

Rooted in Resistance

Land Grabs, Climate Crisis and
Corporate Power – Women's
Resistance and Leadership



All over the world, women are at the heart of our economy and society – whether that’s as farmers in the food system, as workers in our vital public services, as unpaid carers propping up the economy or as leaders in responding to the climate crisis. Yet, due to long-standing economic practices and political decisions, they remain landless, at risk of marginalisation and systemically excluded from decision-making. In a world of escalating climate disasters, land grabs, food insecurity and a rollback on gender equality, continuing to ignore women’s land rights is no longer tenable.

Despite producing up to 60-80% of food in many countries, women own less than 2% of the world’s land.¹ This stark inequality is not accidental; it is a result of colonial legacies, patriarchal legal systems and a failing global economic system that is allowing the unchecked expansion of extractive industries, many backed by UK-based financing.²

As land becomes more degraded and scarcer, these systems reinforce one another, leaving women to bear the costs of increasing unpaid care burdens, hunger, gender-based violence and economic exclusion.

The Urgency of Land Justice

Across ActionAid’s global network, women are mobilising with feminist economic alternatives that resist corporate power and land grabs and protect ecosystems, while fighting for recognition, often in the face of threats, violence or silence from authorities. In Nigeria’s Niger Delta, women describe land once rich with cassava, now

poisoned by oil spills.³ In Cambodia, communities watch freshwater ponds destroyed for private development.⁴ In Brazil, Quilombola communities in São Luís Gonzaga confront persistent land grabbing and destruction of vital coconut groves.⁵ In Nepal, formerly bonded Kamaiya women have reportedly faced exclusion from land titles under discrimination resettlement schemes.⁶ These examples are not isolated; they show a repeated pattern of exclusion and discrimination of women’s land rights. This exclusion is more than just a legal technicality – it is a structural injustice with generational consequences. Without secure land tenure, women cannot access credit, invest in agriculture or pass assets to their daughters. Without land, women cannot build resilient futures.

And yet, when women do have access and control over land, they are much more likely to realise their other rights and benefits. Evidence shows, for example, that households where women hold land rights increase spending on food and education by up to 30%.⁷

Securing land is also foundational to women’s ability to develop sustainable livelihoods. Across ActionAid programmes, women farmers who gain access to land

are able to grow more food, diversify income sources and build local economies, reducing dependence on exploitative labour markets and emergency assistance. Without these rights, women are locked out of agricultural support systems, cooperative networks and income-generating opportunities that are essential for long-term food and income security.⁸

¹<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/be7de9bb-f9dc-4afb-ade9-51ff274064a2/content>

²https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/AAUK_Who%20pays%20the%20price_FULL_REPORT_online.pdf

³<https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/AA-Loss%26Damage-English-digital.pdf>

⁴Chan Kimcheng, personal communication with ActionAid, April 2025

⁵https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/AAUK_Who%20pays%20the%20price_FULL_REPORT_online.pdf

⁶Krishni Tharu, personal communication with ActionAid, April 2025

⁷<https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/be7de9bb-f9dc-4afb-ade9-51ff274064a2/content>

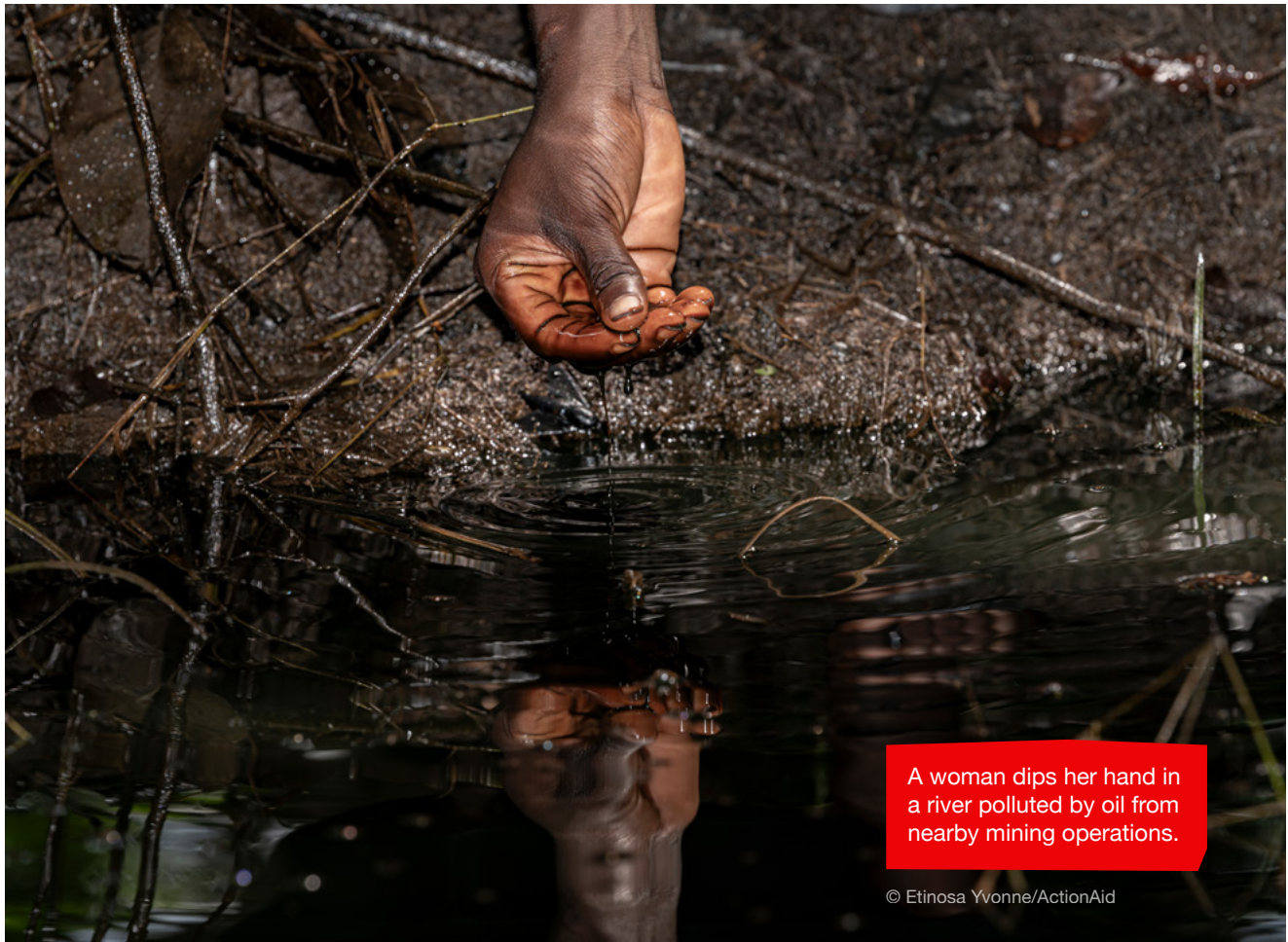
⁸<https://www.actionaid.org.uk/our-work/womens-economic-rights/food-security-sustainable-livelihoods>

A Feminist and Decolonial Imperative

The struggle for land is inseparable from histories of colonial dispossession. Today, those dynamics continue as a result of a flawed and unfair economic approach, through land grabs, mining and industrial agriculture, often enabled by UK-based banks and multinational corporations.⁹ ActionAid's 2025 report, *Who Pays the Price*, found that HSBC's financial flows led to 357 million tons of CO₂e emissions over just three years, contributing to an estimated £128 billion in climate damages.¹⁰

Meanwhile, less than 10% of land managed by Indigenous and rural communities is legally recognised, despite their stewardship of over 50% of the world's land.¹¹

Despite its climate and gender equality ambitions, the UK government cannot credibly claim 'climate leadership' while UK financial institutions continue to bankroll environmental destruction and are linked to human rights violations. The UK's weak, voluntary financial rules and lack of business and human rights legislation allow banks to pour billions into fossil fuels and industrial agriculture with devastating impacts for women and girls.¹²



A woman dips her hand in a river polluted by oil from nearby mining operations.

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⁹See for example: <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/publications/another-world-possible-advancing-feminist-economic-alternatives> and <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/publications/who-pays-price-cost-hsbc-climate-damages>

¹⁰https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/AAUK_Who%20pays%20the%20price_FULL_REPORT_online.pdf

¹¹<https://www.unccd.int/news-stories/land-rights-key-sustainable-prosperity>

¹²https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/AAUK_Who%20pays%20the%20price_FULL_REPORT_online.pdf

What the UK Government Must Do

Despite their essential role, women's rights organisations receive less than 1% of global gender-focused ODA¹³. To support women's land rights, the UK government must address the structural causes of land injustice and invest in feminist economic alternatives and women-led solutions. This means:

Providing long-term funding for women's rights organisations and women-led land justice movements directly

The UK should increase direct, long-term funding to and meaningful partnerships with women-led organisations and movements defending women's land and environmental and economic rights. ActionAid's new fund works with women's rights organisations and feminist movements to resource their vital work.

Supporting a feminist, just transition away from harmful energy and agricultural systems

Agroecology is a transformative approach to farming that takes into account the experience of women farmers and indigenous people. It is also the most effective means of adaptation to climate change.

The UK should invest in women-led agroecological approaches which are vital for preserving natural resources, producing healthy food and building climate resilience. Agricultural policies must be geared towards scaling up these approaches.¹⁴

¹³ <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-05/ActionAid%20UK%20Manifesto%20%28web%29.pdf>

¹⁴ For more information, visit our campaign's website: <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns/climate-campaign>

Ensuring companies operating in the UK meet the highest environmental and human rights standards

Around the world, companies have been linked to serious human rights and environmental harms which lead to displacement, loss of livelihoods and rights. The UK government must introduce new legislation on business, human rights and the environment which would require all companies operating in the UK to conduct gender-responsive due diligence to identify, prevent and address environmental and human rights harms.¹⁵ ActionAid UK is working as part of the Corporate Justice Coalition, which is calling on the UK government to urgently introduce such legislation to hold UK companies, including banks, to account.¹⁶

Making Polluters Pay

Polluters, including banks, should pay for the damages they cause through new taxes or fines. This should fairly reflect their responsibility for financing climate harm and human rights abuses and discourage planet-destroying financing. Funds generated should support communities to rebuild after climate disasters and keep investing in the solutions women are already leading. ActionAid UK, along with many others, are calling for urgent new taxes and fines to make sure those who are driving the climate crisis are paying for the cost of responding to it.¹⁷

Providing new and additional International Climate Finance

Significant climate finance that is additional to Official Development Assistance (ODA) is urgently needed to address the impacts of the climate emergency. The UK government must ensure that the UN Loss and Damage Fund and UK bilateral ODA embeds gender-responsive, locally led solutions that protect land and livelihoods. This funding should be in the form of grants and not loans, so as not to exacerbate the debt distress of other governments.

Read more about ActionAid UK's campaigns at actionaid.org.uk/get-involved/campaigns

¹⁵ https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/2025-06/AAUK_Who%20pays%20the%20price_FULL_REPORT_online.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.goodbusinessmatters.org>

¹⁷ <https://makepolluterspay.co.uk/>

Glossary

Agroecology

Farming approach that works in harmony with nature to produce food in a manner that is healthy for people, the environment and local communities.

Colonial

A system or period when one country controls and rules over another area or people, often by force. This control usually involves taking resources, land and power from the local population for the benefit of the colonising country.

Extractive industries

Businesses that take natural resources from the earth to be used or sold. This includes industries like mining, oil and gas drilling, and logging.

Feminist economic alternatives

Ways of organising the economy that focus on equality, care and social justice. They challenge traditional economic systems that often ignore the value of unpaid care work, exploit women and marginalised groups and prioritise profit over people and the planet. These alternatives support community well-being, shared resources and fair work for everyone.

Food insecurity

Not having reliable access to enough safe and nutritious food to live a healthy life.

Food sovereignty

The right of people to control their own food systems. It means communities can decide how food is grown, shared and eaten in ways that are healthy and environmentally sustainable. It supports local farmers, traditional knowledge and fair access to land and resources.

Gender-responsive

Taking into account the different needs, experiences and challenges of all genders when making decisions, policies or programs.

Kamaiya system

A form of bonded labour practised in western Nepal, where poor landless people (mostly from the Tharu community) worked for landlords to repay debts. These debts were often passed down through generations, trapping families in a cycle of poverty and slavery-like conditions. Although the system was officially abolished by the government in 2000, many former Kamaiyas still face poverty, lack of land, and limited access to education and jobs.

Land grabs

When large companies, governments or investors take control of large areas of land, often without the consent of the local people who live there.

Official Development Assistance (ODA)

Money given by governments and official agencies to support the economic development and welfare of other countries.

Patriarchal

A social system where men hold most of the power and authority in families, communities and society.

Quilombola communities

Communities in Brazil formed by the descendants of African slaves who escaped from plantations and established their own settlements.

Women's rights organisations

Women-led groups that work to promote and protect the rights of women and girls. Their goal is to create a fair and just society where women have equal opportunities and freedoms.

Cover photo: Lila, a Coconut Breaker from Brazil, returning after a day's work in the babassu palm groves. She is an advocate for protecting the land where the coconuts grow.

Changing the world with women and girls

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