

Climate-induced loss and damage: a source of community instability and destruction

Policy Paper
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Climate change and the loss and damage resulting from it pose a threat to the rights of communities to protect their lives, livelihoods and their assets. The staggering rise in temperatures, the increase in rainfall and related heavy rain events, the more frequent heat waves, the rise in sea levels, the salinization of coastal lands and freshwaters, are just some examples of climate change impacts. These phenomena do not follow traditional patterns anymore. Local communities cannot rely on their traditional knowledge of weather patterns, and predicting these events with accuracy is becoming more difficult. These are just some of the clear manifestations of the adverse impact of climate change. They are now the daily reality for a lot of people at the frontline.

National governments are the primary decision-makers for climate action, and they must adopt fair, effective, and practical approaches to tackle the real causes of climate change and the impacts that climate change is already having on communities at risk. The forthcoming Conference of the Parties (COP26) in Glasgow from October 31 to November 12, 2021 offers the ultimate opportunity to do just that.

Following the Paris Agreement¹ national governments are due to review their commitments on climate action during COP26. These commitments are expressed through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which embody efforts by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. At present, NDCs currently submitted do not go far enough to reverse the current trend in global rising temperatures. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), greenhouse gas emission rates must be reduced by at least 45% compared to the 2010s. However, according to the report of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), NDCs submitted by countries so far only account for a 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emission - far from the minimum requirement of 45%. This foreshadows extreme events that are likely to exacerbate the already difficult conditions experienced by communities most at risk.

The momentum built ahead of and during COP26 should serve to encourage states (especially industrialised and developed countries) to make more concrete efforts to increase the level of ambition of all nations, and to effectively implement the commitments made at the international level. This commitment needs to be reported and tracked.

¹ <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs/nationally-determined-contributions-ndcs>

To do so, developing countries need a formal process to report on progress made to avert, minimize, and address loss and damage; and to take stock of the resources mobilised in support of climate-vulnerable communities. The best way for these mechanisms to be established and effective is to retain loss and damage as an official element of UNFCCC negotiations. During COP26, we hope to see a decision by member states to introduce the issue of loss and damage as a standing agenda item for all future COP discussions.

At COP 26 we would like to see commitment towards bold action in three main areas:

1. Averting, minimising, and addressing loss and damage
2. Enhancing gender equality and inclusion
3. Increasing financial commitments to support climate-vulnerable countries and communities

Climate-related loss and damage are a reality and need to be effectively addressed

Climate change is already having devastating impacts, often beyond what is possible for countries and communities to adapt to. We refer to this impact as “loss and damage”. The projected economic cost of loss and damage in developing countries alone by 2030 is estimated to be US\$400 billion a year by one study (Baarsch et al., 2015), and between 290 and US\$580 billion in another study (Markandya and González-Eguino, 2018). By 2050 the economic cost of loss and damage in developing countries is estimated to be US\$1,132 - 1,741 billion (Markandya and González-Eguino, 2018) and US\$1-1.8 trillion (Baarsch et al., 2015)².

Natural disasters or weather-related events (whether or not attributed to climate change) already cause losses of more than US\$300 billion per year. It is estimated that by 2030, global loss and damage specifically associated with climate change will amount to between \$300-700 billion, potentially increasing to about US\$1.2 trillion per year by 2060³.

GNDR has researched local-level risk perceptions as part of its flagship *Views from the Frontline* programme. Over 100,000 CSOs, local government representatives, and communities were interviewed. The analysis shows that more than 60% of interviewees believe that the main threats faced by the current generation are floods, droughts, and climate change⁴. These phenomena affect both agricultural and income-generating activities for many communities. They cause very significant migratory movements and expose communities to more fragility. For some respondents, “extreme weather events impact the natural system and affect food security and livelihoods all over the world”⁵. For others, more frequent droughts and torrential rains lead to increased forest fires and flooding, respectively.

² <https://us.boell.org/en/unpacking-finance-loss-and-damage> (2021)

³ <https://actionaid.org/publications/2019/market-solutions-help-climate-victims-fail-human-rights-test> (2019)

⁴ See *Views from the Frontline* data platform here: <https://vfl.world/explore-vfl-data/>

⁵ Concern Worldwide, “*how climate change threatens food security — and why we’re all at risk*” October 23, 2019 available on <https://www.concernusa.org/story/climate-change-food-security/>,

As a direct impact, 50% of respondents highlighted ongoing loss and damage of housing and loss of livelihood. A further 20% highlighted the loss and damage of crops that remain hard to restore

Climate change has an impact on many aspects of people's lives: it has an economic impact, as mentioned above. The phenomenon is also responsible for the forced displacement that has pushed back communities and families into poverty. A GNDR project called *Making Displacement Safer* has shown that persons who are displaced (whether due to climate change or not) seem to be more concerned with economic-related issues. The increase in the number of climate change events will lead to more displacement and create a situation that will be a blow to sustainable development efforts.

For example, in the Banibangou community in Niger, ecosystem degradation was identified as a factor that caused mass displacement. So addressing climate impact on ecosystems was one key action to reduce population displacement. The community worked to reinforce existing dykes and plant trees. They also organised training sessions for women and youth on income-generating activities, as poverty was a major obstacle to resilience. As a result of these activities, communities (and women's groups in particular) have been able to increase their market gardening and livestock activities.

Although loss and damage affects many communities and local actors in an extreme way, the issue is rarely approached with the same urgency as other key climate discussions (for example, mitigation and adaptation measures). This must change. Loss and damage must be addressed with the same level of urgency by climate negotiators. Communities most at risk need decision-makers' support to address loss and damage caused by climate change. Clear plans, commitments, and budget allocations should be agreed on with the utmost urgency. States should have an ecosystem approach and give priority to preventive investments. They should finance actions for the conservation and restoration of ecosystems, in order to guarantee ecosystem functions and services, and a natural balance is maintained. Communities on the frontline need to be compensated for the losses and damages caused. They need help in the restoration and support to transform their lives and wellbeing. We need a just transition for climate impacted peoples that include economic as well as non-economic loss and damage.

Loss and damage should be addressed with a combination of urgent and longer-term measures.

The **urgent component** involves finding immediate solutions, namely: localising early warning systems; and allocating a budget for early support to the already significant impacts posed by climate change for the most at-risk communities. These solutions must apply to farmers, fishermen, coastal communities, and at-risk individuals suffering from the severe consequences of climate change - such as sea-level rises, floods, drought, etc.

The **long-term component** would address the cumulative effects of climate change, the occurrence of which is irreversible. Longer-term measures include setting up early warning systems adequate for recording the changing weather patterns we are experiencing.

Increased data collection and exchange, as well as local level involvement in scaling down climate projections, are key aspects of improved early warnings. This component would prioritise disaster prevention, and avert additional loss and damage. Adequate resources should be mobilised for this, with a multi-hazard approach.

Access to climate information is essential for community resilience. The GNDR *Views from the Frontline* programme results indicate that more than half of the communities interviewed cannot access relevant information about risk and resilience⁶. Some are taking action, but more support is needed. For example, in Rwanda, communities were concerned about the lack of access to information, such as weather forecasting, to enable them to prepare for disasters. To address this issue, they worked together with local organisations to conduct training on disaster risk reduction knowledge, climate data, and resilience actions. As a result, communities can now access information related to climate change and weather forecasting, which helps them prevent future climate-related disasters.

Local actors in Rosrovut, Tajikistan, worked together to address the lack of integration of disaster risk reduction and climate considerations in local development plans: they started by installing information community boards within various community centers. In these boards, information on climate issues, disaster risk reduction, and other relevant topics were posted. This stimulated community groups to share new proposals and ideas with their local government. The government in turn has committed to consider these ideas during their Disaster Risk Management Cycle review, and some of these activities were proposed to be included in the local development plan 2021-2025.

Women and children continue to be disproportionately impacted by climate change

Climate impacts, like many other disasters, have a disproportionate impact on particular societal groups: women and children are among the most impacted. Gender dynamics impact both the way women and girls are affected by disasters, and their capacity to withstand and recover from them. Gender inequalities can result in gender-differentiated disaster impact, and differentiated impacts can influence gender dynamics, which in turn affect future resilience to shocks.

According to *Views from the Frontline* 2019 data,⁷ only 15% of women surveyed say they are included in the design of resilience policies and actions. Similarly, the vast majority of women, children and youth, the elderly, and people with disabilities⁸ report that they are excluded from the design, implementation, and monitoring of resilience policies and activities.

⁶ <https://global-report.vfl.world/project/information-gap/>

⁷ <https://vfl.world/explore-vfl-data/>

⁸ More specifically, 80% of women interviewed; 85% of children/youth; 83% of elderly; and 87% of persons with disabilities.

Mapping the consequences of climate change must be gender-sensitive and transformative. To do this, it is imperative to invest in information and training activities dedicated to women. These actions will aim to strengthen women's empowerment, and further support their engagement in national and local climate and resilience processes. With strengthened capacities, they will be able to access resources, improve their self-care abilities, and ultimately contribute to change. Women's leadership should be strengthened if effective climate action is to be pursued. Without women's inclusion in the design of activities and plans, these initiatives often fail to reduce the intersectional vulnerabilities of women that only those at risk fully understand and can advise on. This includes the human-social, physical, economic, and environmental vulnerabilities and the gaps related to the consideration between women/girls and men, elderly, and persons with disabilities.

GNDR members are already working to ensure inclusion and women leadership in many local resilience activities. For example, members in the Wajur community in Indonesia have been supporting the involvement of women during local resilience action planning. A participatory assessment identified drought and insect infestation as the main threats affecting livelihoods. Women were better able to explain these threats because they are the main farmers and deal with them more regularly. In response to these threats, the women's group asked to be trained on resilient agriculture techniques. Training activities involved innovative techniques on how to reduce the risk of pest infestation and how to improve soil fertility. These techniques have contributed to increasing productivity and families' stability.

In Niger, communities in Sargane, Tillabéry region, have identified women's training on market-oriented gardening as a solution to address households' vulnerability. In Niger, women take care of their families, while men travel or invest in long-term income activities. During the first year after the training, more than 50 women were able to produce tomatoes, squash, carrots, and moringa. Given the results obtained, three women's groups are now lobbying to scale up this initiative and negotiating for adequate land and resources. Market-oriented gardening resulted in improving the communities' income and food supply, thus enhancing their overall resilience.

Children pay a high cost when it comes to climate-induced hazards and disasters. They don't have access to schools, and lose their lives when hospitals are no longer secure places. They deserve to be listened to so that solutions are sensitive to their difficulties. They must be educated about eco-citizenship actions so they become responsible citizens who are sensitive to the environment and climate. Decision-makers must secure their growth and development by providing safe places for their activities.

A sustainable fight against climate change must include vulnerable people in decision-making spheres.

The *Views from the Frontline* 2019 program has supported the successful implementation of projects in various communities, to improve resilience and promote inclusiveness of different stakeholders and the adoption of community ideas.

Climate financing needs to be increased more effectively, and target the impact of climate change in communities most at risk

The fight against climate change cannot be effective without structured financial plans that respond to the realities of communities on the ground and address the impact that climate change is already having on their lives and livelihood.

International stakeholders, national actors, and technical and financial partners must work together to define a common plan for financing climate action and resilience. This plan should cut across all relevant sectors, identify urgent actions, and actively promote successful experiences for scaling up. In particular, funds should be provided to tackle loss and damage, as well as overall adaptation measures.

Some key elements that would support increased action towards resilience building, adaptation and loss and damage include:

- **Localise climate information.** Climate change affects the livelihoods and income-generating activities of local communities. Effective climate action should go through local actors and should be aimed at strengthening the resilience and protection of communities' means of subsistence. Global climate projections are becoming more readily available, but these are often not translated down to the local level where communities need to prepare for crises ahead. To do this, it is urgent to find alternative and simple methods of facilitating access to reliable and local climate information, and bring climate scenarios to local actors (for example, participatory downscaling).
- **Work with civil society organisations to gather local priorities and integrate them across sectors.** Local information should guide development action at the local level. For this to be effective, it is important to work with civil society organisations, which can facilitate and mobilise communities at risk and connect with decision-makers. They can support efforts to integrate climate and resilience considerations into local planning processes and contribute to effective connections between local and national levels.
- **Integrate local knowledge into local planning.** People at the frontline of the climate crisis must be brought into the decision-making processes, and their knowledge and experiences should be taken into consideration. GNDR members are supporting communities most at risk to engage with their local government representatives, and contribute to resilience planning processes: more than 150 communities most at risk have been working together with local authorities to strengthen local resilience. Experiences from these communities highlight the increased effectiveness of local-level planning that takes into account risks and underlying factors of vulnerability.
- **Facilitate collaboration between research bodies and community actions.** The process of identifying inclusive and nature-based solutions requires a stronger collaboration between research institutions and community actors. This collaboration

makes it possible to map solutions based on both the reality on the ground of communities and technical and scientific analyses. It would result in concerted mechanisms that enhance and interweave local and scientific knowledge. This will promote the practical translation of technical solutions to the challenges posed by climate change.

During COP26, countries are expected to agree on an ambitious plan for the years ahead, which will include a clear financial mechanism that builds on the current pledge of US\$100 billion per year from developed countries. This plan should not only prioritise the significant reduction of greenhouse gas emissions but also increase action on adaptation and address loss and damage. It should serve as an instrument to catalyse change, and build solidarity with populations already affected by the negative impacts of climate change.