, COMWARN, FEWSNET, IOM DTM, etc.)

- The nascent [eEARTH](#) from the International Crisis Group, does not include gender datasets, nor forest cover datasets (such as from Global Forest Watch).
- **Leverage WPS frameworks to strengthen gender-responsive early warning** by promoting the use of SGBV and other gendered indicators as signals of escalating insecurity and ensuring that women's knowledge and participation are embedded in early warning, risk analysis and anticipatory action systems.

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