CARING IN A CHANGING CLIMATE:
CENTERING CARE WORK IN CLIMATE ACTION
This Oxfam Research Brief is derived from a longer Oxfam Research Backgrounder: Caring in a changing climate: Centering care work in climate action. This brief is an effort to condense the information contained in the original Backgrounder. It has not been written by authors of the original work. As such, all references have been dropped to ensure that original works are not misrepresented and to save on space. For a full account of the referenced works, the reader is directed to the original report.

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Caring in a Changing Climate: Centering Care Work in Climate Action

We are in the midst of a long-standing care crisis. While care work is essential to human existence and underpins all economic activity, its value to society is systematically ignored. Further, prevalent gender norms mean that, in general, women bear a disproportionate responsibility for care work. This, in turn, has been identified as central to sustaining women’s generally lower level of social status compared to men, with cross-national research finding that care workloads adversely affect women’s quality of life.

Care work includes 1) direct acts of care, such as bathing, feeding, attending to psychological well-being, etc.; 2) indirect acts of care that provide the necessary conditions for caregiving, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc.; and 3) “environmental care,” which includes acts such as tending to animals and common spaces (e.g., forests, neighborhoods, etc.). Climate change will exacerbate the care crisis in three direct ways. First, it will increase the amount of care work that needs to be done. Second, it will make the act of undertaking care work more arduous. Third, it will compound the injustices pertaining to the current unequal distribution of care work. In addition, badly designed efforts to address climate change stand to exacerbate the care crisis, placing further demands on the time of carers, restricting the control they currently have over their time, and reducing the resources they have access to. Despite the importance of this nexus of issues, policy and research circles have largely overlooked such connections.

Description of the general concern regarding the nexus of gender justice, care, and climate change belies the nuance necessary for a genuinely intersectional approach that understands how gender identities and norms derive from the interaction of a host of structural factors; for example, class, race, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, etc. Further, articulation of the care crisis needs to be caveated to ensure that care work is not viewed as all bad or solely burdensome. Care work is essential to society. It can be an important source of meaning and social status. Nonetheless, the individualization, feminization, and invisibilization of care work is widely understood to be a central impediment to achieving gender justice.

Concern about the nexus of climate change and care work is acute in low-income countries, specifically among those pursuing subsistence livelihoods. Such contexts are most vulnerable to climate change. They lack collectivized care infrastructure (e.g., schools, hospitals, etc.), lack adequate social safety nets, and have populations that are aging faster than investments in elder care. These contexts tend to see women working the longest hours, with their responsibilities most characterized by drudgery. It is a characteristic injustice of climate change that these groups have also done the least to contribute to the climate emergency.

Addressing the climate-care nexus requires aggressive action to limit greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions so that global average temperature increase is kept below dangerous levels. It requires efforts to address climate change that are sensitive to care dynamics, such that they can become transformative of gender relations. The most prominent framework for advancing solutions to the care crisis is the 5R framework, which articulates the need to: i) recognize care work; ii) reduce care work; iii) redistribute care work; iv) represent care workers; and (more controversially) v) reward carers for their work. There is scope to integrate these approaches into climate initiatives, specifically by: a) making investments in physical infrastructure and technologies that simultaneously address climate change and are labor-saving; b) making investments in social infrastructure and support mechanisms that simultaneously collectivize care work and address climate vulnerability; and c) pursuing climate initiatives in tandem with efforts to advance norm change and tackle the feminization, individualization, and invisibilization of care work. Central to the success of any of these efforts will be placing the needs and voice of carers at the center of program and policy design.
INTRODUCTION

We are in the midst of a long-standing care crisis, one which climate change stands to exacerbate. The social and economic impacts of COVID-19 have reaffirmed that care work is essential to the functioning of society and is the basis of all subsequent economic activity. Despite this, care work’s value to society has been systematically ignored, with time spent in care work undervalued. Moreover, care work has generally fallen disproportionately on the shoulders of women, limiting their economic opportunities and exacerbating hardships. The situation in developing countries is especially concerning. Social safety nets are inadequate, populations are aging faster than investments in elder care, and women tend to work the longest hours and have their responsibilities most characterized by drudgery. While we should be wary of casting all care work as negative or unwanted—care work is an essential part of society, and much meaning and status is derived from it—the unequal burden of care and the scale of the climate emergency are cause for significant concern.

Climate change stands to worsen the care crisis in several ways. First, climate change will likely increase the total care requirements of society. Second, it will likely make the work of providing care more difficult. Third, if poorly designed, efforts to address climate change stand to compound the challenges experienced by those responsible for care work. These interactions are expected to be most damaging for subsistence producers in less-industrialized nations, where livelihoods are closely linked to the natural environment, where the impacts of both rapid- and slow-onset weather and climate events will be particularly damaging, and where gender norms shaping the unequal distribution of care work are firmly entrenched.

The outrageous injustice, which is that these populations have done the least to cause the climate problem and have the least capacity to adapt but stand to suffer the worst consequences, cannot be overlooked — See Figure 1.

Despite these linkages, to date there has been a general lack of focus in both policy and research circles on the nexus of climate and care. In general, climate change efforts, due to their preoccupation with biophysical concerns, have tended to overlook social dynamics such as those around gender and care. Where issues of gender have been incorporated, much of this work has focused narrowly on women’s economic empowerment, which has been operationalized in such a way that it has often resulted in an additional burden on women’s time, creating new time-pressures around economic, or “productive,” work.

A new report by Oxfam, *Caring in a Changing Climate: Centering Care Work In Climate Action*, seeks to shed light on the nexus of climate change and care work, with a focus on agrarian livelihoods in low-income countries. It calls for greater action to limit greenhouse gas emissions, and a greater focus on the nexus of climate and care work within policy and research. The report points to the need for climate initiatives to pursue gender-transformative approaches via the adoption of care-sensitive interventions.
We are in the midst of a long-standing care crisis. While care work is essential to human existence and underpins all economic activity, its value to society is systematically ignored. Further, prevalent gender norms mean that, in general, women bear a disproportionate responsibility for care work. This, in turn, has been identified as central to sustaining women's generally lower level of social status compared to men, with cross-national research finding that care workloads adversely affect women's quality of life.

Care work includes 1) direct acts of care, such as bathing, feeding, attending to psychological well-being, etc.; 2) indirect acts of care that provide the necessary conditions for caregiving, such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, etc.; and 3) "environmental care," which includes acts such as tending to animals and common spaces (e.g., forests, neighborhoods, etc.).

Climate change will exacerbate the care crisis in three direct ways. First, it will increase the amount of care work that needs to be done. Second, it will make the act of undertaking care work more arduous. Third, it will compound the injustices pertaining to the current unequal distribution of care work. In addition, badly designed efforts to address climate change stand to exacerbate the care crisis, placing further demands on the time of carers, restricting the control they currently have over their time, and reducing the resources they have access to. Despite the importance of this nexus of issues, policy and research circles have largely overlooked such connections.

Description of the general concern regarding the nexus of gender justice, care, and climate change belies the nuance necessary for a genuinely intersectional approach that understands how gender identities and norms derive from the interaction of a host of structural factors; for example, class, race, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, etc. Further, articulation of the care crisis needs to be caveated to ensure that care work is not viewed as all bad or solely burdensome. Care work is essential to society. It can be an important source of meaning and social status. Nonetheless, the individualization, feminization, and invisibilization of care work is widely understood to be a central impediment to achieving gender justice.

Concern about the nexus of climate change and care work is acute in low-income countries, specifically among those pursuing subsistence livelihoods. Such contexts are most vulnerable to climate change. They lack collectivized care infrastructure (e.g., schools, hospitals, etc.), lack adequate social safety nets, and have populations that are aging faster than investments in elder care. These contexts tend to see women working the longest hours, with their responsibilities most characterized by drudgery. It is a characteristic injustice of climate change that these groups have also done the least to contribute to the climate emergency.

Addressing the climate-care nexus requires aggressive action to limit greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions so that global average temperature increase is kept below dangerous levels. It requires efforts to address climate change that are sensitive to care dynamics, such that they can become transformative of gender relations. The most prominent framework for advancing solutions to the care crisis is the 4/5R framework, which articulates the need to: i) recognize care work; ii) reduce care work; iii) redistribute care work; iv) represent care workers; and (more controversially) v) reward carers for their work. There is scope to integrate these approaches into climate initiatives, specifically by: a) making investments in physical infrastructure and technologies that simultaneously address climate change and are labor-saving; b) making investments in social infrastructure and support mechanisms that simultaneously collectivize care work and address climate vulnerability; and c) pursuing climate initiatives in tandem with efforts to advance norm change and tackle the feminization, individualization, and invisibilization of care work. Central to the success of any of these efforts will be placing the needs and voice of carers at the center of program and policy design.

Alizeta Sawadogo, 55, is a farmer, widow and mother of 8 children. She draws water from a well to water her crops in the collective farm that has granted her a plot of land. Samuel Turpin / Oxfam
WHAT IS CARE WORK?

Care work (also identified variously as “caregiving,” “domestic labor,” “sustaining services,” and “social reproduction”) refers to the work of daily and generational renewal of life that is essential to sustaining societies. It includes work done in the direct care of persons (e.g., bathing, feeding, talking, attending to psychological well-being, etc.) as well as the indirect activities that provide the necessary conditions for caregiving (e.g., cooking, washing, and shopping). Care work can include work undertaken within the household and among society more generally. It is usually done without monetary compensation, although in some cases it is remunerated.

Care work is distinguished from the “productive,” generally monetizable, aspects of work, which tend to dominate policy. There are no hard boundaries between care and productive work, and people’s roles often overlap. Despite the blurred boundaries, care work has become an area of specific focus in order to draw attention to a host of human activities that are essential for society and the economy to function, and yet are frequently overlooked or ignored.

In addition to direct and indirect care, there is a need to also consider the idea of caring for the environment. “Environmental care” has tended to be discussed separately under the notion of “natural resource management” and includes both direct care necessary to sustain households—such as tending to animals and vegetable gardens—and indirect care—such as caring for common spaces (neighborhoods, forests, etc.). The motivation to include a focus on environmental care is justified because: i) a narrow focus on natural resource management overlooks a variety of unacknowledged work, which is, in effect, care work for the environment (and not for production); ii) there are concerns that instrumentalizing the environment as a resource simply in need of management potentially contributes to the climate emergency; and iii) acknowledging such environmental work as care work creates possibilities for more gender-transformative approaches via the recognition of local knowledge and expertise as part of the solution to the climate crisis. Table 1 provides a typology of the different types of care work.

FIGURE 1. HISTORIC RESPONSIBILITY FOR TEMPERATURE RISE.

Showing the rapid rate of global temperature increase and disproportionate responsibility for climate change among high human development index (HDI) countries. The 14 countries shown in the right-hand figure are responsible for more than 80 percent of total historic emissions. Note the complete lack of low HDI countries. Source: Editor.
they might interact with both climate change impacts and efforts to address those impacts. In the same vein, we should be careful to avoid unitary caricatures of “women as carers.” These caricatures draw on essentializing stereotypes of women as somehow fundamentally more caring or more concerned about the environment.

Notwithstanding the caveat that care responsibilities will manifest differently for particular groups of women, the general disproportionate responsibility for care work among women remains a fundamental impediment to gender justice. The norms that dictate this allocation of care work are central to sustaining women’s generally lower level of social status compared to men. Cross-national research finds that care workloads adversely affect women’s quality of life. They have less time for relaxation and fewer opportunities for the kinds of activities needed to maintain physical and mental health, and for civic participation. It is a glaring irony that despite women and girls’ disproportionate responsibility for care work, their own resultant care needs are often documented to be downplayed and neglected.

### Why Care About Care?

Care is foundational to social and economic functioning. Oxfam has previously calculated that care work contributes US$10.8 trillion to the global economy annually. It cannot be neglected. It is not possible to simply not care. In a context where care work is essential, the next salient question becomes: Who is responsible for care?

In general, women around the world bear a disproportionate responsibility for all types of care work. Although women tend to spend less time in paid work than men, this reduction does not offset the additional care responsibilities, resulting in women tending to bear a disproportionate responsibility for all work (see Figure 2). Of course, this generalized language about “women’s” experience overlooks differentiating structures of class, race, caste, ethnicity, sexual identity, place of residence, etc. To this end, it is important to adopt a context-specific and structural approach to understanding care and gender, one that appreciates the experience of being a woman as it is shaped by the intersection of gender with other structural categories. Such an approach is essential if we are to appreciate the specific manner in which care responsibilities are manifested, and how

### Table 1. A Typology of Care Work

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<th>Type of Unpaid Care Work</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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| Direct care for persons. | - Hands-on caring for the well-being of people in one’s family or household, including children, the elderly, and sick relatives as well as non-kin people in one’s community via volunteer work.  
- Responsibility for care (planning, management, anticipation).  
- Emotional labor (love, support, worry, maintaining relationships). |
| Indirect care for persons. | - Household/domestic work that provides the (pre)conditions for direct care.  
- Household chores (cleaning, waste disposal, washing clothes and bedding).  
- Provisioning of food, water, clothing, energy, shelter.  
- Preparing and cooking food. |
| Local environmental care. | - Care beyond the domestic “indoor” space, including:  
- Direct care for animals and plants for own/communal purposes; small-holding; vegetable gardening;  
- keeping animals (e.g., chickens and goats);  
- collecting and carrying fodder and water for animals;  
- manure application to fields, weeding and pest control;  
- managing woodland and water sources;  
- managing village commons and keeping them clean;  
- community gardens. |
The time pressures created by care work limit opportunities to pursue education, a problem that is acute among children, with 15 million girls estimated to never gain a school education (compared to 10 million boys) because they are needed at home to do care and domestic work. Such dynamics drive a vicious and intergenerational cycle in which women’s lack of education drives an undervaluation of their time, which results in that time being overexploited in under-remunerated care activities. Women’s general disproportionate responsibility for care also exposes them to greater risk. For example, caring for the sick increases the risk of human-to-human transmission of disease. Likewise, activities like cooking (which often takes place outside around dusk and dawn) and collecting water can both increase exposure to mosquito-borne diseases.

The case for transforming how and by whom unpaid care work is performed is uncontroversial: there is widespread agreement in the literature that heavy unpaid care responsibilities limit women’s lives and that transformation is necessary for gender justice. To this end, it has been documented that most women who shoulder a disproportionate amount of care work relative to their male counterparts express a desire to change the gender norms that prevent greater sharing.

In acknowledging the care crisis, and in raising alarm about the degree to which climate change will exacerbate it, we should be careful not to assume that all care work is unwanted. Responsibility for care work can provide a measure of authority as well as power and esteem for the caregiver. Engagement in collective environmental care work has provided women’s groups with recognized space and agency from which to challenge harassment and inequalities. Importantly, care work can be a source of meaning and connection (both with others and the natural environment) that transcends the instrumental value of care. Nonetheless, the systematic undervaluing of care work in the formal economy disadvantages women and girls in contexts where they are disproportionately responsible for it. Further, it leads to their time being over-exploited, resulting in drudgery and in limiting opportunity.
HOW DOES CARE RELATE TO CLIMATE CHANGE?

The anticipated impacts of climate change are varied and include long-term changes in the temperature and precipitation, as well as increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and storms. Deserts are becoming hotter and drier, and agricultural land is becoming less productive. Oceans are warming, leading to melting glaciers and sea level rise. Natural habitats are changing, and biodiversity is being lost. These and many other climatic and environmental changes are affecting everyday life everywhere, but the impacts are most severe for people in low-income communities and less-industrialized countries of the global South.

The implications of such impacts for care work, however, are largely overlooked and have received little attention in the research or policy literature. While there are statistics on individual displacement, mortality, suicide, and infection rates, there is scant consideration of the lasting impacts of death and illness within families and, in particular, how coping with pain, loss, sadness, and depression as a result of these impacts affects other people. There are few studies, for example, that examine what daily life is like for parents raising distressed children and keeping a family safe in the aftermath of a cyclone or in the context of a refugee camp. Nor did the report find any mention of carers’ own need for care, either given by others or “self-care,” when coping with the emotional effects of loss, damage, and uncertainty. There are few, if any,

FIGURE 3. THE INTERACTION BETWEEN CARE WORK AND CLIMATE CHANGE.

Visualizing the linkages between climate change and care work. This visualization represents a simplification of these relationships, which i) have interacting impacts and ii) include the possibility of exacerbating the injustices resulting from the unequal distribution of care work. For a more complete account of these relationships and how they impact care work, see Table 3.2 (pp. 42) in the full report. Source: Editor.
studies that consider care work as rewarding or unchanged in the face of climate stresses, and similarly few discussing the potential need for increased sharing, cooperation, and solidarity among households and communities experiencing climate stress. Whenever unpaid care work is mentioned, the increase in the amount of care work due to climatic changes and naming care roles as a main reason for why women are adversely affected by climate impacts are the central themes. Climate change is expected to impact care work through its direct impacts (such as those described above). At the same time, there is scope for efforts to address climate change (if badly designed) to increase care work and exacerbate unequal care burdens. Both potentials are discussed below.

THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON CARE WORK

Notwithstanding the lack of literature on care and climate, the review identified that climate change is anticipated to shape care burdens via three pathways, operating across all three types of care work (direct, indirect, environmental). See Figure 3. Impacts will include: i) increasing overall care requirements; and ii) making care work more challenging. Unless interventions to address climate change (both adaptation and mitigation) are carefully designed, these could iii) compound care burdens by placing increasing pressures on carers’ time. Together these forces stand to compound the injustices associated with the current unequal distribution of care work. Each of the three pathways is elaborated upon below.

I) INCREASED CARE REQUIREMENTS

Climate-related extreme weather events, food insecurity, and water stress all stand to increase the direct care burden experienced by households as a result of associated physical injuries, and increased malnutrition and disease. These outcomes are compounded by increased psychological stress that accompanies the specter of environmental stress and its impacts. In contexts of forced displacement, such psychological care needs can be particularly substantial. Physical damage from extreme weather also stands to exacerbate indirect and environmental care burdens, as work needs to be done rebuilding households and restoring the household’s natural capital (e.g., crops and grazing lands) that might have been damaged in extreme weather.

Aggregate changes in weather (such as increased water stress) stand to exacerbate environmental care work as, for example, more time must be spent seeking out grazing and fodder. Water-stressed plants and cattle require greater care to keep them healthy, manage pests, etc. Such circumstances can also create additional indirect care burdens such as having to filter or purify water for drinking. Among subsistence households, reduced productivity from farming practices regularly results in the need to engage in foraging, which itself becomes increasingly arduous as environmental stress increases. Further, where climate stress has affected household incomes, it is possible that households will revert to the use of dirty fuels in increasing quantities. The burning of such fuels can be a substantial driver of negative health outcomes, thereby driving increased care burdens.

II) CARE MADE MORE DiffICULT TO PROVIDE

The above impacts on physical and mental health serve to decrease the number of carers available or make the act of providing care more difficult for carers suffering hunger, illness, physical pain, or psychological stress. Importantly, such impacts are not likely to be limited to the household. Community networks will also be jeopardized, undermining collective care capacities. The loss of carers can also result from migratory responses to environmental stress, though in such cases remittances can help secure livelihoods.

In addition to impacting human lives, extreme weather can make the provision of care more difficult through the damage it does to physical care infrastructure, such as healthcare services and water and sanitation systems. Likewise, the destruction of household possessions and tools necessary for undertaking indirect and environmental care work can make those tasks more arduous.

Finally, where climate stress creates water or fuel shortages, collection times for these vital household goods can be increased. Such scarcity can further affect indirect care work by making cooking and cleaning more difficult as less water and energy can be used. Long-term aggregate changes in the weather also stand to alter landscapes, resulting in a loss of traditional and/or technical knowledge that will make subsequent environmental care more difficult. The same negative impacts can be expected, should holders of specific valuable knowledge be killed because of climate change–related impacts.

III) THE INJUSTICES OF THE CURRENT UNEQUAL DISTRIBUTION OF CARE WORK COMPOUNDED

In certain instances, climate change stands to compound the impact of other injustices via its impact on care work. For example, there are numerous mentions in the literature of women being attacked and raped when venturing far from home to fetch water and fuel. Should climate change result in the need to travel longer distances to collect water and fuel, it will compound the current injustices that cause gender–based violence (GBV) to proliferate and render the collection of water and fuel “women’s work.” Such outcomes then further add to care needs and challenges through the impact of physical and psychological stress. Similarly, cases in which there might be...
an increase in the number of female-headed households (due to excess male deaths or migration) can create acute care burdens, as not only are fewer carers available but also a host of patriarchal norms over communal decision-making, asset ownership, etc. can make the formal or productive tasks of the household more difficult, thereby dramatically compounding the current injustice of the global care crisis.

THE IMPACTS OF ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE ON CARE WORK

While climate change impacts stand to increase care requirements, make care work more difficult, and compound the injustices that result from the current distribution of care work across genders, efforts to address climate change can also have impacts on care work. Both adaptation and mitigation initiatives stand to interact with the way care is provided, either by creating more work or making the provision of care work more arduous. For example, the adoption of novel but labor-intensive lower-emission agricultural technologies, and community resilience or adaptation responsibilities, can compound care responsibilities or reduce the time available for care work. Similarly, time-intensive educational or awareness-raising programs, and even economic empowerment programs, that are ignorant of the social norms regarding the distribution of care work can add to the demands on carers’ time. A notable finding from the literature is that when adaptation and mitigation efforts include burdensome work, new tasks tend to fall to women. These tasks end up being considered a natural extension of their care responsibilities. Under such circumstances, when carers are not engaged in the design of interventions, a common result is for the technology or behavior change to be ignored, meaning its adaptation or mitigation benefits do not materialize, while the extent unequal gender relations around care work persist. This can be the case even when innovations are perceived to be “win-win” and intended to reduce drudgery while also mitigating or adapting to climate change. Unless such interventions are designed with the end-users at the center of the process, it is common for the interventions to have few impacts.

In cases where mitigation or adaptation efforts involve changes in the governance of public space—for example, in forest conservation efforts that exclude historic productive uses or shifts to energy crops such as biofuels—rejection of the intervention is not possible. Such interventions can have significant impacts, creating more work for carers. The carers must take on the additional burden of productive work. Interventions can compound the time and effort necessary for environmental care or the provisioning of food. In several such cases, where rejection of the technology is not possible, it has been found that women (with their general responsibilities for care work) have been left worse off following the intervention than they were before it.

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While gender-neutral climate efforts ignore the existing gender relations, climate work that is attentive to gender is frequently criticized for its limited engagement with the concept, simply equating gender with a focus on women as the sole target of interventions and ignoring any role for men. Such approaches are problematic for a number of reasons. First, they ignore the dynamic manner in which gender relations are produced and reproduced by society. Responsibilities for care work that result from these relations tend to be overlooked. Further, tackling the power structures that set up such unequal outcomes ends up being outside of the scope of any intervention. Second, such approaches are criticized for viewing gender as a simple binary opposition between men and women, ignoring both non-binary and LGBTQI+ groups as well as overlooking the context-specific intersecting forces that shape differential outcomes for people and communities. Since all these dynamics shape responsibilities and opportunities, approaches that overlook them will not effectively account for care responsibilities (and notably exclude various other vulnerabilities from any consideration). Finally, “empowerment approaches” framed in simply gender-responsive terms tend to focus solely on economic empowerment. The lack of appreciation for systematic gender relations means they fail to appreciate that increases in income do not necessarily equate to empowerment in the household or into reductions in the burden of care. In fact, many market-based models further structure women’s time, leaving less flexibility for balancing responsibilities for care work. Overall, approaches that equate gender with women risk marginal impacts, as underlying structures are ignored. Such approaches stand to magnify the burden of both care and productive work that women tend to bear, while leaving men’s roles and responsibilities unchallenged.
Of course, tackling gender-power structures is difficult. It has been observed that, among climate projects that focus on gender, there is a tendency to bureaucratize the process of engagement. Gender is a focus, while the power structures that shape gender relations remain intact. On the other hand, those climate efforts that seek to tackle gender-power structures head-on have also run into difficulty, with initiatives being resisted. With these challenges in mind, it is noted that effectively tackling the power structures that reproduce unequal gender outcomes requires close engagement with all the actors involved in a project. Ideally, participation should continue through all stages of a project: selection, design, implementation, and evaluation.

It should be noted that the challenges described above are not novel. Climate interventions are reproducing problems that have plagued development strategies in the past—including gender insensitivity, adopting binary approaches to gender, and bureaucratizing engagements so as to avoid challenging deep-rooted power relations. Unless such issues are tackled, we can expect many of the same outcomes: initiatives will be ignored, and many women could well be left worse off as they take on the new burdens imposed by climate projects. At the same time, interventions are absolutely necessary to both mitigate and adapt to the inevitable impacts climate change will bring, raising the question: What can be done?
WHAT CAN BE DONE?

When considering how to make sure climate projects effectively advance gender justice, it is important to first emphasize that more aggressive action is required to mitigate GHG emissions and limit the increase in average global temperature to safe levels. Development and adaptation are difficult to achieve. Climate change compounds these challenges, not only making development more challenging but also creating new potential risks—such as increasing the burden placed on women’s time. It is a core and now well-understood injustice that those individuals least responsible for climate change will suffer its greatest impacts. While there is more that needs to be done to ensure that climate initiatives provide transformative possibilities for gender justice, an absolute priority should be limiting GHG emissions to safe levels.

Making climate interventions gender just requires centering effort on ensuring that such interventions not only address climate stress but also seek to transform the structural gender relations that constrain women’s choices and undermine their well-being. Doing so requires making radical changes to the material, political, and socio-cultural causes of gender inequality. Achieving such outcomes is unlikely to be possible without placing significant emphasis on understanding the distribution of care work as part of any interventions to address climate change.

However, seeking to “address care work” raises tensions between aiming, on the one hand, to improve the conditions of women’s care work and, on the other, to liberate women from such care work. This tension is acute in cases where women’s role as caregivers affords them status or identity, where it is a source of satisfaction and fulfillment, or where they undertake it despite considerable cost to themselves. The aims in “addressing care” therefore tend to be concerned with offering answers to the questions: “Who should provide care, for whom, and bearing which costs...and which institutions, economic structures, gender norms and public policies would be conducive” to gender equality?

The most prominent framework for balancing these tensions and seeking transformation in care relations is the 3R, 4R, or sometimes 5R framework: Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Represent, and Reward [see Table 2]. Recognition is essential in addressing the injustices that underpin the current unequal distribution of care work. There are three core components to such recognition. First, recognizing care, including environmental care, and its central role in the functioning of society is a necessary part of addressing the patriarchal norms that undervalue care work and underpin the normalization of care work as women’s work.

Second, in the context of climate change, it is important to recognize the degree to which care involves few-to-no GHG emissions (captured in the notion of “care jobs as green jobs”). While this refrain has gained traction in discussions around the “just transition” in the Global North, the distinct context among subsistence livelihoods in low-income countries (where care and productive work are so intertwined) means that it might need further contextualization. Finally, it is thought important to recognize the value of “traditional” knowledge, gained via acts of environmental care, in the development of sustainable and effective climate interventions.

Reduction is identified as central to addressing the pressures placed on carers’ time, thereby addressing some of the injustices and arresting vicious cycles experienced by women when they take on a disproportionate responsibility for care work. Across the literature, investment in basic social services and infrastructure—particularly healthcare, water, sanitation, childcare, and labor-saving technologies—that serve to reduce individual women’s workloads and build resilience without further curtailing their time and self-determination is identified as essential.

Redistribution is thought to be a vital part of reducing the disproportionate responsibility for care work borne by women. Redistribution can be achieved by addressing patriarchal norms that situate care work as women’s work and by tackling the economic hegemony that has individualized care work. Notably, recognition of the importance of care work, and the current distribution of responsibility for it, is thought essential to both of these pursuits. Redistribution includes both the collectivization of care work via investments in social infrastructure, such as health- and childcare, and awareness raising so that patriarchal ideas about who should undertake care and what caring should look like can be challenged so that men and boys do more, and women and girls can do less.

Representation, referring to both political organization and facilitated participation, is identified as of fundamental importance for ensuring that the complicated position of carers is accounted for in the development of any potential solution. This is essential to ensure that efforts at “liberation” don’t undermine sources of power and meaning, and that tensions over care work and identity are suitably navigated. It is important, however, that institutions pursuing representation do so in a manner that does not cause the work of representation to simply compound challenges of excessive care burdens that may already exist. It is further noted that a basic form of representation can be achieved simply through the adoption of processes that systematically require gender-disaggregated data collection in any research or evaluation.

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Table 2. The 5R Framework

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<th>PRINCIPLE</th>
<th>EXPLANATION</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Recognize care work</td>
<td>Acknowledge the nature, extent, and contribution of unpaid care work to human development.</td>
<td>Make care visible in policies; gather qualitative and quantitative data; mainstream care into policies and programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce care work</td>
<td>Reduce the amount of time required to carry out care work by making it more convenient, safer, and less physically and temporally demanding.</td>
<td>Provide social and physical infrastructure that reduces demands on individuals to provide care. State-provided health and childcare services. Labor-saving technologies, e.g., electricity and plumbing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Redistribute care work</td>
<td>Share care work between adult family members (e.g., women and men in heterosexual couple households); challenge norms that make women responsible for care work. Collectivize/socialize care work through state policies, services, and facilities.</td>
<td>Workplace crèches; equal maternity and paternity leave. Media campaigns challenging stereotypes that only women and girls should be responsible for care work and promoting care work among men and boys.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represent care workers</td>
<td>Give care workers a voice in decision-making; gather data that illuminate their lived experiences, concerns, and ideas for change.</td>
<td>Research that centers the lived experiences of women whose lives are dominated by care work; organizations that mobilize and advocate on behalf of carers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reward carers for their work</td>
<td>Pay for hitherto unpaid care work through direct cash transfers or tax rebates.</td>
<td>Mother’s allowances. Carer’s income. Universal basic income.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Reward** is controversial and not endorsed by all experts. While rewarding care work can play an important role in advancing recognition and addressing problems of time being undervalued, the approach has its critics. Forms of reward that are clearly remunerative, paying people for all care work for example, are criticized due to the potential impact of market relations on the flexibility of carers’ time and the manner in which market relations can change the social meaning of caring (with potential impacts for the status that is derived from care). Broader notions of reward and broad-based entitlements, universal basic income for example, have their own debates, which extend beyond the scope of this paper. Notably, the issue of rewarding carers is not identified in any of the literature discussing care work in a context of low-income, agricultural households in less-industrialized countries. It is maintained here not with the intention of resolving debates on this issue, but because it presents a potentially valuable avenue that is worthy of consideration when designing climate initiatives.

Contextualizing the pillars of the 5Rs in terms of climate interventions, the following priority areas are identified:

### 1. Investment in Labor-Saving Technology and Infrastructure

Investments in resilient physical infrastructure will be essential for addressing climate change. Notably, much of the priority infrastructure for protecting well-being under a changed climate also features centrally in concerns about care work. Examples include energy, water and sanitation, agricultural labor-saving technologies, and communications technologies. In cases where synergies between infrastructure for care work and infrastructure for climate can be identified, these should be prioritized. As was pointed out earlier, however, technological and social innovations of these sorts are not guaranteed to address care burdens, with interventions/innovations liable to be counterproductive or ignored if they do not center the experience of carers in the design, implementation, and evaluation of projects/policy. This, in turn, requires attention to the power dynamics shaping gender relations and the care roles and responsibilities that result. In this respect, the introduction of labor-saving technologies can be as much a means for addressing care and climate-related burdens as it can be a space in which gender relations become contested.
Attention to the power dynamics that contextualize new technologies, and which result from them, is therefore imperative to the task of transforming gender injustice in a context of climate change.

2. INVESTMENT IN SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND SUPPORT MECHANISMS

A variety of research, in particular from disaster risk studies, shows that physical infrastructure alone is unlikely to improve well-being without concomitant investments in social infrastructure (or “social protection”). Here again inclusion of the end-users in design and implementation is essential. While the links between social infrastructure and care work are well established, they are less clear in the context of climate change, where it is only very recently that these connections have been identified. The most prominent body of work in this area is the idea of adaptive social protections that combine social protection, disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation. In the Sahel, for example, efforts at adaptive social protection have involved the integration of, among other elements: health, education, nutrition, and family planning. These approaches have highlighted the value of expanding narrow accounts of social protection, focused on social safety nets in times of emergency, to long-term interventions aimed at combatting chronic poverty. Examples include annual employment guarantees, cash and asset transfer programs, and micro-insurance schemes. All these interventions present potential synergies between care and climate work. For example, pensions and grants for those living with disabilities can be rendered transformative in the context of climate change when they aid in managing potentially increased care burdens created by climate impacts among more vulnerable populations. Likewise, investment in healthcare systems can be central for advancing the redistribution of care work and limiting the impact of climate change on existing care burdens. Social infrastructure that is focused on asset classes is potentially most transformative, as it stands to confront gendered entitlements and capabilities. Such an integrated approach, one that is focused on long time-horizons and chronic conditions, is notably different from the market-based focus that tends to dominate economic empowerment initiatives.

3. SHARE AND COLLECTIVIZE CARE WORK AT THE HOUSEHOLD LEVEL

In very low-income rural contexts, state-provided social and physical infrastructure is often lacking. While investments in these domains are incredibly important, it is also the case that, given budgetary constraints and limited institutional capacity, simply calling for the national provision of infrastructure is insufficient. To this end, current infrastructure, both physical and social, in such contexts tends to be informal and manifested at the household, kinship, or community level. At this scale, few initiatives have been identified that link investments in care and climate. Stand-out examples that attempt this linkage pertain to forest conservation efforts that were combined with the establishment of community maternal and sexual healthcare services, or initiatives in which childcare was provided as part of a solar irrigation project. Further to bundling these interventions, another identified approach is to engage men as part of such projects, with the aim being for men to either accept and support women’s empowerment or (ideally) to specifically encourage them to reconsider gender norms and take on a larger load of the domestic work. Combining such activities into climate adaptation and resilience building can be essential for either freeing up women’s time to engage in adaptive or economically empowering work, or simply allowing them more rest time. Changing norms is, of course, challenging. Participatory approaches focused on establishing equitable intrahousehold gender relations, in which working together is identified as a solution from which everyone benefits, have seen some success. On this front, there is evidence to suggest that norm changes propagate intergenerationally.

While it is true that climate change interventions have not historically been well integrated with the dynamics around care work, and there is scope for synergies considering the principles of the 4/5Rs, it is also true that at some point, trade-offs between climate action and care work may be necessary. A likely example is the need for women’s participation and representation in climate initiatives resulting in an increase in their overall workload, especially considering the challenges of norm change and limited scope for public investment in many very low-income agricultural contexts. Pretending that such trade-offs are never necessary, rather than understanding and attending to them, is liable to undermine overall effectiveness, as impacts on care burdens may simply be ignored and care burdens increased or initiatives resisted. Understanding these processes to identify where synergies might exist and where trade-offs might be inevitable is an important area of future research.
The current care crisis is set to be compounded by the impacts of climate change, which will increase the burden of care work and make providing care more difficult. Adding to this challenge is the fact that, if poorly designed or implemented, efforts to address climate change could themselves serve to worsen the care crisis. This would both undermine human well-being and potentially undermine progress on gender equity. The situation among low-income countries and in agricultural contexts is notably worrying, where vulnerability to climate change is greatest and gender norms shaping the unequal distribution of care work are most entrenched. The injustice of the fact that these populations are least responsible for climate change cannot be overlooked. Despite the gravity of this nexus of issues, and notwithstanding the significant growth in the literature on gender and climate change, questions regarding the impact of climate change on care work have largely been ignored within research and policy circles. Addressing this challenge requires more aggressive action to curb emissions. Further, initiatives to mitigate and adapt to climate change need to adopt a gender-transformative approach that is sensitive to the care work that tends to be done disproportionately by women and girls.

While limiting emissions to dangerous levels is a priority, it is also true that climate change is already happening, further mitigation will be required, to some extent, in low-income countries. To this end there is scope for climate initiatives in low-income agricultural contexts to advance gender justice. Achieving this will require such initiatives to adopt a gender-transformative, care-sensitive approach. Based on the literature consulted in this review, the most effective means for achieving gender justice is to pursue the principles laid out in the 4/5R framework in the identification, development, implementation, and evaluation of climate initiatives. For such an approach to be truly transformative requires moving beyond a programmatic and policy focus on women to a focus on challenging the power structures that produce and reproduce gender roles that lead to fundamentally unequal outcomes for men and women—specifically the feminization, individualization, and invisibilization of care work. Given the general trend that women bear a disproportionate responsibility for care work that, in turn, limits possibilities for gender justice, it is also important that care sensitivity be adopted as a stand-alone concern of climate interventions and not simply be subsumed into concerns about gender. It is essential that these power structures be understood as highly context specific and informed by forces that intersect with gender, e.g., class, race, ethnicity, etc. It is further imperative that the woman-man binary be interrogated to understand how care and marginalization manifest for non-conforming individuals and households.

Priority approaches for advancing progress at the nexus of climate and care include:

• Investing in social infrastructure that provides care and collectivizes care work;
• Investing in labor-saving technologies and infrastructures;
• Driving norm change to redistribute individualized care work within households/communities.

As mentioned throughout this research brief, centering the needs of carers in the identification, design, implementation, and evaluation of such programs will be essential to their success, as will locating them in the wider context in which gender roles are reproduced.

Finally, it must be remembered that care work is not new, nor are the challenges to development posed by long-standing ignorance of the needs of the people development interventions are intended to serve. In this respect, climate initiatives are not creating new challenges. Rather, they are reflecting well-established issues in development. It should also be recalled that efforts to advance gender-transformative work are long-standing, as are calls for more research and better data. This is no more clearly articulated than in the 1995 Beijing Declaration, which called for regular time-use surveys in all countries. Twenty-seven years later, we still lack data for large numbers of less-industrialized nations that would allow insights into the gendered distribution of care work. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 further recognizes the imperative of care, calling on states to “recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.” With the impacts of climate change already being felt, and the global ambition on emissions reduction and support for least developed countries currently insufficient, the need to see concrete actions on care grows ever more urgent.
Hoden Abdi Iwal, 36, a married mother of four boys and six girls, lives in Gilo. Pablo Tosco / Oxfam
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