WHO CARES FOR CARERS?

The importance of securing land rights for those at the frontlines of climate-induced land degradation

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Abstract

This briefing note argues that climate-induced land degradation is not only an environmental crisis but also a crisis of care and inequality. As droughts, floods and other climate impacts degrade land, the people who sustain ecosystems and livelihoods, including women, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists and smallholder farmers, bear disproportionate burdens while often lacking secure land rights. Drawing on evidence from Uganda, Timor-Leste and Sri Lanka, the paper demonstrates how insecure tenure undermines climate resilience and sustainable land management. It calls for care-centred approaches that secure land rights, strengthen inclusive governance and invest in the people whose stewardship is essential for restoring land and building resilience.

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For further information on the issues raised in this paper, please email advocacy@oxfaminternational.org

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Cover photo: Salo Kuni at her home. Floods swept their home in May 2025 and affected her family's livelihood. Credit: Peter Irungu/Oxfam.

1. Introduction

Land is under growing pressure from climate change. Extreme weather events have impacted millions around the world, taking lives, destroying land, cultures, homes and livelihoods; damaging agricultural systems; and increasing displacement and food insecurity. The growing frequency and intensity of floods, fires and droughts have accelerated land degradation. It is fundamentally changing how people can use their land, and reducing the economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits derived from it.[1] Protecting land from degradation requires an integrated approach that safeguards both the ecosystems and the people who depend on them.

The poorest countries suffer the worst impacts of climate hazards, and within those countries, it is the poorest people who are most exposed. As land, water sources, forests and biodiversity are degraded, the impacts are felt most acutely by those whose daily lives and livelihoods depend directly on these resources. With the intensifying climate crisis, they face repeated climate shocks, their lands degrade rapidly, their ability to respond becomes weaker, their resilience drops and climate impacts become a force multiplier on existing inequalities.

At the same time, extractive and resource-intensive business activities can prioritize short-term economic returns while generating pollution, depleting natural resources and causing harm to water resources and land.2 Fossil-fuel extraction, large-scale mining, deforestation and other resource-intensive activities can undermine environmental and human rights by extracting value from land and natural resources without adequately considering their long-term sustainability. Meanwhile, those with greater wealth and power are often better positioned to shield themselves from, or even profit from, environmental crises. Oxfam's analysis demonstrates how race, income and power shape vulnerability to climate impacts. Racialized communities are more likely to live in hotter, degraded neighbourhoods with less tree cover and fewer resources to cope with extreme weather, while poorer populations are more likely to live in flood-prone areas and on less productive land, increasing their exposure to climate and environmental risks.3

These inequalities are also reflected in land governance where large-scale land investors are given tax incentives, ready access to fertile land, water and other natural resources. At the same time, weak regulation, inadequate environmental and human-rights impact assessments, limited community consultation and insufficient corporate due diligence can allow environmental harms to continue without effective remedy.4 In contrast, smallholder and medium-scale farmers face persistent barriers to securing land rights and accessing technology, agricultural inputs, finance, information and markets. Fighting inequality should be a cornerstone of a carer-centred land restoration. As climate-induced land degradation reduces productivity and livelihoods, these structural disadvantages limit their ability to invest in sustainable land management and adapt to changing environmental conditions.

The result is a vicious cycle in which environmental degradation deepens poverty and inequality, while unequal access to land, resources and decision-making power increases vulnerability to further degradation. Without addressing these structural inequalities, the benefits of land and natural resources will continue to be concentrated among those with greater wealth and power, while the majority who depend directly on land bear the greatest social, economic and environmental costs.

This briefing note has been developed at a critical moment when climate change is accelerating land degradation across many regions, placing growing pressure on the people and communities who care for and restore natural resources. It is anchored in the 17th Conference of Parties of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD COP17), held in Mongolia under the theme of accelerating land restoration and resilience. While policy debates often focus on ecological and technical solutions, insufficient attention is given to the carers whose labour, knowledge and stewardship sustain ecosystems and livelihoods. The briefing note seeks to bring this overlooked dimension of care, justice and power into discussions on climate and land degradation and argues that securing land rights for those who care for the land is imperative to fight land degradation and desertification.

Land degradation is happening fast. From 2015 to 2019, the world lost at least 100 million hectares of healthy and productive land every year; by 2025, up to 40% of the world's land was already degraded.[5] If the world continues degrading land at the current rate of 100 million hectares every year, more than 2.3 billion hectares could be degraded by 2030: nearly double today's reported levels.[6] Recent studies have argued that for every 10% increase in land degradation, the crop yield gap widens by as much as 2%.[7] There is no question that the implications for widening inequality, especially for communities dependent on land for agriculture, are dire.

2. Caring for carers matters

Climate-induced land degradation is not only an environmental crisis but also a crisis of care. The people who sustain households, farms, forests, water sources, and local ecosystems are often the same people who bear the greatest burdens when land becomes degraded. They have the closest connection with the land and, as custodians, are bound by cultural and spiritual tradition to protect its integrity.[8] These communities are often the primary stewards of the environment, investing their labour, knowledge and time in protecting, restoring and sustaining natural resources for the benefit of society as a whole.[9]

Drawing on feminist approaches to caring communities,[10] addressing land degradation requires recognizing that care is fundamental to both social and ecological reproduction. Care extends beyond households and interpersonal relationships to include the everyday practices that sustain land, water, forests, biodiversity, and the broader ecosystems upon which human wellbeing depends. Feminist scholars argue that societies and economies rely on often invisible forms of care work, much of which is carried out by women and marginalized groups. In rural communities, this includes managing natural resources, preserving local knowledge, maintaining food systems, protecting communal lands, and supporting collective resilience during environmental shocks. A caring communities approach emphasizes reciprocity, interdependence, and shared responsibility, challenging development models that prioritize extraction and economic growth at the expense of people and nature.

Women, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, and smallholder farmers undertake essential yet often invisible work that sustains landscapes, livelihoods, and natural resources.[11] However, many lack secure land rights, adequate resources, and meaningful decision-making power. Climate change and land degradation further intensify the responsibilities of carers by increasing the time, labour, and resources required to maintain households, secure livelihoods, and protect ecosystems.[12] At the same time, carers frequently face insecure tenure, limited access to finance and technology, inadequate public services, and exclusion from land governance and climate-related decision-making processes.

A care-centred approach therefore recognizes that climate resilience cannot be achieved by placing ever-greater demands on already overburdened carers or through the dispossession of their lands and territories. Instead, it requires recognizing and valuing their knowledge, labour, and stewardship; reducing and redistributing care burdens; securing land and resource rights; ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making; and directing resources and investment towards those who sustain and restore the land. In this sense, caring for carers is not merely an additional dimension of land restoration. Rather, it is a transformative approach that strengthens climate resilience, advances equitable land governance, and supports the creation of thriving communities and healthy ecosystems.

3. Impacts of land degradation on land-dependent communities

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report of 2022 revealed how climate change is intensifying the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, accelerating soil erosion, vegetation loss, desertification, and the decline of ecosystem services.[13] Anthropogenic activities such as deforestation, overgrazing and unsustainable agricultural practices are the main cause of land degradation.[14] Floods due to unusually intense rainfall wash away fertile topsoil, damage agricultural fields, erode riverbanks and trigger landslides that permanently alter landscapes. In severe cases, entire plots of land can be lost due to landslides, disappear beneath rivers or be buried under mud and debris.

When Cyclone Seroja hit the Southeast Asian country of Timor-Leste in 2021, some families lost not only their homes but also the land on which those homes stood, leaving them without a foundation for rebuilding their lives.[15] Cyclones can rapidly degrade land through flooding, erosion, landslides and the destruction of vegetation and agricultural systems, while prolonged droughts degrade land more gradually by reducing water availability and weakening the capacity of soils and ecosystems to recover. Droughts degrade land through prolonged water scarcity, reducing soil moisture, vegetation cover and soil fertility.[16] As land becomes less productive, farmers are often forced to abandon traditional crops and adopt drought-resistant varieties or reduce cultivation altogether. In many dryland regions, recurring droughts contribute to desertification, livestock losses and declining household incomes.[17]

The impacts of these climate hazards on agriculture and local food systems are profound and directly affect smallholder farmers, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists and rural communities who depend on healthy land for food production, income generation and cultural survival. Smallholder farmers are heavily concentrated in rain-fed drylands, mountainous regions, coastal zones and other environmentally marginal areas where agricultural production relies on local weather conditions, making them particularly vulnerable to droughts, floods, soil degradation and shifting rainfall patterns.[18] Women farmers are disproportionately affected because they often have less access to secure land rights, finance, agricultural inputs and climate adaptation resources.

An extremely strong, or 'Godzilla', El Niño is forecast for 2026–27, with the potential to significantly accelerate climate-induced land degradation worldwide. It could significantly impact many lives and

livelihoods, including those of the people who directly depend on land. The super El Niño is expected to disrupt normal rainfall patterns, intensify droughts, heatwaves, wildfires and extreme rainfall events across many regions, including in parts of Africa, Asia, Australia and Latin America. Prolonged drought and higher temperatures reduce vegetation cover and soil moisture, leaving land more vulnerable to erosion, desertification and declining productivity. When intense rainfall follows dry periods, degraded soils often cannot absorb water effectively, resulting in increased runoff, flooding and the loss of fertile topsoil.

Evidence from the 2015–16 El Niño, which was the strongest on record, showed that the combination of severe drought and heat stress triggered significant increases in desertification in dryland regions. The IPCC further notes that climate change exacerbates land degradation by increasing drought intensity and rainfall extremes, both of which accelerate soil erosion and vegetation loss. Given forecasts that this season's El Niño may reach unprecedented strength, there is growing concern that it could further undermine the resilience of already degraded landscapes, threatening food security, biodiversity and the livelihoods of land-dependent communities.

Beyond economic losses, climate-induced land degradation disrupts entire ways of life. For Indigenous Peoples and local communities, land is not merely a productive asset but a source of identity, culture, spirituality and traditional knowledge. When communities are displaced by floods, droughts or wildfires, they can lose access to sacred sites, customary territories and knowledge systems that have been passed down through generations.[19] Children's safety becomes a concern and families may be forced to migrate in search of safer places, which can disrupt the children's education.[20]

The very people who care for our land suffer most from the consequences of loss of access to land, degraded land and natural resources. These impacts are not experienced equally. Climate-induced land degradation compounds existing inequalities based on gender, income, ethnicity, age and geographic location. Those with insecure land rights, limited savings and weak political representation are often the least able to recover from environmental shocks. Women and girls frequently assume greater unpaid domestic care responsibilities when food, water and fuel become scarce, further limiting their opportunities for education, employment and participation in decision-making. Land degradation, climate change and inequality form a reinforcing cycle in which vulnerable populations face the greatest losses despite contributing the least to global greenhouse gas emissions.[21]

The following three case studies demonstrate some of the ways in which land stewards are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change and point to possible ways forward in the fight against land degradation.

4. Highlights of community impacts: evidence of land degradation from Africa and Asian regions

Case study 1

Caring for the land, caring for communities: Esther Ibiaru's story

Figure 1: Esther Ibiaru from Adamasiko village, Soroti District in Uganda

Esther Ibiaru's journey demonstrates why carers must be placed at the centre of efforts to address climate-induced land degradation. Like many smallholder farmers in Uganda, Esther once relied on farming practices such as clearing land by cutting trees and burning vegetation. While widely practised, these methods contributed to soil degradation, declining fertility and reduced crop yields. Combined with increasingly unpredictable rainfall and changing seasons driven by climate change, these challenges left many farming households facing food insecurity, uncertainty and poverty.

For Esther, farming had become a risky undertaking. Crops frequently failed because she lacked access to a climate warning system and sustainable agricultural practices. The degradation of land not only affected productivity but also increased the burden of providing food and care for her family. Her experience reflects the reality faced by millions of rural women across Africa who depend directly on natural resources for their livelihoods and who also bear the responsibility of ensuring household wellbeing when climate shocks occur.

A turning point came when Esther joined the Cultivating Change in a Warming World (CCW) project led by the Community Integrated Development Initiative (CIDI) with support from Oxfam. Through training in agroecological practices, she learned sustainable practices such as using organic manure to restore soil fertility, preparing for dry seasons through food storage and establishing kitchen gardens to maintain food supplies during droughts. Her commitment and leadership led her to become a Trainer of Trainees, enabling her to share this knowledge with other women in her community.

Esther's story highlights that the carers who experience the effects of climate-induced land degradation most acutely are also the best-placed people to implement sustainable land management practices and take a leading role in the fight against degradation. Through her work, she helps protect soil, improve food security and build community resilience. Yet her contribution extends beyond environmental stewardship. She uses her platform to advocate for women's economic empowerment, land rights and gender equality, recognizing that sustainable land management cannot be separated from issues of power and access to resources.

Her efforts have helped shift community attitudes toward women's land ownership and participation in decision-making, including influencing religious and community leaders to support greater equality. Some families have begun allocating land to daughters and wives, creating opportunities for women to invest in productive and sustainable land use.

Esther's experience illustrates a critical lesson for climate and land restoration policies: environmental solutions succeed when they invest in the people who provide care. In recognition of this, different initiatives around the world, from Kenya[22] to Cambodia[23], have now started placing women as leaders in the restoration of land, water, energy and food amidst land degradation and extractive activities.

In line with locally led adaptation principles, structural inequalities that hold back women, youth, children, persons with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples on the frontlines of climate change impacts need to be tackled. Importantly, carers' voices also need to be amplified across critical spaces such as the UNCCD, where life-altering decisions are being made about their lands. Esther's story demonstrates that addressing climate-induced land degradation is not only about restoring ecosystems – it is also about recognizing, valuing and supporting the carers whose daily work sustains both people and the planet.

Case study 2

Protecting carers in the face of climate-induced land degradation: lessons from Timor-Leste

The experience of Timor-Leste following Cyclone Seroja in April 2021 demonstrates how climate-induced land degradation extends beyond environmental damage to become a crisis of livelihoods, land rights, care and social justice. The cyclone destroyed homes, farmland, and infrastructure, displacing thousands. Women faced disproportionate burdens, providing emotional care for young children while coping with their own trauma and stress, alongside increased household responsibilities. Overcrowded temporary shelters, where several families shared limited space, exposed women and girls to heightened risks of gender-based violence. Limited land registration and inadequate government data delayed assistance and reconstruction, highlighting how weak land governance undermines climate resilience and the protection of those who care for land and natural resources.

Figure 2: Dilva Filipe in front of her damaged house

The experiences of two women – Domingas da Silva and Dilva Filipe – illustrate the interconnected impacts of climate change, land degradation, and insecure land rights. Before the cyclone, Domingas had struggled to secure affordable land in Dili. Limited economic opportunities and rising land prices forced them to purchase plots in flood-prone areas near rivers. When Cyclone Seroja struck, severe flooding washed away their homes, belongings and, in some cases, the very land on which their houses stood. Dilva and her community faced a different but equally challenging reality. After decades of living and farming on coastal land, they were informed that the area had been classified as unsafe for habitation. However, many residents lacked formal documentation proving their land rights, creating uncertainty about their future, compensation and resettlement options.

The disaster also destroyed critical livelihood assets, including fishing equipment, agricultural resources, small businesses and household possessions. As a result, many affected families lost their primary sources of income and were forced to rely on emergency shelters and humanitarian support. Months after the floods, numerous households remained in temporary accommodation with limited access to water, education, healthcare and livelihood opportunities while awaiting long-term solutions.

Figure 3: Domingas da Silva outside her tent at the evacuation centre

This case highlights an important lesson for addressing climate-induced land degradation globally. Across many regions, climate change is accelerating soil erosion, flooding, droughts, landslides and the loss of productive land. These processes not only degrade ecosystems but also undermine the work of those who care for them. In Timor-Leste, rural women, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, smallholder farmers and local communities are key stewards of land and biodiversity, yet with only 20% of land formally registered, most continue to manage and protect land without secure tenure rights. Through their daily labour, they sustain food systems, conserve natural resources, and strengthen community resilience. Yet they are also among the first to experience displacement, loss of livelihood, and increased care burdens when environmental degradation reaches a critical level.

Following Cyclone Seroja, the Government of Timor-Leste established a committee to coordinate reconstruction and resettlement planning. The committee was tasked with assessing the needs of affected households and developing policy responses that balanced humanitarian concerns, legal obligations and financial realities. Importantly, authorities recognized that communities faced different levels of risk and vulnerability. Rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach, the government considered a range of solutions, including supporting some households to rebuild in place while relocating others whose land had become unsafe. The challenge for the majority of people was to prove

ownership of the land due to the lack of land titles and documents that could prove ownership. While the government acted swiftly to save lives, inadequate land data and widespread economic hardship delayed assistance and reconstruction, revealing how weak land governance undermines climate resilience and leaves land-dependent communities more vulnerable.

The Timor-Leste experience demonstrates that responses to climate-induced land degradation must integrate environmental restoration with social protection, secure land governance and recognition of care work. Protecting the people who care for land is fundamental to protecting the land itself. As climate change intensifies land degradation and displacement worldwide, governments and development partners must adopt care-centred adaptation strategies that secure land rights, invest in resilient landscapes and ensure inclusive decision-making. Such approaches not only reduce the risk of forced displacement but also strengthen communities' capacity to restore ecosystems and build a more just and climate-resilient future.

Case study 3

The significance of tenure security and autonomy over land for small-scale farmers in Sri Lanka in the fight against land degradation

In Sri Lanka, as much as 50% of the land is degraded and 34% of the land experiences declining productivity.[24] The stories of K. P. Somalatha and Namal Sanjeewa from Sri Lanka demonstrate the importance of having tenure security and decision-making power over land to fight land degradation.[25] 80% of the country's land belongs to the state and is distributed among people under two main laws.[26] However, their implementation has been slow and involves prolonged administrative processes. Even where state lands have been distributed to people, much of the control and decision-making power related to these lands is still retained by the state.

In the drought-stricken Monaragala District in Sri Lanka, K. P. Somalatha, who is a paddy farmer, occupies a piece of state land given to her under a land grant by the government. Even though she has rights to her land, Somalatha explains how the state still retains control over the land, seriously affecting farmers' ability to adapt to climate change and forcing them to move away from agriculture.

Figure 4: K. P. Somalatha stands before her vegetable cultivation, which she is only able to work during the rainy season when they have access to water. Photo credit: Renuka Sampath

> *We used to cultivate paddy in two seasons, but with the unpredictability of rain, we have reduced it to one. Rice farmers now struggle to earn a profit with low-yielding harvests.*

Even though state lands have been allocated to people by the government, crucial decisions such as water allocation, use of chemical fertilizer and pesticides, and use of hybrid paddy seeds are taken by the government agriculture officials, leaving little or no decision-making power to the farmers with paddy lands located under irrigation systems.

> *Our Jayabhoomi land grant [land certificate issued by the state] is just for namesake. We can't really make any decisions about our land. We want to cultivate indigenous paddy varieties which require less water and give a higher yield and use fewer agrochemicals. But state officials push corporate profits forward. We very rarely get any compensation for droughts. It does not cover even 10% of the loss we suffer.*

Prolonged droughts in Somalatha's village have diminished groundwater levels and their lands are no longer arable. With the lack of decision-making power over land, coupled with power imbalances and the intersectionality of inequalities, rural farmers like Somalatha struggle to save their lands and cultivation from degradation and drought and often get into debt or are forced to completely abandon agriculture.

Namal Sanjeewa, a fourth-generation farmer from Badulla District in Sri Lanka cannot access drought relief because he does not own his farmland.

Farmer and irrigation societies are one of the main mechanisms through which government-led support is channelled to agricultural communities in Sri Lanka. As land ownership is a prerequisite for membership of these societies, farmers like Namal Sanjeewa, who do not have formal ownership of land, are unable to access agricultural extension services, support on adaptation and mitigation measures, crop insurance and drought or flood relief provided by the government.

We have been occupying these lands for over three generations, but the state refuses to give us land permits, saying that we are living on encroached state land. They refuse to release irrigated water from reservoirs to our lands because they want us to vacate the area and give our lands to a private company for sugar cane plantation. We don't receive any agricultural extension services or technical support for climate mitigation or adaptation from the Agrarian Services Department. This is because they don't recognize us as farmers, as we don't own this land.

We are unable to register for crop insurance or drought relief for the same reason. So we can't get any relief when our crops fail during droughts. We can't build water storage facilities or a small reservoir because we don't own this land. We have reduced cultivating crops according to seasons and some farmers have shifted to growing perennial crops like mango and coconut. These crops take time to generate an income, but it is an alternative we are willing to take because seasonal cultivation has become futile. But we fear that we will lose the money we invest to change our crops or farming practices if the government evicts us.

Figure 5: Namal Sanjeewa, from Badulla District, Sri Lanka tills his land. While grappling with irregular rainfall patterns and prolonged droughts, Namal receives no drought-relief support as the state refuses to recognize his right to land. Photo credit: Thakshila Sewwandi

High temperatures, irregular rainfall patterns and prolonged droughts have degraded their lands and the soil is becoming more infertile. Harvests are significantly reducing. Without assistance from the government and without secure land tenure, farmers like Namal are unable to make investments to adapt to these climatic changes and continue to suffer loss and damage year after year.

> *We carry these losses to our next cultivating season. It affects our families, children's education, household food security, health and all aspects of our lives. Recovery after a drought seems next to impossible to us at this stage. The state is refusing to formalize our ownership and to watch our farming communities deteriorate in the face of extreme drought but it brings into question our dignity and worth as small-scale food producers.*

There are around 163 farming families in his village facing a similar predicament to Namal. Unable to bear the continued losses and increasing debt, many of these farmers are gradually moving away from agriculture to daily wage labour or have migrated to cities to find jobs.

Land tenure security and autonomy over land are important for farmers in Sri Lanka to improve their climate resilience and save their lands and farms from drought and degradation.

5. The importance of land rights for land Carers

The evidence throughout this report is clear: investing in the wellbeing, rights and leadership of those who care most for the land is essential for achieving the objectives of the three Rio Conventions. Secure land tenure creates incentives for long-term environmental stewardship.[27] When individuals and communities have legally recognized rights to their land, they are more likely to invest in sustainable land management practices such as agroforestry, soil and water conservation, terracing, reforestation and climate-resilient agriculture practices because they have confidence that they will benefit from these investments over time.[28] Secure tenure also enables households to access credit, extension services, insurance and climate finance, strengthening their capacity to adopt adaptation and mitigation measures. Conversely, insecure tenure discourages investment and can accelerate land degradation, as people have little incentive to restore land they may lose.

For women in particular, secure land rights are closely linked to empowerment and decision-making.[29] Women with documented land rights have greater bargaining power within households and communities, increased participation in local governance, and stronger influence over decisions regarding land use, agricultural production and natural resource management.[30] Crucially, secure tenure is an economic asset to households and female smallholders as it brings them more security within agricultural value chains. When complemented by fair pricing and living incomes from multinational companies – as advocated for by Oxfam[31] – secure tenure can become a pathway to sustainability, climate adaptation and, ultimately, inequality reduction in large-scale value chains such as cocoa, coffee and tea.[32] Studies consistently show that when women participate equally in land governance, the whole community achieves better outcomes.[33] Recognizing women as landholders rather than merely land users also strengthens their ability to access finance and climate adaptation programmes.[34]

Despite these benefits, significant barriers continue to prevent carers from securing their rights and contributing fully to climate action and land restoration. Discriminatory laws and customary practices limit women's rights to own, inherit or control land.[35] Weak land administration systems, high costs of land registration, overlapping statutory and customary tenure arrangements and inadequate recognition of Indigenous and community land rights create widespread tenure insecurity. Climate policies and land

restoration programmes frequently overlook unpaid care work related to land management and rarely include carers in planning and decision-making processes. As a result, women have the least influence over policies affecting them.

6. Recommendations

Addressing climate-induced land degradation requires integrated actions that restore ecosystems while protecting the people who care for them. Governments, development partners, civil society, and local communities should adopt care-centred approaches that recognize carers as essential actors in climate resilience, sustainable land management and food security.

Place carers at the centre of land restoration and climate adaptation practices

Governments and development partners should invest in sustainable land management practices that strengthen both ecosystem health and community resilience. These include agroecology, agroforestry, farmer-managed natural regeneration, watershed restoration, climate-resilient agriculture, integrated water resource management and ecosystem-based adaptation.[36] Such interventions should prioritize women, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, and smallholder farmers, who are often the primary carers of land and natural resources. Investment should help communities access climate information, resilient technologies, quality seeds, community seed banks, finance, and extension services to strengthen sustainable livelihoods and improve their ability to withstand droughts, floods, and other climate shocks. This will enable carers to restore degraded landscapes while sustaining their livelihoods. Communities affected by climate change must be at the forefront of designing adaptation solutions based on their lived experiences and local knowledge.

Tax Large Corporations Investing in Land, Strengthen Regulation and Ensure Corporate Accountability

Governments should ensure that large corporations and extractive industries pay a fair share of taxes and resource rents,[37] closing loopholes that enable profit shifting and tax avoidance, and redirect this revenue towards land restoration, climate adaptation and supporting smallholder famers and communities whose livelihoods depend directly on land and natural resources. This should be accompanied by stronger regulation and corporate accountability, requiring large-scale land investors and extractive industries to undertake robust environmental and human-rights due diligence, ensure meaningful community

consultation, and take responsibility for environmental damage. Land and climate policies should shift incentives away from extractive practices that concentrate wealth and environmental benefits among powerful actors and towards sustainable land management. Such reforms can help restore ecosystems, reduce inequality, strengthen the resilience of smallholder farmers, and protect the livelihoods of the millions of people who care for and depend directly on land and natural resources

Fight land inequality and secure land rights as a foundation for climate resilience

Governments must reduce land inequality and address its drivers by introducing measures such as redistributing land ownership and dis-incentivizing changes in land use that drive inequality. Governments must strengthen legal and policy frameworks to guarantee secure, equitable and gender-responsive land tenure, reform discriminatory inheritance and property laws, recognize customary and collective land rights, simplify land registration procedures and ensure that women can own, inherit, control, and make decisions over land on an equal basis with men. Secure land rights increase incentives for long-term investment in sustainable land management, improve access to climate finance and agricultural services, and strengthen communities' capacity to adapt to climate change and recover from climate-related disasters.[38]

Integrate care work into climate, land, and agricultural policies

National climate adaptation plans, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs), and Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets should explicitly recognize unpaid care work and the role of carers in protecting ecosystems. Policies should include gender-responsive budgeting, social protection measures, childcare support and targeted investments that reduce unpaid care burdens while enabling carers to participate fully in climate action, land restoration and natural resource governance.[39]

Strengthen inclusive and accountable land governance

Governments should establish strong people-centred, participatory land governance systems that ensure the meaningful representation of women, Indigenous Peoples, youth, pastoralists and local communities

in land-use planning, climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and restoration programmes. Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) should guide decisions affecting Indigenous territories, while community-based institutions should be empowered to lead ecosystem restoration using local knowledge and traditional practices. Transparent and accessible land administration systems should reduce tenure insecurity and improve access to justice in land disputes.[40]

Align climate, land, and development governance

Greater coherence is needed between the implementation of the three Rio Conventions, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national development strategies. Similarly, there should be a move towards integrating Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN) targets, National Action Programmes (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) into a coherent national and sub-national planning framework[41]

Increase financing for carers and community-led restoration

Urgent and upscaled action must be taken to substantially increase climate finance to the Global South. Developed countries must deliver their pledges and prioritize public and grant-based climate finance which must reach the communities at the forefront of the climate crisis, enabling them to prioritize community-led restoration and adaptation initiatives, ensuring that women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other land carers can directly access resources. Funding mechanisms should be transparent and aligned with locally-led adaptation principles so that community priorities shape investment decisions. Dedicated funding should support secure land tenure, ecosystem restoration, livelihood diversification and climate resilience. Capacity-building is also needed to help carers develop bankable and sustainable projects. Monitoring frameworks should track land tenure security, women's participation in decision-making, unpaid care work, ecosystem restoration outcomes, and the resilience of vulnerable households and communities.[42]

Explore agroecological solutions as pathways to sustainable land rights

Prioritize national policy and investments in agroecology with trackable milestones to ensure that impacts on agriculture induced by climate change are adapted to and mitigated to restore the integrity of land to

its dependents. Indigenous populations, smallholder farmers and women have for generations built and maintained knowledge systems and know-how to sustainably live on land. These efforts should be strengthened and expanded by supporting farmer-managed and Indigenous seed systems, increasing access to organic compost, and promoting traditional farming practices that are adapted to local environments.[43]

Fighting inequality should be a cornerstone of a carer-centred land restoration

Governments must introduce progressive policy interventions to reduce economic inequality and create more equal societies, in favour of human wellbeing and planetary flourishing. Fighting inequality should be a cornerstone of a carer-centred approach to land restoration, because economic, social and environmental justice are inseparable. Women, Indigenous Peoples, pastoralists, smallholder farmers and other marginalized groups are often the primary caregivers of land and natural resources, yet they face persistent inequalities in access to land, finance, technology, decision-making and climate adaptation resources. These disparities undermine their ability to restore degraded landscapes and build resilience to climate change. A carer-centred land restoration approach must therefore address structural inequalities by securing land rights, ensuring equitable access to resources, recognizing traditional knowledge and promoting inclusive governance. It must challenge the concentration of land, wealth and economic opportunities that drives persistent inequality. By empowering those who care for the land, restoration efforts become more effective, sustainable and capable of delivering environmental, social and economic benefits for present and future generations.[44]

Notes

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