



Maria Tanyag

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## How Feminist Research Will Help Solve the Climate Crisis

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*As the impacts of global warming are already being felt and we are warned of the irreversible impacts, [Maria Tanyag](#) tells us why women's situated knowledge will increasingly prove to be a key and advantageous source of knowledge for solving the climate crisis and why we must bring together the social, political and economic dimensions with the environmental in our analysis of the climate*

*crisis in order to translate visions into action.*

The 2018 [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\) special report](#) on the impacts of global warming of 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels provided a comprehensive mapping of the broad-range of risks if global CO2 emissions do not start to significantly decline well before 2030. Among the key findings with “high confidence” (that is, a strong degree of correctness based on scientific evidence and consensus) is that natural and human systems have already been impacted by global warming. With strong scientific basis, the IPCC reported that changes toward extreme temperatures in many regions and increases in the frequency and intensity of precipitation in several regions are already underway.

An increase in global warming will lead to long-lasting, irreversible impacts such as ecosystem loss and species extinction. It will negatively affect all populations with higher risk of adverse consequences in health, livelihood, food and water supply for people in the Arctic, drylands, Small Island states and in developing countries. Limiting global warming to 1.5 °C instead of 2 °C could reduce the number of people impacted by climate-related risks, however, these risks are already occurring in multitudes and with amplified effects. In the face of this, an increasing number of people and regions will face overlapping vulnerabilities and will therefore contend with new and compounded hazards we are yet to envision.

Humanity is now at a point where we can no longer afford to examine climate-related risks and their impacts on humans independent of other ecosystems, or to treat risks to food insecurity and health, for example, in isolation from climate-related drivers to conflict and

displacement. Indeed, as the IPCC report indicates, there are significant gaps in knowledge on the *interactions* of climate change responses with sustainable development and poverty eradication, particularly in understanding what synergies and trade-offs there are in current mitigation and adaptation strategies across regions and globally. Moreover, the development of *integrated* risk assessment, management and long-term response is increasingly necessary to encompass the occurrence of simultaneous hazards, cumulative impacts and cascading disasters which cannot be left to natural and physical sciences alone.



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Feminist research speaks directly to these challenges and has much to contribute in helping solve the climate crisis by strengthening integrated risks assessments, platforms and responses. Spanning critical scholarship in the humanities and social sciences, feminist

research contributes indispensable analytical, ethical and methodological tools precisely because it has accrued expertise in interrogating overlapping and multiple forms of insecurities across different sites from gendered bodies, households and communities, to state level and globally. This article identifies these feminist tools as intersectionality, the ethics of care, and situated knowledge.

### **An intersectional approach**

More than four decades of feminist scholarship in different disciplines – such as geography, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, legal studies, international relations and peace and conflict studies – have yielded knowledge on the interactions between gendered inequalities and women's and men's relationship of mutual interdependence, vulnerability and violence vis-à-vis their human and natural environments. Despite differences in terminologies, [feminist research](#) brings to the fore the interconnectedness of the social, political and economic realms with the environmental in its analysis of climate risks and hazards. This is done by paying attention to women's lives, gendered structural constraints and opportunities, as well as the legitimating symbols that 'naturalise' inequalities in the human environment. For example, anti-gender opposition by transnational religious fundamentalist forces that promote traditional or family values stems from ideas that link sexual binary and heteronormativity to the [natural order](#). In effect, harmful laws that restrict sexual and reproductive freedoms have been legitimised as in alignment with laws of nature.

Feminist research, quite simply, does not only relate to 'women's issues', nor are its contributions limited to understanding

women's different experiences of climate risks and impacts. Feminist research provides complementary analytical tools for conceptualising the full extent of the climate crisis which does not add climate change to the long list of insecurities women and men face. Rather – particularly through the lens of [intersectionality](#) – feminist research can locate the current climate crisis within the study of interlocking systems of oppression which involves asking why there is a crisis in the first place, and what can we learn by seeing the climate crisis in continuity with other historical and human crises, such as the persistence of gender-based violence and armed conflicts.

### **Re-linking women's bodies and the environment**

Feminist research can re-orient the current technocratic interpretations of climate *adaptation* and *mitigation* through [the ethics of care](#). Currently, the language that permeates the IPCC precludes space to re-imagine the climate crisis as an opportunity to forge a global response that allows both human and natural systems to *replenish* and *renew*. What alternative ethics and practices might be inspired by shifting emphasis from mere survival to a broader notion of flourishing? If we are in need of approaches that capture the multidimensional interactions between human and natural systems, scientists and engineers must engage with feminist scholars and activists who have been theorising, and empirically demonstrating, the linkages between the depletion of land and natural resources and the depletion of women's bodies.

Adaptation and mitigation will remain profoundly unequal and inane to unintended consequences unless these attend to, rather than

perpetuate the invisibility of, human interdependence and vulnerability. For instance, such tensions are evident in the displacement of indigenous peoples in the name of **natural conservation** which in turn sows further ecological imbalance. Integrated risk assessments that are informed by feminist ethics can be part of broader efforts to ensure global redistribution and justice within and across human systems.



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### **A return to knowledge**

The IPCC Special Report stressed the need for ‘ambitious actions’ toward ‘equitable societal and systems transitions’. Radical

visions for change can come, as feminist research would suggest, by actively integrating different types of information and knowledge sources. Feminist research recognises that knowledge is *situated* and *embodied*. What counts as climate risks is ultimately shaped by the realities and relationships available to those who do the counting. Therefore, it is in the coming together of “[partial perspectives](#)” through collaboration and intersectional knowledge production that we arrive at a fuller, more objective account of the climate crisis.

Feminist researchers, scientists, and engineers all have a role to play in the brokerage of ‘scientific knowledge’ and ‘knowledge from the ground’ in order to translate public commitments into radical actions for change. For example, FemLINK Pacific’s [Women’s Weather Watch](#) is demonstrating that such a knowledge interface is not impossible. Women’s Weather Watch is a two-way community radio with information channels across social media and SMS. As a disaster-monitoring platform, it links networks of women, particularly those in remote areas, by disseminating disaster-related information as well as allowing them to report back on their ‘real-time’ experiences and observations during and in the aftermath of a disaster. Through this platform, women are able to triangulate weather-related information with a broad-range of interrelated security risks from their standpoint.

The ethos of this innovation is crucial in acknowledging what feminist research across disciplines has shown: women may and do have multiple, simultaneous roles in their households and communities as

farmers, disaster responders, peacekeepers and community health workers, among others. Given that climate-related risks will impact all areas of human life, women's situated knowledge will increasingly prove to be a key and advantageous source of knowledge for solving the climate crisis.

*This blog is part of the mini-series on Gender, Nature and Peace framing the conversation on women's rights, climate change, the environment and post-conflict situations, and builds on the first Gender, Nature and Peace workshop, funded by the British Academy small grant and by the AHRC project a Feminist International Law of Peace and Security. The second workshop is due to take place in Colombia.*

*The views, thoughts and opinions expressed in this blog post are those of the author(s) only, and do not reflect LSE's or those of the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security.*

## **About the author**





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