



WOMEN'S VOICES FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

Practices, resistance and perspectives
of empowerment in South Kivu

*When women take care of the land,
they also take care of the Community*







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Supported by the Women's International Peace Centre and the
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Research Team:

Nathalie Ndimubanzi, Joseph Lubunga,
Judith Maroy and Iragi Daniel .

Editorial Team:

Juliet Were, Patience Nakiranda

Correspondence:

Please address all correspondence to Club Zaida Catalan

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

WITH	Village Savings and Loan Associations
CCFD	Catholic Committee Against Hunger and for Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FBA	Folke Bernadotte Academy
FEMNET	African Women's Rights Network
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
UN	United Nations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This report is the result of participatory social study conducted in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe and the city of Bukavu (South Kivu Province, DRC). It aims at making women's contributions to climate justice, at promoting their ecological resilience practices, and at analyzing the obstacles that hinder their inclusion in environmental governance.

In a context marked by increasingly perceptible climate change: unpredictable rains, violent winds, prolonged droughts, accelerated deforestation, floods, declining soil fertility; women emerge as key players in adaptation and social transformation. Responsible for the daily management of natural resources, they initiate concrete actions in their communities: reforestation, production of ecological briquettes, biomass, livestock farming, sustainable agriculture, plastic recycling, collective nurseries, community awareness raising and water management.

Despite this commitment, women are still underrepresented in decision-making platforms. The identified obstacles are numerous and structural: the weight of patriarchal norms, lack of access to land, financing, and information, persistent insecurity, excessive domestic workload, low self-esteem among some women, and institutional reluctance to recognize their role.

Yet, data collected from more than 100 participants (women leaders, members of cooperative societies, NGO leaders, local authorities, and male allies) reveals a living reality: women are mobilizing, innovating, influencing those around them, and strengthening community resilience. Several testimonies show how women have transformed their practices, generated income through ecological activities, or reduced domestic violence by becoming financially independent.

The report identifies the tools to be activated to strengthen their power to act:



Concrete recommendations are made for **policymakers, donors, and civil society organizations** to strengthen inclusive, equitable, and sustainable climate governance.

This report is intended to be both an advocacy tool, a call for mobilization of resources and a collective record of women's ecological struggles in a region that is at the crossroads of climate, gender and peace issues.

INTRODUCTION



I.1 Climate crisis, peace and social justice

Climate change is now a multidimensional global challenge. Beyond being an environmental issue, it is also a threat to peace, security, and social justice, particularly in the contexts of structural vulnerability (Saboori & Sulaiman, 2013; IPCC, 2022). In sub-Saharan Africa, where economies rely heavily on natural resources, the effects of climate change are compromising living conditions, increasing inequalities, and undermining social balances.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), despite having the second largest tropical forest in the world, the country is among the most vulnerable according to the Global Climate Risk Index (German watch, 2021). In the province of South Kivu, this vulnerability is manifested through an intensification of climatic hazards: unpredictable rains, prolonged droughts, deadly landslides, massive deforestation, accelerated soil degradation, conflicts linked to access to land and water resources (USAID, 2020; Heri -Kazi & Bielders , 2020).

Rural communities in South Kivu are bearing the brunt of these upheavals. The climate is no longer perceived as a natural cycle but as a diffuse threat, fueling fears and daily uncertainty. In Kabare, Kalehe, and Bukavu, residents report "seasons gone wild," "constant heat," and a "loss of agricultural bearings," according to the testimonies collected in this study.

I.2 Women, first exposed, last consulted

In this context of extreme vulnerability, women are at the forefront of the consequences of climate change. As those responsible for subsistence farming, water collection, firewood collection, and household food supply, they directly experience resource scarcity, land degradation, and ecosystem erosion (FAO, 2014; Balasha et al., 2021). The impact is all the more severe as women rarely have land titles, access to agricultural inputs, or decision-making power over the use of natural resources.

Yet, despite their crucial role in day-to-day ecological management, women remain largely absent from environmental planning processes, institutional climate management frameworks, and climate financing mechanisms (UN Women, 2022; FEMNET, 2023). The majority of participants interviewed in this study emphasized that they had never been consulted in decisions related to environmental protection in their locality.

The obstacles identified are numerous: patriarchal norms, low literacy, domestic overburden, persistent insecurity, lack of financial support, and lack of institutional recognition. Several testimonies also reveal persistent self-censorship, fueled by years of social marginalization: "Some women think they have nothing to say," confides a respondent from Bukavu.

1.3 Invisible agents of change

Beyond their role as victims, the women of South Kivu are above **all, key players of resilience, adaptation and ecological transformation**. In Kabare, they develop community nurseries for reforestation; in Kalehe, they make ecological briquettes from agricultural waste; in Bukavu, they transform collected plastics into paving stones and garbage cans; elsewhere, they create rotational credit systems (AVEC) to support agroecological activities.

These initiatives, though local and often informal, have a tangible impact on the environment, economic empowerment, and social cohesion. Some women proudly share of how planting trees has enabled them to send their children to school or gain independence from domestic violence. Others point out that ecological solidarity has helped bring together historically divided communities, particularly between the Bantu and Pygmy women.

Despite this, few of these actions are captured in public policies, provincial adaptation plans or climate finance programs. As one local

actor points out: *“Our women are taking action, but no one sees them, let alone being listened to.”*

1.4 A report to document, recognize and mobilize

Given these findings, it is crucial to **document women's concrete contributions** to climate justice, not only to make them visible, but also to equip future advocacy and political influence by highlighting the efforts of the women of Kabare, Kalehe, and Bukavu. This participatory social study is aimed at filling the gap often observed in public policies: the absence of qualitative and contextual data on local knowledge, resilience practices, and innovations carried out by women in rural communities.

As highlighted by several international reports (UN Women, 2022; IPCC, 2022), women are not just “victims” of climate change: they are key players in adaptation, mitigation, and ecological transformation. Recognizing and strengthening their role is a tool for building inclusive, sustainable environmental peace rooted in local realities.

This study therefore has a dual purpose:



To recognize and value the actions and experiences of women in climate justice, often ignored or made invisible;

To produce an accessible data base for communities, partners and decision-makers, in order to inform future advocacy and public policies in favor of more inclusive climate governance.

The study is based on a qualitative, feminist, and participatory methodology. It relies on semi-structured interviews, focus groups, field observations, and literature review in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe, and the city of Bukavu. It gives voice to more than 100 people, primarily rural women, but also local authorities, committed men, religious leaders, and local organizations.

1.5 Study Questions

The participatory social study envisaged within the framework of this project is structured around a central question which guides the entire process of data collection and analysis: **How do women in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe and the city of Bukavu contribute to climate justice and environmental preservation, and what does their experience reveal about the gaps that need to be filled to ensure their effective inclusion in environmental governance processes?**

By shedding light on these issues, this study aims at becoming a tool not only for social and institutional mobilization, political advocacy, but also serve as a platform for intergenerational records and transmission of a peaceful environment that is inclusive, equitable and sustainable environmental peace.

1.6 Objectives of the study

This study is part of a deliberate move to promote initiatives led by women in the fight against climate change, while contributing to the creation of useful information on actions for future advocacy, community mobilization and the formulation of inclusive policies.

a) General objective:

To highlight women's contributions to climate justice in the territories of Kabare and Kalehe, and in the city of Bukavu, by analyzing their practices, knowledge and perspectives, in order to identify the tools and obstacles for a more inclusive environmental governance.

To answer this in depth, the study also explored the following sub-questions:

1. What forms of commitment, know-how or innovation are women mobilizing to address the impacts of climate change in their communities?
2. What social, cultural, economic or institutional challenges affect the recognition, support or extension of their ecological initiatives?
3. How do women perceive their role in the management of natural resources and what are their aspirations regarding participation in environmental decisions?
4. What conditions, approaches or strategies could sustainably strengthen their ecological leadership and their capacity to influence local climate policies?



b) Specific objectives:

1. To identify and promote initiatives, practices and forms of engagement carried out by women in response to the effects of climate change in their communities.
2. To analyse the obstacles, inequalities and factors of exclusion that hinder the full and meaningful participation of women in decision-making platforms related to environment and climate.
3. To generate an accessible and contextualized report that can serve as a tool for raising awareness, mobilization and advocacy in favor of climate justice based on gender equality.

1.7 Methodology

1.7.1 A feminist, participatory and contextualized approach

The methodology adopted for this study is based on a **qualitative, participatory and feminist approach**, focused on the life experiences of women in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe and the city of Bukavu. It was designed to recognize women not as mere informants, but as **co-producers of knowledge**, holders of practices, stories and analyses essential for a detailed understanding of climate justice in a local context.

This methodological stand is inspired by the principles of **feminist action research** (Harding, 1987; Haraway, 1991), which values situational knowledge, reflexivity, active listening, and equity in the relationship between researchers and the respondents. Far from imposing an external framework,

the survey was constructed with respect for community dynamics, local rhythms, and the priorities expressed by the women.

1.7.2 Data collection techniques

Several qualitative tools were used to promote an in-depth exploration of the practices, perceptions, know-how and obstacles linked to the involvement of women in climate justice:

a) **Individual semi-structured interviews**

In-depth interviews were conducted with women community leaders, members of women's cooperative societies, local NGO leaders, cultural authorities, and male key-players involved in environmental initiatives. The objective was to collect real-life accounts of concrete examples of practices, analyses of local climate change, and proposals for action.



In Bukavu, Marlene Nabintu of Badilika Youth Association explained how her plastic recycling activities have raised awareness among more than 200 women and developed alternative sources of income for households. In Kabare, Dunia Buringanine, from the CRCM Cooperative Society, shared how the seedlings distributed in the community have facilitated the schooling of children.

b) **Focus groups**

Homogeneous focus groups were organized in the three geographical areas, bringing together members of cooperative societies,

rural women, local facilitators, and young women. These collective discussions helped identify shared representations, collective practices, and possible solutions.



In Kabare, one of the focus groups gave rise to a powerful testimony from a woman explaining how the trees she had planted 15 years earlier helped pay for the education of her children, one of whom is now a priest.

c) Participant observation

The team took part in several activities led by women's organizations, including reforestation, production of eco-friendly briquettes, and awareness-raising sessions. This involvement provided an opportunity for them to understand social dynamics, working conditions, gender roles, and solidarity mechanisms.



Example: In Kalehe, women showed the team how they produce paving stones from recycled plastic, despite lack of material resources.

d) Literature review

A review of existing work allowed us to carry out the study in a regional and national landscape that is still partially explored. It was based on publications by NGOs, UN agencies, African researchers and feminist networks (UN Women, FEMNET, Akina Mama wa Afrika, FBA, CCFD, etc.).

1.7.3 Strategic sampling

The selection of respondents was based on an intentional sampling, aimed at capturing the diversity of experiences while ensuring a strong representation of rural women. A total of **110 people** were consulted, according to this distribution:

Table 1: Sample distribution

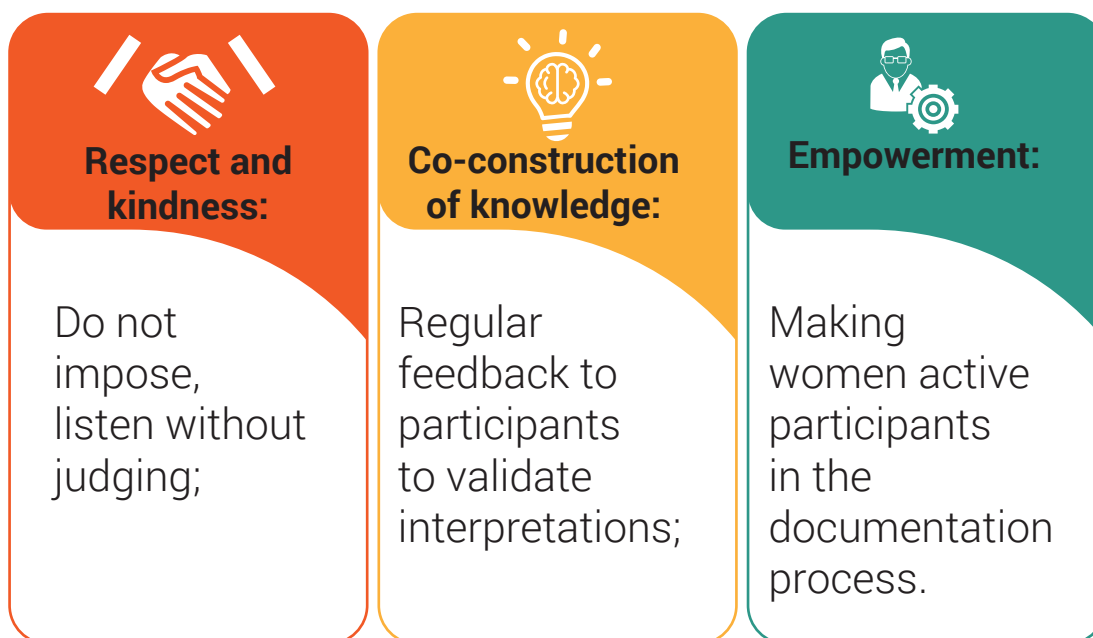
Category	Total number	Distribution by territory (Kabare/Kalehe/Bukavu)	Distribution by gender
Women community leaders	40	15 / 15 / 10	100% women
Members of women's cooperatives	30	15 / 15 / 0	100% women
Organization leaders	15	5 / 5 / 5	100% women
Local authorities and influential people	15	5 / 5 / 5	50% women / 50% men
Male partners	10	4 / 4 / 2	100% men

This approach ensures a strong representation of female voices (nearly 90%) while integrating male perspectives that are often influential in environmental governance.

1.7.4. Ethics and consent

All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and gave their clear consent before participating in interviews or focus groups. Confidentiality was respected, and names were anonymized in published excerpts unless explicitly agreed otherwise.

The ethical stand was based on three fundamental principles:



FINDINGS



II.1 Concrete and diverse practices carried out by women to address climate change

In the territories of Kabare, Kalehe, and the city of Bukavu, women play a crucial role in environmental resilience. Often left out in the process of making public policies and decisions, they are nevertheless at the forefront of a multitude of local ecological initiatives. Their actions, carried out both individually and collectively, aim at responding to the growing effects of climate change while supporting the economic and social dynamics of their communities.

The women of Kabare, Kalehe, and Bukavu are involved in multiple activities such as reforestation, composting, waste management, the production of ecological briquettes, sustainable agriculture, field irrigation, raising community awareness, and the recycling of plastic waste. These practices address ecological, economic, and social issues. For example, reforestation, a key activity in the three territories, has not only restored ecosystems but also reduced pressure on natural parks. As one woman from Kabare put it: *"It's positive because women, as housewives, used to look for fire wood in the park, and now they can find it more easily in the local area."*

In Bukavu and Kabare, the production of eco-friendly briquettes made from plant waste offers an alternative to charcoal, reducing deforestation while generating income. In Kalehe, women, facing forced displacement due to landslides, have initiated tree-planting campaigns to prevent soil erosion, while

involving the youth in activities that offer alternatives to idleness and crime. These initiatives demonstrate that women are not simply enduring the effects of climate change: they are actively responding to them with innovative, adapted, and sustainable solutions.

II.1.1 The relationship between climate justice and economic empowerment:

Several testimonies show that women's ecological activities are closely linked to their economic survival strategies. In Kabare, training programs in agricultural management during the rainy season have enabled women to improve their yields, while in Bukavu, women's cooperative societies transform plastic waste into paving stones, thus combining urban sanitation and the creation of green jobs. One participant emphasizes: *"The empowerment of women, through these activities, is starting to generate some income for our households."*

By promoting local biodiversity and integrating sustainable practices, women are developing a small-scale circular economy that strengthens food security, financial independence and resilience for their families.

II.1.2 Climate justice, a powerful tool for social cohesion

Climate justice initiatives play a significant role in strengthening social cohesion, particularly by building bridges between different communities. The example of Pygmy women and women from other communities in Kabare perfectly illustrates this phenomenon. Collaboration on environmental projects, such as making ecological embers or communal gardening, has fostered positive interactions

and increased mutual understanding. These activities create platforms for dialogue and sharing, helping to overcome previously existing prejudices and misunderstandings.

Nabintu's testimony is eloquent:



“ Since we started activities in our group, we have become very close and the misunderstandings that once existed between us are gradually disappearing. When making our ecological embers or during our communal gardening, for example, we are compelled to talk, to ask each other for services, and this brings us closer. ”

This closeness, coming from a collective action in favor of the environment, contributes to forging bonds of solidarity and building a more inclusive and harmonious community.

II.1.3 Education and transmission as tools of transformation:

Another major aspect of women's involvement

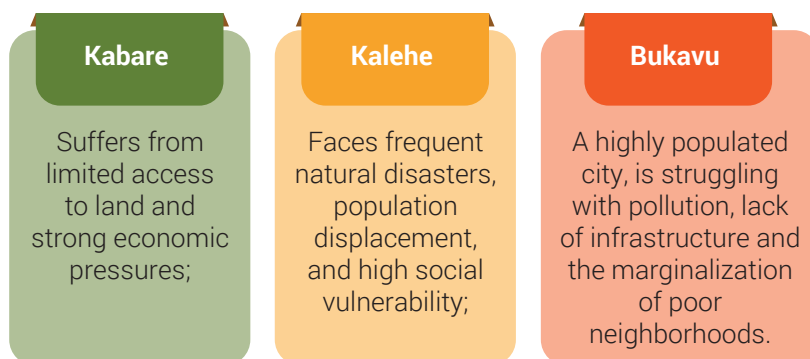
is their role in awareness-raising. They regularly organize community campaigns, educate the youth, and pass on the knowledge they have acquired to their peers. This educational role contributes to changing attitudes in communities. A woman from Bukavu testifies: *“Today, people are fighting for waste, something that couldn't be done before.”*

This dynamics of intergenerational transmission is essential for establishing a communal ecological culture. Women thus become vectors of long-term **behavioral change**.

II.1.4 A differentiated response according to the territories:

While the practices are similar in their purpose (protecting the environment and building resilience), they vary according to local priorities. In Kabare, the focus is on economic empowerment through briquette making and the improvement of local resources. In Kalehe, the women focus their efforts on community engagement, youth mentoring, and reforestation. In Bukavu, a more urban area, plastic waste management and sanitation take precedence.

These differences are explained by specific contextual challenges:



By adapting their actions to their realities, the women of these territories are building relevant and grounded responses.

II.2 Structural obstacles to women's participation in climate justice

Despite their active involvement and central role in community ecological practices, women in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe,

and the city of Bukavu face a series of structural obstacles that limit their effective participation in environmental initiatives and climate governance. These barriers, often rooted in patriarchal social norms, precarious economic conditions, and lack of institutional recognition, hinder the full potential of their actions. Analysis of the testimonies collected highlights several categories of challenges.

Figure 1: Obstacles that prevent strong involvement of women

First of all, women participate in our activities and others do not participate because they are not well informed. They continue to believe that that planting a tree is a man's job. Supposedly, it is he who will build a house with it or make excavations with it ...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Too many household chores - Lack of money or support - Not enough training - Traditions that limit their role - Lack of security in certain areas 	Stereotypes. It was known that women shouldn't plant trees. But we have started showing men that it is	Lack of interest. Some women don't know the importance of given race. Sometimes we give them...	Lack of means, resources. Also lack of knowledge
They are there and they participate as they can, and they were beaten slapped but also they were made to pay a lot of fines in the park, there is also the problem of poverty	The local culture does not yet allow women to value themselves and value what they do, but with time this will happen.	Reforested land is sometimes land where animals graze which does not allow trees to grow. Sometimes	Social norms that are hard or prejudiced. A woman should not cut down a tree because if she does, it will destroy the tree.	Problem of fertilizers, materials and financing
		Lack of involvement of women in decision-making. Some women have a negative attitude to community work		

a. **Deeply rooted social norms and gender stereotypes**

Many of the women interviewed spoke of cultural representations that condition their role in society, relegating environmental activities to men. A widespread perception is that reforestation or waste management are “masculine” tasks. As one woman from Kabare put it: *“It was believed that women should not plant trees.”* These stereotypes are reinforced by the absence of outstanding female role models in the fields of ecology, sustainable agriculture, or environmental governance. In many cases, women themselves internalize these limitations and self-exclude, due to a lack of confidence or fear of social stigma.

b. **An overwhelming domestic load and lack of time**

The unequal distribution of domestic tasks is a major obstacle to women’s mobilization. They must juggle childcare, housework, gardening, and social obligations, with little support or recognition. One woman testified: *“Too many household chores prevent us from participating in village activities.”* This daily overwork leaves little room for active participation in community initiatives, let alone leadership roles in collective or advocacy structures.

c. **Extreme economic precariousness: a cross-cutting barrier**

Structural poverty is one of the main obstacles to women’s commitment. In all three territories, women lack the financial resources to invest in ecological activities or access training. They live in the urgency of daily survival, which makes it difficult for them to sustain their involvement in reforestation, recycling, or ecological production projects.

A woman in Kalehe sums it up: *“We have too many needs. How can we plant trees if we don’t even have enough to eat?”*

Adding to this economic precariousness, particularly in Kabare and Kalehe, is the problem of access to land. Most of the women interviewed are neither landowners nor concessionaries. Even when they have seedlings or seeds, the lack of access to land represents a considerable obstacle. Moreover, their decision-making capacity is limited even when they have access to land, which generally belongs to their husbands. One participant explains: “It also happens that we have seedlings or seeds; but no land. And when we do have them, we don’t have any decision-making power because they belong to our husbands.” This situation of land dependence reinforces women’s vulnerability and limits their autonomy in implementing climate justice initiatives. Access to land and control over land resources are therefore essential elements to consider for women’s effective participation in climate justice.

The lack of financial support, microcredit or incentive mechanisms seriously hinders the sustainability of ecological actions carried out by women.

d. **A glaring lack of appropriate training and information**

Another significant barrier is the lack of awareness, technical training, and access to environmental information. Several women reported having only an intuitive understanding of climate change, with no explicit link to their practices or rights. One participant said, *“I haven’t had the opportunity*

to participate in any climate training.”

The lack of appropriate technical support prevents women from taking ownership of environmental issues, especially in rural areas. This situation perpetuates a vicious cycle of exclusion and political inaction.

e. Lack of access to decision-making frameworks and environmental dialogues

Despite their active role in ecological practices, women are rarely represented in planning, consultation, or environmental management bodies. In many villages, decisions are made by men, and women are not consulted. A woman from Bukavu testifies: ***“Women’s contributions are not really taken into account; their voice is stifled by men.”***

Conversely, in Kalehe, some women report participating in dialogues, which demonstrates a more inclusive dynamics. However, these cases remain isolated, and the majority of women report not being invited to participate in environmental committees, planning meetings, or advocacy campaigns.

f. The unclear role of large organizations and the weakness of local support

Several women interviewed criticized the lack of flexibility and outreach of large NGOs or institutions that are supposed to support local initiatives. One of them stated: ***“Large organizations are not flexible enough to support us.”***

They point to the lack of local technical support, the absence of environmental experts in the villages, and a lack of consideration for their

specific needs. Lack of equitable partnerships between women and institutional key-players remains a major obstacle.

g. Insecurity and state of crisis: a bottleneck to mobilization

In some areas, particularly Kalehe, women face acute insecurity linked to armed conflict, landslides, and political instability. This limits their freedom of movement, access to land, and their safety during communal activities. One participant testified: ***“We cannot access our gardens because we are often displaced.”***

This state increases their vulnerability, hinders communal activities and complicates the implementation of structured ecological initiatives.

II.3 Types of support and collaboration identified as necessary

The analysis of interviews and focus groups conducted in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe, and Bukavu highlights a strong convergence around the needs expressed by women, cooperative societies, the youth, and male ecologists. While the will to act is evident in the local practices observed, it is systematically hampered by a glaring lack of institutional, technical, and financial support. This section summarizes the main needs and aspirations expressed, highlighting the forms of collaboration that could strengthen local ecological dynamics led by women.

Figure 2: Types of support or collaboration

Technical support, training and financing	First of all, there is lack of partnership, there is no financial support, hence lack of resources, capacity. You will find that in a village, there is no expert on environmental matters	Training in environmental matters and financial means to help us to manage it	Stereotypes about women and state of security	Lack of the will to work and not be ashamed	Our own pesticides
Large organizations are not flexible in supporting us	Limited means in	Financing and training and technical support are very important	Strengthening activities of AVEC	Financial support and facilitation	Technical and financial support to produces more seedlings

The women and cooperative societies interviewed overwhelmingly emphasize the importance of receiving continuous technical support that is accessible. This isn't about one-off support, but a process of learning and co-developing ecological solutions. As expressed by one participant,

"We need technical training, not just speeches. We want to learn how to manage our gardens, our waste, our environment."

Several stakeholders deplore the lack of availability of environmental experts in the villages: ***"In almost every village, there are no experts on environmental matters."***

This deficit undermines the quality of projects carried out and limits their sustainability. It is therefore urgent to strengthen local skills through practical, continuous, and contextualized training, including that on agroecology, sustainable forest management, alternative energy, waste processing, and adaptation to the effects of climate change.

An urgent need for flexible and targeted financing:

Lack of funding is omnipresent in all interviews. Women, cooperatives, and community leaders decry a fragmented aid system that is difficult to access and often unsuited to their situations. Local women's organizations, such as the Club Zaida Catalan, struggle to secure funding for their activities despite their relevance: ***"Resources are very limited in the areas of interest to women's organizations."***

Participants call for funding:



2



Flexible in their use

To be able to adapt to local emergencies and priorities;

3



Structuring and sustainable,

To build a long-term vision rather than multiplying one-off actions.

They also suggested to develop **specific funds for rural women**, that integrate a gender-sensitive approach and recognize the central role of women in climate justice.

Another critical need is to **secure access to land**, which is essential for all ecological activities carried out by women: reforestation, sustainable agriculture, briquette making, etc. Several women emphasize that even when they have received land from the chiefdom, they lack the means to develop it: *"The chiefdom has granted land to women to plant trees, but lack of money remains a major obstacle."* Access to land, often controlled by men or conditioned by customs, remains a tricky land justice issue. It is imperative that local policies guarantee women **clear and**

protected rights to use of land intended for ecological projects.

Village Savings and Loan Associations (AVEC) and ecological **cooperative societies** are seen as strategic structures in the economic and ecological resilience of communities. They play a role in solidarity, resource pooling, and collective training. However, they lack the resources to consolidate themselves: *"AVEC should be strengthened with technical and financial support. This is how women can support themselves."*

These structures should be systematically integrated into development programs and be made to benefit from targeted support for management, internal governance, documentation of results, and innovation in sustainable agriculture and the green economy.

Several participants emphasized the importance of **changing social perceptions**, particularly those that marginalize women in decision-making platforms and environmental projects: *"There are people who continue to believe that women can do nothing."*

Support for **popular, participatory and continuous awareness campaigns** is needed.

These campaigns should aim at:



Awareness-raising should also include components on **land rights, agroecology, waste management,** and climate governance, using local languages and formats accessible to all social categories.

Finally, a crucial need identified is to **promote the effective participation of women in the frameworks of dialogue, planning and monitoring of environmental policies.** Many women decry a systemic that excludes them from such platforms: ***"We are not taken into account, our voices do not count."***

II.4 Perceptions and participation of women in environmental dialogues

The study conducted in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe, and the city of Bukavu reveals contrasting realities regarding women's participation in dialogues related to the environment, climate governance, and community planning. Although positive initiatives exist, the testimonies collected show that women remain largely underrepresented, rarely listened to, and held back by structural and cultural obstacles.

To remedy this, women recommend:



In several interviews, women report being **excluded from consultation platforms or marginalized when they participate**. In Bukavu, as one participant emphasized: *“Women’s contributions are not really taken into account; their voices are stifled by men who hold power.”*

This perception is shared in rural areas of Kabare, where one woman confides: *“Unfortunately, no, she is not taken into account.”*

In many cases, women are not aware of existing participation frameworks, or do not feel relevant in them due to **social norms and lack of self-confidence**. Some have even expressed that their presence in these forums remains **purely decorative**, without any real influence on decisions.

In other localities such as Kalehe, testimonies show a **more active participation of women**, particularly in community dialogues on environmental issues. One woman interviewed

stated: *“Climate is our life and our survival, and we must protect it regardless of our gender.”*

This involvement appears to be driven by more inclusive community dynamics and emerging female leadership. **Local organizations and some authorities** also facilitate women’s access to participatory dialogue, although this remains marginal.

We also observe **better accessibility of urban women** (particularly in Bukavu) to awareness-raising activities, due to their proximity to information centers and NGOs: *“Yes, several times, I participated in these activities.”*

In contrast, **women in rural areas are more constrained** by distance, domestic responsibilities, and the lack of local support structures.

Factors limiting women’s active participation: The obstacles to women’s participation in environmental dialogues are numerous and often interconnected:

Persistent gender stereotypes:

Several testimonies reveal that some women internalize discriminatory norms: *“It was believed that women should not plant trees.”* *“Many people continue to believe that women can do nothing.”*



Lack of self-confidence:

Male environmentalists recognize this problem and call for support for women: *“The only obstacle is with them; many women lack self-confidence.”*



Lack of information and invitation in decision-making processes:

Several women say they have never been consulted or invited to environmental dialogues, like this rural woman who says: ***"Not really. I have never been invited to any training or dialogue."***



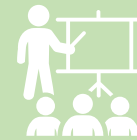
Domestic workload:

Women's over-responsibility for household and family tasks prevents their availability: ***"Too many tasks at home... we don't have time to participate."***



Lack of appropriate training:

Participation is often hampered by a lack of technical skills. One woman explains: ***"We need training to understand and carry out our actions effectively."***



Inspiring practices and multiplier effects:

Despite these obstacles, some women manage to play a role as **knowledge multipliers**. They participate in training and then commit to **training other women in their circles**: ***"We have inspiring practices; the women are trained and in turn they will train others."***

These dynamics, although fragile, demonstrate that **targeted and contextualized support** can quickly produce tangible results in terms of awareness and collective action.

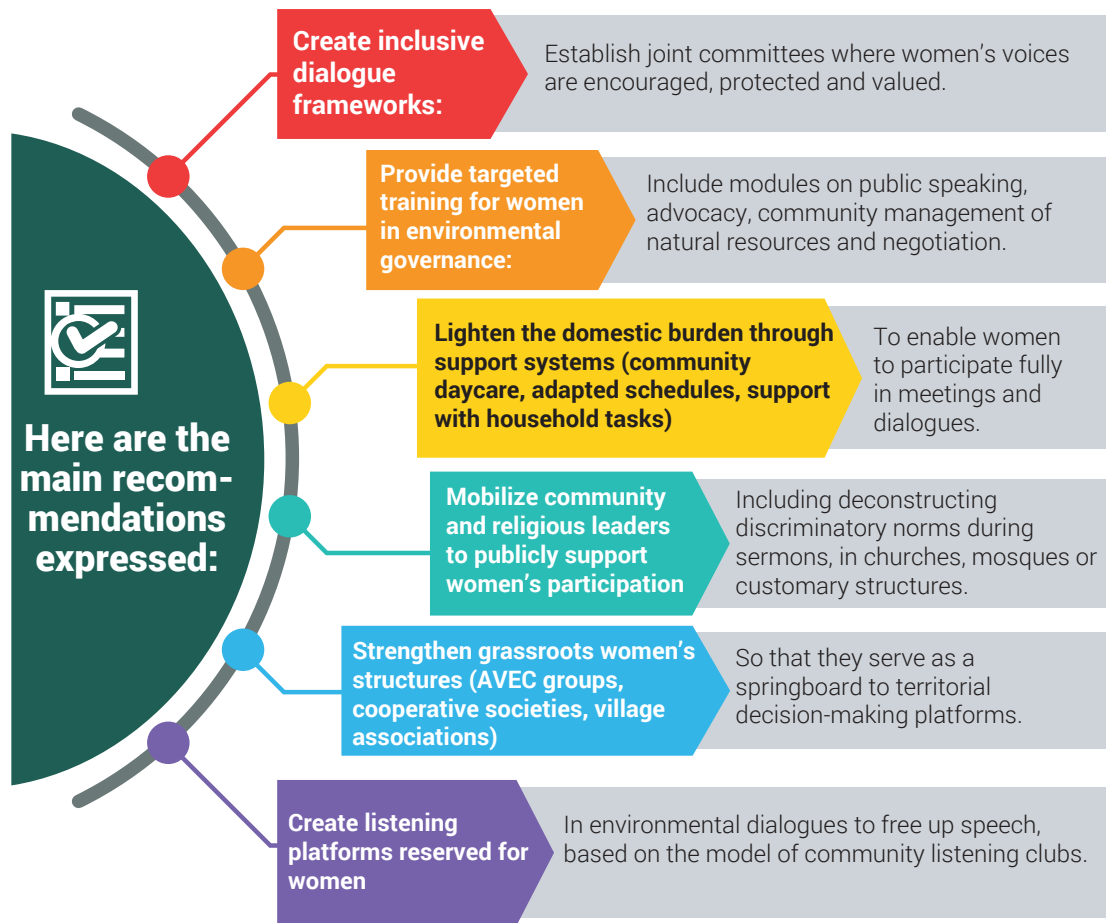
Some participants also express their **pride in having been included in awareness**

campaigns, reforestation activities or community projects, even on a small scale: ***"We are looking for ways and means of adapting to and mitigating climate impacts."***

These initiatives show that when women are **considered as full partners**, their contribution becomes decisive.

Perspectives and recommendations for equitable participation:

The views collected unanimously call for **structural change** and concrete actions to guarantee women in an active and valued position in decision-making processes related to the environment.



II.5. Understanding of climate change and actions of women leaders

The women leaders interviewed in Bukavu, Kabare, and Kalehe shared varied perceptions of climate change, influenced by their local realities, their level of information, as well as the tangible effects observed in their daily lives. These perceptions reveal both a growing awareness and significant gaps in environmental education, which still hinder their full involvement in the fight against the effects of climate change.

Figure 3: Actions against climate change

It's the irrigation of gardens using water from wells	They use natural fertilizers in their gardens, plant trees and raise awareness	In any case some participate through reduction in waste and transforming these plastic wastes into ...	We have our seedlings and we plant trees. We distribute seedlings to members of our ...	
In my community, women diversify their cultures, plant trees and manage water better	The AVEC system, which also serves as a platform for sharing experiences and knowledge. We are also changing ...	Participating in large numbers in technical training to learn more skills and find ...	Several activities are put in place by women in order to deal with the changes. We can ...	Community monitoring against deforestation. Using improved stoves to minimize use of charcoal ...

Women leaders in Bukavu demonstrated a more articulate and precise understanding of climate change. They clearly described extreme weather events, seasonal disruptions, and the direct consequences on their environment and daily lives: **“Climate change is the fact that the earth and the climate are changing in a lasting way. It disrupts our agriculture, makes us sick, and destroys our environment.”**

In contrast, women in Kabare and Kalehe report more disconnected observations, expressing an empirical awareness rather than a technical understanding of the phenomenon. They often speak of “disruption of seasons” or “changes in harvests,” without necessarily making a direct connection to concepts of climate change: **“Women just say they notice certain disruptions to the seasons, without understanding what that really means.”**


These gaps illustrate an urgent need for climate awareness, particularly in rural areas, where access to information is limited and women are often excluded from formal training channels.

The consequences of climate change are being felt massively in all three territories, with particular acuteness in rural areas. Women describe **prolonged droughts, recurrent floods, and significant agricultural losses:**

“Climate change has very serious consequences. Water is destroying our gardens, drought is affecting our harvests, and we are experiencing famine.”

Some participants draw a direct link between these upheavals and increasing **food insecurity**, reporting cases of **domestic violence** when agricultural production is deemed insufficient by spouses: **“When the harvest is poor, it's the woman who is beaten. We are accused of not farming well.”**

Climate change therefore exacerbates women's **social and economic vulnerabilities** and affects their physical and psychological well-being.

Extreme weather conditions also have a direct impact on the health of women and children. Reports highlight an **increase in respiratory tract infections, skin infections, and heat stress**, particularly among the elderly and infants:  **"The health risk is becoming too high because of the heat. Children are getting sick. We too are feeling very tired."**

These findings reinforce the need to integrate a **"health and gender" approach** into local climate strategies, by strengthening health alerts and prevention systems in vulnerable environments.

Adaptation initiatives: between innovation and solidarity:

Faced with these challenges, women leaders are employing **multiple adaptation actions** that demonstrate their ingenuity and resilience. They organize themselves into groups to irrigate gardens from natural sources, plant trees, diversify their crops, and share seeds. One participant explains: *"We apply sustainable agriculture according to our partners' training. This helps us better withstand droughts."*

Solidarity **among women** is also a driving force behind adaptation. Some distribute seedlings to community members or share products from their ecological activities: *"We distribute seedlings to members of our group, but also to those in the community who need them."*

Training appears to be a **fundamental tool for transformation**. Several women leaders actively participate in technical workshops and awareness campaigns. They then become **trainers within their communities**, promoting more ecological practices and daily activities that are favorable to the environment: *"We are looking for ways and means of adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change."*

In some localities, women transform plastic waste into **paving stones or useful objects**, illustrating an innovative appropriation of ecological practices for economic and environmental purposes.

However, women also point out the **lack of training in rural areas**, where initiatives remain limited. Some have never had the opportunity to participate in a single awareness-raising workshop. This gap in access to training exacerbates inequalities and limits the potential impact of women in the fight against climate change.

Actions with high potential, despite structural obstacles:

The initiatives led by women leaders in the three territories demonstrate strong potential for innovation, mobilization, and social transformation, provided they are supported and consolidated. Currently, they face several obstacles:



An inspiring action: women transform plastic waste into paving stones in Bukavu

In Bukavu, a group of women leaders has established an innovative business that recycles plastic waste and transforms it into eco-friendly paving stones. This initiative, resulting from a recycling training program, helps reduce urban pollution, generates income, and increases women's visibility in public forums. *"This project is a source of pride for us. We're helping to clean up our city and generate income."*

This practice shows that women can play a leading role in the green economy if they are properly supported.



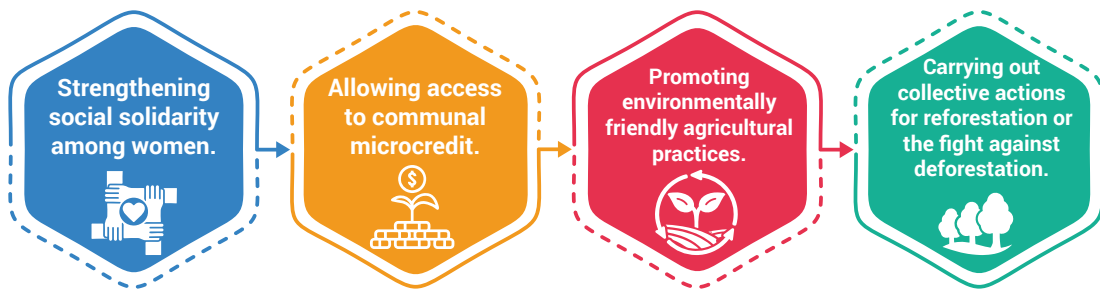
Recommendations on priorities:

Based on the experiences analyzed, the participants formulated several recommendations to strengthen the involvement of women leaders in the face of climate change:

<p>Increase technical training on sustainable agriculture, water management, recycling and community forestry.</p> 	<p>Finance micro-projects led by women and facilitate their access to green credit.</p> 	<p>Systematically include women in climate planning committees at the local level.</p> 	<p>Promote and document good female practices, in order to inspire others at the regional level.</p> 	<p>Strengthen public health systems in areas with high climate exposure, with specific attention to the needs of women.</p> 
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II.6. Women members of ecological cooperative societies

The women's ecological cooperative societies of Kabare and Kalehe play a crucial role in combating the effects of climate change, empowering women economically, and transforming communities. Resulting from local solidarity dynamics, these structures offer women a platform for resource pooling, training, sustainable production, and collective engagement in the face of environmental challenges. The women members interviewed in Kabare and Kalehe describe their cooperative societies as platforms for communal aid, savings, and the promotion of sustainable agriculture. These structures aim at:



"In our cooperative society, we want to strengthen love among ourselves, work together, improve our autonomy and protect our environment." Member of a cooperative society in Kabare.

This organizational model allows women, often excluded from the formal sector, to take charge of their economic development while committing to the protection of natural resources. In both territories, the cooperative societies are leading a series of concrete initiatives to combat climate change, including:

Community reforestation

(planting of fruit and forest trees).



Use of natural pesticides

to avoid pollution of soil and groundwater.



Resilient agriculture

with the promotion of improved seeds and the sharing of agroecological techniques.





"We plant trees to protect our environment and improve our agriculture." Female cooperative worker in Kabare



"Since we've been working together, we can support ourselves, and that reduces tension at home."

The testimonies also reveal a growing awareness of collective responsibility in preserving the environment and in combating the effects of irregular seasons.



Participants report several positive outcomes from being part of a cooperative society:

Improving agricultural productivity and income.

Reduction in economic dependence on spouses.

Increased social cohesion and mutual support among women.

Reduction in domestic violence, linked to the financial independence acquired.

Some women also highlight an improvement in community environmental practices, thanks to awareness-raising activities carried out locally by cooperative societies.

Despite the successes recorded, cooperative societies face several **structural and contextual obstacles** which hamper their effectiveness:

Insecurity and forced displacement, particularly in Kalehe: *"We cannot access our gardens because we are often displaced."*

Lack of stable funding: *"The war and lack of resources make our work difficult."*

Theft, destruction of crops, lack of seeds and agricultural tools.

Poor technical support in most remote areas.

Territorial inequalities: In Kabare, women benefit from slightly more support from local organizations than those in Kalehe, who feel more isolated.


These challenges reflect a dire need for **structural, equitable and sustainable support**, in order to ensure the sustainability and impact of women's cooperatives.

Some cooperative societies receive partial support from organizations such as SPFF, FCCP or Mama Tonde Tonde, in the form of:


- Technical training (in sustainable agriculture, product processing, cooperative management).
- Distribution of seeds or seedlings.
- One-off material support.



“Yes, some people help us, and it makes a difference. But it’s still not enough.”

However, participants agree that this support is often irregular, concentrated in a few localities, and largely insufficient given the scale of the needs.  ***“SPFF can’t do everything. If other organizations get involved, we will be better equipped.”*** They therefore call for a broader mobilization of technical and financial partners to strengthen community resilience in the face of climate change.

Trees against food insecurity and for peace in Kalehe

Despite the conflict, women from some cooperative societies in Kalehe have successfully established community reforestation areas in vulnerable villages. By planting fruit trees, they have not only combated deforestation but have also been able to generate income to finance their children’s schooling.  ***“Our trees have become a solution to feed our families, educate our children, and create peace in our***

This type of initiative demonstrates that **ecology, peace, and women’s empowerment can reinforce each other.**

Based on their experiences, the focus group participants expressed a series of strategic recommendations to strengthen the impact of ecological cooperatives:

- Increase technical support in resilient agriculture, agroforestry, recycling and cooperative management.
- Fund local initiatives led by women, including in humanitarian emergencies.
- Facilitate access to seeds, natural fertilizers and agricultural tools in isolated rural areas.
- Ensure equitable support between territories, particularly between Kabare and Kalehe.
- Develop psychosocial support programs for women displaced or affected by conflict.

Women also emphasize the importance of recognizing their role as agents of change, not just as beneficiaries. Strengthened support for their cooperative societies represents a powerful tool for local adaptation to climate change, community resilience, and gender equality.

II.7. Male environmentalists and perception of climate justice

Men’s involvement in environmental initiatives is a key link in the collective fight

against climate change. In the territories of Kabare, Kalehe, and Bukavu, men involved in environmental projects share diverse experiences and perspectives, reflecting both a growing awareness of environmental issues and the structural challenges that hinder their impact. Their testimonies also provide insight into their positioning with regard to women's engagement and the dynamics of intergender collaboration in climate action. The men interviewed in all three territories demonstrate a heightened **awareness of the concrete effects of climate change** on their daily lives and on the environment.

In **Bukavu**, men cite **seasonal disruptions, rising temperatures, and declining harvests** as clear signs of climate change. One participant explained, **"On our part, we are trying to plant trees to combat climate change."**

This direct link between climatic hazards and reforestation initiatives illustrates a form of **community eco-reflex**, based on action rather than complaint.

In **Kabare**, men perceive climate change as a direct threat to their food security and agricultural economy: **"We are seeing erratic rains and increased heat, which is affecting our production."**

The disruption of the agricultural calendar is causing crop failures and prolonged lean periods. These consequences contribute to exacerbating tensions within households, as several participants mentioned.

In **Kalehe**, the testimonies reveal a deep concern. Participants describe an extreme

climate, alternating between prolonged drought and torrential rains, leading to landslides and the degradation of ecosystems:

"The sun becomes scorching and the rain ravages the soil, which leads to a reduction in production."

This type of climate vulnerability accentuates the feeling of helplessness, especially since Kalehe has recently been hit by deadly natural disasters.

The motivations of men involved in ecological activities vary according to the territories, but share a common base: **concern for the future of the community and future generations.**

In Bukavu, men affirm their desire to be protectors of nature: **"We want to be among those who defend nature and not among those who destroy it."**

They express a **moral responsibility**, based on awareness of the effects of deforestation, pollution and climate change on their lives and those of their children.

In Kabare, engagement is often triggered by direct experience of the effects of climate:

"Famine, tree felling, and the climate situation push us to act."

Their motivation is therefore both **reactive and pragmatic**, linked to issues of survival, food security, and the local economy.

In Kalehe, motivations take on a **more community and ideological character**, with men wishing **to change collective mentalities** and drive a dynamic of social transformation:

“The desire to see the mentality of the community change for the good of the environment pushes us to act.”

They are also more likely to **collaborate with women** in ecological initiatives, highlighting their importance in the process of change.

Box 3: A male-female collaboration in the service of climate in Kabare

In Kabare, mixed groups of men and women farmers have initiated a pilot project of reforestation using organic composting techniques. Men plow, women plant, and together they maintain the land.

“Women contribute to the process, especially in land preparation and plowing,” says one participant.

This experience shows that **complementarity in roles** is a key factor in strengthening the ecological resilience of communities.

Overall, committed men recognize the importance of women’s role in environmental

protection, but this recognition is expressed in varying degrees depending on the region. Despite their motivation and involvement, environmentalists encounter several obstacles that limit the effectiveness of their actions:

<p>Lack of technical and financial resources: absence of seeds, tools, inputs, training.</p> 	<p>Logistical difficulties linked to extreme weather conditions.</p> 	<p>Lack of institutional recognition of their voluntary efforts.</p> 	<p>Few partnerships with NGOs or support structures.</p> 
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In **Bukavu**, men consider women as **frontline actors**, highlighting their participation in reforestation, awareness-raising and waste management activities: **“Women are frontline workers and key actors in this fight.”**

In **Kabare**, although men recognize women’s efforts, they also take note of **persistent cultural barriers**, such as domestic overload or lack of self-esteem among some women: *“Many women do not have confidence in themselves.”*

This observation calls for increased efforts to strengthen the **psychosocial capacity** of women and deconstruct gender stereotypes.

In **Kalehe**, men insist on the need for a change in mentality at the community level to allow for real inclusion of women: **“Men must support women to achieve change.”**

Here, intergender collaboration is seen not only as an asset, but as an **essential condition for the success of environmental actions.**

The most frequent recommendations concern:



- **Strengthening technical capacities in agroecology, community forestry, and natural resource management.**
- **Mobilizing financial support to sustain reforestation activities.**
- **The creation of inclusive frameworks for gender dialogue on environmental issues.**



"We need technical and financial support, because without it, our efforts will struggle to bear fruit." Participant in Kabare

Analysis of the testimonies shows that the men involved in ecological initiatives are not only executors: they are also **agents of change**, carrying a desire for community transformation and climate justice.

Their active involvement in awareness raising, reforestation and sustainable agriculture can serve as leverage for:

1

Deconstructing patriarchal norms that hinder women's participation.

2

Promote the co-construction of local solutions, involving the entire community.

3

Mobilize more resources, by promoting the role of men in gender dynamics and environmental governance.

II.8. Authorities and influential actors in climate governance

Local authorities, traditional chiefs, religious leaders, and other community actors play a key role in defining climate justice priorities. Their attitudes, commitment, and decisions strongly influence women's involvement in environmental policies and actions. Through their testimonies, this section highlights power dynamics, cultural resistance, local progress, and prospects for women's inclusion in climate governance in South Kivu.

Data analysis shows a growing recognition of the role of women in the fight for the environment, although their **effective participation remains unequal depending on the territories and spheres of power.**

In **Bukavu**, the words of the vice-president of the Youth Parliament indicate an ambivalent view. He acknowledges a form of women's presence, but describes it as **timid, constrained or undervalued**: *"Women are also involved, but they are very reluctant."*

This type of analysis shows that women are still **perceived as marginal in decision-making processes**, or even as having voluntarily withdrawn, without always recognizing the structural obstacles that hinder their participation.

In **Kabare**, perceptions are more encouraging, and several authorities say that women are **being highlighted in certain local initiatives**. This is the case in the Mkaji project. Mpya , where: *“Women are put at the forefront of actions.”*

This statement indicates a local political will to promote female leadership in climate governance, although this remains limited to specific initiatives.

In **Kalehe**, women's involvement is more integrated into community coordination dynamics. According to Jonas Bahizire, a research associate: *“Women constitute 75% of the coordination members.”*

This shows a **high level of female involvement** in awareness-raising, reforestation and local advocacy activities, making Kalehe a model of community anchoring of female leadership. Despite notable progress in certain contexts, obstacles to the full participation of women in decision-making processes remain significant:



Stereotypes and patriarchal norms:

Customary culture continues to assign women domestic roles, distancing them from spaces of power. A political actor in Bukavu acknowledges: *“Women are perceived as tools and must be under the orders of men.”*



Lack of self-confidence:

Some authorities cite self-censorship among women, who hesitate to speak out in public or to take on leadership roles. In Kabare, a traditional leader states: *“The only obstacle is the women themselves.”*



Lack of financial and logistical resources:

Although some chiefdoms have allocated land to women for reforestation activities, lack of funding limits implementation. In Bukavu, a chiefdom rapporteur explains: *“The chiefdom has allocated land to women, but lack of resources is a hindrance.”*

These findings illustrate the gap between stated institutional commitments and the realities on the ground, where **lack of resources, weight of custom and gendered representations** limit concrete progress.

Churches are a major source of influence in Congolese society, particularly in terms of awareness-raising, education, and changing attitudes. In all three territories, several religious leaders affirm their commitment to environmental protection:

- In **Kalehe**, the parish priest of Ihusi emphasizes the importance of **moral and Christian teachings on safeguarding of creation**.
- In **Bukavu**, Pastor Esther Mijiza says: *"We are raising awareness to maintain climate and protect the environment."*
- Pastor Safari of the 55th CPSE Church insists: *"We must invite women and men to discuss together important issues within the Church."*

These faith-based initiatives demonstrate a **multi-sectoral and inclusive commitment**, where faith serves as a tool to promote climate justice. Nevertheless, some leaders recognize that **retrograde customs** persist,

even within religious circles, and that **raising awareness among tradition keepers** remains essential to changing patriarchal norms.

Civil society members, researchers, youth leaders and community facilitators are also involved in promoting more inclusive climate governance.

- In Bukavu, **environmentalist students** participate in public debates and radio broadcasts, demonstrating their ability to address climate issues.
- A local environmental coordinator says: *"The woman contributes well."*
- A community facilitator recommends: *"We need to give women more platforms to express themselves."*

These intermediate key players, often younger and more highly trained, appear as **potential partners in advocating for equality** in climate governance. Their role is crucial in bridging the gap between community demands, traditional institutions, and public policies.

Based on cross-analyses from the three territories, several avenues for improvement are proposed by the influential key players themselves:

01 Empowering women

Through continuous education, environmental education and community leadership.

02 Financial and material support

For initiatives led by women or mixed groups, to enable them to take sustainable action.

05 Creation of inclusive dialogue frameworks,

Where women, men, the youth and influential people can co-construct local ecological priorities.

03 Deconstruction of gender stereotypes

Through awareness campaigns among customs guardians, religious leaders and customary authorities.

04 Promotion of good

Local practices, in particular the experiences of women's coordination in Kalehe or rural conservation clubs.

“Empowering women is an asset in the process,” concludes a local actor, thus summarizing the growing conviction that **a just ecological transition must necessarily also be an egalitarian transition.**

II.9. Analysis of initiatives led by women in climate governance

The analysis of the perceptions of political actors, customary authorities, community leaders and religious figures highlights the progress but also the limits of women's involvement in decision-making processes related to the environment and climate in the territories of Bukavu, Kabare and Kalehe.

In all three areas, women are generally perceived as important actors in climate initiatives, but their involvement in **climate governance** remains marginal and highly dependent on local cultural, institutional, and social dynamics. In Bukavu, for example, the vice-president of the Youth Parliament mentions women's participation, but emphasizes that they remain “very reluctant,” a formulation that often obscures structural obstacles to their real engagement, such as patriarchal norms or the lack of self-confidence cultivated by customs.

In Kalehe, women appear more mobilized and structured. A local actor states that “women constitute 75% of the coordination members,” demonstrating a notable advancement towards shared governance. This dynamic could be linked to the lived experience of climate disasters (landslides, displacements) which have strengthened their community leadership in crisis situations. In Kabare, the

inclusion of women in organizations like Mkaji Mpya is also mentioned, with positioning in first line in reforestation actions, an important step forward to be valued.

Despite this progress, **many structural obstacles remain**, including the influence of customs, the predominance of male roles in decision-making, and unequal access to resources (land, financial, institutional). One actor in Kabare said, “Society perpetuates discrimination,” illustrating the extent to which gender inequality is maintained by deeply rooted social norms.

Religious institutions, which are highly influential in the region, have a dual role in promoting inclusive climate justice. On the one hand, figures such as Pastor Esther Mijiza and the parish priest of Ihusi demonstrate an **active commitment to community awareness**, encouraging both men and women to “maintain climate and protect the environment.” These initiatives reinforce the idea that the Church can be a key player in social and ecological transformation.

However, **the conservative nature of some religious doctrines** continues to limit women's full participation. For example, debates in some churches remain focused on traditional gender roles, which hinders women's access to decision-making roles, even when their environmental commitment is proven.

In addition to cultural barriers, lack of **material resources** is a major obstacle to women's effective participation in environmental governance. Several officials, particularly in the Buhavu chiefdom, point out that even

when land is allocated to women, **lack of funding, tools, seeds, or technical support** makes it difficult to implement ecological projects. Goodwill is not enough: without **targeted investments** and **sustainable support**, women remain confined to executive rather than decision-making roles.

This deficiency is also highlighted by civil society figures, who call for stronger **advocacy for women's empowerment in the field of climate**. One actor in Bukavu claims to be *"willing to support advocacy initiatives,"* which suggests potential for collaboration to be strengthened between community actors and external institutions.

Finally, emerging practices offer hope. The participation of female environmentalist students in radio programs and debates shows that **the new generation is more mobilized and better informed**. An environmental NGO coordinator concludes that "women contribute a lot," a simple but powerful statement that sums up the conviction shared by several actors: **women must be recognized as co -decision-makers and no longer as invisible executors** in local responses to the climate crisis.



Interviews with traditional leaders, local political leaders and religious actors agree on several concrete avenues for action:



II.10. Cross-sectional analysis of climate justice issues in South Kivu

Participatory documentation conducted in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe, and the city of Bukavu highlights a rich, complex dynamic deeply rooted in local social, economic, and political realities. While women are proving to be key players in climate resilience, their actions remain hampered by a series of structural and systemic constraints. This section offers a cross-sectional reading of all the findings collected, from a critical climate justice perspective.

Data shows that women, whether members of cooperative societies, community leaders, or committed citizens, are at the forefront of environmental initiatives: reforestation, composting, sustainable agriculture, waste transformation, and community awareness. However, this mobilization is undervalued. Their actions are often perceived as incidental, non-institutionalized, or relegated to the status of "survival volunteering," despite their real impact on food security, natural resource management, and social cohesion.

Several reports point to **lack of recognition** of their knowledge and practices. This invisibility not only hinders their access to funding and decision-making processes, but also limits the possibilities of scaling up their ecological innovations.

The persistence of stereotypes that associate technical or agricultural tasks with men remains a major obstacle to women's active participation in climate action. The fact that

some women still believe that "planting trees is not a woman's job" illustrates the power of these discriminatory norms.

Furthermore, **domestic burdens**, economic insecurity, and daily insecurity limit their time, mobility, and ability to organize collectively. In this context, women are both the **most exposed** to the effects of climate change and **the least supported** in their resilience strategies.

The comparative analysis of the three study areas reveals notable specificities. In **Kabare**, the emphasis is on the economic empowerment of women through initiatives such as the production of ecological briquettes or sustainable agriculture. In **Kalehe**, which is heavily affected by natural disasters (landslides, floods), the involvement of the youth and the link between ecology and social protection (violence prevention, family cohesion) is more pronounced. **Bukavu**, as an urban area, focuses its efforts on waste management and sanitation, with more institutionalized initiatives.

These specificities reflect **the intersectionality of climate justice issues**, and show that solutions must be adapted to local contexts, while respecting community aspirations.

The involvement of customary, religious, and administrative authorities varies. On the one hand, some local key players (chiefdoms, religious leaders) recognize the role of women and call for their inclusion in environmental programs. On the other, **the governance framework remains patriarchal**, and the "consideration" of gender is often lip service,

with little translation into concrete actions.

The lack of intersectoral coordination, public funding and inclusive policies contributes to a **fragmentation of initiatives** and a feeling of discouragement among change agents.

Faced with these challenges, women are organizing themselves into alternative forms of solidarity: AVEC, agricultural cooperative societies, ecological clubs, and churches. These platforms constitute **tools of endogenous power** that promote skills development, knowledge sharing, and economic inclusion. They also represent **potential advocacy platforms** for structuring collective demands for climate justice.

However, these structures remain fragile and underfunded. Their empowerment requires **technical, institutional and financial**

strengthening, as well as recognition of their strategic role in environmental governance.

Cross-sectional data analysis highlights one obligation: **climate justice cannot be achieved without social justice and gender equality**. This involves not only recognizing women as key players, but also guaranteeing them effective access to resources (land, training, financing), equitable representation in decision-making bodies, and protection against economic, social, and climate-related violence.

The challenge is to move from a logic of “symbolic participation” to **transformative inclusion**. That is, an approach that reverses power relationships, revalues local knowledge, and promotes a political ecology centered on women’s rights.





RECOMMENDATIONS





RECOMMENDATIONS

From a perspective of climate justice, gender equality and sustainability, the following recommendations aim at guiding the actions of public authorities, donors, local organizations, and all stakeholders involved in the fight against climate change in South Kivu. These recommendations are part of the desire to **strengthen the involvement of women**, to **promote community initiatives**, and to **promote inclusive, effective and fair climate governance**.

01

Strengthening the capacities of women and ecological cooperatives

- Invest in continuous education for women, particularly in sustainable agricultural practices, natural resource management, ecological waste transformation, advocacy techniques and climate leadership.
- Provide technical and material support to women's cooperative societies: agricultural tools, improved seeds, reforestation equipment, waste processing equipment, etc.
- Support existing community structures (AVEC, women's groups, ecological clubs, committed churches, etc.) in order to consolidate their autonomy and their role in local environmental governance.

02

Provide structural financial support

- Create specific support funds for rural and environmental women, accessible, flexible and adapted to the realities of small organizations.
- Simplify funding procedures and adapt eligibility criteria to local realities to avoid the exclusion of small women's structures.
- Strengthen the partnership between donors and community initiatives by establishing participatory and transparent financing mechanisms.

03

Promote the inclusion of women in climate governance

- Ensure the representation of women in environmental consultation frameworks, community dialogues, local development plans and decision-making bodies.
- Support local advocacy initiatives led by women to influence environmental and gender policies.
- Involve community, customary and religious leaders in promoting gender equality and deconstructing stereotypes that hinder women's participation.

04

Promote climate education and community awareness

- Strengthen popular education programs on climate change in rural and urban areas, through appropriate channels (community radio, street theaters, school clubs, etc.).
- Develop educational content in local languages on environmental rights, the impacts of climate change and good ecological practices.
- Encourage trained women to become trainers, by capitalizing on existing mentoring dynamics and inspiring practices.

05

Integrate gender dimension into climate policies and strategies

- Demand for a systematic integration of a gender-sensitive approach into all environmental programs, whether local, provincial or national.
- Support the collection of gender-disaggregated data in environmental areas to inform policy decisions.
- Include gender equality as a cross-cutting condition in the specifications of climate projects supported by technical and financial partners.

06

Protecting women from environmental and social vulnerabilities

- Develop community mechanisms to protect women from environmental violence (evictions, harassment, attacks during firewood or water collection, etc.).
- Ensure secure access to land for women-led initiatives by strengthening their individual and collective land rights.
- Integrate environmental health issues (diseases linked to climate change, nutrition, maternal health, etc.) into local responses.

07

Support local climate resilience dynamics

- Encourage networking among women committed to climate change, through local, provincial and national platforms.
- Promote endogenous ecological knowledge and practices, carried by women, as credible alternatives to imported technocratic solutions.
- Involve young women and girls in environmental initiatives, starting at school level, to build an informed, active and conscious future.

CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

This report, the result of a long process of participatory study in the territories of Kabare, Kalehe, and the city of Bukavu, highlights a reality that is too often invisible: that of women who, every day, work to protect their environment, often without recognition or support, but with remarkable resilience and creativity. They plant trees, transform waste, protect the soil, train their communities, raise awareness among children, organize the youth, and resist the extractive, patriarchal, and climate-killing mentalities that threaten their livelihoods and dignity. Their commitment to climate justice is not theoretical. It is rooted in the land they farm, the waterways they protect, the forests they reforest, and the daily actions they take within their cooperatives, associations, families, and villages. It is also political, in the sense that it questions power structures, gender inequalities, access to land, the distribution of resources, and the way decisions that affect their futures are made.

However, this struggle is hampered by numerous obstacles: persistent gender stereotypes, chronic insecurity, poverty, lack of training and access to financing, and marginalization in planning frameworks. The weight of traditions, economic inequality, and the tangible effects of climate change make this struggle even more difficult for rural and urban women in South Kivu.

Despite this, the testimonies gathered in this documentation reveal transformative dynamics. Women leaders are emerging, ecological cooperative societies are strengthening, young girls are becoming informed, alliances are forming with male environmentalists, and authorities are becoming aware of the central role women play in climate resilience. Endogenous, local, and sustainable solutions exist. What is lacking is not the ideas or the will, but the political, technical, and financial support to meet the challenges.

This is why this report is not only intended for documentation, but also as a tool for mobilization. It calls for **recognizing women as central actors in the ecological transition**, for **correcting the systemic injustices** that hinder their participation, and for **directing public policies and climate financing towards inclusive community solutions**.

In a global context where climate crises are accelerating and inequalities are widening, the voices of the women of South Kivu must be heard, supported, and placed at the heart of transformation strategies. For real, sustainable, and feminist climate justice. For a future where every woman, every community, can live in dignity, in harmony with nature.

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Contact us

Av Mimoza, commune d'ibanda, Bukavu, DRC

www.clubzaidacatalan.org