



## COP28 Series

# Addressing the Triple Nexus: Gender, Climate and Security in the Arab World

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**November 2023**

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## Summary

- The interplay between climate change, gender inequality and conflict produces a vicious cycle with devastating impacts on women and girls. This triple nexus exacerbates gender inequalities, increases poverty, enhances state fragility, reduces a state's ability to cope with climate change impacts and shatters communities' resilience. Climate change is a serious threat and insecurity multiplier – where the well-being of women and girls in conflict-prone states is at stake.
- The Arab world, where the devastating impacts of climate change are intertwined with war and gender inequality, is especially vulnerable to environmental threats. This makes access to agriculture, food, and water especially difficult, increases people's displacement and perpetrates gender-based violence (GBV) across the region.
- In various Arab states where women have predominantly relied on agriculture or the informal labor market as their primary means of sustenance and where gender inequality remains prevalent, women have become more vulnerable to the interlocking impacts of climate change and conflict. Women's access to food, water, land, and maternal healthcare services have been severely strained in countries such as Syria and Yemen, exposing women to higher risks of GBV, poverty, and malnutrition.
- To address this triple nexus, the first step is to recognise that different groups have diverse perspectives and experiences that can inform climate strategies. Inclusion leads to a more comprehensive and holistic approach to dealing with climate change impacts. In many cases, women are responsible for and play a significant role in securing food, water, and energy within their societies which are critical aspects of climate adaptation. As such, enhancing community resilience, fostering solutions that are gender sensitive, developing adaptive measures to protect community well-being, and reducing the impacts of this triple nexus start with engaging women.
- After starting with a conceptual understanding of the gender, climate and conflict triple nexus and an evaluation of how it impacts the Arab world, especially in Syria and Yemen, this Insight finds that the gender-focused climate action plans and strategies that Arab countries have adopted so far are failing to address climate and security-related risks that impact women. Moreover, apart from Jordan, Arab states with a national action plan for Women, Peace and Security (WPS) do not address the risks posed by climate change. The initiatives that do exist are new and ill-suited to tackle security and climate-induced impacts on women and girls.
- The Insight offers several policy recommendations on how to address the triple nexus in the most vulnerable Arab countries. These include:
  - Adopting and implementing rigorous national action plans for WPS that address climate change impacts and risks.
  - Designing gender sensitive climate National Adaptation Plans.
  - Collecting gender-disaggregated data and designing gender-responsive financing instruments and strategies.
  - Developing effective awareness programmes in addition to gender-sensitive initiatives that tackle the triple nexus.
  - Implementing comprehensive agricultural reforms that empower female landowners and combat land degradation and desertification.
  - Leveraging the COP28 summit as a platform to communicate the impacts of the triple nexus in the Arab world while discussing opportunities for the increased engagement of women.

## The Issue

Countries around the world are experiencing the devastating impacts of climate change. For the most vulnerable communities, these effects are often destructive, destabilizing and quite costly, leading to myriad problems such as food insecurity, water shortages, diseases, violence, and displacement. Other severe weather patterns caused by rising temperatures and climate change threaten livelihoods, development efforts and, in the case of war-torn countries, peace and security. While the impacts of climate change cause serious problems for entire populations, a “gender blind” approach to climate problems can deepen and aggravate the security and climate-related risks that women and girls face.

The interplay between climate change, gender and security exacerbates gender inequalities, increases poverty, enhances state fragility, and reduces a state’s climate adaptability. Both climate change and conflict reinforce existing gender imbalances, making both climate security and violence existential threats to women’s well-being. Conflict decreases the ability of states to respond to climate shocks adequately, thereby reducing their overall adaptive capacity, which leads to devastating impacts on people, including women. Climate is thus a serious threat and insecurity multiplier – where the well-being of women and girls is at stake.

The Arab world, where the devastating impacts of climate change are intertwined with war and gender inequality, is especially vulnerable to environmental threats. This makes access to agriculture, food, and water especially difficult, enhances the displacement of people and perpetrates gender-based violence (GBV) across the region. According to a study by the United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA), extreme weather patterns in countries such as Sudan, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, combined with the societal expectations on women’s caregiving responsibilities, have led to the increased displacement, gender-based violence, death and human trafficking of women.<sup>1</sup> For rural women who rely on agricultural activities for their livelihoods, climate change threatens farming production, which along with war and displacement in Syria for instance, have led to the exploitation and impoverishment of women.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is singled out as a region where the triple nexus of gender inequality, state fragility and climate vulnerability is dangerously pervasive.<sup>2</sup> Of the 10 countries where this triple nexus is “very highly prevalent”, four are Arab – with Somalia and Yemen in the first and second positions respectively, Sudan in 8<sup>th</sup> and Syria in the 10<sup>th</sup> position.<sup>3</sup> Yet, apart from Jordan, no other Arab country has so far included climate considerations within their national action plans (NAPs) for Women, Peace and Security (WPS), a comprehensive roadmap document that outlines how states intend to embed the protection and engagement of women in security affairs.<sup>4</sup> In addition, only a handful of Arab states have added a gender-lens to their climate action plans and their climate adaptation initiatives are either ill-suited to address the triple nexus risks or completely absent.<sup>5</sup> In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which hosts the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP28) in November and December 2023, gender has been designated as a key dimension to consider when discussing climate change and the country has pledged to making COP28 the most inclusive conference to date.

The nexus between climate change, gender inequality, and security remains unaddressed in most Arab countries from a conceptual and practical perspective. By recognising the most pressing challenges that climate change and conflict inflict on women in the Arab world, solutions and entry points can be generated through women-led climate adaptation initiatives and through commitments to climate-inclusive WPS NAPs. While some gender-focused adaptation initiatives have already been rolled out in several Arab countries, they are still sparse and ad-hoc, without considering how security intertwines with climate. In addition, while Syria and Yemen, two of the most vulnerable and conflict-prone states, do not have climate national adaptation plans, most of the other Arab countries’ existing plans do not reflect how gender, security and climate intertwine. Addressing the triple nexus and how all three dynamics interlink is important for effective climate adaptation efforts, conflict prevention, and sustainable development.



## Box 1: Defining Concepts

<b>Gender Equality</b>	<p>“The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognising the diversity of different groups of men and women. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights’ issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.” (UN Women Training Centre, Gender Glossary)</p>
<b>Climate Vulnerability</b>	<p>Refers to exposure, sensitivity, and capacity to adapt to the negative effects of climate change. (1) Exposure: Degree to which a system is exposed to significant climate change from a biophysical perspective. It is a component of vulnerability independent of socio-economic context. (2) Sensitivity: Extent to which a country is dependent upon a sector negatively affected by climate hazard, or the proportion of the population particularly susceptible to a climate change hazard. (3) Adaptive Capacity: Availability of social resources for sector-specific adaptation.</p>
<b>Security</b>	<p>Security, in the context of this report, refers to women’s ability to move freely without facing any threats of violence (whether physical or political) or displacement (because of their proximity to conflict). Security also refers to the absence of gender-based violence (GBV), sexual violence, rape, or intimate partner violence. At the community level, security is the ability of women to move outside the home while feeling safe (Source: Author compilation; 2023 – 2024 WPS Index).</p>
<b>Climate Adaptation</b>	<p>Climate change adaptation refers to actions that help reduce vulnerability to the current or expected impacts of climate change like weather extremes and natural disasters, sea-level rise, biodiversity loss, or food and water insecurity.</p>
<b>The Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda</b>	<p>“The United Nations WPS Agenda is a global policy architecture [...] aimed at promoting gender equality, peace and security [...]. In October 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was drafted and adopted by UN Security Council. It has been followed by nine other resolutions (UNSCR 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2467, and 2493), which make up the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. This Agenda has transformative potential - the potential to escape cycles of conflict, to create inclusive and more democratic peacemaking and to turn from gender inequality to gender justice [...] The WPS Agenda is an innovative toolbox to leverage more equitable peace” that includes both women and men, while guaranteeing the protection of vulnerable communities during conflict, the prevention of violence, the representation of women and relief and recovery efforts. The WPS agenda links gender equality to international peace and security efforts (Authors Compilation; PeaceWomen.org; Seymour Smith (2020)).</p>

## Explaining the Triple Nexus

Climate change alone does not directly cause or create conflict and gender inequality. The interplay between climate change impacts (such as extreme weather events, droughts, floods, or land degradation) and insecurity brought about by wars and conflicts creates compound risks which, when mixed with pre-existing gender inequalities, limit women's access to resources, their mobility, and their ability to cope with climate-related events.<sup>6</sup> How all three parts are linked together through a negative feedback loop is illustrated in Figure 1.

### The Climate and Security Nexus

Climate change increases conflict-induced security challenges and makes peacebuilding and recovery efforts evermore untenable. In war-torn or conflict-prone states where institutions are already absent or weak, pressures and shocks caused by climate change can overwhelm resources and amplify the drivers of conflict.<sup>7</sup> When droughts, desertification, or floods occur, the losses incurred put immense pressure on the concerned communities to find alternative sources of income. In war-torn states, any displacement or competition over resources would be dangerous and could potentially exacerbate tensions and prolong conflicts. Weakened states would, in turn, be unable to respond or confront these risks, thereby amplifying the risks posed by climate change and conflict.<sup>8</sup>

Conflicts and wars also make it challenging for states to design and implement climate adaptation measures. At the local level, communities' ability to adapt, cope and respond to changing weather patterns during war is weakened. Conflicts therefore increase climate vulnerability. Simultaneously, climate change heightens state fragility in conflict-prone states by aggravating tensions and worsening socio-economic conditions.<sup>9</sup>

### The Climate and Women Nexus

Extreme weather events disproportionately affect women, girls, and vulnerable populations who depend on natural resources. Climate risks limit women's access to food, water, housing, education, and healthcare. They also limit access to services that are crucial to women such as reproductive and maternal health, protection from GBV and preventing child marriage. A direct link can be found between child marriage risks and crisis vulnerabilities, particularly climate change-exacerbated crises.<sup>10</sup> Research has also found that domestic and sexual violence increase in the aftermath of a disaster that led to displacement and huge economic losses,<sup>11</sup> including violence perpetrated by one's partner. Shocks and stressors, especially in rural regions where populations are already more vulnerable due to poverty, inequality, and climate change, are especially vulnerable.<sup>12</sup>

Pre-existing gender inequality practices decrease women's ability to cope with climate change impacts and reduce their participation in climate adaptation efforts. When women have fewer resources and assets to begin with, face discriminatory laws and live in patriarchal environments with specific social expectations, any climate-related shock or impact enhances their vulnerability.<sup>13</sup> While both men and women face the impacts of climate change, women's lower adaptive capacity to respond to climate shocks means that climate change impacts them disproportionately.

Women who rely on agriculture and natural resources to sustain their livelihoods are especially vulnerable to climate change stressors that threaten these resources. For example, women farmers who do not own the land they work on are more susceptible to loss after a climate shock because they cannot secure financial (or other) indemnities and will find it difficult to find alternative sources of income.<sup>14</sup> Women who must secure water for their families may face longer and more strenuous traveling times following a climate shock, which exposes them to potential risks of GBV.<sup>15</sup>

### The Conflict and Women Nexus

Wars amplify gender inequality, discrimination and violence against women and rob them from accessing basic services such as education and healthcare. Sexual violence against women in times of war can also become a tactic, coupled with torture and forced marriages. Conflicts create insecure environments which, in turn, reinforce discrimination against women.<sup>16</sup>

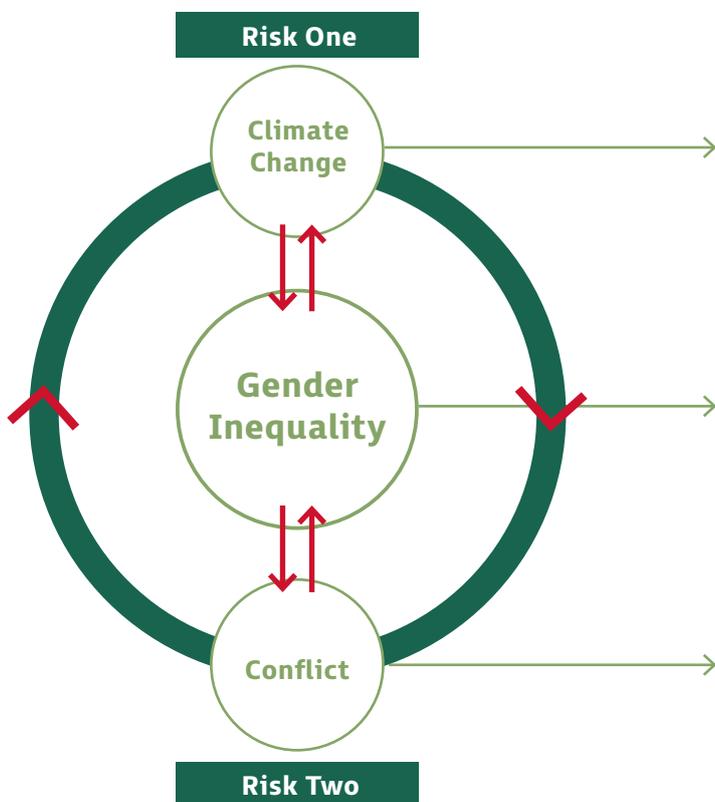
While men also suffer during conflicts, women experience wars differently. In households where men are the main breadwinners and are called to fight, women become more vulnerable to poverty and violence because they lack access to protection and self-defence which enhances the risk of GBV. Girls are also more susceptible to be taken

out of school as a way of protecting them, which puts them at a disadvantage compared to boys. Trafficking and sex work also increase during wars, enhancing the incidence of rape and sexual violence against women. Lastly, under already-strained healthcare facilities, treating women and girls becomes secondary as hospitals tend to war-related injuries first.

### The Triple Nexus

As illustrated in Figure 1, climate change, gender inequality and conflict are interconnected and amplify each other. Vulnerability to climate shocks is higher in war-torn states where gender inequality is rampant. Climate adaptability, in turn, is higher and effective in more peaceful, inclusive, and equal states. The most climate-resilient countries are also the safest, most secure and most gender equal.

**Figure 1: The Triple Nexus Illustrated**



#### Climate Change:

Climate change impacts, such as droughts, floods, desertification, sea-level rise, and overall environmental degradation aggravate existing socio-economic conditions, decrease access to natural resources, increase food insecurity and poverty, and may potentially cause displacement.

#### Gender Inequality:

Discrimination, unequal socioeconomic norms, and unequal access to resources & opportunities reduce women's adaptive capacity to cope with climate change impacts. Conflict-related insecurity, coupled with climate risks, makes women disproportionately vulnerable to climate change.

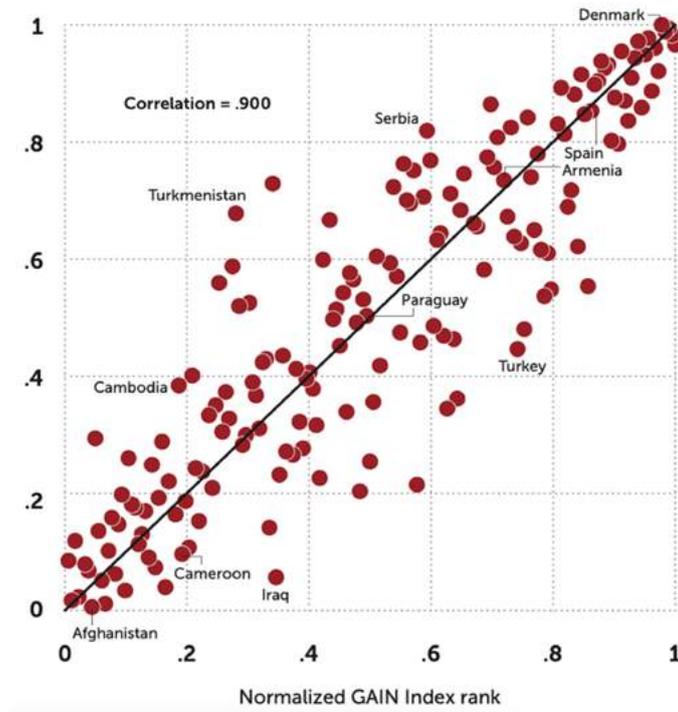
#### Conflict & Insecurity:

Wars cause displacement, violence and overall insecurity and instability, which decrease women's mobility, safety and ability to adapt to climate-related impacts. Coupled with weak institutional mechanisms that are incapable to respond to women's needs, conflict reinforces gender inequality and reduces climate adaptability efforts.

Source: Authors' Compilation

In addition, as shown in Figure 2, there is a strong correlation between climate change preparedness, measured by the ND-Gain Index, and the WPS Index, indicating that resilience to climate shocks in terms of infrastructure, resources and ecosystems, depends, at least in part, on the status of women and the extent of their inclusion, security and access to justice.<sup>17</sup> This also reinforces the idea that the way women experience climate change impacts depends on the societal expectations that are placed on them and on their access (or lack thereof) to resources such as land and other financial assets.<sup>18</sup> Coupled with conflict and the plethora of problems that wars cause, such as displacement, violence and poverty, women are therefore more vulnerable to climate shocks and less able to cope with slow or sudden onset climate-related events.

**Figure 2: Climate Adaptation and WPS Index Ranks**



Source: 2023–2024 Georgetown Institute’s WPS Index<sup>19</sup>

The dangerous impacts of the climate–security nexus are most pronounced when gender inequality, gender norms and societal expectations create differentiated ways through which women and men experience climate change impacts. These include, for example, having different levels of access to natural resources, financial and physical assets and decision-making power in the household and community.<sup>20</sup> Climate change impacts, such as water scarcity, food insecurity, displacement and forced migration, and agricultural shocks, then exacerbate these existing tensions and expose women and girls to new challenges such as GBV, increased poverty, and decreased safety. Compounded by conflict, which limits women’s mobility, security, and ability to seek help, this instability prevents women from not only recovering from war but from coping with climate-related challenges and risks.

### Climate Change, WPS Agenda and SDGs Framework

While efforts to include climate change as one of the security risks faced by women and girls have been slowly burgeoning since 2019,<sup>21</sup> the WPS agenda has not yet fully caught on. As the main framework that combines gender equality in peace and security efforts, the absence of climate risks as threats to women’s security and the limited discussions of how climate change aggravates women’s insecurity are glaring omissions. As illustrated in Table 1, as of July 2023, out of 105 WPS national action plans (NAPs) that have been adopted by states,<sup>22</sup> only 18 make a direct and explicit mention of climate change as a serious security risk that the WPS agenda – and, by extension, states – need to address. In the Arab world, only Jordan’s WPS NAP (2022–2025) identifies climate change as a risk.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the 2023–2024 WPS Index published by the Georgetown Institute for WPS recognises the strong link between climate resilience and gender equality (see Figure 2). Yet impacts and risks brought about by climate change are not part of the sub-indicators that the Index looks at when tallying WPS country scores and rankings.<sup>24</sup>

**Table 1: List of Countries that Included Climate Change in WPS National Action Plans**

Year	Countries
2009	Liberia
2011	Senegal
2016	Italy, Kenya, Netherlands, United States
2017	Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Montenegro, Nigeria, Spain
2018	Finland (3 <sup>rd</sup> generation NAP), Slovenia
2019	Bangladesh, Ireland, Namibia, Norway
2022	Jordan

Source: Authors' Compilation & SIPRI Insight no. 7/2020 <sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework offers a comprehensive roadmap towards achieving gender equality (through SDG5) and climate resilience (through SDGs 2, 6, 7, 13, 14, and 15). However, how climate change poses risks to gender equality is unclear because SDG5 only makes one reference to climate through one sub-indicator (SDG5. a.1) that measures the share of agricultural lands held by women.<sup>26</sup> In parallel, as displayed in Table 2, the SDGs related to climate change do not consider gender-specific or sex-disaggregated data enough when measuring the progress made towards the SDGs and the impact that various climate-related challenges have had on women.

Overall, 52 out of 231 SDGs indicators are gender specific. However, when considering the SDGs related to climate, as shown in Table 2, only three indicators are gender specific.

**Table 2: Number of Gender-specific Indicators in Climate-related SDGs**

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)	Number of gender-specific indicators	Gender-specific indicators
SDG2: End hunger, achieve food security & improved nutrition & promote sustainable agriculture	2	Prevalence of anemia in women aged 15 – 49 years, by pregnancy status; & Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and indigenous status
SDG6: Ensure availability & sustainable management of water & sanitation for all	0	
SDG7: Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable & modern energy for all	0	
SDG13: Take urgent action to combat climate change & its impacts	1	Extent to which global citizenship education and education for sustainable development are mainstreamed in national education policies, curricula, teacher education and student assessment
SDG14: Conserve & sustainably use the oceans, seas & marine resources for sustainable development	0	
SDG15: Protect, restore & promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, & halt & reverse land degradation & halt biodiversity loss	0	

Source: Authors' Compilations from "Progress on the SDGs: Gender Snapshot 2023" report (UN Women) <sup>27</sup>

While the research proves the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and the need to include them in all climate adaptation measures, the fact that two main frameworks that potentially can provide insights into how this triple nexus unfolds (the WPS agenda and the SDGs framework) do not pay enough attention to climate-related risks, in the case of the WPS agenda, and to gender-specific considerations, in the case of the SDGs framework, hinders states' ability to assess risks, design adequate adaptation strategies and monitor progress.

## Impact of the Triple Nexus on Syrian and Yemeni Women

The Arab region has witnessed violent conflicts for decades.<sup>28</sup> Coupled with changing weather patterns and high levels of gender inequality, women are unable to deal with the impacts of conflict and instability. The 12 countries that rank lowest on the 2023–2024 Georgetown Institute WPS Index include Syria, Yemen, and Somalia.<sup>29</sup> These countries are also highlighted for the very high prevalence of climate vulnerability and state fragility.<sup>30</sup> Further, in Syria and Yemen, gender inequality and state fragility are interlinked<sup>31</sup> and both countries have the lowest ranks on the 2021 Gender Inequality Index and the 2022 State Fragility Index.<sup>32</sup>

The Arab region is thus not only a hotbed for violence, but also one where the compound effects of climate change and gender inequality lead to dangerous levels of climate fragility and reduced resilience. In the case of Syria and Yemen, the triple nexus strongly impacts women through increased loss of agricultural jobs, food insecurity, displacement, increase in gender-based violence (GBV) and lack of access to healthcare, including maternal health services.

### Agriculture

In 2023, agriculture-related female employment in Arab countries was 23%. Yet women in the region own less than 10% of agricultural land apart from Comoros where women hold approximately 33%.<sup>33</sup> Despite having the responsibility to tend to farming activities and agriculture, women have encountered disparities in societal and agri-food systems in Syria and Yemen. They frequently assume the role of contributing family workers with very little or no wage, whilst facing limited opportunities for land ownership and securing land tenure rights, hence exacerbating the gender disparity in land productivity.<sup>34</sup> Not only do women experience disadvantages in land ownership, but also in gaining access to the resources and information that would increase crop yields.<sup>35</sup> Traditionally, men have left rural areas to pursue non-farming careers, leaving women to tend the land and care for their families.<sup>36</sup> This is because women tend to have lower literacy rates, earn less money in the labour market, have fewer career opportunities, and have more responsibilities at home.<sup>37</sup> Such formal and informal norms are deeply rooted in social structures and limit women's access to agricultural resources.

In Yemen, considering that only 6% of women participate in the labour market compared to 72% of men, the agrarian sector has been the main source of livelihood for women.<sup>38</sup> In addition, there still exists a gender pay gap where women earn approximately just 30 cents for every dollar earned by men.<sup>39</sup> In Yemen, women have had a crucial role in agriculture and animal grazing as the main sources of income for their families.<sup>40</sup> It has also been noted that during conflict, women's employment in the agricultural sector increases.<sup>41</sup> In Yemen, over 46% of women are engaged in agricultural activities, whereas only 27% of men are involved in this sector.<sup>42</sup>

In the Arab world in general, land degradation and desertification due to climate change are expected to impact 73% of arable lands. Since 1990, forest areas shrunk, thereby impacting the availability of arable land.<sup>43</sup> Considering women's extensive work in the agricultural sector, climate change and conflict will cause devastating effects for women farmers, putting their livelihood at risk. Climate variability and increase in temperatures in Yemen is likely to have negative impacts on agriculture, and more rainfall could increase the likelihood of floods.<sup>44</sup> Yemen also suffers from water stress and groundwater depletion which could reduce agricultural output by 40%.<sup>45</sup> Such recurrent climate-induced stressors and years of violent conflict have caused livelihood deterioration in Yemen, internal displacement and increase in migration.

Syria, on the other hand, is characterised by dry and semi-arid conditions and is also anticipated to experience serious consequences from the effects of climate change. Syria's agricultural productivity is expected to be adversely affected by heightened environmental strain due to excessive water use in irrigation for agriculture (accounting for 88% of all freshwater), deforestation, overgrazing, and soil erosion.<sup>46</sup> A preliminary evaluation indicates that there have been shifts in rainfall patterns and variations in temperature across the entire nation



over the course of the last five decades.<sup>47</sup> Specifically, there has been a significant decline in the average annual rainfall in the primary agricultural regions during recent years.<sup>48</sup> Due to record low rainfall and an increase in temperatures, northeast Syria is experiencing the worst drought in 70 years after experiencing more than a decade of conflict.<sup>49</sup> Those who live in rural areas and rely on agriculture are disadvantaged, and many women working in the agricultural industry have lost their livelihoods and were forced to find other jobs in the non-formal sector to support their families.<sup>50</sup>

## Food Security

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization, food security is defined as the state in which individuals possess both the physical and economic means to obtain an adequate supply of food that is safe, nutritious, and aligns with their dietary requirements.<sup>51</sup> As stated in the Global Report on Food Crises, approximately 193 million people were acutely food insecure in 2021, compared to 155 million in 2020. Of this, around 570,000 people were facing a catastrophe, including starvation and death, with Yemen being one of the countries facing these dire conditions.<sup>52</sup> In the 2020–2022 period, 67.2% of the total Yemeni population suffered from severe food insecurity.<sup>53</sup>

This surge in the number of food insecure people is attributed to the prolonged nature of conflicts and exacerbated effects of climate change, which have led to increased displacement rates, soaring unemployment levels, an increase in poverty levels, and a substantial increase in food costs. Tellingly, all countries that experience food insecurity suffer from environmental fragility.<sup>54</sup> Countries like Yemen, which is one of the top ten hunger spots in the world, also suffer from severe environmental fragility.<sup>55</sup> Syria, also one of the top ten hunger spots, is classified as very high in environmental fragility.<sup>56</sup>

Food security has disproportionately affected women. In 2022, 9.5% of men globally faced severe food insecurity compared to 10.6% of women.<sup>57</sup> In the MENA region, 21 million women are projected to be food insecure by 2050, compared to 12 million men.<sup>58</sup> Women have had a disproportionate access to food even though they are primary actors in the food chain.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, food security goes beyond the issue of increasing food production. It is a social problem that requires a society-focused approach.<sup>60</sup> Specifically, food security is not just a matter of availability but is also a matter of accessibility. Gender social norms in the MENA region places a disproportionate burden on women and girls to provide food, nutrition and manage water resources, which could require them to travel considerable distances alone thus putting them at security risk.<sup>61</sup> Lack of resources prevents women from developing effective climate change mitigation measures which hinders their ability to provide money and food for their family.<sup>62</sup> Conflicts also lead women to sell their possessions to meet family needs, which puts pressure on already limited resource availability and control.<sup>63</sup>

Another challenge in the MENA region is nutritional quality. There is a micronutrient shortage of crucial minerals and vitamins, meaning one can be food insecure despite eating many calories.<sup>64</sup> Girls and women in the MENA region suffer from a severe nutritional disparity, which is the result of lack of information about what constitutes proper supplemental feeding.<sup>65</sup> Maternal malnutrition has detrimental effects for pregnant women including cases of stunted births, pregnancy and birth complications, and postpartum hemorrhage.<sup>66</sup> The prevalence of undernourishment has increased in conflict affected countries. In Syria, for example, the number of pregnant and lactating women suffering from undernourishment has more than doubled since the war began.<sup>67</sup> In Yemen more than one million pregnant women face malnutrition.<sup>68</sup>

## Displacement

Many Arab countries have experienced long-term infrastructure damage from past or ongoing wars, hindering access to natural resources, such as water, and depleting natural resources. During the Yemeni war, a considerable proportion of internal displacement was attributed largely to the deterioration of essential water, sanitation and hygiene facilities, rather than being only caused by direct conflict.<sup>69</sup> Women have been highly affected by this because they must travel longer distances, and in many instances to unsafe places, to access water.<sup>70</sup> Since the start of the war in 2014, approximately 4.5 million Yemenis have been internally displaced and many of them have been displaced multiple times.<sup>71</sup> Displaced women suffer from violence and exploitation especially during times of conflict where human rights protection mechanisms weaken.<sup>72</sup> Women and children make up over 75% of Yemen's displaced population, and at least 26% of displaced households are headed by women.<sup>73</sup> Displacement has had dire consequences such as the increase of child marriages among young Yemeni displaced girls.<sup>74</sup>

In Syria, prior to the civil war, the land had already witnessed severe droughts. In the years leading up to the conflict, around 1.3 million people and 60% of Syrian land had been severely affected by human-induced desertification, climate change and water scarcity.<sup>75</sup> Conflict and climate-induced effects has led to Syria being one of the world's largest displacement crises,<sup>76</sup> with over 14 million Syrians displaced since the start of the conflict in 2011.<sup>77</sup> The experiences of women in displacement are often marked by economic instability, restricted employment prospects, difficulties in accessing health support, isolation, an escalation of violence, and shifting gender dynamics.<sup>78</sup>

### **Maternal Health, Reproductive Health and Gender-Based Violence**

Women and girls in the MENA region, especially in Yemen and Syria, bear a disproportionate share of the region's burden of malnutrition.<sup>79</sup> The prevalence of acute malnutrition among women in Yemen continues to rank among the highest globally, affecting 1.3 million pregnant or breastfeeding mothers.<sup>80</sup> The crisis in Yemen has had a devastating impact on maternal and child health, with one mother and six babies losing their lives every two hours due to difficulties during pregnancy or birth.<sup>81</sup> The increased vulnerability of mothers and children has been associated with failures in conducting routine pre- and post-natal care, which can be attributed to the overloading of the health system caused by conflict-linked outbreaks such as cholera.<sup>82</sup> Maternal death is highly linked to the survival of the child, and many of these deaths could have been prevented if women had access to quality healthcare.<sup>83</sup>

These patterns heighten women's vulnerability to violence during conflicts and make them more economically and socially dependent on men. In Syria, inequalities in social, economic and health conditions were most noticeable among women of lower socioeconomic status, such as agricultural labourers, mothers living in rural areas and individuals in the slums of Damascus and Aleppo.<sup>84</sup> These women had less reproductive decision-making power, lower access to reproductive healthcare and greater rates of illiteracy and school dropout rates.<sup>85</sup> Following a prolonged period of hostilities, a substantial proportion of the male population experienced casualties, displacement or engagement in combat, leaving women to occupy the role of primary decision-makers and earners.<sup>86</sup> Although women have gained access to employment opportunities that were previously unavailable to them, it is important to recognise that the mere presence of such opportunities does not guarantee equality. Syrian women during the conflict have had the dual responsibilities of domestic unpaid care in addition to the financial burdens of the family. As such, many women were forced to participate in the informal labour market and the war economy, creating new vulnerabilities and risks that affect women's coping mechanisms.<sup>87</sup>

The gendered component to violence in times of shocks is intricately linked to the allocation of economic and social resources in times of conflict. In 2022, 90% of the Syrian population lived in poverty,<sup>88</sup> with women facing higher rates of poverty than men.<sup>89</sup> In Syria, women faced GBV in several forms such as direct violence, trafficking or child marriages, and attacks on maternal health facilities.<sup>90</sup> In Yemen, poverty affects 78% of the population which led to an increase in the occurrence of violence against women, especially amongst marginalised, poor and rural women.<sup>91</sup> The correlation between poverty and GBV is a result of deep-rooted social and cultural norms that are exacerbated during times of conflict. For example, when families suffer from a lack of food, females eat less as a coping mechanism, leaving women to resort to begging for food and vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.<sup>92</sup> With many families, changes in gender roles due to the war have led to the increase in household GBV rates. This is also due to many men losing their jobs and being unable to fulfil the traditional roles of providers.<sup>93</sup>

**Taken together,** the impacts of the triple gender-climate-conflict nexus have been devastating for Syrian and Yemeni women. Not only have wars and climate change left both states more fragile and unable to cope with climate stressors, but their lack of adaptability has also been hindered by high levels of gender inequality. The triple nexus has created a dangerous and unsustainable situation for women and girls in both places, making climate adaptation efforts ever harder.



## Women-led Climate Adaptation Initiatives in the Arab Region

The dire effects on Syrian and Yemeni women that are caused by the continuous interplay of the triple nexus forces prove how gender equality and women empowerment are considered fundamental principles of climate action. Different groups often have diverse perspectives and experiences that can inform climate strategies. Therefore, inclusion leads to a more comprehensive and holistic approach to dealing with climate change impacts. Evidence underscores that inclusive adaptation efforts that account for gender considerations are notably more effective.<sup>94</sup>

Women-led climate adaptation promotes gender equality by ensuring that women participate in decisions related to climate strategies. It also recognises the unique vulnerabilities women face due to climate change and seeks to address these issues. Climate adaptation can be an important entry point to break the vicious cycle of the security-conflict nexus. Through inclusive climate adaptation strategies, community resilience and well-being can be enhanced.

Even though women in Syria and Yemen play a significant role in securing food, water and energy within their societies, which are critical aspects of adaptation, climate adaptation initiatives are either absent, in the case of Syria, or ill-suited to address the pressing triple nexus, in the case of Yemen. In both countries, climate adaptation strategies fail to address the most pressing impacts of climate change and war, namely food insecurity, displacement and GBV. As illustrated in Table 3, several adaptation initiatives are burgeoning in Arab countries and aiming to emphasise women's leadership in building resilient and sustainable communities in the face of various threats. Nonetheless, while information on Syrian adaptation strategies could not be found, the programmes on offer in Yemen only marginally address the triple nexus.

**Table 3: Examples of Climate Adaptation Initiatives Focused on Empowering Arab Women**

Country	Initiative
Egypt	<b>Greening Women's Community:</b> The project empowers women to become leaders in reforestation efforts in the Sinai Peninsula. Women participate in tree planting activities, learn about sustainable land management, and play a crucial role in combatting desertification.
Jordan	<b>Solar Mama Programme:</b> It trains rural women, including refugees, to become solar engineers. Women are equipped with the skills to install and maintain solar panels, which not only provides clean energy to their communities but also empowers women economically. <b>Coping strategies and refugee innovation in the Za'atari refugee camp:</b> International organisations ran projects related to waste and water management with strong cash-for-work components as well as initiatives to increase the participation of women in the workforce, with a special focus on agriculture inside of the camp.
Morocco	<b>Oasis School Project:</b> The project empowers women in rural areas to protect and restore the country's oases, which are vulnerable to climate change. Women receive training in sustainable agriculture practices, water management, and biodiversity conservation, helping to preserve these vital ecosystems.
Tunisia	<b>Women's Climate Centres:</b> Tunisia has established Women's Climate Centres in vulnerable areas to train women in climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction. These centres provide women with knowledge and skills to respond to climate impacts, including agriculture techniques, water management and disaster preparedness.
Yemen	<b>Women's Participation in Traditional Water Management:</b> Given the challenge of water scarcity, women-led committees in rural communities are involved in maintaining and repairing irrigation infrastructure, ensuring equitable water distribution, and managing water resources sustainably. <b>Strengthening the role of women in water-related conflict resolution:</b> The project focused on the inclusion of women and increased community participation in the resolution of water conflicts.

Source: Authors' Compilation <sup>95</sup>

The examples listed in Table 3 demonstrate the diverse ways in which women are taking the lead in climate adaptation actions across the Arab world. Some of these projects bridge the risks posed by climate and war, as seen in the projects based in Jordan and Yemen. In the case of Yemen, climate adaptation strategies are addressing water scarcity issues. This resulted from the security-climate nexus, but these initiatives are not widespread enough to include large groups of women or other security and climate-induced threats.

### Gender in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)

Addressing gender inequality plays a pivotal role in how nations respond to the increasing risks brought about by climate change. As a result, it is imperative that gender-based disparities are taken into consideration throughout the planning, design, and execution of adaptation measures. This recognition is reflected in international climate change negotiations, as seen in the UNFCCC’s Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan. NDCs lie at the core of implementing the Paris Agreement, encapsulating each Party’s aspirations and commitments. Parties should remain dedicated to enhancing their contributions, offering a significant opportunity to advance gender-responsive climate actions within their pledges continually.

In one analysis of how gender is globally considered in countries’ NDCs, it was found that it is mostly mentioned on a planning level, thereby explaining why it is important to mainstream gender into climate-related processes and strategies, rather than reporting back on gender-responsive implementation.<sup>96</sup> As illustrated in Table 4, a few Arab countries address gender in their NDCs. Syria and Yemen, however, do not.

Moreover, while there is some mention of the effects of climate change on GBV within Arab countries’ NDCs, there is very little mention of the specific effects of GBV within the context of conflict. Somalia is one of the countries that discusses this nexus in its NDC by stating that 80% of internally displaced persons and refugees are women and are specifically exposed to GBV.<sup>97</sup> In a study done by UNFPA, only three Arab countries (Jordan, Somalia, and Tunisia) have referenced GBV in their NDCs.<sup>98</sup> Again here, most Arab countries, including Syria and Yemen, fail to address the triple nexus within their NDCs.

**Table 4: Gender Considerations in NDCs from Select Arab Countries**

Country	Gender-related actions, as quoted in NDCs
Comoros	“In rural areas, women’s livelihoods depend largely on natural resources (water, forest products, agriculture) which are highly dependent on climate hazards. The impacts of climate change (land and forest degradation, erosion, water stress, natural disasters) lead to the scarcity of resources, making activities carried out by women more difficult. Women’s difficult access to economic and productive resources further weakens their ability to adapt to climate change. Better access to renewable energy with adapted technologies would allow access to energy services for lighting, cooking and productive activities which would reduce their workload and free up time which they could devote to other, income-generating activities.”
Iraq	“Given that climate change is today’s biggest problem and that women and children are more vulnerable than men to the problem of climate change, it requires full environmental awareness towards climate changes and the development of strategies, plans, laws and legislations for environmental awareness among all segments of society, especially the vulnerable groups.” “[...] support rural women through the use of modern technologies and technologies as part of achieving sustainable development goals.”
Jordan	“The inequitable distribution of resources, decision making powers and services are disproportionately affecting women’s role in climate response plans and in natural resources management in general, especially in rural areas.” “Transformative change relies on translating the gender equality commitments to practical actions that address root causes of inequalities, discrimination, and imbalanced distribution of resources, unequal power relations, and marginalisation.” “Jordan is currently pursuing to move forward with gender mainstreaming in climate change action by developing the National Gender Mainstreaming in Climate Change Policy which encompasses the development of the framework for addressing the gender inequality and a strong local discourse on gender equality and climate change to advance progression towards achieving the national sustainable development goals.”



<p><b>Mauritania</b></p>	<p>“Mauritania adopted, in 2015, the National Gender Institutionalisation Strategy (SNIG) to promote equity between men and women and create favourable conditions for their development at the political, economic, and social levels. The SNIG aims to ensure the integration of gender in all sectors of the country’s development to guarantee the promotion of women and gender equity.”</p> <p>“[...] The gender and youth dimension is taken into account in all the adaptation actions recommended therein. In particular, the dimensions of strengthening the resilience of rural women to the effects of climate change and developing community approaches to adapt to climate change must be part of any adaptation action undertaken with a minimum of 10% of the budget assigned to them. Thus, the integration of the gender and youth dimension requires US\$1,062.646 million [...]”</p>
<p><b>Palestine</b></p>	<p>Rather than addressing gender as a separate “sector”, gender has been mainstreamed in all NDC implementation action plans developed for six of the highly vulnerable sectors: agriculture, energy, health, transport, waste, and water;</p> <p>“All of Palestine’s climate actions will be gender responsive and will be based on equity, ensuring equitable protection of disadvantaged groups in society.”</p> <p>“A business-as-usual approach is likely to exacerbate existing inequalities and limit the opportunities for gender-sensitive and, where appropriate, gender-responsive adaptation actions that may improve gender equality.”</p> <p>“Palestine’s technology roadmap is designed to be gender responsive and makes recommendations throughout to ensure that the differing needs of women and men (along with other groups, including youth, persons with disabilities, and refugees) are met.”</p>
<p><b>Tunisia</b></p>	<p>“Initiate training in the areas of conflict resolution and mediation expertise integrating a gender perspective throughout the process, «Do No Harm» approach combined with specific participatory approaches focusing on intersectionality and gender transformative effects. Develop the capacity of women’s organizations in PAOs, associations and professional organizations to communicate about climate change environmental research and policy to equip them to develop and implement relevant and appropriate adaptation policies and programmes that consider local contexts while prioritising democratic and participatory approaches that ensure women’s sustained involvement. Stimulate areas of research on gender mainstreaming in climate change and encourage studies in the areas of gender and climate governance in university curricula and professional training curricula.”</p> <p>“Transform gender inequalities at scale by promoting gender-transformative planning, decision-making and institutional development for water and food security investments. Significantly increase women’s access to information, decision-making power over practices and management.”</p>

Source: Authors’ Compilation<sup>99</sup>

Beyond the Arab region, African countries provide various examples of NDCs which demonstrate how a gender-inclusive process could look like. These constitute valuable lessons learnt that Arab countries could consider when designing their own NDCs. For instance, Nigeria performed a detailed gender analysis to determine gender differences in contributions to national development, division of labour, employment, access to resources, and participation in decision-making in the seven priority NDC sectors. The analysis revealed a general lack of access to and control of resources by women compared to men in all seven priority sectors.

Other countries have positive examples of sectoral focused adaptation strategies with concrete projects to strengthen the resilience of women. Liberia, for example, focused on gender and the agriculture sector. Their aim was to implement a “Women in Agriculture” programme with four training sessions per year (with at least 45 women trained annually) to support implementation of climate-resilient agricultural and livestock practices and increase women’s access to agricultural inputs and labour-saving devices by 2025.

Uganda, on the other hand, highlighted its success in integrating women’s concerns into development and adaptation strategies. The country developed a water and sanitation gender strategy where the government committed to provide better access for women and take a gender perspective into account for water resource management.

## Gender and Representation in Arab Countries’ National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)

Considering gender and empowering women in NAPs is essential for achieving effective, equitable and sustainable outcomes. NAPs allow an in-depth integration of gender considerations within adaptation plans and strategies. Additionally, they address the specific vulnerabilities and capacities of women while also contributing to broader development goals and the resilience of entire communities in the face of climate change.

As illustrated in Table 5, some Arab countries such as Jordan, Kuwait and Palestine have taken gender considerations when designing their climate adaptation NAPs and have acknowledged that some of the impacts of climate change are indeed gendered.<sup>100</sup> However, Syria and Yemen – the two Arab countries where the triple nexus is most prevalent – do not have a climate NAP. Moreover, Palestine, which has gone through waves of violence, does not consider how security-related risks intertwine with climate change impacts, leaving the triple nexus unaddressed. The Palestinian NAP also does not include evidence of gender equality in the planning process. In Kuwait, the NAP does not include a comprehensive assessment of how climate change impacts women. Tellingly, what Arab countries’ climate NAPs also miss is a deeper examination of how adaptation strategies can address the most pressing climate change impacts on women, such as food insecurity, and how displaced women and children can cope with climate risks.

**Table 5: Gender Considerations in Arab Countries’ NAPs**

Country	Gender considerations	Omissions and Challenges
Jordan	Women participated in planning processes; NAP links the gendered impacts of climate change to existing socio-economic inequalities; NAP is quite comprehensive and gender- sensitive.	Identifies difficulties in collecting sex disaggregated data and lack of funding.
Kuwait	NAP includes a section on gender in Kuwaiti society & impact of asthma on women.	Analysis on the impacts of climate change on women is limited.
Palestine	Recognises the gendered concerns regarding food security, water, sanitation, and diseases. Uses gender-disaggregated data to analyse impacts on women’s health.	No evidence of gender-balance in planning process.

Source: Authors’ Compilation

For adaptation to be effective , a positive correlation has been observed between increased female participation in parliamentary bodies and the adoption of climate change measures.<sup>101</sup> However, the level of women’s political participation and representation in the Arab region remains limited. The average share of women parliamentarians in the MENA region in January 2023 was 16.3%, compared to the global average of 26.5%.<sup>102</sup> As such, the lack of women representation in decision-making bodies across the Arab region impedes the design and implementation of inclusive adaptation plans. This affects the overall participation of women in the planning process of national agendas, especially those related to climate change, security, and gender equality.

## COP28 and Recommendations for the Road Ahead

While the gender-climate-conflict triple nexus remains unaddressed in climate adaptation plans and national action plans for WPS in the most vulnerable Arab countries such as Syria and Yemen, various climate adaptation strategies and initiatives are slowly emerging in the wider Arab region. However, current efforts are not enough. Apart from Jordan, the eight Arab countries that committed to the WPS agenda through official plans – Yemen being one of them – did not mention climate as a serious risk multiplier in their NAPs. Arab countries that mention gender in their NDCs (see Table 4) have not yet translated their strategies into effective and comprehensive projects that target all women’s groups. Most worryingly, the Arab countries that are mostly affected by the gender-climate-conflict triple nexus like Syria and Yemen do not even have climate adaptation plans.



Considering the above findings and the inclusion of a dedicated day for “Gender” at the COP28 summit in the UAE in November–December 2023, the following recommendations could help plug gaps and address the gender-climate-conflict nexus in the Arab region:

- **Including climate risks within states’ National Action Plans (NAPs) for Women, Peace and Security (WPS):** National action plans for WPS offer good platforms to address how women are impacted by climate change and how they can be engaged in addressing both climate and security risks. The fact that only eight Arab countries have NAPs for WPS means that others who may adopt a plan soon could include climate considerations. For the Arab countries who have NAPs that are under review for renewal, climate change risks are an important inclusion.
- **Addressing the triple nexus (gender, climate and security) by designing gender-sensitive NDCs and National Adaptation Plans:** More Arab countries need to address the differentiated impacts of climate change on different groups through their NDCs and NAPs. When it comes to women and girls, keeping gender differences and the triple nexus in mind is important to design effective and gender sensitive strategies that encompass all women. While several Arab countries do consider gender in their NDCs, only four have climate NAPs. More Arab countries, especially Syria and Yemen, need to adopt plans. When initiatives and strategies are designed, they must be properly cascaded to the most vulnerable groups first – in the case of Syria and Yemen, these include women in rural areas and the displaced.
- **Gender-disaggregated data:** Collecting gender-disaggregated data and designing gender-responsive financing instruments and strategies is key. The climate-related SDGs do not contain enough gender-specific indicators and targets (see Table 2), which in turn reduces Arab countries’ reporting and monitoring abilities and responsibilities. Despite this, it is important to design survey instruments and reports that break down indicators by gender if we are to accurately evaluate how climate change impacts women differently. This is especially important in conflict-prone countries. Moreover, while models that study the compound effects of climate change, gender inequality and conflict are being developed,<sup>103</sup> countries where the triple nexus is most prevalent need to refer to them when designing and planning their climate strategies.
- **Gender mainstreaming:** Adopting an integrated approach to gender mainstreaming and promoting women’s agency in economic and security sectors as well as natural resource management is key for effective peace-building and sustainable development in the most fragile states. Such a change could be brought about by legal reforms, community mobilisation, and incentivisation.
- **Agricultural reforms:** Since climate change impacts arable lands, and given the centrality of agriculture for women’s livelihoods, agricultural reforms need to be implemented by protecting women’s rights for land ownership, empowering women farmers with knowledge and skills on sustainable farming practices and increasing investments in new farming techniques that could mitigate the negative effects of land degradation and desertification.
- **Conducting thorough studies to assess appropriate adaptation methodologies:** Since the relationship between the triple nexus is quite complex, collecting accurate data, consistent monitoring, and a continuous evaluation of gender equality is important in analysing the evolving impacts and vulnerability to climate change and designing change driven solutions. More research is needed on how the triple nexus unfolds in vulnerable contexts, especially in the Arab world, and on successful gender-inclusive adaptation initiatives that could be replicated in other states.
- **Triple nexus awareness programmes:** Developing effective climate change awareness programmes in addition to gender-sensitive initiatives and projects that involve all actors (government, media, and civil society) is important to raise awareness on the triple nexus and how it unfolds in the Arab world. This will help highlight the importance of developing local capacities that would support mobilising recourses towards adaptation.
- **Using COP28 and future COP meetings to sound the triple nexus alarm:** With a dedicated day for gender at COP28 and a promise to making the summit the most inclusive to date, the conference is an opportunity to sound the alarm on the links between climate change and conflict in a region of the world that is equally impacted by both. Conversations on how women can be engaged in finding solutions and building community resilience should take centre stage at COP28 and at all future COPs through various events, panels, and publications on the topic.

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