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# **Women Confronting Loss and Damage: Implications for the UK's international climate policy**

Policy brief: November 2022

Cover photo – Koabikigi cooperative of women smallholder farmers in Gisahara District, Rwanda, using innovative agroecological practices to grow vegetables in the face of climate change impacts. ActionAid has supported the cooperative by providing training on sustainable farming techniques such as soil conservation, crop diversification, crop rotation, mulching, seed keeping, and how to make compost fertilizers and botanic pesticides.

# Introduction

In 2022, the losses and damages<sup>1</sup> caused by climate change are escalating faster than predicted and with increasingly devastating consequences. With the Horn of Africa close to famine due to drought, 100,000 people displaced by floods in Nigeria, and 30 million in Pakistan affected by severe flooding, a resolution on Loss and Damage is urgently needed.

Alongside the devastating toll on human lives, the economic costs are skyrocketing. The costs of climate

losses and damages are estimated to be USD 400 billion a year by 2030, rising to USD 1-1.8 trillion a year by 2050 for low income countries alone.<sup>2</sup> Loss and Damage is the key topic of climate negotiations in 2022 and securing an agreement on financing will be the litmus test, not only for COP27 but for the entire global governance system on climate change.

## What is 'loss and damage' and 'Loss and Damage'?

Loss(es) and damage(s) can result from slow onset or extreme weather events and affect both human and natural systems. Examples of slow onset events are sea-level rise, salinisation, ocean acidification and desertification. Extreme weather events include droughts, floods, cyclones, wildfires, heatwaves and storms. While some forms of loss and damage can be translated in economic terms—such as loss of income and physical assets—many

losses and damages are non-economic. Non-economic loss and damage include loss of life, biodiversity, territory, cultural heritage, ecosystems, indigenous and local knowledge, and physical and mental health impacts. With the rise of every fraction of a degree of warming, these losses and damages are happening sooner, faster and more severely than expected,<sup>3</sup> and the impacts being more acutely felt by countries in the Global South.<sup>4</sup> When capitalised, Loss and Damage refers to the political debate on losses and damages, which covers issues of responsibility and justice.



Focus group discussion in Isiolo County, Kenya

## Loss and damage and women's rights: the knowledge and policy gap

Climate change affects everyone, but not equally. Women<sup>5</sup> living in countries vulnerable to climate change in the Global South—who bear the least responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions—are experiencing the worst impacts of the climate crisis. As such, developing appropriate international, national and local policy frameworks to address loss and damage will depend on relevant evidence to understand the complex interplay between climate change related losses and damages and gender inequality.

However, there is limited evidence on the nexus of climate loss and damage and gender, as well as a lack of loss and damage research that is led from a Global South perspective. Despite losses and damages being felt most acutely in the Global South, only 7.1 percent of studies on loss and damage originate from institutions in Africa, and even fewer focus on women's experience of losses and damages in Africa.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, most Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and studies focus on economic and physical losses and overlook non-economic impacts such as gender-based violence and mental health. These gaps in existing literature hide the complexities of climate impacts and lead to the silencing of a diverse and rich pool of knowledge on climate change impacts which should be central to informing climate policy and action at all levels.

## Feminist research on loss and damage

ActionAid conducted participatory, reflexive and feminist research to investigate women's lived experiences of loss and damage and understand how women are responding to these impacts. The research aimed to generate evidence to inform policy and action on loss and damage.

Research took place across four African countries: Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Zambia. It was conducted using a climate justice and gendered lens and sought to create space for a Southern-led and feminist perspective. In each country, research teams were jointly led by ActionAid and local partners working with women on the frontlines of climate change in their communities.

## The lived realities of loss and damage

ActionAid's research illustrated the multidimensional lived realities of African women at the forefront of the climate crisis. In addition to financial loss and material damage, women are experiencing a wide range of non-economic losses and damages, such as loss of life; loss of safety and security; damage to health and wellbeing; and heightened risk of gender-based violence.

Our research also found that women are taking actions to adapt and rebuild in the face of climate losses and damages. For example, women are leading the way in restoring damaged infrastructure, taking up alternative livelihoods, preserving food, planting drought-resilient crops and developing early warning systems. The research found that through these actions women are not only addressing climate impacts but also taking up leadership roles, challenging entrenched patriarchal norms and striving to advance gender equality in their contexts.

Yet, whilst these women-led initiatives are helping communities to adapt to climate change, it is clear that governments and policymakers in the Global North must do more to support and finance responses to losses and damages. The evidence from this research clearly demonstrates that current adaptation, mitigation, development and humanitarian measures are not adequate to address the needs and ensure the basic rights of women on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

Analysis of the findings demonstrates how losses and damages are aggravating pre-existing gender inequalities and materialising into a violation of women's fundamental human rights. Left unaddressed, climate impacts are exacerbating unequal gender norms, increasing women's care burden and leading to increased risk of gender-based violence. Climate change is pushing women and their communities from resilience to risk.

## The implications for climate policy and programming

This research demonstrates that far greater support and financial assistance are urgently needed to address loss and damage, and that communities need to be able to access this support. Furthermore, it demonstrates that loss and damage are complex problems that need

multi-layered and holistic solutions. Short- and long-term actions are needed to address urgent needs and help rebuild stronger and restore sustainably. These solutions need to recognise and breakdown the socially imposed barriers that women face when addressing climate impacts. A systemic and transformational approach is needed that will shift power, safeguard women's rights and allow space for women to lead.

## What this means for UK climate policy and programming

**The UK must use its position as outgoing COP president and as a negotiating party to help broker an agreement at COP27 on Loss and Damage and accelerate the establishment of a dedicated Loss and Damage Financing Facility (LDFF)**

A dedicated Loss and Damage finance facility needs to be agreed on at COP 27 to enable loss and damage

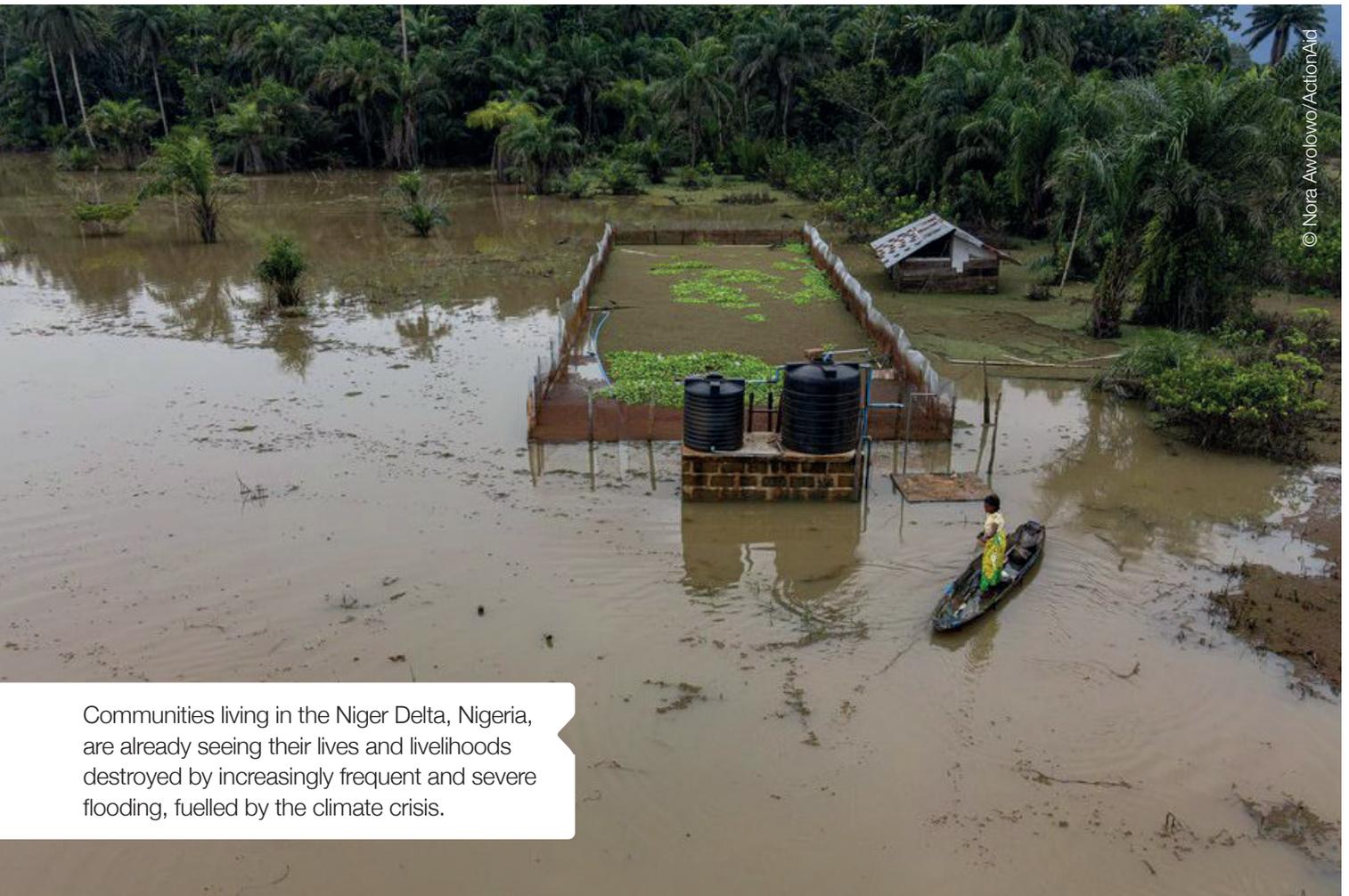
funds to be raised and delivered rapidly and at scale. Flexible, readily accessible, and locally appropriate funding is needed to support communities to address the losses and damages they are facing.

**The UK must commit to providing new and additional finance for loss and damage**

The UK has a historic responsibility for climate change, having built its wealth and power from the industrial revolution, extractive neocolonial and neoliberal policies, and the carbon-based economy. It therefore has a responsibility to provide new and additional finance to address climate-related loss and damage.

**The UK must push for loss and damage finance to be gender transformative**

Financing alone is not enough. Climate justice can only be achieved when based on the foundations of gender justice. Loss and damage financing therefore needs to adopt a systemic and transformational approach that will shift power to the local level, safeguard women's rights and enable women to lead.

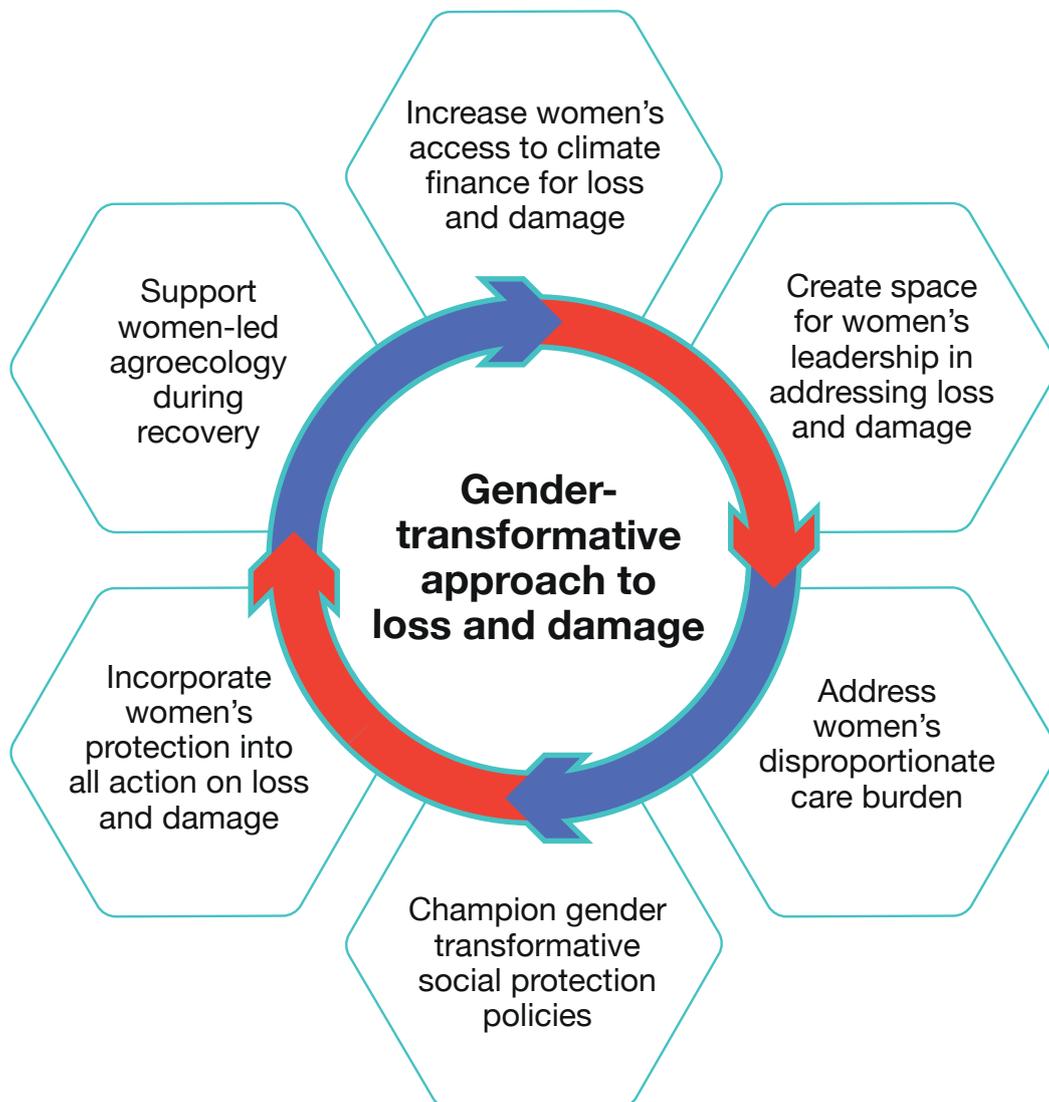


Communities living in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, are already seeing their lives and livelihoods destroyed by increasingly frequent and severe flooding, fuelled by the climate crisis.

The UK Government has committed to prioritising women and girls in its programming and policy work, as set out in its International Development Strategy, and as expected in the upcoming National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. We urge the UK Government to embed a gender transformative approach across all its programming on climate justice and within any upcoming Loss and Damage finance mechanism. The UK Government must use its position as a major provider of climate finance to champion a gender transformative approach to loss and damage financing from the outset.

ActionAid's research identified six key components to help guide loss and damage policy and programming in each of the four African countries involved in the research. These components should be adopted by the UK government as it considers how to address loss and damage through the FCDO, and as it contributes to international dialogues on loss and damage programming. These are illustrated in Figure 1 and detailed below.

**Figure 1:** Key components of a gender-transformative approach to loss and damage programming



## 1 Increase and enable women's access to climate finance for loss and damage

Across all four contexts women face challenges in accessing climate finance to address loss and damage. Special measures should be taken to remove bottlenecks that prevent women from accessing funds, and to provide tailored support for women lacking literacy or women with disabilities.

This requires deliberate efforts by the UK government to ensure that its own climate programmes are aligned with women-identified needs, that gender screening processes are incorporated into the selection of projects and that robust power analysis informs the design, delivery and assessment of projects. The UK government must also provide increased funding and support to women's groups on the frontlines of the climate crisis, including information on the types of funding available and how to access these funds. Meanwhile, as a major contributor to climate funds, the UK government has a responsibility to champion gender transformative approaches within these funds and the much needed Loss and Damage Finance Facility.

## 2. Create space for women's leadership in addressing loss and damage

This research has demonstrated the breadth and depth of women's leadership on addressing climate change at the local level. These women-led initiatives need to be recognised and supported at all levels so that they can be replicated and scaled. UK support for loss and damage needs to recognise the power of women's leadership in tackling the climate crisis and provide dedicated funding that promotes and supports women leaders in their communities.

## 3. Address women's disproportionate care burden

Simply creating leadership positions for women will not be effective if their disproportionate burden of work at the household level is not addressed. As the research has shown, women are overworked and suffer from time poverty, preventing them from prioritising their own development or leadership. These conditions are exacerbated by the strain that losses and damages put on people and their communities.

The UK's approach to loss and damage programming needs to recognise women's disproportionate responsibility of unpaid care and domestic work in the household and encourage quality public services that can lift their burden.

## 4. Champion gender transformative social protection policies

The findings demonstrate that climate losses and damages are leading to the violation of women and girls' fundamental human rights—such as access to food, clean water, shelter and education—and are heightening gender-based violence in resource-scarce communities. Governments must ensure the rights of women and girls and other marginalised groups, such as people with disabilities, are protected.

The UK can support this by championing gender-responsive social protection policies that address the inequalities faced by women and girls in the context of the climate crisis and help them to be better able to address climate losses and damages and rebuild from the impacts of climate shocks.

## 5. Incorporate women's protection into all action on loss and damage

When climate change results in losses and damages, women experience increased violence and risks to their health, wellbeing and autonomy. The research reveals that losses and damages are undermining the peace and security of women and girls by exacerbating pre-existing conflict risks and gender inequalities, including natural resource related conflicts and forced displacement.

This calls for women's protection thinking and approaches to be incorporated into all UK programmes and finance that seek to address losses and damages. Risks and power relations need to be analysed using participatory approaches and in partnership with women on the frontlines of climate impacts. Safe spaces must also be created for women and girls, alongside healthcare and counselling. Women can play a critical role in leading this service provision, as well as in conflict mediation, environmental peacebuilding and sustainable resource management systems.

## 6. Support women-led agroecology during the recovery

As demonstrated by the research findings, agroecology plays a key role in helping women smallholder farmers to cope with the climate crisis and its impacts. Agroecology is a transformative way of farming. It puts agriculture back into nature by taking into account the experience of farmers and indigenous people and combining it with evidence-based, natural agricultural practices that promote self-sufficiency and sustainability.<sup>7</sup>

The UK should ensure that its programming supports and encourages the transition to agroecology as a key tool to help address climate change. This can be done through supporting broad-based social movements and rural women's initiatives to widen the use of agroecology at the grassroots level; prioritising local food systems and territorial markets; and fostering short food supply chains.<sup>8</sup>

### A multifaceted approach to a multifaceted problem

These recommendations highlight the need for a multi-layered and multifaceted approach to addressing loss and damage that is anchored in context and that has a deep understanding of complex gender and power dynamics. These six components are relevant

to the contexts in which this research took place and the lived experience of the participants that took part. They are by no means the only components of a gender transformative approach to addressing loss and damage, and further research is needed to explore additional approaches and tools, such as cash transfers. It is also expected that a different combination of interventions may be needed for other contexts, in particular urban environments.



Participants of a focus group discussion in rural Chongwe, Lusaka, Zambia. The cutting down of trees for charcoal production in the area has led to changes in rain patterns which has negatively affected crop yields, resulting in food insecurity in their community.

### Acknowledgements

This paper is authored by Sophie Rigg (ActionAid UK) and Trimita Chakma (Independent Consultant), with input from Alice Ramsay (ActionAid UK) and Nafisa Gudal (ActionAid UK). It draws on research conducted in Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Zambia and on women's lived experiences of loss and damage. You can find the full report here: <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/AAUK%20Loss%20%26%20Damage%20report.pdf>

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