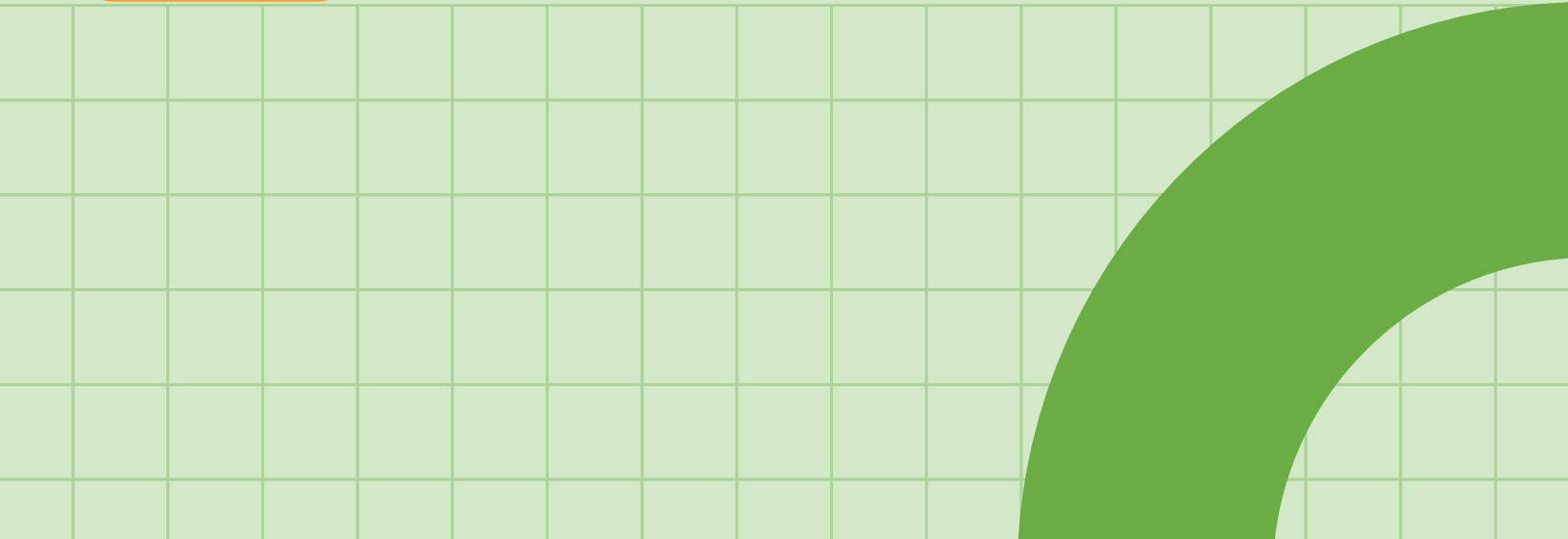
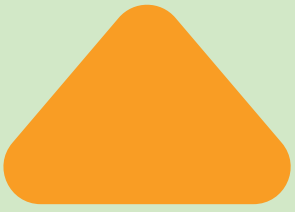




A Caribbean agenda towards climate and care justice





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Supported by:



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Introduction: Centering care in the Caribbean's climate and social landscape

While some authors have alerted to the gender equality backlash in Bonn and G7 negotiations (ODI, 2025), Latin American and Caribbean experts have met in two academic fora preparing the XVI Regional Conference on Women, strengthening the body of knowledge in terms of the care society framework agreed by governments under the Buenos Aires Commitment. The Caribbean Academic Forum held in Barbados in March 2025 contributed to further articulating the vision of care as central to resilience and climate justice from a Caribbean perspective, which can enrich existing policy efforts across the Latin American and Caribbean region, strengthening the body of knowledge in terms of the care society framework agreed by governments under the Buenos Aires Commitment¹.

The Caribbean is threatened by climate change, with tangible impacts on the economy, biodiversity, and social fabric. Urgent climate adaptation and mitigation measures are necessary to mitigate the impacts of climate change and climate disasters on the deterioration of natural resources, health, agricultural production, and infrastructure (ECLAC, 2023a). As part of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), the region is shaped not only by environmental exposure but also by centuries of colonialism, slavery and racism, gender inequality, and economic dependency. These historical structures of exclusion amplify the region's vulnerability and limit its adaptive capacity.

In this context, care is not merely a social function; it is a survival strategy, a hidden social infrastructure that has sustained life, memory, and resilience. Care has enabled Caribbean communities to resist domination, rebuild after hurricanes, and maintain collective life amid economic shocks and forced displacements. Acknowledging the essential role that women have historically played in sustaining the resilience of our community structures requires questioning and transforming the unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work. Building resilient societies demands care systems that are socially recognized, economically supported, and equitably shared (UN Women and ECLAC, 2021).

Studies have been conducted in Barbados (UN Women, 2024), Montserrat, and Grenada (UN Women, 2021a) to measure the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 5.4.1, which is the proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work (UDCW) per day, by sex, age, and location. These

¹ The first Academic Forum was held in Mexico City from [insert dates], convened by the Government of Mexico through the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), and co-organized by El Colegio de México (COLMEX), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and UN Women.

studies provide a gender analysis for evidence-based policy and programmatic interventions in support of enhanced social protection measures for those most impacted by the unpaid care and domestic responsibilities for children, older persons, and people with disabilities, which are critical for resilience. As access to water, food, and energy becomes more precarious, the time required to sustain basic livelihoods increases dramatically. Women and girls often absorb this temporal burden by, for instance, walking longer distances to collect water, cultivating in degraded soils, or substituting formal health and care systems through unpaid labor. This silent expansion of survival time intersects with care responsibilities, exacerbating gendered inequalities.

Care work plays a crucial role in environmental sustainability, and it is not only pivotal in interpersonal and healthcare contexts but also extends significantly to environmental management. The criticality of caring for our planet is increasingly recognized as a critical dimension of sustainable development, and women are often at the forefront of resource management and community-based conservation efforts. Practices such as resource conservation, waste reduction, and the adoption of renewable energy sources are vital to mitigating environmental degradation. Thus, fostering a culture of care for the planet is a technical prerequisite for ensuring ecological resilience and the long-term viability of human societies.

These perspectives were emphasized at the Caribbean Academic Forum. The Forum, which was hosted by the University of the West Indies, brought together academic, institutional, and civil society voices to reflect on building care societies from a Caribbean perspective rooted in memory, resilience, and collective ties to the territory. In this context, the Forum was centered on a truth that can no longer be ignored: **without care, there is no resilience, and without climate justice, there is no gender equality.**

This brief builds upon that message and, based on UN Women and partners' joint work and studies in the region, argues that the **Caribbean is not only a region highly exposed to the consequences of climate change but also an epistemic territory that offers valuable insights** for facing its effects through a paradigm of interdependence, solidarity, and memory.

As SIDS, Caribbean countries have long advocated for global recognition of their multidimensional vulnerability and have called for international financing mechanisms that address *loss and damage*, facilitate *climate adaptation*, and invest in long-term *resilience*. These efforts are intrinsically linked to the care agenda. Rebounding from crisis requires not just roads and seawalls but functioning comprehensive care systems and policies, public health, food security, and gender-responsive services.

This message resonates with the **Gender Equality Forum held at SIDS4** (Antigua and Barbuda, May 2024)², which urged SIDS governments and the international community to include care, gender equality, and resilience as core priorities in the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS (ABAS). The Forum highlighted that unpaid and paid care work is essential for climate adaptation and recovery

2 The Gender Equality Forum was held on 25–26 May in Antigua and Barbuda, co-organized by UN Women and the Caribbean Development Bank. information available at <https://caribbean.unwomen.org/en/our-work/gender-equality-forum-2024>.

and called for increased investment in care systems as part of climate finance mechanisms, including the Loss and Damage Fund. These demands are fully aligned with the Caribbean Academic Forum's call to reframe care as a core dimension of resilience.

For Caribbean voices, care cannot be understood without memory. In territories marked by slavery, structural racism, and inequality, care has for centuries been an act of quiet resistance. As Mariama Williams of the Integrated Policy Research Institute (IPRI) expressed at the *Caribbean Academic Forum*: “We would not have survived slavery and colonialism without taking care of each other.” These legacy positions the Caribbean not only as a region impacted by climate change but as a critical site for reimagining care as a transformative approach to challenging gender hierarchies and building more just economic, social, and ecological relations.

The Caribbean, due to its fragmented geography, diverse microclimates, and legacy of economic dependency, faces the consequences of climate change on multiple fronts, including the loss of agricultural land, climate disasters, forced migration, and food insecurity. It is essential to note that these impacts do not affect all individuals equally; they are distributed unevenly and tend to exacerbate pre-existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

Traditionally discriminated populations facing structural poverty and inequalities (particularly those living in rural, remote, coastal communities or conflict-affected areas in developing countries) experience the most severe effects of this phenomenon. Limited adaptive capacity, restricted access to basic services, and exclusion from decision-making processes render these populations more susceptible to losses caused by extreme climate events such as hurricanes, droughts, floods, and environmental degradation. Climate inequality reinforces cycles of poverty and exclusion, underscoring the need for differentiated, inclusive, and territorially sensitive responses to address these issues both in terms of different territorial vulnerabilities and households' composition.

Approximately 13 out of every 100 people in the Caribbean lived below the international poverty line, compared to about 4 out of every 100 people in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in 2015³. This stark difference underscores broader structural challenges related to poverty in the Caribbean.

In the Caribbean, working women experience a higher prevalence of working poverty compared to men. In 2019, 7.5 % of employed women aged 15 and older lived below the international poverty line, compared to 5.6 % of employed men, reflecting a gender gap of 1.9 percentage points. When compared to LAC, a notable disparity emerges between women in the Caribbean and those in the rest of the region. While only 2.9 % of employed women in LAC were in working poverty, this prevalence more than doubles in the Caribbean (7.5 %). This regional gap of 4.6 percentage points suggests deeper structural challenges for women in the Caribbean labour market.

This underscores the urgent need to advance inclusive, gender-responsive labour policies that ensure

3 According to the latest available data.

women's access to decent and adequately paid employment, thereby reducing their vulnerability to working poverty despite being part of the workforce.

Regarding income inequality, Gini coefficient of 41.9 was recorded across 4⁴ Caribbean countries, indicating higher income inequality in the Caribbean than the rest of the region compared with the average of 48.7 observed in 16⁵ Latin American countries in 2018⁶ (World Bank, 2025).

According to ECLAC (2023b), women in the Caribbean bear a disproportionate burden of unpaid care work—up to three times more than men in some islands—limiting both their autonomy and the capacity for organized social responses to climate emergencies. This overload is intensified when environmental policies fail to recognize the care dimension that sustains resilience systems:

“In insular and coastal contexts, women are often responsible for the provision of water, food, and care in situations of climate emergency. The intensification of cyclones and rising sea levels exacerbate these burdens.” (UN Women, 2023a)

From Trinidad and Tobago to Jamaica and across Barbados and Saint Lucia, testimonies abound of rural women, community leaders, and domestic workers who assume not only the responsibility of providing food and water in times of scarcity but also offer emotional support, participate in post-hurricane reconstruction, and care for children, older adults, or persons with disabilities. These acts of care are absent from climate and legal adaptation frameworks, yet they constitute the first line of response to climate change, not only in post-disaster contexts but also in the management of scarce daily resources.

As Tonya Haynes, Director of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies, stated at the Caribbean Academic Forum: *“Care is both relational and systemic: rooted in family, community, and collective practices, but also dependent on strong public policy, state accountability, data systems, and sustained financing.”*

4 Belize, Grenada, Jamaica, y Republica Dominicana.

5 Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Republica Dominicana, Grenada, Jamaica.

6 The year with the most comprehensive data coverage in the region.

Climate change, adaptation, and care: a critical intersection

In the Caribbean, climate change is not a distant threat; it is a reality that is deeply embedded in everyday life. Prolonged droughts, increasingly intense hurricanes, biodiversity loss, and threats to food security create a scenario of multiple vulnerabilities. According to ECLAC (2024), the Caribbean has one of the highest climate risk levels in the world, with a disproportionate impact on women, particularly in rural and coastal areas.

Moreover, the effects of climate change are not evenly distributed and tend to deepen pre-existing socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Poverty, structural inequality, and dependence on tourism, agriculture, or fossil fuels place the region in a state of systemic vulnerability. In 2017, Hurricane Maria caused damage in Dominica, equivalent to 226 % of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). While there have been advances in climate risk management, national reports indicate that countries are far from meeting the targets of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction adopted in 2015 to reduce disaster risks and build resilience by 2030 (ECLAC, 2024).

Furthermore, climate change exacerbates gender inequalities, disproportionately affecting women and girls. According to UN Women (2023b), by 2050, climate change could push 158 million women and girls into poverty and expose 236 million to food insecurity. The report also highlights the increase in gender-based violence in the context of the environmental and climate crises.

People engaged in small-scale agriculture (most of whom are women) are responsible for approximately one-third of global food production. However, the transition toward climate-resilient agricultural systems faces structural barriers, including limited financing and insecure land tenure. In 40 of the 46 countries with available data, women are less likely than men to own agricultural land (UN Women, 2023b). Despite ongoing efforts to implement national action plans in line with the agreed-upon UN Sustainable Food Systems standards, data from LAC indicate that 30.3 % of women experienced food insecurity in 2023, 5.2 percentage points higher than men (25.1 %) (ECLAC, UN Women, 2025). In Haiti, the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity among women reached 83.7 %, the highest recorded in the region in 2023 (ECLAC, UN Women, 2025).

In preparation for the United Nations Food Systems Summit +4 Stocktake (UNSSF+4), there is a growing understanding of the need to align national policies for food security and sustainable food systems with climate change, development plans, and global frameworks (UNSSF+4, 2025). However, care is not mentioned in the most recent Independent Stakeholders' Report, which reflects the voices, experiences, and priorities of non-state actors involved in food systems transformation

across all regions and sectors. At the same time, the need to fund and ensure stronger participation by women's and youth organizations is well-documented and widely referred to (UNSSF+4, 2025). This suggests that the international understanding of the policy and practical intersections between food security, care, and climate change, as well as the role of women, is still under development. In contrast, the academic debate in the Caribbean has demonstrated that these intersections are not theoretical but are part of daily livelihood and adaptation, local practices, and strategies. documented and referred (UNSSF+4, 2025). This suggests that the international understanding of policy and practical intersections between food security, care and climate change and the role of women is still under development. While the academic debate in the Caribbean showed that these intersections are not theoretical but part of daily livelihood and adaptation local practices and strategies.

The Sixth Assessment Report of the IPCC (2022) notes that communities with lower adaptive capacity face greater risks and damage associated with climate change. Limited capacity for adaptation, restricted access to basic services, and exclusion from decision-making processes render these populations more susceptible to losses caused by extreme climate events such as droughts, floods, and environmental degradation. Women, particularly in rural and marginalized territories, often bear the brunt of these impacts: they are the first responders in crises, the ones who ensure access to food, water, and care, yet they are rarely seated at the tables where climate strategies are designed. This disconnect has also been echoed in broader regional processes. This point was also reinforced at the **SIDS4 Gender Equality Forum**, which underscored the need to embed care work into national adaptation plans and climate finance frameworks. Their call for gender-responsive, community-rooted strategies aligns with the Caribbean perspective presented in this brief.

The lack of participation in decision-making spaces is a core element of this structural inequality. As UN Women (2023b) highlights, women represent only 27 % of national parliaments worldwide, which severely limits their influence in shaping climate, care, and adaptation policies. Considering a broader sphere, despite international commitments to gender equity, women's representation in leadership roles within climate negotiations remains limited. For instance, at COP28 (2023), only 34 % of national delegates were women, and fewer than 2 % of party delegations achieved gender parity; just 15 out of 133 world leaders present were women. This trend persisted at COP29 (2024), where only 8 of the 78 attending heads of state were women (CARE, 2023). These figures illustrate a persistent stagnation in female inclusion at high-level climate decision-making forums and underscore the urgent need for policy interventions that advance gender equity in these spaces. In other words, **those who are most affected by climate breakdown are also the least represented in the decisions that seek to address it.**

This exclusion has concrete consequences. Poorly designed adaptation strategies are often the drivers of maladaptation (Schipper, 2020). There are growing concerns about how existing adaptation and mitigation strategies can increase vulnerability of certain groups, communities or populations (e.g. increasing the care burden on poor women or limiting markets' access to SMEs

or rural women’s cooperatives). Adaptation strategies implemented without a gender perspective or care lens, such as community relocations, the promotion of more sustainable agricultural practices, or post-disaster reconstruction, can lead to what the Academic Forum identified as one form of “maladaptation”: a climate response that increases the burden on women and caregiving communities rather than alleviating it. To promote a just transition, climate transition investment incentives should consider social and ecological knowledge of the context, including territorial, care, and gender equality (Alemany et al., 2024).

National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) constitute fundamental strategic mechanisms within the international climate regime for operationalizing States’ commitments to climate mitigation and adaptation⁷. In the Caribbean context (characterized by high vulnerability to climate impacts and structural inequalities), the incorporation of care work into NAPs and NDCs represents an innovative and necessary approach to equitably strengthening socio-environmental resilience. Recent studies (UN Women, 2021b; CARE International, 2020) **demonstrate that climate strategies that overlook the centrality of care work fail to address gender inequalities and the multiple vulnerabilities exacerbated by the climate crisis**. Furthermore, the explicit inclusion of **care in climate policies enables the recognition of the economic and social contributions of care activities**, often rendered invisible in conventional analyses, and promotes the redistribution of responsibilities through gender-responsive climate finance mechanisms (ILO, 2018; IPCC, 2022).

Therefore, for NAPs and NDCs in the Caribbean to advance towards intersectional climate justice, it is essential that care work must be incorporated as a structural component, aligning adaptation and mitigation objectives with public policies that strengthen the adaptive capacity of the most impacted populations, particularly women and marginalized communities. In this regard, Gender Action Plans (GAPs) provide a critical complementary framework to guide the integration of gender-responsive approaches into climate policy instruments. When meaningfully implemented, GAPs hold the potential to drive a fundamental paradigm shift in climate governance—from technocratic and mitigation-centered frameworks toward socially embedded approaches. Rather than treating gender as an isolated or secondary consideration, GAPs invite a reconfiguration of climate priorities around a gender perspective that could challenge dominant notions of resilience.

One example cited at the Academic Forum was that of environmental conservation programs that rely on female volunteer labor, reinforcing women’s time poverty without providing recognition, training, or financial compensation. The same occurs with certain energy transition policies that disproportionately affect women who cook with firewood or gas without offering affordable alternatives. In the words of Mariama Williams, “*If climate responses do not incorporate a gender and care perspective, they end up shifting more of the burden onto those already sustaining life*”.

Caribbean experiences offer concrete lessons on how to mitigate the risk of “maladaptation” by prioritizing care, equity, and local leadership in climate responses. In the Turks and Caicos Islands,

7 More information available at <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement/the-paris-agreement>.

for example, recent efforts to develop gender and climate-responsive budgeting frameworks⁸ have helped align public investments with care needs and climate resilience goals. By explicitly incorporating care systems into budget planning and fiscal governance, the country is laying the groundwork for sustainable and equitable adaptation.

At the community level, grassroots women's groups in countries such as Jamaica, Saint Lucia, and Dominica are leading care-centered approaches to climate resilience. These include participatory early warning systems, disaster preparedness networks that consider caregiving roles, and the organization of food and water distribution during climate emergencies. By grounding adaptation in the lived realities of caregiving communities, these initiatives mitigate risk while preventing the deepening of gender inequality. They show that when care is made visible and resourced (as infrastructure and as governance), it strengthens both climate resilience and social justice.

In Caribbean contexts marked by high exposure to climate hazards and limited state capacity, especially in post-disaster scenarios, care emerges not merely as a social function but as a critical infrastructure of community survival. **Reframing care work**, both paid and unpaid, **as a form of community-based social resilience infrastructure** challenges the dominant paradigm that situates resilience solely in engineering or financial mechanisms. Networks of caregiving, often led by women and rooted in local knowledge systems, mobilize decentralized, low-carbon, and adaptive responses, from spontaneous shelters and food distribution to emotional support and healthcare in the absence of formal services. **Recognizing and funding these practices as structural components of climate governance** (through NDCs and local adaptation strategies) **would elevate care to the status of strategic resilience infrastructure**. This approach not only legitimizes the socio-ecological intelligence embedded in caregiving networks but also aligns with feminist and decolonial calls to redefine resilience through relational, rather than extractive, logics (Tronto, 2013; UN Women, 2023c). **In the Caribbean, where vulnerability and solidarity are intimately linked, care must be conceptualized and governed as a collective infrastructure of survival.**

The effects of climate change underscore the urgent need to reassess social and economic systems and their interconnection with nature. It is time to move toward models grounded in interdependence, care, and sustainability. This moment presents a key opportunity to overcome the dominant development paradigm, centered on extraction and the depletion of resources and life, and to transition toward an approach that places care for people and the planet at the core of collective decision-making.

The Caribbean perspective **calls for care to be reclaimed as a key component of climate policy**, recognizing it as part of resilient infrastructure, integrating it into budgets and regulatory frameworks, and redistributing it as a matter of social and ecological justice. As Carolina Robino of IDRC stated at the Caribbean Academic Forum: *"If care is central to climate resilience, it must be recognized, accounted for, and compensated."*

8 Experience presented in a regional workshop co-organized by UN Women and IMF in 2024.

Reclaiming care as climate policy: health, labor, rights, and cultural transformation

One of the Caribbean's most significant contributions to the regional debate is its ability to articulate an *ecology of care*, one in which territory, sustainability, and human connection are inseparable. The Caribbean Academic Forum reaffirmed that care must be reclaimed as a **central pillar of climate policy**, rather than being treated as an external social issue. From this collective position, several strategic priorities emerge.

First, care work must be integrated into climate planning and vulnerability assessments. This includes collecting sex-disaggregated and time-use data, recognizing community-based care systems, and valuing unpaid care work in economic and resilience models. Adaptation strategies must aim to redistribute care responsibilities through the expansion of public services and investments in climate-resilient care infrastructure, such as childcare, elder care, and disability support.

Second, the health and well-being of caregiving populations must be prioritized. Climate shocks (floods, droughts, hurricanes) frequently disrupt essential services, including sexual and reproductive health. Over 8,000 women die every year in Latin America and the Caribbean from causes related to pregnancy, childbirth, or postpartum complications, figures that may worsen under crisis conditions. Women caregivers also experience significant physical and emotional exhaustion, particularly in rural, mobile, and underserved contexts (WHO, 2023). The Forum called for health systems that adopt intersectional approaches, considering the interplay of gender, ethnicity, territory, and climate risk.

In an additional health perspective, sexual and reproductive health (SRH) is a critical yet frequently overlooked component of climate adaptation and disaster preparedness strategies, particularly in the Caribbean, where extreme weather events and environmental degradation recurrently disrupt basic services and disproportionately impact women and girls. In contexts of disaster and climate-related displacement, access to contraceptive services, maternal care, emergency obstetric care, and protection from gender-based violence is often severely compromised, heightening both immediate health risks and long-term vulnerabilities (UNFPA, 2021; PAHO, 2020). The burden of navigating these systemic gaps frequently falls on women themselves, who are simultaneously care workers and care seekers, often operating without institutional support. Integrating SRH into climate policies (especially within GAPs, NAPs, and NDCs) requires **acknowledging care as both a social infrastructure and a resilience mechanism**. This means not only ensuring the continuity and accessibility of SRH services during climate-related emergencies, but also investing in localized, gender-responsive systems of care

that strengthen preparedness, equity, and recovery⁹. In the Caribbean, centering SRH within climate strategies is essential to safeguarding rights, promoting health justice, and enabling community resilience in the face of increasingly frequent and severe climate disruptions.

The Forum also drew attention to the intersection between climate change and violence against women and girls (VAWG), two overlapping global emergencies. Climate-related crises often increase exposure to violence, particularly for marginalized groups. Yet, despite increasing awareness of this connection, data gaps and weak coordination persist in emergency response systems. Considering this, efforts are underway to strengthen protection mechanisms, including the development of gender-based violence (GBV) referral pathways, legal reforms, quality essential services, and partnerships with disaster risk management agencies.

Responding to these layered vulnerabilities requires more than emergency interventions: it demands structural planning. Conventional climate planning in the Caribbean has primarily been driven by risk assessments grounded in physical vulnerability and economic loss projections. While important, such models often obscure the social architectures of interdependence that underpin real adaptive capacity. A disruptive shift involves **reorienting climate planning not around abstract risk, but around care ecosystems**, that is, mapping and prioritizing areas based on caregiving dynamics in terms of who provides care, who receives it, and under what material and institutional conditions. This would mean, for instance, integrating data on care burdens, social reproduction gaps, and gendered labor into territorial adaptation plans and urban resilience strategies. Doing so reframes climate vulnerability not just as a function of environmental exposure but also because of systemic neglect of care infrastructures, encompassing childcare and eldercare, as well as community health and mobility. In the Caribbean, where caregiving often occurs in informal or community-based settings, this planning paradigm could catalyze investments in social infrastructure that bolster both everyday well-being and disaster resilience.

At the same time, with projections indicating that the population aged 60 and over in the region will increase by 31.1 million people between 2020 and 2030 (reaching 114.9 million, or 16.5 % of the total population of Latin America and the Caribbean¹⁰), it becomes urgent to adopt integrated public policies that recognize care as critical social infrastructure, guarantee equitable access to health services, and promote resilience with gender equity.

Care-related jobs, such as those in health, education, or long-term care, are, in essence, sustainable occupations: their carbon footprint is significantly lower, with emissions 26 times lower than those of the manufacturing sector and up to 1,500 times lower than those of the oil sector. Investing in care is investing in a just, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable transition (UN Women, 2023c).

9 More information available at [https://www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research-\(srh\)/areas-of-work/sexual-reproductive-health-and-rights-in-health-emergencies](https://www.who.int/teams/sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-research-(srh)/areas-of-work/sexual-reproductive-health-and-rights-in-health-emergencies)

10 More information available at https://www.cepal.org/es/enfoques/politicas-sistemas-integrales-cuidados-largo-plazo-personas-mayores-analisis-experiencias?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Yet, for care to truly anchor this transition, it must be supported by rights-based labor frameworks and decent work standards, as outlined in **ILO Convention No. 189 on decent work for domestic workers**, and the **2024 ILO Resolution concerning decent work and the care economy** (Resolution V, ILC.112). The Resolution calls for the recognition of care work as essential to social and economic development and urges Member States to invest in universal care systems, promote decent working conditions, ensure social protection, and professionalize the care workforce (ILO 2024).

Care work must also be understood through a labor and migration lens. The realities of domestic workers (many of them migrant women) were highlighted at the Forum through voices like that of Ida Le Blanc from the Trinidad and Tobago trade union. These workers often face informality, a lack of legal protection, and exclusion from citizenship rights. Climate-driven mobility has a direct impact on care networks at every stage, from origin to transit and destination. The Forum emphasized the need to professionalize and protect care work through unionization, training, and labor regulation with a gender and migration perspective. The **ILO Resolution on the care economy (2024)** explicitly urges governments to implement professionalization pathways for care workers, including certification systems, continuous education, skills recognition, and fair remuneration. It also stresses the importance of investing in the enabling conditions of care work—legal protections, inclusive public services, quality employment, and voice and representation—especially for women in vulnerable situations, such as migrant and informal domestic workers.

These labor and mobility dynamics are not abstract, they are spatial. Considering that urban and territorial planning are critical yet often underutilized tools in the formulation of effective and equitable climate policies in the Caribbean, as the region grapples with rapid urbanization, coastal vulnerabilities, and unequal access to infrastructure and services, spatial planning offers a strategic entry point for embedding care-centered approaches into climate adaptation and mitigation frameworks. **Integrating care work into urban and territorial planning entails a paradigm shift, as it requires recognizing that the spatial distribution of housing, transportation, health, education, and green infrastructure directly affects both unpaid and paid care work**, which disproportionately falls on women and marginalized groups (UN-Habitat, 2022).

In climate-vulnerable settings such as small island states and coastal urban centers, failing to plan for caregiving needs exacerbates exposure and undermines social resilience. Conversely, climate policies that are territorially grounded and care-sensitive—such as the design of multi-risk shelters accessible to care workers, inclusive public transport systems, and decentralized health and childcare facilities—can reduce vulnerability while enhancing adaptive capacity across communities (UNDRR, 2022). In this regard, urban and territorial planning must not be treated as neutral technical exercises but as mechanisms for advancing climate justice by spatializing care as a public and ecological good.

Finally, reclaiming care as climate policy requires a cultural transformation. This entails redefining the value of care within economic systems, shifting gender norms, and fostering collective imaginaries grounded in memory, territory, and interdependence. The Forum emphasized that this transformation must be rooted in the lived experiences of Caribbean peoples—and must involve everyone, including men, in the development of care societies.

Policy recommendations from the Caribbean



The following recommendations align with the 5Rs framework proposed by UN Women in *The Climate-Care Nexus* (2023c), which emphasizes the recognition, reduction, redistribution, reward, and representation of care work as essential components of a just and climate-resilient transition. They are structured into two parts: the first outlines **policy and governance priorities** for mainstreaming care in climate action, while the second identifies the **enabling conditions** to ensure effective implementation.

I. POLICY AND GOVERNANCE PRIORITIES

- **Integrate care into climate governance and legal frameworks**

Formally acknowledge care work—primarily community-based and gendered responses—as part of national and subnational climate governance. This includes integrating care systems into disaster preparedness, adaptation strategies, and early warning mechanisms, ensuring they are recognized, valued, and protected before, during, and after climate-related events.

- **Guarantee public investment in care systems for resilience**

Ensure that national and subnational climate budgets, post-disaster recovery funds, and public infrastructure plans explicitly allocate resources to care systems (childcare services, elder care, water access points, mobile health units), especially in rural, coastal, and climate-vulnerable areas.

- **Reduce unpaid care burdens through public services and social protection**

Design and implement adaptation strategies that redistribute care responsibilities by expanding gender-responsive public services, social protection measures, and community-based support networks, especially during climate emergencies.

- **Mainstream gender and care perspectives into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) by integrating Gender Action Plans, such as Climate Change Gender Action Plans (ccGAPs).**

Include disaggregated data, risk mapping, and measures to prevent care overload in adaptation strategies, with a particular focus on rural, coastal, and impacted communities. GAPs should systematically identify gender-specific vulnerabilities and opportunities across all priority

sectors, support the participation and leadership of women and gender-diverse groups, and ensure gender-responsive budgeting and monitoring.

- **Ensure decent work and care workers' labor rights and social protection**

Promote the professionalization, unionization, and legal protection of care workers, including migrant and domestic workers, with a focus on gender, race, and migration status. According to the ILO, the State has a primary responsibility for care provision, funding, regulation, and ensuring high standards of quality, safety, and health for care workers and care recipients, including the allocation of the necessary resources and the adoption and maintenance of a robust policy and regulatory framework (ILO, 2024).

Support programmes and tax incentives for professionalization and regularization of care and domestic workers, including independent workers, SMEs, and the social and solidarity economy, with earmarked initiatives for refugee and migrant care labour¹¹.

- **Incorporate care into urban and territorial planning**

Embed care needs across all levels of territorial planning—including the design and location of community facilities, public spaces, mobility systems, and climate-resilient care infrastructure. Prioritize caregiving populations, especially in remote, underserved, or climate-vulnerable areas.

- **Include care in risk mapping and climate vulnerability assessments**

Develop and apply methodologies that identify the impacts of climate change on care systems and caregiving communities. This includes producing sex-disaggregated and time-use data, “care maps,” and care-sensitive risk analyses that inform planning and financing decisions.

- **Align comprehensive care policies and emerging systems with food systems efforts, national development plans, and climate strategies**

Develop integrated approaches that align comprehensive care policies with food systems efforts, national development plans, and climate strategies (UNFSS, 2025). This includes ensuring policy coherence between care, nutrition, social protection, and environmental sustainability frameworks—especially in rural and climate-vulnerable territories.

11 See UNHCR Guidelines on International Legal Standards Relating to Decent Work for Refugees (2021) available at: <https://www.refworld.org/policy/legalguidance/unhcr/2021/en/123889>

II. ENABLING CONDITIONS

- **Make care visible through robust data systems.**

Support the generation of sex-disaggregated, georeferenced, and time-use data to quantify care work and inform policy decisions. Develop “care maps” to identify territorial inequalities.

- **Support feminist and community-led research on care and climate justice.**

Develop funding mechanisms that support research led by Caribbean women and grassroots collectives, with a focus on participatory knowledge production and ancestral knowledge.

- **Mobilize climate finance for comprehensive care systems and policies**

Position care systems as a financing priority within national adaptation and disaster recovery plans and ensure their integration into international financial mechanisms. This includes existing instruments such as the Green Climate Fund, Adaptation Fund, and loss and damage finance arrangements.

In the context of ongoing debates on global financial reform and the Financing for Development (FfD) agenda¹², it is critical to advocate for climate, gender-responsive, and care-sensitive taxes and investments that align with climate justice, including international funding from global funds, foreign direct investments, and public taxation and budgeting.

- **Improve women’s and local communities-based organizations’ access to climate and biodiversity funding**

Develop mechanisms to improve access to climate and biodiversity finance for women-led and community-based organizations engaged in care work. This includes simplifying accreditation processes, providing technical assistance for project design and implementation, and ensuring direct access to funding through small grants or dedicated windows within climate funds. Supporting local actors – especially those rooted in caregiving ecosystems—enhances the legitimacy, effectiveness, and equity of adaptation and resilience strategies. Care-sensitive financing must prioritize those most affected by climate impacts and historically excluded from decision-making and resource allocation.

12 <https://financing.desa.un.org/ffd4/history-ffd-conferences>.

- **Strengthen regional, multilateral, South-South, and Triangular cooperation on climate and care**

Foster regional alliances that prioritize care and gender justice in climate action. Share best practices and innovations across Caribbean countries and with other Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

- **Promote public communication and cultural transformation**

Launch campaigns, educational programs, and community dialogues that shift social norms, challenge gender stereotypes, and foster a narrative of care as a collective responsibility and ecological justice.

The Caribbean's contribution to the regional and global debate lies not only in its exposure to climate risk but in its profound understanding of care as infrastructure, memory, resistance, and governance. The reflections emerging from the Caribbean Academic Forum reinforce a powerful truth: **there is no resilience without care, and there is no climate justice without gender justice.**

As Caribbean voices have shown, **care is not only what sustains life in emergencies, it is what sustains life, period.** Recognizing and funding care as a key political strategy for sustaining life (in all its dimensions) is essential for climate justice, gender equality, and sustainable development. Care must be reclaimed not as an add-on to climate policy but as a pillar of climate resilience. From water access to emotional support, from disaster preparedness to food security, care is the invisible scaffolding that sustains life before, during, and after a crisis.

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