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Exploring Leadership approaches of Women in Climate Justice: Pathways to Impact and Empowerment

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ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the role of women in promoting peace through leadership in the climate justice space; through building an inclusive climate movement to tackle the triple planetary crisis facing the globe. Studies reflect that marginalised populations are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation, particularly indigenous communities and women, despite contributing the least to climate catastrophe. Women are among the 32.6 million climate migrants and refugees each year, who are in turn, at risk of experiencing gender-based violence. Standing at the frontlines of the triple planetary crisis, women are ideally placed to take up leadership roles within efforts toward achieving climate justice and a sustainable future. Women serve as primary caregivers, often responsible for providing food and water security, sustaining families and households in climate-affected regions. They are the first guardians and caretakers of our youth, possessing the necessary emotional depth, compassion, and maternal instinct to promote the values underpinning climate justice, which at its core, advocate for the sustenance of Mother Earth through an empathetic lens. Women, at the helm of community development and holistic wellbeing, are integral to building peaceful global communities through forming compassionate networks of changemakers, leaders and entrepreneurs adopting sustainable livelihood approaches. Following a conference on "Women, Religion and Climate Change, working together to move faster on climate change" which took place at Wilton Park in the UK in September 2023, an official report of findings and recommendations was produced, highlighting the real-life experiences, opportunities, and challenges within this arena. This report will serve as a key case study for this paper, drawing on discussions and focus groups among the diverse multi-lateral participants, influencers, and faith leaders present at this event. This paper will consider emerging approaches related to female leadership including the capability approach, the whole community approach, and the Islamic concept of Maslaha [Maslaha is an Arabic word, which means public interest]. These approaches also promote peaceful and sustainable societies and communities.

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Introduction

This paper will examine the role of women in promoting peace through leadership in the climate justice space; It explores how women advocate for inclusivity within the climate movement to address the interconnected challenges of environmental degradation, social inequity, and economic instability. Studies shows that marginalised populations are disproportionately affected by climate change and environmental degradation, particularly indigenous communities, and women, despite contributing the least to the climate catastrophe. Women are among the 32.6 million climate migrants and refugees each year, exposing them to heightened vulnerabilities and the risks of gender-based violence. This exacerbates the urgency for inclusive climate action and highlights the crucial role of women in driving such initiatives.

The triple planetary crisis is causing major natural calamities and disasters throughout the globe. It is becoming more and more difficult for communities living in the Global South to prepare themselves for these natural disasters such as droughts, bushfires, floods, and earthquakes. If we are to see peace and security on this planet, we need clear, decisive, and compassionate leadership at all levels of society, local, national, and international. This leadership must recognize the invaluable diversity of ecosystems and shift focus away from the Anthropocene, to prioritise sustainable harmony which recognises the importance of the different ecosystems which exist.

The IPCC synthesis report 2023 unequivocally recognizes the immense strain inflicted upon the Global South by the impacts of climate change. Its many observations clearly illustrate the climate injustices endured by low-income nations and groups, particularly in the Global South. The report also highlights the increasing diversity of the actors engaged in tackling climate change.

The UN estimates that 80% of those displaced by the effects of climate change are women, emphasising the critical importance of amplifying their voices and acknowledging their contributions in combating climate change. Indeed, women can serve as pivotal agents of change, leveraging their expertise in local knowledge and sustainable resource management. Recent research by the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security indicates that women have the potential to contribute to more sustainable peace, with their leadership resulting in enhanced outcomes in the realm of climate action. This is also recognised in the IPCC synthesis report 2023 which shows the uptake of mitigation options. For example, the report cites the utilisation of solar energy, wind energy, electrification of urban systems, urban green infrastructure, energy efficiency, demand-side management, improved forest and crop/grassland management, and reduced food waste and loss. Strong leadership emerged in these domains bringing about change through citizen and community engagement and making these cost-effective options available today.

However, with adaptation efforts there are some key barriers which the IPCC report identifies; these are 'limited resources, lack of private sector and citizen engagement, insufficient mobilization of finance (including for research), low climate literacy, lack of political commitment, limited research and/or slow and low uptake of adaptation science, and low sense of urgency. There are widening disparities between the estimated costs of adaptation and the finance allocated to adaptation projects.'

The recent experience with the COVID-19 crisis has clearly demonstrated that if we all work together with focus and strong and effective leadership, we can overcome crises; however, this is not currently happening. Furthermore, without achieving balance between mankind and nature, we are poised to face dire consequences which threaten the existence of life on this planet. WWF's Living Planet Report 2020 has already validated this concern, revealing that one million species of animals and plants are threatened with extinction, with a staggering decline of more than 68% observed among wildlife populations.

Outline

This paper will commence with an introduction to the relationship between gender and the environmental agenda; it will then provide a brief overview of the Wilton Park report, before exploring how approaches, initiated from different disciplines, are being embraced by a growing number of women leaders in the environmental space, often without explicit recognition as such. All three approaches discussed are based on public interest, care, and compassion for the community, and are inclusive approaches in alignment with the principle of leave no one behind. This principle, central to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, echoes the ethos championed by women leaders within their circles of influence. Drawing from my own experiences of utilising faith to mobilise communities around shared values, I believe that women leaders possess compassion, courage, morality, resilience, and justice; qualities that are crucial in effective leadership to combat climate change and achieve climate justice.

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Development of role of women within the environment agenda

There is a longstanding and complex dialogue surrounding the relationship between women and the natural environment which has been reinscribed into the contemporary climate change agenda. Understanding gender-environment relations is vital to the management and distribution of resources, policy initiatives, and environmental measures as climate change, far from being a gender-neutral scientific phenomenon, is in fact a deeply gendered issue that perpetuates and recreates inequalities within societyThis is because women are disproportionately impacted, particularly those in the global south who are dependent on subsistence farming and agricultural livelihoods.

In the late 1980s/ early 1990s Women, Environment and Development (WED) became a popularised strand of thought that shaped international debates and global policy agendas. Based on compelling stories of poor rural and indigenous women, predominantly in the Global South, WED narratives claimed that women were the hardest hit by issues of environmental degradation and resource depletion and therefore should play a greater role in environmental programmes and policies. Further examining the correlation between the degradation of the environment and the subordination of women, ecofeminists such as Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood and Carolyn Merchant argued that women, particularly women of the Global South, are closer to nature for two primary reasons and hence are more significantly impacted by its destruction. Firstly, they argued that women had a greater biological affinity with the natural world, performing roles like those provided by nature including bearing children, nurturing, and providing sustenance. By this reasoning they perceived women to be more innately attuned to conservation and preservation. Secondly, they argued that both women and the environment are connected by their subordination and marginalisation at the hands of dominant 'masculine' forces of development, colonialism, and capitalism which 'destroy life' and 'threaten survival'. Indian environmental scholar activist Vandana Shiva therefore argued that Western science displaced the 'feminine principle' victimising women, and people from the South and nature and as such third world women ought to play a significant role in recovering the feminine principle:

'Third world women are bringing the concern with living and survival back to the centre stage in human history. In recovering the chances of survival for all life, they are laying the foundations for the recovery of the feminine principle in nature and society and through it the recovery of the earth as a sustainer and provider'.

Whilst ecofeminism had a significant influence on discourses of gender-environment relations, it has been greatly criticised for essentializing women in the global south and promoting 'innate' feminine roles and identities. Instead, a less essentialised perspective was proposed by academics such as Bina Agarwal and Brinda Rao, who called for the need to contextualise women to avoid harmful stereotypes which reinforced misogynistic ideas about women with implications for policy and development work. While maintaining that there exists a unique relationship between women and nature, they argued that this was not based on patriarchal ideology or biology but social, economic, and political inequalities, discrimination, and marginalisation which structure women's interactions with nature. Known as 'feminist environmentalism', they employed an intersectional and multi-dimensional approach to highlight how women's unique relationship with nature is constructed within structural systems including structures of gender, class, and caste division of labour and property. Both ecofeminism and feminist environmentalism therefore argue that women and nature share a unique connection on account of gender, although they vary on the sources and rationale of this relationship.

Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognise the disproportionate impacts of environmental concerns including climate change, the degradation of land and the depletion of natural resources on women, particularly as they are responsible for producing between 60% and 80% of the world's total food production. Indeed, 80% of food production in sub-Saharan Africa is done by women, 60% in Asia and 50% in Latin America. Yet their critical contribution to household and world food security has only recently been recognised. This is largely because women continue to be excluded from large-scale agricultural opportunities due to traditional practices and bureaucratic factors that prevent women from accessing new technologies, resource development and management, and property rights. These exclusions illustrate that dynamics of power, gender and class shape an individual's interaction with nature, and as such, the effect of the environment on women differs significantly to men and their responses to changes are thus also likely to be different. Environmental change, and its management therefore involves a deeply gendered dimension.

Faced with situational threats arising from the triple planetary crisis, combined with structural threats experienced by women- as women within gender-

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stratified social structures- women are more likely to be greatly impacted by changes to the environment than men.During periods of conflict, climate change impacts, and forced migration, women, children, and indigenous groups are disproportionately exposed to the most vulnerable and adverse consequences. In societies in which women are afforded less social, economic, and political value than men, women are likely to experience violence, discrimination, and marginalisation. This can involve a range of practices from abortion, infanticide, and the neglect of female children to high levels of domestic violence and/or low levels of access to education, healthcare, and the formal employment sector, property, credit, and inheritance (Ibid). These forms of political, economic, and social disempowerment render women more vulnerable to the negative consequences of environmental change compared to men as they are unable to access mitigation and adaptation practices as quickly as men. Several academics therefore argue that in order to effectively address the impacts of environmental changes on women, they must be situated within the context of women's rights as deeply embedded structural inequalities converge with environmental concerns, complicating women's relationships and interactions with the natural environment. Issues, such as women's access to the control of natural resources, land ownership, and property are consequently increasingly becoming the subject of debate in both the environmental realm and within women's rights movements as the two are further recognised as being intrinsically interlinked.

Furthermore, women are the most impacted by environmental concerns because in many parts of the global south, women are the primary users of natural resources and are responsible for gathering food, fuel and fodder. With such responsibilities, they are seen as possessing greater interest, knowledge and commitment to preventing the degradation of the environment. Whilst it is important, as argued by Charlotte Bretherton to avoid tendencies to discursively reduce women into the categories of 'victims, saviours' and 'the problem'' in evaluating the relationship between women and environmental issues, in employing an intersectional approach as advocated for by feminist environmentalists, women's role of primary users of natural resources can be explained by patriarchal structures that confine women to the sphere of domesticity and deny the pursuit of education, professional careers and access to civil society. It is therefore hardly surprising that women, in their role of providers, tend to learn more about the environment around them, forming a closer relationship with the land and other natural resources than men in the community and learning how to not misuse them but instead encourage preservation and sustainability. For instance, as argued by Kanhiya Mahour, women are already the principal conservers of biodiversity given their role in seed selection, multiplication, and conservation. . Women's perspectives and values for the environment are therefore somewhat different from men as they afford greater priority to protection, improving the capacity of nature, maintaining farmlands, and ensuring its future; they have more at stake and therefore are more invested.

Given this socialisation of women's experiences with nature some have theorised that women would protect the Earth better than men if given positions of power. We have many examples of impactful women leaders and women-led initiatives which show this including Wanjira Mathai through the Wangari Maathai Foundation, Greta Thunberg, Vandana Shiva, Latika Nath, Mary Robinson and the Dandelion Project. Women are more sensitive to the earth and its problems and are more invested in protecting and sustaining the natural world. It can therefore be argued that women have a vital role to play in environmental management and development that importantly not only preserves the environment but also has the potential to make significant progress in the sphere of women's rights by enabling women to gain access to land and property, financial independence, new technologies- all of which would provide women with a critical voice in their communities and afford them a higher social and economic value. The challenge is therefore to re-establish a sense of unity at the nexus between communities, women, and natural resources to not only help reduce the negative impacts of climate change on already vulnerable populations but also to empower women and encourage development more broadly. What is clear from the discussions at Wilton Park is that this sense of unity is already established but the missing link is the insufficient promulgation of what is in this space.

Wilton Park report overview

"We are on the cusp of a catastrophe and efforts are often siloed, and separated by politics, profit, culture, resource limitations, and even plain old competition."

The Women, Religion and Climate Change: Working together to move faster on climate change, 6th – 8th September 2023 | WP3297 took place at Wilton Park, UK 6-8th September 2023. This event gathered women leaders and their male allies to explore the nexus between faith, women, and climate change to identify ways to rapidly increase the impact of women's influence within

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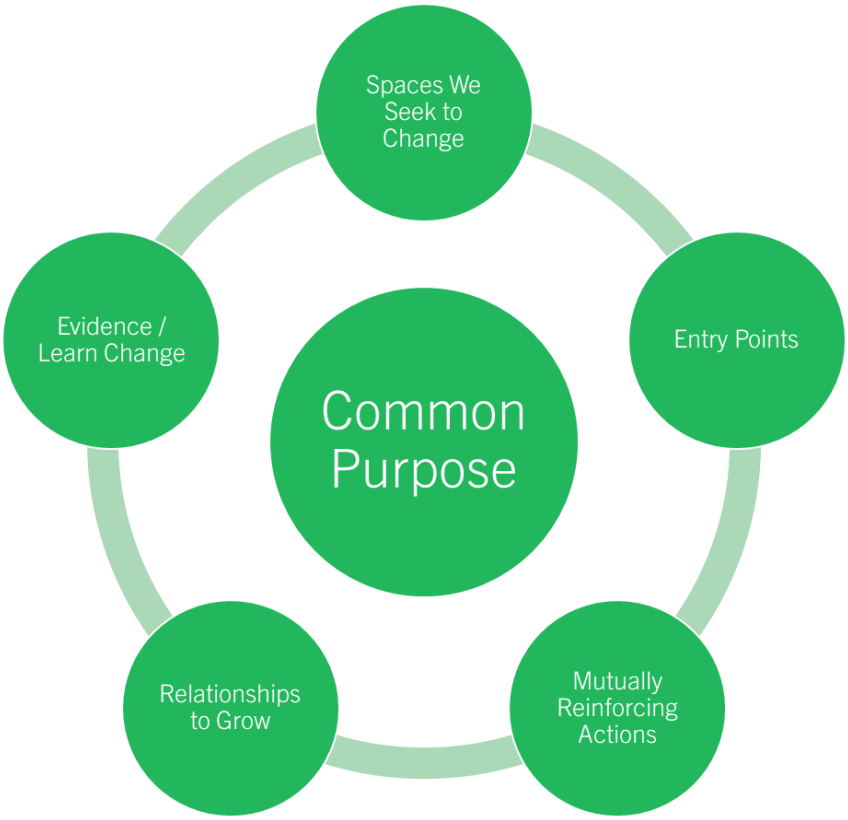
this sphere. It created an interactive cultural, scientific, and practical platform based on the inclusion, complementarity, and integration of civil and religious society, as well as women's efforts in the fields of environment, climate change and sustainable development. This platform brought together 50 women and their male allies for a residential event at Wilton Park which is an executive arm of the UK FCDO. It brought entrepreneurs, experts and representatives of women's associations, civil and human rights institutions, religious and educational institutions, and research centres.

The event was inspired by the outcomes of the 2022 Rockefeller Foundation and Brookings Institute's 17 Rooms process, an initiative attended by the two primary organisers of the Wilton Park Event. The findings from this previous event affirmed the urgent priority of greater collaboration between faith and secular worlds on climate action. Room 17 experts identified four areas with potential for short-term impact, including the scaling up of women's leadership and fostering closer collaboration. between women of faith and those leading in secular contexts. The event was important because the organisers recognised a concerning trend of siloed climate action, with women being left out and overlooked. Give the urgency of the crisis we needed to explore how and why this was the case and identified recommendations and solutions for greater inclusivity and collaboration moving forward.

'We need to be attentive to the kind of leadership we need. This is about the leadership of listening, and about giving hope and inspiration. It's about putting community, compassion, and inclusivity at the heart of all we do"

At the Wilton Park Event, Mary Robinson presented her initiative called the Dandelion Project which is an example of how, engaging women leaders can lay the foundation for a mass mobilization of women from all walks of life including the faith and secular worlds advocating for climate action.This is a new global Climate Justice Campaign that will be shaped and implemented by a coalition of women and youth leaders from every continent, connecting generations and geographies.

One of the key outcomes highlighted in the report is a framework for radical collaboration for women leadership in the climate change space. Diagram below illustrates how leadership collaboration can be possible.



The report presents 16 recommendations which are as follows:

Build on the Radial Collaboration framework that has emerged from the meeting.

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Develop a Declaration outlining the goals and objectives of engaging with women faith leaders on environmental issues.

Conduct a mapping exercise to identify current initiatives among event participants on the nexus of women's leadership in the faith, climate change, and biodiversity loss space.

Develop a repository of resources on the work being carried out by women faith leaders in the climate change and biodiversity loss space, including training resources and multilingual resources.

Increase the visibility of women leaders particularly women from the Global South and indigenous women leaders through media platforms.

Convene representatives of women's networks from all key faith traditions to discuss radical collaboration for global mobilization.

Build on existing interfaith initiatives including the Joint Appeal Faith and Science: Towards COP26 and The Charter of Makkah.

Consider aligning with global initiatives, statements, and agreements.

Encourage further theological reflection and renewal on our relationship with nature and duty to care for the earth. Move away from what is often a patriarchal and colonial framing of the environment existing for man's use.

Train both faith and non-faith actors on Climate literacy.

Participate in a series of advocacy events where the voices of women of faith are amplified in discussions on climate change and biodiversity loss.

Develop a communications campaign to support the mass mobilisation of women of faith to act on climate change and biodiversity loss.

Develop a documentary film illustrating faith leadership for climate change.

Break through the siloes and foster greater collaboration amongst the various stakeholders including indigenous women and youth.

Encourage female leadership in all aspects of climate action by bridging the "gendered leadership chasm in faith communities" and getting women to the decision-making table.

Support youth leaders with mentoring and training, recognising that climate anxiety is a real phenomenon today.

Action emerging from the report.

Since the report came out last year a number of the recommendations have already started to be taken up and implemented under the leadership of some interested delegates. For this paper I will focus on the main initiative currently under development: Multi Radical Collaboration. This initiative aims to scale up collaboration among women of faith networks to accelerate progress towards climate goals. The aim is to develop a Global Multi-faith Women-led Climate Action Network, which will explore avenues for advancing radical collaboration both within and between faith-based and secular climate-related activities.

A Steering Committee has been set up which includes representatives of the World Council of Churches, Union of International Superiors General, Women's Learning Partnership, Global One, Wilton Park, Faith Invest and Partnership for Faith and Development. This Committee is supporting the ongoing 'radical collaboration' via a stakeholder-led coordinating mechanism. Key strategic partners in this initiative are Mary Robinson with Project Dandelion and the Elders, UNEP Faith for Earth, and the UK FCDO.

4. Three approaches to building a climate movement

In this section, I wish to explore three similar but distinct approaches that I believe our women leaders are already embracing in shaping the climate movement. The rationale behind focusing on these three approaches is rooted in the imperative need to tackle climate change, particularly climate justice. By drawing from various disciplines and applying them to the triple planetary crisis, we can enhance the level of leadership to find solutions.

These are the capability approach, the whole community approach, and the Islamic concept of maslahah.

4.1. Capability Approach

In the 1980s Amartya Sen first formulated the capability approach, a framework that centres on the quality of life. This approach has gained enormous traction, shifting policy paradigms on human development over the past few decades. Central to the capability approach are two core concepts; 'functionings' and 'capability'. It operates under the assumption that individuals possess the freedom to pursue a high quality of life and the agency, or capability, to effect change.

If we explore this approach from a climate change perspective, it is evident that the impact of climate change will be highly detrimental to the quality of life of all humans and ecosystems worldwide. Therefore, there

exists a moral imperative for individuals to have the freedom to pursue well-being. Additionally, if people are not agents of change, they cannot achieve the goal of well-being and quality of life. The approach is particularly compelling in the context of climate justice as it underscores the two core concepts of functioning and capabilities. In order to achieve 'substantive freedoms', one needs to be able to have agency to do so and enact change. From a women leadership perspective, this resonates strongly as previously observed, women are significant agents of change in the climate justice space. Although this approach has historically been targeted at governments and public bodies, I believe that Robeyns' study of the capability approach is reflective of the political situation in many countries in the Global South and more enabling for women who are often not part of any institutions or organisation. Sen and Dreze argue that 'The crucial role of social opportunities is to expand the realm of human agency and freedom, both as an end in itself and as a means of further expansion of freedom. The word 'social' in the expression 'social opportunity' [...] is a useful reminder not to view individuals and their opportunities in isolated terms.'

4.2. Islamic Concept of Maslahah

As a Muslim, I believe in the interconnectedness of all who live on our planet and the impact of our actions – in the past, the present and in the future. Within religious traditions including Islam, relations between humans and other elements of the natural world are not compartmentalised but instead conceived of as being tied into a series of continuous spiritual interactions. Our blessed Prophet Muhammad reminded us that our lives on this planet are for a finite time beautifully -

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) said: "I am in this world like a rider who halts in the shade of a tree for a short time, and after taking some rest, resumes his journey leaving the tree behind." (Ahmad, Tirmidhi)

In Islam, all aspects of a Muslims life is dictated by the spiritual values and ideals enunciated in the Quran and Sunnah. I believe that the principle of Maslahah [public interest] which is derived from Shariah [Islamic law] and is used mostly within Islamic finance context; is a principle which women leaders can apply to climate justice and climate change issues of mitigation and adaptation. Taken literally, Maslahah means seeking public benefit and repelling harm.

According to Imam al-Ghazali: 'The objective of the Shari`ah is to promote the well-being of all mankind, which lies in safeguarding their faith (din), their human self (nafs), their intellect (`aql), their posterity (nasl) and their wealth (mal). Whatever ensures the safeguard of these five serves public interest and is desirable.'

Dusuki and Abdullah assert that a contemporary interpretation of the concept of Maslahah [public interest] offers theoretical insights into various domains including economics, science, technology, politics and even environment and climate change. They also further categorise maslahah into three stages: into necessity (daruriyat), complementarity (hajiyat) and embellishment (tahsiniyat)

They posit that Shariah's main objective is to promote harmony and justice through compassion. Building upon this principle, I assert my earlier argument that women are leading through compassion in the climate space. This principle is excellent grounding for developing leadership in climate justice and tackling climate change. Women leaders are already embedding this principle within the frameworks that they employ to combat climate change, particularly in regions in the Global South where many Muslim populations are facing the serious impacts of climate change.

4.3. The Whole Community Approach

"There is no animal on the earth, or any bird that wings its flight, but is a community like you." Quran (6:38)

The community in Islam is not founded on race, nationality, locality, occupation, kinship, or special interests. It does not take its name after the name of a leader or a founder or an event. It transcends national borders and political boundaries. The foundation of the community in Islam is the principle which designates submission to the will of Allah, obedience to His law and commitment to His cause. The Prophet Muhammed (PBUH) was a role model, who showed us how to live sustainably and simply, respecting the earth and our fellow humanity. He taught us to consume moderately and avoid wasting precious natural resources such as water "even if on the banks of a flowing river" [Ibn Majah].

I find a real alignment between the concept of community in Islam and the whole community approach. In this section, I would like to focus on the importance of leaving no one behind, a leadership trait often demonstrated by women leaders. For them, the family and community evoke compassion and resilience in their leadership. I first discovered the whole community approach when attending the COP 15 in Montreal in December 2022. This approach is an instrumental part of the Global Biodiversity Framework.

The Whole Community Approach emerged in 2011 and provides a strategic framework that emerged from

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emergency disaster management responses. Its fundamental premise is that all levels of the community need to be engaged in responding to disasters or emergencies. This involves including government entities, individuals, private sectors, faith-based organisations, and communities. The essence of the whole community approach lies in understanding and meeting the actual needs of the whole community, fostering relationships with community leaders, building and maintaining partnerships, empowering local action, and strengthening social infrastructure, networks, and assets.

The Global Biodiversity Framework [GBF], adopted in 2022, aims to halt and reverse nature loss by 2030. The introductory section of the GBF section C sets out the

Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach

(c) This is a framework for all - for the whole of government and the whole of society. Its success requires political will and recognition at the highest level of government and relies on action and cooperation by all levels of government and by all actors of society;

It calls for participation by all stakeholders, including businesses and financial institutions. Every part of the global economy is dependent on nature and its ecosystem services. To take nature-positive action at the scale and speed required, it is crucial for businesses to understand their specific interactions with nature within their sectors. The framework developed 23 targets and the two targets which are most pertinent for women's leadership are Target 22: Ensure Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice and Information Related to Biodiversity for all;

Ensure the full, equitable, inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making, and access to justice and information related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities, respecting their cultures and their rights over lands, territories, resources, and traditional knowledge, as well as by women and girls, children and youth, and persons with disabilities and ensure the full protection of environmental human rights defenders.

and Target 23: Ensure Gender Equality and a Gender-Responsive Approach for Biodiversity Action

Ensure gender equality in the implementation of the Framework through a gender-responsive approach, where all women and girls have equal opportunity and capacity to contribute to the three objectives of the Convention, including by recognizing their equal rights and access to land and natural resources and their full equitable, meaningful and informed participation and leadership at all levels of action,

I believe this Global Biodiversity Framework is really an excellent example of how to give agency to women to take leadership. The whole of community approach is an enabling and empowering approach which will gain more traction as women take on more leadership in the climate justice space; which is inevitable as we prepare the climate catastrophe as highlighted by the IPCC synthesis report.

Conclusion

In this paper I have given an outline of the current position regarding the triple planetary crisis, followed by an examination of the academic perspectives of women environmentalists and ecofeminists. This analysis clearly showed the scientific evidence and the myriad challenges and barriers faced by women, particularly in the Global South. I then outlined the Wilton Park report on "Women, Religion and Climate Change: Working together to move faster on climate change", to substantiate and corroborate the academics findings. Transitioning to solutions, I outlined the recommendations that emerged from the Wilton Park report, including the Radical collaboration framework. I highlighted one key initiative which is now being pursued to develop a Global Multi-faith Women-led Climate Action Network. I conclude my paper by arguing that based on the Report there are clearly three approaches which women leaders are either employing or should consider utilising in the climate space due to their effectiveness and impact; the capability approach, the concept of Maslahah [from Islamic law], and the whole of community approach. Whilst I have only alluded to one faith-based approach which is the Maslahah concept, it is essential to avoid silos in this space and allow women leadership to develop at every level of society, organically and with support from policy makers, governments, and institutions.

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