



# Gender-based violence and environment linkages

Summary for policy makers

Itzá Castañeda Camey, Laura Sabater, Cate Owren and A. Emmett Boyer  
Jamie Wen, editor



INTERNATIONAL UNION FOR CONSERVATION OF NATURE



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## Introduction

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This summary for policy makers synthesises key issues, findings and recommendations from IUCN's [\*Gender-based violence and environment linkages: the violence of inequality\*](#) (Castañeda et al., 2020), an expansive publication developed in partnership with USAID. Bringing together existing and new evidence from across sectors and spheres, the publication serves as a robust reference for policy makers, researchers and programming and project practitioners at all levels to understand interlinked issues and forge rights-based, gender-responsive interventions across environment-related contexts. It also informs environment-responsive gender equality interventions, especially those focused on eliminating gender-based violence. Recommendations gear toward leveraging existing tools across sectors and forging cross-sector partnerships. Emphasis is also on urgent action needed to step up investment and innovation.

Published in this critical post-2020 period of environmental decision-making, and with less than a decade to meet the targets of the Agenda 2030 and the overlapping Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this *Summary* collates top considerations and recommendations to support policy makers in addressing and responding to gender-based violence and environment linkages.

### Why does GBV matter for environmental policymaking?

Gender-based violence (GBV) affects the security and well-being of nations, communities and individuals, violating human rights, jeopardising development goals and contributing to cycles of vulnerability at all levels. Rooted in discriminatory gender norms and laws and shrouded in impunity, GBV occurs in all societies around the world as a means of control, subjugation and exploitation that further reinforces gender inequality.

Gender-based violence and gender inequality are pervasive across all environmental contexts. National and customary laws, societal gender norms and traditional gender roles often dictate who can access and control natural resources, which frequently results in the marginalisation of women compared to men and increases vulnerabilities women can face in relation to violence.

**Globally, at least  
1 in 3 women has  
experienced physical  
and/or sexual  
intimate partner or  
non-partner violence.**

Source: World Health  
Organization, 2021

As threats and pressures on the environment and its resources amplify gender inequality and power imbalances in communities and households coping with resource scarcity and societal stress, gender-based attacks and harassment are employed to bar women from exercising their rights over and use of resources—augmenting the loss of traditional knowledge, biodiversity and ecosystem services and resulting in new, more damaging forms of violent control and exploitation.

The linkages between GBV and environmental issues are complex and multi-layered, but these threats to human rights and healthy ecosystems are not insurmountable. Urgent action to end GBV, promote gender equality and protect the environment is crucial and is the responsibility of all. Preventing and responding to GBV in environmental contexts facilitates this action, unlocking opportunities for enhanced conservation, sustainable development, human rights and gender equality.

**Core concepts**

**Gender**, as opposed to biological sex (male/female), is the socio-culturally constructed concept defining what it means to be women or men, or those of diverse gender identities.

**Gender-based violence (GBV)** is any harm or potential of harm perpetrated against a person or group on the basis of gender. The term encompasses many forms and expressions of violence, including but not limited to: physical, sexual and emotional abuse; sexual harassment; stalking; rape, including

“corrective” rape and rape as a tactic of conflict; domestic violence and intimate partner violence (IPV); child marriage; human trafficking; female genital mutilation; property grabbing and widow disinheritance.

A **gender-responsive approach** proactively identifies gender-based gaps, discriminations and biases, and then takes coordinated steps to develop and implement actions to address and overcome them.

Source: IUCN, n.d. [\[website\]](#)



## GBV and environment linkages

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### A. Access to and control over natural resources: Land, forests, agriculture, water and fisheries

Gender-based violence is often employed as a means to maintain power imbalances between men and women and their rights and roles in accessing, using and managing natural resources by violently reinforcing sociocultural expectations and norms and exacerbating gender inequality. Moreover, gender-differentiated roles related to land and resources can also put women in a more vulnerable position to suffer GBV while carrying out daily responsibilities.

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See section 2.1 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV and land

#### A.1 Gender-based violence can be used as a means to enforce land and property grabbing from women and to extort them when they aim to secure it, hindering economic opportunities and the means to abandon abusive relations

1. Perpetrated by both men and women within communities and families, property grabbing – or disinheritance – is a form of economic violence that undermines women's agency to generate land-based income and food separately from a male relative. It is often accompanied by other forms of GBV, from mental and physical harassment and abuse to violently evicting women from their land (Izumi, 2007).
2. Women, especially indigenous women, are also at greater risk of land grabbing for large-scale use – and of other forms of GBV being used to obtain it – due to greater land rights insecurity and intersecting forms of discrimination and violence (Tauli Corpuz, 2015).
3. At times, women are subjected to sexual extortion to gain access to agricultural land and land titles from corrupt authority figures (Transparency International, 2018)
4. Improving women's land rights has numerous benefits, including increasing food security, access to financial opportunities, decision making power and willingness to invest in sustainable land practices. In various contexts, it can also decrease intimate partner violence (IPV) and other forms of GBV. However, the links between GBV rates and increased land rights for women are highly context-specific (Kaiser, Hughes and Richardson,



2015). In some cases, men and boys can perceive shifts in rights as a threat to their power and control over resources (USAID, 2018).

## **A.2 Women are at risk of GBV while accessing and collecting forest resources**

1. In private and protected forests, women can face sexual assault, rape, attacks and harassment when they access and use forest resources. Violence is perpetrated by a range of actors, from forest guards to opportunistic attacks (Wan, Colfer and Powell, 2011). These attacks harm the wellbeing, safety and dignity of people as they work to earn income and meet livelihood needs.
2. When indigenous women are denied access to their territories and resources, it can increase exposure to sexual violence when they resort to migrant labour at plantations. Displacements caused by agricultural developments also deepen poverty as access to traditional crops and jobs disappear and have led families to resort to child marriage to use bride wealth as a coping mechanism (Luithui and Tugendhat, 2013; NIWF et al., 2012). As indigenous women are often holders of traditional knowledge on forest and forest resources management, these violations and vulnerabilities also harm livelihoods and environmental resilience (FIMI, 2006).
3. The unsustainable use of customary-owned forested land by logging companies impacts women deeply. Disputes and corruption relating to logging agreements result in increased domestic violence and women are exploited and coerced to engage in transactional sex to access existing logging infrastructure that should be free (Lipton, 2018).



See section 2.2 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV  
and forests

**A 2014 study by UNHCR found that 42 per cent of 673 refugee households in Chad reported GBV incidents experienced by women and girls while gathering firewood over a six-month span.**

Source: GACC, 2016

## **A.3 In the agricultural sector GBV is used to maintain and reinforce unequal power dynamics within households and in workplaces.**

1. Women can experience domestic violence if they challenge the status quo of unequal decision-making power over agricultural production and yields (Case Study - EN19).
2. In agricultural workforces, male supervisors have been documented abusing their positions and power over income to sexually harass and abuse women, relegating women to dangerous work or limiting hours if their advances are denied (UN Women, 2018b).



See section 2.3 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV  
and agriculture

## **A.4 Women face increased risks of GBV in water collection and management activities**

1. Women experience increased risks, exposure and vulnerability to violent attacks, sexual assault, rape and harassment when conducting water collection. These risks are augmented when water resources are far or in remote areas, a key consideration



See section 2.4 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV and  
water collection and use

as gendered divisions of labour mean women and girls fill the vast majority of this role worldwide (Sommer et al., 2015).

2. Reduced water access due to environmental degradation and rising prices amplify existing patterns that contribute to GBV, such as household and community stress and tensions that can increase domestic violence (IDRC, 2017).
3. Traditional gender norms around water collection can reinforce and perpetuate GBV when those roles are challenged. In many countries in which it is typical for wives or children to collect the water, men who participate in water collection face gender-based harassment from community members. This has a negative impact on men as well as women in the household, as embarrassment can result in increased domestic violence (House et al, 2014).

#### **A.5 In the fisheries sector GBV is used to reinforce gender norms and power dynamics and, given the remoteness and impunity of high seas fishing, it can be linked to human trafficking and sexual exploitation**

1. Domestic and sexual violence is used to keep women away from the most valuable fisheries, which actively applies violence to reinforce gender inequality and discriminatory social norms (Ratner et al., 2014). Physical violence has also been documented as a means to prevent women from participating in decision-making in the fisheries sector, which utilises violence to limit the ability for women to fully participate in economic activities (GBV-ENV survey respondent EN131).
2. At a global scale and in specific countries' fisheries sectors, women and children are trafficked for the purpose of organised sexual exploitation by fishers and seafarers (Organisation for Migration, Indonesian Ministry of Marine Affairs and Fisheries and Coventry University, 2016). Traffickers target impoverished women and girls, offering the promise of work, food and visiting relatives as a way to get women on boats. Once on boats, victims are deprived of documentation and forced on long, dangerous journeys across water (Tory, 2019).
3. 'Sex-for-fish' is a form of sexual exploitation that targets women's livelihood and sustenance needs wherein women are coerced into transactional sex to obtain fish for food or processing and marketing - particularly pervading small-scale fishing enterprises (Béné and Merten, 2008).

**Research in Pakistan shows that GBV is linked to tensions over water use and management. Eighty per cent of those with poor or no access to water experience domestic violence, compared to 10 per cent among those with excellent water supply.**

Source: IDRC, 2017



**See section 2.5 of *The violence of inequality* for more on GBV and fisheries**

**Fishing communities have HIV and AIDS rates four to 14 times higher than national averages, in part due to exploitative 'sex-for-fish' practices.**

Source: Béné & Merten, 2008

## Enabling response options

Strengthening knowledge, data and capacities, and policy enabling conditions to address GBV and natural resource linkages is increasingly important to better understanding context-specific dynamics and potential solutions to these issues.

- Environmental policies and their implementation frameworks can embrace and elevate existing promising practices—including from other sectors such as in humanitarian interventions—that can inform GBV-responsive strategies for environmental contexts. These include investment in women's collective empowerment and agency in the protection of natural resources (Veuthey et al., 2012), engaging men and boys as champions (Tu-Anh Hoang, Trang Thu Quach and Tam Thanh Tran, 2013), investing in research to better understand context-specific GBV dynamics (Global Alliance for Clean Cookstoves, 2016), and conducting women's safety audits in access to and use of natural resources (Travers, Khosla and Dhar, 2011).
- Policy can enable much needed research to better understand diverse dynamics, such as the link between secure land rights and IPV and other forms of violence across countries and communities.
- Environmental decision-making processes and spheres can ensure diverse representation to mitigate gender-blind policies that inadvertently exacerbate GBV. Enabling conditions for gender-responsive decision-making processes include mutual learning, priority setting and cooperation across sectors, including in particular with gender ministries and dedicated GBV-expert organisations.

## B. Environmental pressures and threats: Environmental crimes, extractive industries and agribusiness, and climate change and weather-related disasters

Environmental degradation and natural resource scarcity pose significant threats to ecosystems and livelihoods, resulting in or exacerbating biodiversity loss, food insecurity, poverty, displacement, violence, and loss of traditional and cultural knowledge. Ensuing tension and competition over scarce resources in communities and households amplifies discriminatory and exploitative gender-based inequalities, creating conditions for exacerbated GBV employed as a means of control and reinforcement of power imbalances. In the case of child marriage and other harmful practices, various expressions of GBV are characterised as survival tactics.

### B.1 Environmental crimes are destructive to natural resources and thrive in contexts with limited governance, fostering and relying on human trafficking, exploitative transactional sex, sexual abuse, and forced and/or child labour to enable criminal activities.

1. In the illegal wildlife trade armed poachers use violence, including raiding homes and markets and perpetrating sexual violence against women, to get what they want (Kahumbu, 2014). At the same time,



See chapter 3 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV and  
environmental crime

in response to illegal wildlife trade, law enforcement and communities themselves have sometimes asserted their authority through the militarisation of anti-poaching actions, perpetuating a cycle of violence that can lead to worsening human rights abuses and GBV (Lunstrum, 2014), with counterproductive impacts on conservation (Cooney et al., 2018). These acts of violence destabilise local economies and bring crime, corruption and/or violence into communities.

2. Illegal logging camps exploit local communities, trafficking men into forced labour and women into coerced sex work. Indigenous people in remote regions, often undocumented, are especially vulnerable to labour and sex trafficking by illegal loggers (UNHRC, 2011).
3. Illegal charcoal production and trade is a large and fast-growing portion of the informal economy in sub-Saharan Africa. While the illegal charcoal industry is male-dominated, in some areas women are entering into the trade out of economic necessity where they face exploitation from men, including demands of sexual favours to transport charcoal to markets (Ihalainen et al., 2018).
4. Illegal fishing activities are a major driver of human trafficking abuses, including child labour and forced sex work (Ratner et al., 2014). At fishing ports, women, girls and boys are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence by fishermen, including being kidnapped and imprisoned on fishing vessels (Bondaroff, 2015). In some parts of South Asia, men and boys are deceived into working on fishing boats where they endure dangerous and inhumane working conditions and sexual abuse (Urbina, 2015a).
5. Illegal mining activities often occur in areas controlled by organised criminal networks, meaning that exploitation of natural resources and local communities continues with impunity. Much like other environmental crimes, illegal mining thrives on trafficking people into forced labour and sexual exploitation. Large influxes of men to work in illegal mines drive demand for sexual services, with women and children particularly vulnerable to being sold or misled into sex work (GIATOC, 2016).
6. Using GBV, particularly the use of systematic rape, armed groups further exploit and exacerbate existing gender inequality, patterns of corruption and abuse of power and deprive communities of their resources and revenue when tapping environmental crime – such as illegal mining – as a means to sustain armed conflict and instability (UNEP, 2018a).

**In 2013, during a two-month period, 19 documented cases of rape linked to illegal logging sites in South Sudan were reported to local authorities.**

Source:  
Kiarie-Komondo, 2018

**In La Riconada, more than 4,500 Peruvian and Bolivian girls are trafficked for sexual exploitation by miners in illegal mining areas.**

Source: GI-TOC, 2016

## Enabling response options

Well-documented evidence of GBV related to illegal fisheries and illegal mining, and emerging evidence connected to the illegal wildlife trade and illegal logging, altogether demands urgent attention to tackling gender dynamics and specifically violence connected to environmental crime, including through cross-sector investment and cooperation.

- Environmental policy makers can drive research and information sharing toward better-informed interventions that are needed to address gender-responsive, and specifically

GBV-responsive, environmental crimes legislation and accountability frameworks.

- Gender analyses and value chain analyses that specifically include GBV considerations can aid governments, corporations and other actors in identifying enablers of and strategies to tackle environmental crimes, including through better understanding complex, interlinked socio-ecological root problems that impede implementation of potential sustainable solutions (Responsible Sourcing Tool, n.d.; FAO, 2017b.).

### **B.2 Extractive industries and agribusiness depend on large-scale production to achieve profitability, often resulting in deterioration of local economies, dispossession of land, loss of local livelihoods and degradation of natural resources, the social fabric and corresponding gender roles within communities, which can give rise to GBV.**

1. Large-scale extractive industries and agribusiness plantations can increase sexual exploitation and the commodification of women and girls due to diminished economic opportunities and high concentrations of male workers working in the industries (Barcia, 2017b). Women in local communities who enter into sex work, whether voluntarily or by force, face additional health implications through the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (Gender Action, 2011; Barcia, 2017b; Hill and Newell, 2009), which can cyclically reinforce their exclusion and marginalisation.
2. In some contexts, cultural taboos and superstitions surrounding young girls and virginity drive increased instances of rape and sex trafficking of minors into mining camps (Human Rights Watch, 2011; Lahiri-Dutt, 2011; Gillmore, 2013).
3. Intersecting forms of marginalisation and discrimination put Indigenous women and girls at heightened risk of GBV in mining areas, including facing sexual, verbal and physical harassment by male workers or being forced into sex work (Nightingale et al., 2017). Meanwhile, social and legal barriers impede their ability to seek support and justice.
4. Extractive industries and agribusiness can increase domestic violence increase: in local communities, men typically benefit from related job opportunities and land compensation while women lose access to their land, natural resources and livelihoods – and



See chapter 4 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV and  
extractive and large-scale  
agricultural industries

**In Mali, and estimated 12 per cent of sex workers in mining towns are teenagers trafficked from Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. In Senegal, to 'serve' a gold rush, over 1,000 women and girls were trafficked from Nigeria with the promise of work in Europe.**

Source: HRW, 2011;  
Guilbert, 2017

the resulting eroded economic autonomy increases dependency on husbands and household resource stresses, which underpin violence (Lahiri-Dutt and Mahy, 2007; Hill et al., 2017).

5. Documentation shows that women employed in the agribusiness sector can be subjected to sexual exploitation from male supervisors, who demand sexual favours from women in exchange for employment in agribusiness industries, or before paying women their earned wages (World Rainforest Movement, 2019). The compounded gender-based discrimination, harassment and violence these women face are exacerbated by high rates of poverty and lack of formal employment contracts in the agriculture workforce, meaning that women are less inclined to or prevented from reporting instances of violence in the workplace (Henry and Adams, 2018; FAO, 2011).

**In the area of one gold mine in Canada, 50 per cent of survey respondents, largely indigenous women, reported sexual harassment and assault as prevalent workplace issues, citing that it was among the top three reasons to leave jobs at the mine.**

Source: Nightingale et al, 2017

## Enabling response options

Increasing awareness of the exploitative and violent acts perpetrated against local communities by extractive industries and agribusiness in recent years has opened countless opportunities for ending this violence.

- Policymaking across public and private spheres, including at institutional and corporate levels, can support gender-responsive and specifically GBV-responsive legislation, safeguards including codes of conduct and zero-tolerance of abuse rules, and accountability.
- Raising awareness and attention to GBV within these sectors, including through global, regional and sector-specific alliances, remains critical and can help reform policies and accountability measures to address human rights violations.
- Establishing robust legal frameworks and building enabling conditions to enforce rights-based, gender-responsive approaches is needed along with strengthened capacity of national actors to comply with GBV and human rights standards (ETP, n.d.).
- Identifying promising practices from across industries can inform policymaking and implementation frameworks grounded in training and existing resource guides (IDH, 2017b).

**In the United States, a report estimates that 80 per cent of migrant agricultural workers experience harassment and assault by employers.**

Source:  
FIAN International, 2014

### **B.3 Climate change and weather-related disasters are degrading natural resources, disrupting livelihoods, and damaging infrastructure, which increases tensions and vulnerabilities, fostering a proliferation of GBV.**

1. Post-traumatic stress disorder, loss of property and livelihoods, erosion of community and cultural ties, and scarcity of food and basic provisions in the aftermath of weather-related disasters can increase tension and stress in societies over income and resources. This pressure can increase violent behaviours among men, including domestic violence, as a means to exert control (Dankelman, 2016).
2. Climate change impacts in many countries have put more girls at risk of early marriage as families struggle to cope with impacts and see this as a way to lighten the financial burden in the household and secure their future (UN Women, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2015). However, child marriage is a violation of children's rights with lifelong impacts, including preventing them from getting an education, affecting health and exposing them to higher risk of sexual violence and domestic abuse (Yi, 2018; Freccero and Whiting, 2018).
3. Human traffickers also take advantage of financial and livelihood insecurity felt by vulnerable groups after disasters to target people, especially women and children, into sexual exploitation and human trafficking (Calma, 2017). Cases also exist in which sexual exploitation is perpetrated by humanitarian staff, local leaders and security forces (UNHCR and Save the Children-UK, 2002), including exploiting desperate situations to coerce women to exchange sex for food supplies (Human Rights Watch, 2019).
4. Population displacement due to climate change and weather-related disasters can lead to unsafe and overcrowded conditions in temporary housing and emergency shelters. In these situations of high social and economic stress, women, girls and sexual and gender minorities are at greater risk of experiencing GBV in shelters (Nellemann, et al., 2011; UNHCR, 2011; Dwyer and Woolf, 2018) or when venturing outside to collect firewood often not provided at camps. This can strain relations with the host community and result in measures to prevent women from collecting natural resources, including guards and communities using sexual and physical violence to restrict women's access (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2006).
5. While the impacts of climate change do not always cause violent conflict, climate change is considered a 'threat multiplier' at multiple levels, increasing vulnerability to disasters and fuelling social unrest, potentially leading to violent conflict (Rüttinger, 2017). These compounding and potentially reinforcing risks contribute to gender inequality and strengthen conditions for GBV to thrive (International Development Committee of the UK Parliament, 2013; Robleto-Gonzalez, 2014).



See chapter 5 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV and  
climate change

**Human trafficking  
increases by 20-  
30 per cent during  
climactic disasters.**

Source: Nellemann et al., 2011

**In Bangladesh,  
93 per cent of survey  
respondents reported  
that climate change  
and weather disaster  
shelters were not seen  
as 'women-friendly'.**

Source: Khan Foundation  
and ARROW, 2015

**In six months in West  
Darfur, 82 per cent  
of 297 cases of rape  
treated in clinics  
occurred while women  
conducted daily tasks  
such as water and  
firewood collection.**

Source: MSF, 2005

**In Vanuatu, after two  
tropical cyclones,  
there was a 300 per  
cent increase in new  
domestic violence  
cases in 2011.**

Source: UN Women Fiji, 2014



## Enabling response options

GBV undermines the success of disaster-risk reduction; climate adaptation, mitigation and resilience building; and peacebuilding measures.

- Enabling policy environments can recognise the linkages between these issues, creating momentum for, partnerships around, and investments directed to strengthening attention and awareness through cross-sector gender-responsive data collection, analysis and application.
- Climate policy makers and planning can learn from, adapt and utilise promising interventions from across sectors, including the humanitarian and emergency response sectors, which have

experience and validated methodologies to respond to GBV in disaster contexts.

- Policy makers can identify and promote enabling conditions for promising practice, including drawing from cross-sector interventions that have made strides in addressing these interlinked issues. For example, by building climate resilience through dedicated attention to and strategies to address GBV (Case study EN37), integrating GBV strategies and trainings in disaster response plans (SRCS, 2018), and raising awareness on women's rights and the intersection of child marriage and climate issues (UN Women, 2017; Climate Justice Resilience Fund, 2019).

## C. Environmental action: Women environmental human rights defenders and environmental work and workplaces

Gender-based discrimination in social, cultural, legal, economic and institutional frameworks affects the ability of women and girls to equally and safely participate in, influence, benefit and lead in environment-related activism and organisational conservation efforts and programming. In these contexts, GBV is used to assert power imbalances and violently discourage or stop women from speaking out for their rights, working toward and benefiting from a safe and healthy environment. This includes violence faced by women environmental human rights defenders, gender-based violence and discrimination in environmental work and workplaces, and violence as a result of environmental action, including projects across sectors; which ultimately undermines and can even reverse progress on meeting environmental goals.

### C.1 Gender-based violence against women environmental human rights defenders is on the rise to discourage and silence them as they lead in the protection of natural resources and the environment from increasing environmental threats.

1. Although women environmental human rights defenders (WEHRD) experience and are exposed to the same risks and types of violence as other defenders, they face gender-specific risks and violence. This includes threats of rape, intimidation, criminalisation and acts of misogyny (Barcia, 2017; Okech et al, 2017), especially as they defy cultural and gender



See chapter 6 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV and  
environmental human  
rights defenders

**In 2017, an average of four environmental human rights defenders (EHRD) were killed per week for opposing threats to territory and the environment, including agribusiness, mining and extractives, poaching and logging.**

Source: Global Witness, 2018



norms, and assume the traditional masculine behaviour of speaking out and refusing to be silenced (Facio, 2015; Barcia, 2017 and Meffe et al., 2018).

2. Women defenders also experience targeted social, psychological and cyber GBV as ways to undermine their credibility, including by calling them “prostitutes” and “home wreckers” and circulating altered photos of them online (Angel and Kihara, 2017).
3. WEHRDs—typically caretakers of the home and family—often face a double burden when they (attempt to) assume roles as full-time activists. WEHRDs who are mothers are repeatedly stigmatised, ostracised from their communities and labelled as ‘bad mothers’ for leaving their children at home when off working to defend their environment and community (Hurtes, 2018). In some cases, the violence against WEHRDs extends to threats to their families, for example threats of having their children taken away (Hurtes, 2018).
4. Indigenous communities are often on the frontlines of defending their territories, resources and rights from extractive projects and corporate interests (Wijdekop, 2017a). Many indigenous women joining in efforts to defend the environment face intersecting and reinforcing forms of gender-based and other violence, due to a long history of discrimination associated with racism, socioeconomic and political marginalisation.

**Between 2015 and 2016, 609 acts of violence were recorded in Mexico and Central America against Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders (WEHRDs).**

Source:

IM-Defensoras from Lopez and Vidal, 2015; Osorio et al., 2016

## Enabling response options

More attention, investment and action is urgently needed to address violence against women and men EHRDs, first as a human rights obligation, and also in support of a safe and healthy environment for all.

- Environmental policies and decision-making processes can empower, protect and ensure representation of diverse women and men EHRDs, including to ensure access to services and accountability for legal frameworks already in place but insufficiently implemented.
- Legally binding agreements, such as the Escazú Agreement, can be pursued, strengthened and ratified at the national, regional and international levels as a fundamental step to protecting women and men defenders (Bárcena, 2018; ECLAC, 2018).
- Burgeoning data efforts to collect and communicate information on the situation of WEHRDs in some regions can be promoted and amplified, including as a means to identify and replicate promising practice (Osorio et al, 2016).

## **C.2 Gender-based violence can occur in environmental workplaces, particularly when patterns of gender inequality and discrimination create a culture of impunity.**

1. Gender-based bias and discrimination affects and determines the roles that different women fill, including assumptions about competencies and opportunities for advancement, which is recognised as a hazard and risk that increases the likelihood of GBV – such as verbal and non-verbal abuse, psychological and sexual harassment, bullying, mobbing, and threats – at work. Manipulating a person's reputation, isolating a person, withholding information, giving impossible goals and deadlines, or assigning tasks that do not match capabilities have been documented as forms of bullying and psychological harassment that are used to control the roles and advancement opportunities of women in workplaces (ILO, 2017).
2. Women engaged in environmental work face varied GBV. As park rangers, women face forms of GBV related to the type of work they engage in, including the risk of rape and murder by not only poachers (Hinsliff, 2019) but colleagues as well – particularly in work cultures where discrimination, sexual harassment and hostile work environments are compounded by significant power disparities and geographically isolated workplaces (Case Study SP05; CFI Group, 2017; Office of Inspector General, United States Department of the Interior, 2016; Mathekga, 2017).
3. In national parks, surveys show that multiple and reinforcing layers of discrimination anchor women's experiences of violence in the workplace (CFI Group, 2017). Influenced by imbalanced power relationships due to gender, race and ethnicity, disability, health status, sexual orientation, migrant status, age, education, and poverty (ILO, 2017), young women, women from ethnic minorities and those who identify as gender or sexual minorities experience higher rates of harassment (CFI Group, 2017).

## **C.3 Gender-based violence that is instigated, exacerbated or ignored by environmental projects and programmes threatens the wellbeing and safety of communities, as well as the success and sustainability of environmental strategies and outcomes.**

1. Environmental interventions, such as the creation and management of protected areas, can have negative unintended impacts on the livelihoods, economies and social dynamics of local communities. For instance, restrictions on resource and land use can negatively affect women's safety from sexual assault and harassment while other projects can inadvertently impact local gender dynamics and socio-economic conditions, thereby inadvertently exacerbating intra-household conflict and domestic violence (Tauli-Corpuz et al., 2018).
2. Context specific gender dynamics and drivers of violence are important to explicitly consider in implementing gender-responsive programming; for example, in some cases, women and girls may face violence



See section 7.1 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV and  
workplaces

**In 2017,  
39 per cent of survey  
respondents from  
the United States  
National Park  
Service reported  
having experienced  
harassment and/or  
assault.**

Source: CFI Group, 2017



See section 7.2 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV and  
environmental work

as a means to keep them from participating in environmental and conservation projects, to the detriment of the projects (GBV-ENV survey respondent SP33; GBV-ENV survey respondent EN53).

3. Data on abuses of power and perpetration of GBV by staff of environmental and conservation organisations is not known. Underreporting of abuses across sectors is a pervasive issue, not least as it makes the scale of abuse difficult to define, much less tackle (UK Parliament's International Development Committee, 2018). When incidents do become known, the response is episodic, with an intense initial reaction that quickly fades, which can lead to inadequate implementation of the resulting policies and responses to the allegations (Edwards, 2017; UK Parliament's International Development Committee, 2018).

## Enabling response options

Undermining safety, well-being, health and agency, as well as career progression and professional influence, GBV in environmental workplaces creates a culture that negatively impacts the ability of diverse women to fully advance in, shape, contribute to and benefit from environmental work and conservation and sustainable development outcomes.

- Policy makers can reinforce, reform and/or strengthen standards, including legal frameworks and grievance and redress mechanisms, to communicate and enforce rules and expectations in relation to zero-tolerance to all forms of GBV, in alignment with ILO Violence and Harassment Convention.
- Policy makers can support enabling conditions, including capacity and resources, to ensure environmental workplaces are safe for all, including by leveraging learning and best practice across sectors to advance gender equality strategies, targets and outcomes.
- Policy frameworks can drive priority-setting and investments to identify and fill data gaps, particularly in workspaces where evidence of GBV demands more attention, research, gender-responsive analysis and application toward improved rights-based and environmental outcomes, such as protected areas.
- Policies at multiple levels can also reflect and integrate various promising practices that exist to address GBV across sector-specific and cross-sector programming, investment and interventions to help inform prevention and response strategies across the environmental sector. These include establishing GBV safeguards and minimum standards for institutions and programmes (GEF, 2018) and empowering women, including GBV survivors, economically and as social norms change agents in protected areas combating illegal wildlife trade, which has proven to improve conservation outcomes (Case Study EN11; IAPF, n.d.; Mander, 2019; Sahgal, 2014; Aldred, 2016; UNDP 2018; Darabi, 2015).
- Environmental policymaking processes can recognise the various forms of discrimination and GBV that affects diverse people's ability to access and influence decision-making spheres; intentional quotas, minimum-standard representation standards and other affirmative actions can help, as can designating resources to ensure gender-responsive participation and representation.



## Top-line recommendations

While knowledge and data gaps exist across sectors, sufficient qualitative and quantitative information exists to both paint a clear picture of GBV-environment linkages and inspire urgency in attention, innovation and investment to address the nexus. Decision-making processes and policymaking at multiple levels, across sectors, can be critical opportunities to enact change.

Understanding the diverse, context-specific dimensions of GBV-environment interlinkages is critical for effective policymaking, planning and interventions across sectors, as these issues influence one another in various ways that can hinder or even reverse progress. In multiple international policy frameworks; donor, aid and finance mechanism priorities; and sustainable development organisations' strategies and plans, matters pertaining to both GBV (including prevention of and response to violence) and environment (including conservation and sustainable development) tend to be crosscutting but rarely linked, masking potential risks for exacerbating violence and/or environmental degradation alike. Bringing these interlinkages into priority focus offers a chance to develop strategic measures for new and renewed efforts toward meeting human rights and international sustainable development commitments. The following are among the key recommendations for policy makers.



See chapter 8 of  
*The violence of inequality*  
for more on GBV and  
environmental policies  
and action

### International policy makers

- Assess gender and GBV considerations within international policy frameworks, as well as the state of GBV and environment issues across sectors, and identify policy gaps that could be addressed, including through regional cooperation.
- Steer attention to and include GBV-environment considerations in relevant international policies, strategies and planning instruments, and in international funding mechanisms.
- Develop and resource gender action plans that can support gender-responsive policy implementation, coherence and accountability, including to specific elevate attention and resources to GBV in relation to natural resource access and control and environment stressors and threats.
- Evaluate how social and environmental standards and safeguards can be strengthened through the inclusion of GBV considerations in sector-specific and cross-sector policy frameworks.

## National policy makers

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- Assess gender and GBV considerations within sectoral and cross-sectoral national policy frameworks, as well as gender-environment linked issues, identifying policy and implementation gaps that could be addressed.
- Advocate for and ensure alignment of national environmental policies, strategies and planning instruments with GBV standards, policy frameworks and local laws.
- Integrate GBV considerations within national environmental mechanisms and processes (e.g., Nationally Determined Contributions, Climate Change Gender Action Plans, National Strategies and Action Plans) and reporting instruments (e.g., national reports submitted to the multilateral environmental agreement processes, to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women committee, etc.).
- Ground policymaking in cross-sectoral gender analyses that look at GBV-environment links.
- Allocate resources to build capacities across agencies and improve accountability; advocate for parliamentary caucuses to allocate sufficient domestic resources to eradicate GBV.
- Allocate resources to both research and fund GBV interventions in environmental programming.

## Environment and development institutions, including funders

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- Recognise the importance of GBV and the GBV-environment linkages by developing and adopting institutional policies, strategies, plans, procurements and other mechanisms to address them.
- Ensure policies are flexible enough, for example for guiding programme implementation, to be able to steer resources to prevent violence as well as to adjust project budgets to respond to violence and support survivors, if and every time needed
- Ensure social and environmental safeguards and screening (and corresponding policies) include attention to GBV specifically.
- Establish, resource and ensure accountability for zero-tolerance GBV and harassment policies at the workplace and require the same of partners.
- Invest in awareness raising and capacity building, including through tools, trainings and technical support, across staff and peer networks, on gender and GBV, including to implement GBV-responsive gender and social inclusion policies and frameworks.
- Require gender analyses to inform programme and project development and implementation.
- Always ensure diverse women's groups, gender experts, and GBV experts are integral participants of each process, including decision-making processes to design and ensure accountability for policies.
- Establish gender-responsive and GBV accountability mechanisms to track, analyse and communicate progress on gender equality policy commitments.

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## Case studies

All the case studies and survey responses mentioned in this *Summary* were provided to IUCN authors anonymously:

Case Study EN11

Case Study EN19

Case study EN37

Case Study SP05

GBV-ENV survey respondent EN53

GBV-ENV survey respondent EN131

GBV-ENV survey respondent SP33





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