



**International Rescue Committee response to  
International Development Committee's inquiry into  
'Climate change, development and COP 26'.**

**May 2021**

## Introduction and background

1. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) welcomes the decision of the International Development Committee to hold an [inquiry](#) into examining the progress the Government has made putting climate change at the centre of aid policy.
2. The IRC works in conflict-affected and fragile countries around the world to deliver life-saving assistance to people affected by war, disaster and climate change and remains working with communities to assist with rebuilding through the post-crisis phase. Our presence in some 40 countries in education, health, protection, environmental health, women's protection and empowerment, and economic recovery programming provides us with an expert understanding of humanitarian and development challenges in contexts of conflict and fragility.
3. Conflict, climate change and COVID-19 have conspired to drive a surge in hunger, putting millions of people at risk of famine. The climate crisis drives food insecurity and displacement due to slow onset events such as higher temperatures, irregular rainfall, land degradation and desertification; and the increased frequency and severity of sudden natural shocks such as flooding, droughts, megafires and desert locust swarms. These events destroy agriculture<sup>1</sup> and rural livelihoods, displacing people from their homes, resulting in vast regions of our planet facing famine, which at times spark conflict over resources.<sup>2</sup> Climate risks are higher in fragile states.<sup>3</sup>
4. Deeply entrenched gender roles and structural inequalities put women and girls at a disadvantage in crisis situations. Gender inequality creates additional burdens and barriers for women and girls during times of conflict and climate-related crisis, which increases their vulnerability to hunger and food insecurity.<sup>4</sup> Women play key roles in local food systems and are carers and activists, which make them uniquely placed to prevent famine and drive longer term climate resilience and food security. Yet they are rarely included in the design of local solutions for climate adaptation. Women hold multiple roles in crisis situations that often span the artificial divisions between humanitarian, development and peacebuilding interventions, but without dedicated resources and accountable inclusion of displaced women in crisis management they will continue to be left behind.

### **Section 4. The potential of COP26 to address these remaining challenges effectively and the steps the Government needs to take if COP26 is to succeed in tackling them.**

5. **In the run up to COP26, the UK should support an integrated response to protracted crises, both responding urgently to acute crises while simultaneously building resilience to climate change and conflict, combining humanitarian and development approaches.** This means supporting locally-led

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<sup>1</sup>Food and Agriculture Organization (2021) [The impact of disasters and crises on agriculture and food security: 2021](#). Rome.

<sup>2</sup> International Rescue Committee (2020) [2021 Emergency Watchlist](#).

<sup>3</sup> Moran et al (2018) in Smith, J. M., Olosky, L. and Grosman Fernández, J. (2021) [The Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus: Amplifying women's contributions at the grassroots](#). Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, J. M., Olosky, L. and Grosman Fernández, J. (2021) [The Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus: Amplifying women's contributions at the grassroots](#). Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security.

food security and adaptation strategies, which include climate-smart, diverse and nutritious food production that conserves and regenerates biodiversity, and investing in local markets and value chains. The importance of resilient local food systems was illustrated by an Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) survey, which found that facilitating the availability and access to locally produced food were key measures to ensure continued food supply and protect the most vulnerable from COVID-19 impacts.<sup>5</sup> Holistic responses that recognise local priorities and local knowledge are critical<sup>6</sup>. Displaced and conflict-affected communities should be included in local environmental and food systems governance.

6. Despite the barriers to leadership they face, conflict-affected and refugee women are uniquely placed to drive climate resilience and food security. In their capacity as producers, processors, sellers, consumers and preparers of food,<sup>7</sup> they generally farm for household consumption and manage resources like water, firewood and fodder. Household food security suffers when they cannot participate in local resource management.<sup>8</sup> Where women are able to control resources, they and their families are generally found to have better-quality diets.<sup>9</sup> Leveraging women's roles in food systems can more effectively build resilience from shocks and food insecurity risks.<sup>10</sup>
7. Women's knowledge and experiences of leading 'unofficial' community-based and grassroots responses to food insecurity and climate change must be integrated into formal policy making processes.<sup>11</sup> Women often lead organisations or movements for women's rights and climate justice which improve resilience and peacebuilding in their communities and this commitment can and should be harnessed and supported.<sup>12</sup> Advancing gender equality is associated with lower levels of violence and increased peace<sup>13</sup>.
8. **The UK should therefore support a feminist approach to building climate resilience and food security** in fragile and conflict-affected states that centres on the resilience and leadership of women and girls. This requires transformations to take place at individual, household, community and society levels that improve crisis-affected women's agency and access to key resources and opportunities – in line with IRC's model for women's economic empowerment in crisis contexts.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization (2020) [COVID-19 and the role of local food production in building more resilient local food systems](#).

<sup>6</sup> Greene, S. (2020) [Local must lead action to tackle world's multiple interconnected challenges](#). IIED.

<sup>7</sup> Zengeni, T. (2020) [Promoting women's influence in their food systems. Womens' influence within food systems outcomes in the Sustainable Diets for All programme](#). Hivos and IIED.

<sup>8</sup> Salcedo-La Viña, C. (2017) [Global Rights, Local Struggles: Barriers to Women's Participation in Community Land Decision-Making](#). World Resources Institute.

<sup>9</sup> Botreau, H. and Cohen, M. J. (2019) [Gender Inequalities and Food Insecurity: Ten years after the food price crisis, why are women farmers still food-insecure?](#) Oxfam.

<sup>10</sup> Smith, J. M., Olosky, L. and Grosman Fernández, J. (2021) [The Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus: Amplifying women's contributions at the grassroots](#). Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security.

<sup>11</sup> Greene, S. (2020) [Local must lead action to tackle world's multiple interconnected challenges](#). IIED.

<sup>12</sup> LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security, Gender Action for Peace and Security and the Women's International Peace Centre (2021) [Defending the Future: Gender, Conflict and Environmental Peace](#). and Smith, J. M., Olosky, L. and Grosman Fernández, J. (2021) [The Climate-Gender-Conflict Nexus: Amplifying women's contributions at the grassroots](#). Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security.

Transformative interventions should be multi-sector and multi-year, combining food security support with a response to gender-based violence. They should challenge discriminatory social norms and policies that prohibit women from controlling resources, such as land, and from leading decision making to create stronger and more climate resilient local food systems.

9. **This also requires increased financial support for women leaders and grassroots initiatives** with local knowledge and expertise, who often cannot access climate financing. Of climate adaptation finance provided by most G7 countries, less than ten percent considers gender equality as a key objective<sup>15</sup> and only a tiny proportion of gender-responsive climate bilateral ODA goes to Southern civil society organisations.<sup>16</sup>
10. **The UK should prioritise women and girls' leadership in crises and climate change response** in line with the G7 Whistler Declaration, the Grand Bargain and the Generation Equality Forum, by committing to measurable targets to increase the amount and quality of funding going to feminist approaches and women led organisations.
11. **The UK should ensure all climate finance is gender-just**, takes an intersectional approach and is accessible to national women's rights organisations and local communities, with **50% of climate finance going to adaptation**.
12. **The UK should ensure adaptation strategies within local, national, and global climate response plans incorporate conflict-displacement-gender considerations** and include actions to address the unique needs and circumstances of women, refugees, asylum-seekers, and conflict-affected communities.
13. The IRC also supports the recommendations on climate from UK civil society in the C7 (please find [here](#)) and those from the W7 (please find [here](#)).

**For more information, contact Oliver Phelan, Advocacy Officer, IRC-UK: [oliver.phelan@rescue.org](mailto:oliver.phelan@rescue.org)**

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<sup>14</sup> Many of the barriers conflict-affected and displaced women face to be able to fully drive solutions for climate resilience and food security of themselves and their families, are similar to the barriers they face for being economically empowered – i.e. their ability to safely generate, use and control resources. IRC's model lays out which elements should be included in an appropriate response to economically empower women. See International Rescue Committee (2019) [Choices, chances and safety in crisis. A model for women's economic empowerment](#).

<sup>15</sup> CARE (2020) [Evicted by climate change. Confronting the gendered impacts of climate-induced displacement](#).

<sup>16</sup> OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality (2016) [Making climate finance work for women: Overview of bilateral ODA to gender and climate change](#)