

# Partnering for Climate Justice

April 2021



**Women's  
Learning  
Partnership**

***“Climate change is a manmade  
problem that requires a  
feminist solution.”***

–Mary Robinson,  
former President of Ireland and  
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

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### HISTORY

The existential urgency of climate change and its impact on human survival requires mutual learning and global action. Women are most affected by environmental destruction and are best situated to provide solutions, yet least involved in decision-making. WLP has been championing climate justice for nearly a decade. We have promoted women’s economic initiatives based on recycling and upcycling products, crop diversity, and the slow food movements. Our partners in Africa and MENA have led initiatives to secure women’s rights to land stewardship, sustainable land management, and water conservation, as well as women’s equitable land ownership. In Central Asia, WLP partners have brought international attention to the environmental disasters caused by uranium and other mining. In South America, WLP partners are fighting the extractive industries’ unsafe and environmentally devastating practices which have resulted in pollution and the collapse of massive dams. WLP’s partner in Turkey has been a leader in promoting disaster and risk reduction programs through women’s cooperatives, where thousands of women and men have been trained in disaster management.

#### TWO SIDES OF THE SAME CLIMATE JUSTICE CAMPAIGN

WLP’s advocacy for climate justice has encompasses several key issue areas. Since 2000, WLP has advocated for equity in land access and ownership, and brought awareness to the historical imbalance in women’s right to land and resources. In more recent years, our focus has expanded to calling attention to how climate change is affecting different communities in different ways—and that women, indigenous, refugee, and other underprivileged groups face distinct adverse impacts unique to their social, political, and economic contexts.

### The Global Campaign

WLP’s global campaign for climate justice was launched in November 2019, at our annual full-partnership gathering, WLP’s transnational partner convening (TPC). At the four-day TPC, the partners were joined by Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, to strategize about the how to create a global campaign supported by locally-led initiatives. The partners brought together their disparate programs on climate change to provide a united front in WLP’s mobilization for climate justice. All WLP partners work in countries where climate change is limiting food sources, causing water shortages, triggering extreme weather, forcing many to flee their homes and even their countries, and/or exacerbating conflict. And yet, because of the profitability of fossil fuels and the extraction of other natural resources, education and advocacy on the subject of climate change is limited in many places where our partners are active. At the TPC, the partners discussed what each was doing to address climate change and together set WLP’s agenda for a Global South campaign for climate justice led by women’s organizations.

### Campaign Strategy and Goals

The chief strategy of our campaign is to engage local and regional women leaders in setting priorities and leading mobilization efforts to bring about climate justice. Our science-based long-term goal is to slow down global warming to keep it below 1.5 degrees Celsius. Our human rights goal is to shift the discourse on climate from solely reducing carbon emissions and greenhouse gases to engaging indigenous and vulnerable communities to bring about equitable and sustainable solutions. To reach these goals, we and our partners are mobilizing world leaders of governments and industries, and local leaders of local governments and industries, to work together with activists to set and adhere to planet-saving environmental practices.



### CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

In addition to the context specific, local and regional work being carried out by partners to advance climate justice, there have been a number of partnership-wide activities that have punctuated WLP's work on climate justice over the last five years.

#### Women's Leadership as Key to Countering the Impact of Climate Change | November 7, 2016

WLP and the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) co-hosted this [panel discussion](#) at the 2016 United Nations conference on climate change (COP22) in Marrakech, Morocco.



#### Investing in Rural Women's Leadership: A Solution to Counter Marginalization | March 13, 2018

Panelists from the Middle East and Africa argued for investing in and nurturing leadership and collective action among rural women. Equipped with advocacy tools, rural women can increase their access to services and control over land use. [This event](#) was co-hosted by WLP and our partner in Lebanon.



#### Gender, Families, and Climate Justice November 4, 2019

In preparation for Beijing +25, WLP gathered thought-leaders on climate justice and women's rights to discuss the role of women and youth in confronting the climate crisis. The event included presentations, conversations, and poetry.



### Annual Feminist Forum on Climate Justice

Inaugural Feminist Forum on Climate Justice | September 20, 2019  
In September 2019, WLP convened its first [Feminist Forum on Climate Justice](#) (in partnership with the American University of Beirut) bringing together 40 thought leaders for an intersectional round-table discussion on the linkages between climate justice, gender equality, sustainable development, and peace.



**WLP's second Feminist Forum on Climate Justice** took place on March 31, 2021, and featured an intergenerational dialogue with experienced women's rights leaders and youth advocates from across the globe. During the dialogue, the panelists shared how the knowledge of local communities, the leadership of youth, and the networks built by feminist activists will lead us to holistic solutions to the climate crisis. The event underscored that only by working across silos and engaging with multiple generations will we be able to build a sustainable world.

[Watch the event here.](#)

### Film premiere of *It's Up to Us*, with Keynote from Mary Robinson on Climate Justice | June 12, 2020

At the virtual, premiere screening of WLP's newest documentary *It's Up to Us*, climate justice ambassador and former president of Ireland Mary Robinson gave the keynote address. Following the screening, invited panelists discussed the film and the interconnected threats to human security. Moderating the discussion was Pat Mitchell, Editorial Director of TEDWomen.

*It's Up to Us* explores the shared origins of conflict, economic inequality, discriminatory family laws, gender inequality, and climate change, and offers solutions based on human rights and equitable decision-making. In the 30-minute film, women's rights and climate justice advocates share their insights into how women have been impacted by cross-cutting injustices, and how women's leadership is critical to solving the world's most pressing issues.



**It's Up to Us is available in 7 languages:**

Arabic  
English  
French  
Kyrgyz  
Persian  
Portuguese  
Russian

[Watch the film here.](#)

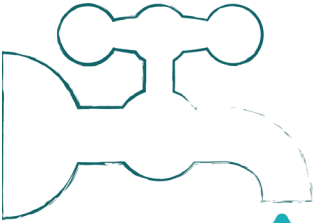
It's Up to Us film screenings and conversations with diverse constituencies summer and fall 2020

Throughout the summer and fall of 2020, WLP held virtual screenings of It's Up to Us in Arabic, English, French, Kyrgyz, and Russian, which included audience discussions and opportunities for planning campaign activities. These events were hosted by our partners throughout the Global South. The film is available on WLP's website for individuals to view or to hold their own screening events. To help activists and organizations host their own virtual screenings or watch parties, WLP has published on our website a toolkit for screening films online and facilitating a post-screening discussion.



### CLIMATE JUSTICE BLOG POSTS & SOCIAL MEDIA

WLP sends out weekly posts on social media that reflect current events and topical issues. Climate justice-related posts are an ongoing part of our communications, many of which are in turn re-posted by our partners and their affiliates, reaching an extensive international audience.



In **80%** of water-deprived households, women and girls carry the burden of water collection.



Source: UN Women  
\*Infographic: Why gender equality matters to achieving all 17 SDGs\*

### CLIMATE JUSTICE CURRICULUM

WLP is planning the development of a stand-alone workshop curriculum on climate justice that can be used in a range of training programs. Organizations will be able to use the curriculum to spark discussion among participants about what climate justice means to them in their own, local contexts, and help launch climate justice advocacy projects. We are seeking funding for this initiative, which we hope to begin in FY2021.



## SELECTED STORIES FROM ACROSS THE PARTNERSHIP

All of WLP's partners are addressing climate justice in one way or another in their work to promote human rights and human security. Below are some recent stories from across the partnership that highlight the important work that is being done.

### KYRGYZSTAN: FINDING CLIMATE JUSTICE IN MAILUU-SUU

The Earth Journalism Network reports that there are currently 92 radioactive and toxic storage facilities across Kyrgyzstan. Although the majority of uranium mines in the region closed in the 1960s, the pollution from them has remained a serious health issue. Scientists have shown that the area's earthquakes and landslides are contributing to the erosion of the uranium tailing storage sites and to the resulting radioactive seepage into the water supply. Due to an abundance of abandoned uranium tailing pits, the most polluted and dangerous of these sites is in the village of Mailuu-Suu, located in the Jalal-Abad region of Kyrgyzstan.

For nearly a decade, a group of women from Mailuu-Suu worked together to raise awareness about the dangerous contaminants in their soil and water. They had witnessed babies being born with physical deformities, and chronic illnesses in old and young people with no explanation. Despite their efforts, they were not succeeding in bringing government resources to the environmental crisis in their community.



[Photo of Mailuu-Suu by BlogTrotters](#)

In 2019, WLP Kyrgyzstan/Bir Duino began to work with the Mailuu-Suu women to bring greater publicity to their plight and to the continuing environmental degradation in the region. Bir Duino had been training human rights advocates and environmental

activists to use the international human rights mechanisms, especially the United Nations' UPR procedures, to draw global attention to Kyrgyzstan's environmental concerns. Bir Duino mentored the Mailuu-Suu women on how to deliver their data to national authorities on the impact of the pollution. It facilitated training workshops on constructive dialogue using sessions from Kyrgyz-language versions of WLP's *Leading to Action* and *Leading to Choices* manuals. Most recently, it has conducted trainings on Zoom. The trainings emphasize women's capacity to lead and participatory leadership tactics, and guide the women in drafting their own local advocacy plans.

"At first," says Bir Duino's director Toleskan Ismailova, "the women didn't believe there was much hope. It took some time to convince them that further work could change their situation for the better. Eventually, we earned their trust."

"After we collected their ideas and information about the risks and threats, we held a meeting with local authorities where the women presented real proof of their words," says Ismailova. Representatives of national departments agreed to conduct more meetings with the local women in the region. In the meetings, the authorities have been considering ways of improving socio-economic conditions for the community, and policies to mitigate the risk of further environmental disasters.



Ismailova adds, "Lack of trust, corruption, and unemployment have led to an absence of initiatives aimed at solving serious environmental and economic problems. From our involvement with the women from Mailuu-Suu, we gained incredible experience in how to build constructive dialogue between local communities, CSOs, and national departments."

**MOROCCO  
FROM EXCLUSION TO EMPOWERMENT: LAND RIGHTS FOR  
WOMEN**

A study conducted by the Landesa World Development Institute identified that communal lands are vital to mitigating climate change and that rural communities with secure land rights are often better environmental stewards. An estimated 50 percent of the world’s land is held under communal systems, but in over half of the world women experience legal and cultural barriers to securing land rights. Since 2007, WLP’s partner in Morocco, L’Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM), has worked closely on collective land issues with Soulaliyates, rural tribal women in Morocco. Over a decade ago, one woman’s courage to stand up to discriminatory land policies in her village led to a partnership between the Soulaliyate women and ADFM that has mobilized hundreds of other women to take action and claim their rights.

This collaboration has resulted in many important advances for women’s rights in Morocco. In 2017, ADFM helped organize a three-week advocacy campaign in which over 600 Soulaliyate women and allies traveled from Fez to Daraa-Tafilalt to the Rabat-Sale regions. The caravan of women brought the issue of women’s land rights to the attention of policymakers in Morocco. During this three-month long campaign, ADFM held 16 communications and advocacy workshops that targeted 660 women from 30 different ethnic groups. These workshops helped equip Soulaliyate women to become participatory leaders and advocates for their rights.



In July of 2018, the Soulaliyate women achieved a major legal victory when the women of Kenitra province were given equal land rights to the men in their communities. Specifically, in the Ben Mansour tribe, women were given financial compensation for previously transferred lands, and in the Ouled Mbarek tribe, women were given plots of land alongside men. Later in 2018, Morocco’s King Mohammed VI announced significant agricultural and land reforms, and the Ministry of Interior established new methods for identifying land rights holders.

ADFM continued workshops to reach more Soulaliyate women and build solidarity between women from different regions and tribes. Their effort to grow the Soulaliyate network proved essential when, in December 2020, a new Government Council decree (No. 2.19.973) included language that pushed back on women’s equal land rights. WLP Morocco and the Soulaliyate women coordinated a national drive to collect 20,000 signatures in support of revising the decree that makes continuous residence on the land obligatory for an individual to acquire the status of being a member of the communal land beneficiaries/tribe. For historical reasons, many of which are the result of discrimination, Soulaliyate women are too often unable to reside on the land.

ADFM’s senior workshop facilitator, Khadija Oueldammou, believes that despite the obstacles still encountered by women on collective land, the situation of the Soulaliyates today is greatly improved. “Empowerment efforts have led to the awareness of Soulaliyates all over Morocco that they are entitled to collective lands on the same footing as men,” says Oueldammou. “They now have the skills and the tools to organize themselves to demand this right.”



**SENEGAL:  
BEYOND THE WALL OF GREEN ARE GARDENS**

Since the launch of the African Union's Great Green Wall program in 2007, it has been beset by challenges—including corruption, terrorism, and now the pandemic. One very positive outcome has been that individual activists and civil society organizations are continuing to establish their own, independent green initiatives to plant trees, introduce more sustainable crops and irrigation, and create green jobs. In Senegal, more than 11 million trees have been planted. But beyond that, green initiatives are being led by women to build agricultural skills and food security even in some of Senegal's poorest regions. One important contributor is Julie Cissé who is the director of WLP Senegal/ GIPS-WAR and a leader in pan-African campaigns for the environment, such as the Kilimanjaro Initiative. She is also the organizer of a range of local projects that encourage women to take on sustainable, small-scale agriculture and animal husbandry. These climate justice projects are implemented as part of GIPS-WAR's Bay Dunde Program, which encourages women to discover the value of the earth and invest in its preservation.



GIPS-WAR's Bay Dunde Program teaches women to consume sustainably by focusing on organic and fair-trade products that avoid soil degradation. It helps them to make personal commitments to protecting and preserving the land. Activities frequently include trainings for local leaders, women and men, to encourage them to strengthen policies to combat desertification and drought, lessons on specific agricultural practices, and press conferences to spread the word. GIPS-WAR has also been tireless in its efforts to spread its messages through social media, as well as on the radio.

GIPS-WAR's climate justice efforts have led to the acquisition of 78 hectares of common land being set aside for women in six of

GIPS-WAR's 11 regions of operation. The arability of these plots of land has been enhanced with irrigation systems, which have made the women far less reliant on the typical three-month rainy season, and have led to larger as well as more frequent harvests. The women farmers have been provided with micro-business training and economic management skills, so that they have been able to set aside a certain portion of their agricultural yield for their own use to feed their families, with the rest being marketed and sold for profit. When the pandemic hit Senegal, GIPS-WAR's trainees have been among the mothers and sisters in the rural areas best prepared to pull through the food shortages in their communities.



**TURKEY:  
PARTNERING FOR A SWEETER HARVEST  
FOR SEASONAL WORKERS**

Turkey provides 70 percent of the world’s hazelnuts, most of which are purchased by large manufacturers like Nestle and Nutella. Hazelnut harvesting is difficult and dangerous work, involving long hours on steep slopes in the sun. The work is undertaken by the poorest and most vulnerable populations, including migrants, women, and children, and many are refugees from Syria. Since 2017, WLP Turkey/KEDV has been working with seasonal agricultural workers in the hazelnut harvest to inform them about environmental threats to their employment security and safety, and to improve their working conditions through women’s collective leadership. One ongoing challenge has been to eliminate child labor. Another has been to address the warming waters of the Black Sea, which have triggered extreme weather events that have destroyed roads and bridges, and caused landslides that washed away thousands of tons of hazel harvests. Moreover, the higher ambient temperatures have disrupted the trees’ pollination cycles, reducing their yield. Also impacting the yield is the deterioration of the soil quality, hastened by the now more frequent droughts and erosion, which have also led to pest outbreaks.



Prior to the pandemic, KEDV conducted leadership and capacity-building workshops (using WLP training materials) for women seasonal workers who worked in the hazelnut groves. Their objective was to help the women take on leadership roles in improving the working and living conditions for themselves, their families, and other seasonal workers. A number of the younger workshop participants formed an advocacy group called

“The Women Ambassadors of Agriculture.” The Ambassadors now serve as local labor mediators, bringing information about the needs of women and child workers to Turkey’s Ministry of Labor, local governments, and companies—this even amidst the challenges of the pandemic.

Because of enduring tension between the seasonal workers and the local communities, the leadership and communication training for the women workers continues to be of critical importance. Regretfully, implementing trainings and creating opportunities to build solidarity is not practical or safe at this time because of COVID-19. Once in-person gatherings may happen again, KEDV will assist the women seasonal workers in their efforts to resolve the myriad threats they and the local host communities face—including the changing climate, lower harvest yields, and negotiating with the large corporations that purchase the hazelnuts for safer work conditions and better pay.

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