



INTERFAITH ACTION *to* PROTECT GLOBAL RAINFORESTS

*What do we know about gender as a
force and factor for change?*

 Religions for Peace



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The World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) is a not-for-profit organization working at the intersection of religion and global development. Housed within the Berkley Center in Washington, D.C., WFDD documents the work of faith inspired organizations and explores the importance of religious ideas and actors in development contexts. WFDD supports dialogue between religious and development communities and promotes innovative partnerships, at national and international levels, with the goal of contributing to positive and inclusive development outcomes.

ABOUT RELIGIONS FOR PEACE

Religions for Peace is the world's oldest, largest, and most representative multi-religious movement, advancing common action among the world's religious and faith communities. *Religions for Peace* works through representative, multi-religious platforms (Interreligious Councils), and their Women of Faith and Interfaith Youth Networks, in over 92 countries and 6 regions. For over 50 years, *Religions for Peace* has been convening to catalyze and promote multi-religious and multistakeholder collaboration and action for the common good.

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the QUESTIONS

- Protecting the world's largest tropical rainforests is one of the most important areas for action on climate change and it is an area where dynamic religious and interreligious leadership show great promise. How well are these roles understood?
- With the “state of knowledge” a starting point in assessing interreligious roles in rainforest protection, where and how are research and literature linked to environmental awareness? What has been their focus and how is that linked to policy and action? Where is knowledge concentrated and what is the current focus of research? What are leading research debates, and where are the most significant gaps in knowledge?
- Zeroing in more specifically on major global rainforests, how does knowledge differ among them? What are distinctive areas of focus and gaps?
- What is known and what inferences are drawn in focusing on religious communities as actors, advocates, critics?
- How is gender perceived in rainforest and ecology scholarship and practice? Are there significant differences by discipline or by national or regional areas of focus?
- What does a focus on a “Venn diagram” focused on rainforests, interfaith action, and neglected appreciations of gender dynamics suggest for future research, understanding, and action?

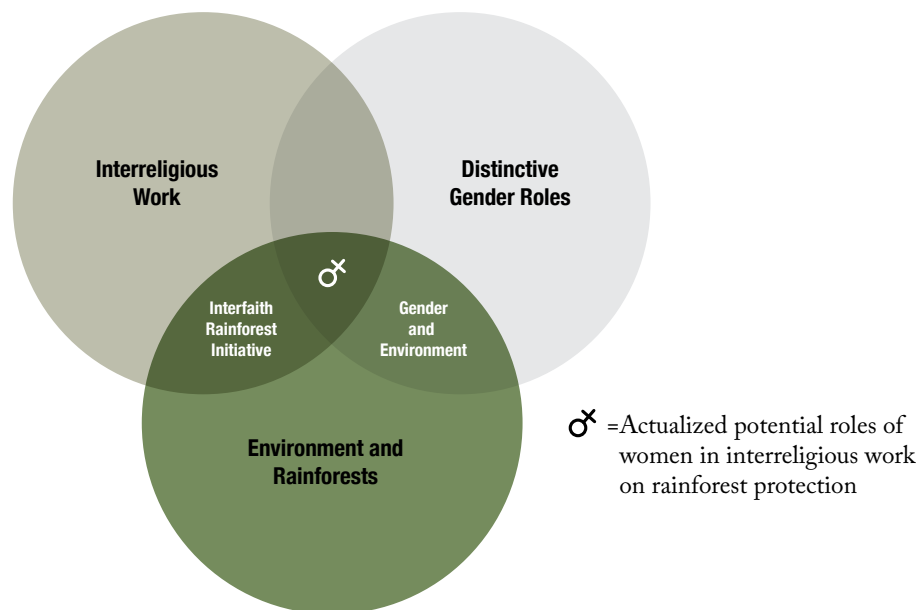
WHY THIS FOCUS?

The world’s major rainforests are a central concern for scientists and activists focused on climate change and environmental protection. Their crucial life-giving functions are often termed the “lungs of planet earth”, and their state and health have regulatory roles for climates worldwide. Thus the trends that see clearing vast areas for agriculture and tree cutting for timber threaten rainforest ecologies, with far reaching consequences. Rainforest welfare is tightly linked to the welfare and life of communities, especially indigenous people, who live in rainforests; they depend on them and communities play conservation roles. Their voice, however, is often unheard.

Rainforest protection fields of action and study have tended to be quite male dominated and women’s distinctive roles were rarely examined, much less taken into account. And, with some notable exceptions, religious actors were long seen as marginally involved in understanding the dynamics around rainforests and in their protection, whether for advocacy or more direct action.

These summary assertions are changing, as the many communities involved—academic, policy-making, advocacy—focus more sharply on the challenges that rainforest protection present. The largest rainforests span different national borders and, with growing awareness of their global importance, research to deepen understanding, protective action on many fronts, and advocacy have increased and taken on more features linked to their roles as “global goods”. The **Interfaith Rainforest Initiative** is among proactive alliances that bring together interreligious actors, multilateral and national institutions, and on-the-ground activists.

Women’s Distinctive Roles in Rainforest Protection



This review outlines the findings of a literature analysis conducted by the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) on behalf of *Religions for Peace*, focused on the intersections between religion, gender, and climate change in three rainforest regions: The Amazon, Congo Basin, and Southeast Asia. It briefly sets out the rationale for engaging with the three themes, in the context of the large literature on religion, gender, and climate change. Three issues emerge as critical for the review: **the roles of interfaith initiatives, the global-local dimensions at play, and special roles of indigenous communities.**

CLIMATE CHANGE RESEARCH *and* ACTION: RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS

Religious roles in understanding and responding to climate change are well established, approached from various angles in both academic and practitioner research. Religious beliefs are cited as sources of spiritual, social, economic, and moral capacities in responses to climate change; numerous theological and confessional responses to and framings of climate change have been published from a variety of religious traditions¹. A growing body of social scientific research demonstrates the ways that religious institutions, organisations and communities have been engaging with climate action (see for example Veldman et al., 2014²). The works of four prolific scholars who also play strong activist roles document countless links: Thomas Berry, Martin Palmer, Mary Evelyn Tucker, and John Grim. Berry, a Catholic priest and cultural historian, has inspired research and reflection (Tucker and Grim, *Journey of the Universe*); Tucker and Grim, based now at Yale University, have produced volumes of analysis, videos, and teaching materials, and are prolific activists; and Martin Palmer, working as a scholar and activist and in partnership with Prince Philip,

1 The academic fields are rather dominated by Christian theological writing, but Islamic theology of climate change is growing, as well as a small but consistent history of responses to climate change from other traditions; Jenkins et al. (2018) provide a good review of this literature.

2 This edited book, *How the World's Religions are Responding to Climate Change: Social Scientific Investigations*, was one of the first academic publications dedicated entirely to social scientific research on faith-based climate action and is a useful review of the approaches, responses and activities of multiple religious traditions at local, national and global levels.

Duke of Edinburgh and the Alliance of Religions and Conservation, highlights the work and commitment of different religious traditions as leaders in protection of the earth. Well beyond, the powerful connections of specific traditions notably Buddhism and different indigenous communities to nature and the earth are the topic of research and other documentation.

The religion-environment nexus argues for considering religious worldviews, beliefs, and practices as central to environmental protection and conservation (see for example, the edited collections and reviews by Bergmann and Gerten, 2010; Jenkins and Chapple, 2011; Grim and Tucker, 2017³). The more specific focus on climate change grows from this long history of research on religions and ecology. It is to a degree a change in language and focus but above all reflects the global scientific⁴ and policy concerns about global warming and other risks to the environment. This cause has generated numerous religious responses⁵; some are specific to specific communities (the Catholic Church, World Council of Churches, International Network of Concerned Buddhists, for example), while many responses come from faith-inspired organizations through programs and advocacy. and others from interfaith or interreligious organizations, notably *Religions for Peace*. The work includes operational programs in the humanitarian and development sectors, particularly where faith-linked organisations have introduced climate change as a crosscutting theme to their existing programs of work. There is also a large involvement with advocacy, including action in cooperation with multilateral and national organizations (e.g., UNEP's Faith for Earth Initiative) and advocacy specifically directed to the successive meetings of the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (perhaps most notably COP15 in Paris and COP26 in Glasgow)⁶.

The publication of the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* in 2015, the same year of the Paris COP and the launch of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, marked a turning point. Though faith-based action on climate change was by no means new at this point, it marked a critical step in the public and policy recognition of the role that religious communities play. The core concept of *Laudato Si'*, integral ecology, demonstrated a move beyond framing climate change as a purely environmental issue and recognised the interconnected concerns of poverty, justice, humanitarianism, and holistic sustainable development. The legacy of *Laudato Si'* is evident within the Catholic Church through the swathe

3 These scholars cover sociology, religious studies and theology and have put together several books and review articles aimed at demonstrating the important and varied role of religions' engagement with the environment.

4 Particularly the successive scientific reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

5 Examples of faith-based climate action advocacy are more than can usefully be synthesised for the purposes of this review but include examples from religious traditions across the globe covering grassroots to international levels.

6 Scholars from religious studies, international relations, political science, amongst others, have tracked, researched and evaluated faith-based involvement on climate change with the UNDP, UNEP and UNFCCC over a number of years. See, for example, Rollosson, 2010; Berry 2014; Ager and Ager, 2016; Glaab, 2017; Ivanova 2017; Krantz, 2021.

of initiatives created its name and numerous Catholic faith-based organisations which mention it as part of their core inspiration⁷. Yet it also had a ripple effect in the interfaith climate space; faith actors from other traditions have engaged with the themes of *Laudato Si'* or have mentioned it as a turning point for the formal recognition of their own work on climate change. A group of researchers in the USA even termed its influence on the framing of climate change “The Francis Effect” (Maibach et al. 2015).

In parallel (and increasingly interconnected), the Orthodox churches have been proactive, especially in advocacy. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, known by many as the “Green Patriarch”, has been similarly outspoken on the need to address climate change and associated environmental issues. At the G20 Interfaith Forum in September 2021 in Bologna, Italy, his statement was directed to participants of the upcoming COP26 in Glasgow. It called for clear and urgent action on climate change at COP26, all in a framework of justice.

UNEP and the Faith for Earth Initiative, in conjunction with the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Science, are developing *Al-Mizan – a Covenant for the Earth*⁸. They are in the process of bringing together Islamic scholars to develop a document which presents an Islamic perspective on climate change, the environment and sustainable development and which is to act as a call to action⁹.

These three documents are supplemented by innumerable statements spanning at least two decades, both faith-specific and interfaith, presenting the urgent moral and practical case for action on climate change.

Religious and interfaith organizations are working to recognise and advocate for rainforest protection and conservation as a central part of climate change action. The most prominent example is the **Interfaith Rainforest Initiative (IRI)**. Religious and interfaith climate action on rainforests forms part of the broader focus on climate action but with an additional spiritual dimension, as rainforest regions tend to be the home of diverse groups of indigenous peoples. They bring two important dimensions: traditional ecological knowledge and practices, and important meaning as sacred sites (Dudley et al., 2009¹⁰).

7 For example, the *Laudato Si'* Movement, Living *Laudato Si'* Philippines, *Laudato Si'* Action Platform, amongst many others.

8 <https://www.unep.org/al-mizan-covenant-earth>

9 Some have suggested that the development of *Al-Mizan Covenant* was inspired by *Laudato Si'*.

10 Dudley et al (2009) in a study from a conservation biology perspective traced the importance of religious and indigenous sacred sites; this built on a seminal 2005 report by ARC and the WWF on faiths, biodiversity and environmental conservation.

and WOMEN'S ROLES?

Posing questions about the research dimensions of gender and women's roles brings us broadly to the extensive research and debates about women's engagement with (faith-based) environmental movements. Three examples illustrate the varied nature of this literature: research tracking the environmental activism of the Chipko Movement in India and the Green Nuns in North America (Dwivedi and Reid, 2007); a study on the success and challenges of Islamic eco-feminism in Pakistan (Haq et al. 2020); and an edited collection of Christian women's theological reflections on climate justice from across the globe (Kim and Koster, 2017). Not surprisingly, with the relatively spotty appreciation for women's roles in looking at religious dimensions more broadly, appreciations of women's approaches and actions and visible research about them have often been missing or limited; this is true for environmental issues generally. Recent research aims to correct the bias (Tomalin, 2008¹¹) and some work can be seen as part of the re-evaluation of religious ecofeminism through the lens of decoloniality (Tøllefsen, 2011; Nogueira-Godsey, 2021¹²).

The effects on, and roles of women in climate change has taken on new emphasis over the last decade, with more focus on gender equality and gender justice in international climate and forest policy, particularly since COP13 in Bali in 2009 where the slogan "No climate justice without gender justice" was a rallying cry (Terry, 2009; Jost et al., 2016; Barre et al., 2018; Andrijevic et al., 2020; Boas et al., 2022)¹³. A counter-critique has emerged, however, concerned that women, especially in poorer countries, are seen simply as "vulnerable" and/or "virtuous" in the context of climate change (Terry, 2009; Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Djoudi et al., 2016)¹⁴.

Ecofeminist research and activism have made some headway in linking the themes of gender, climate change and religion (Dwivedi and Reid, 2007; Tøllefsen, 2011; Kim and

11 Emma Tomalin, from a development studies and religious studies perspective, suggests that research on ecofeminism have historically overlooked the role of religion(s).

12 These scholars work in religious studies and theology and have argued for research on spiritual and religious ecofeminism to reflect the diversity of its activism across the globe.

13 Whilst these scholars have focused variously on global climate policy and governance, the effects of climate change on local agriculture, human mobility indexes, and sustainable development, all emphasise the importance of including that gender equality and gender justice on the climate action agenda.

14 These three scholars have all tracked the framing of women in climate policy debates, but from different angles. Terry has researched the role of gender justice in climate policy arenas, coming from a background in development studies; Arora-Jonsson focuses on the virtue/vulnerability framing of women, from her background in studying rural governance, and Djoudi, a senior scientist at CIFOR, along with five other scholars, reviewed the framing of women in 41 pieces of research on women and climate change.

Koster, 2017; Haq et al., 2020)¹⁵. One critique considers how overlooked demographic dimensions, suggest a higher priority for gender issues. Some see this as the antidote to static framings of women as either vulnerable victims or sacred environmental knowledge bearers (Mwangi and Mai, 2011; Resurrección, 2013; Kaijser and Kronsell, 2014; Harris, 2016; Djoudi et al., 2016; Gumucio et al., 2018). “Intersectionality”, an increasingly common way of responding to these themes, takes both gender as the most important identifier but considers how other social, economic, cultural and political dimensions affect experiences of and responses to climate change. Religion or spirituality are rarely discussed explicitly in this academic debate, and tend to be subsumed under ‘culture’; However, Harris (2016) specifically highlights the importance of engaging with African and Native American cosmologies in accounts of ecofeminism and Nogueira-Godsey (2021) highlights the need to engage with religions beyond the historically Christian-centred ecofeminism¹⁶. A review of research addressing gender in climate change adaptation suggests that there is a “feminisation of vulnerability”¹⁷ (Djoudi et al. 2016, p. S255) in the analyses of and responses to the effects of climate change.

The main point for our purposes is that reliance on gender as a demographic marker alone may overlook more complex socioeconomic dimensions, including religion or spirituality, and entrench gendered assumptions about women’s sacred relationship with the environment and their vulnerability. Women’s vulnerability to climate change can serve a strategic purpose in climate advocacy and policy work but it understates the potential for women to engage in broader ways with climate action (Resurrección, 2013; Kaijser and Kronsell, 2014)¹⁸.

Looking to (rain)forests more specifically, some research looks at women’s roles in forest conservation. Historically, women may have had fairly limited engagement in forest governance, climate policy, and the implementation of REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) programs, even where they have active roles in natural resource management and local agricultural practices (Wan et al., 2011; Larson et al., 2015; Evans et al., 2017)¹⁹. This seems an area for policy reflection, seeking to balance women’s important roles but to avoid the traps of essentializing women’s interests, vulnerability, and sacred ecological knowledge (Mwangi and Mai, 2011; Colfer and Minarchek, 2013).

15 This research has been approached in more theoretical and advocational terms, but also through social scientific and historical investigations tracking (faith-based) ecofeminist activism in different contexts.

16 Both Melanie Harris and Elaine Nogueira-Godsey focus on the racial dimensions (and tensions) of ecofeminism and consider the contributions of African American women and women in Latin America, respectively.

17 A similar argument is made in studies on development, where there is suggested to be a “feminisation of poverty”.

18 Whilst working at the Stockholm Environment Institute, Asia Centre, Resurrección published on the prevalence of women-environment linkages whilst Kaijser and Kronsell approached the issue from a political science framework.

19 These scholars are affiliated with CIFOR (the Centre for International Forestry Research).

Religion and gender are often presented largely as demographic markers, or even as hindrances to participation. However, a smattering of studies suggests that engaging more fully with local religious beliefs and practices and better understanding roles of women and above all focusing on local context is increasingly appreciated (Colfer and Minarchek, 2013; Evans et al., 2017).²⁰

THREE REGIONS: AMAZON, CONGO BASIN *and* SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Amazon

The welfare of the Amazon rainforest is the focus of innumerable research, advocacy, legal, and operational efforts, all currently colored by Brazilian politics but also by the impact of political changes in the six countries involved, by oil explorations, and by missionary activities.

In the Amazon basin region, much focus on climate change and religion has involved Catholic and indigenous groups. The continuing Catholic but also global focus of the papal encyclical *Laudato Si'* and teachings about integral ecology have shaped much recent discussion about faith-based engagement and climate change action there. Integral ecology is taken by some as a holistic response to climate change, one which has the potential to engage with and advocate for the role of indigenous groups and women (Kerber 2018; Desierto and Schnyder von Wartensee 2021; Deneulin, 2021, *Laudato Si'* Research Institute 2021). Before the Vatican Pan Amazon Synod in 2019, a statement endorsed by several Latin American Churches and faith organisations²¹, was released to emphasize the importance of including indigenous land rights, and forest protection as part of integral ecology.

20 Carol Colfer, a senior associate at CIFOR, with sociologist Rebakah Minarchek introduce what they term the “gender box” framework to help practitioners analyse women’s participation in forest governance at micro, meso and macro levels. Evans et al., affiliated with CIFOR in Latin America, have researched sex-differentiated participation in the context of Nicaraguan indigenous territories.

21 Including CONIC, Brazil; ISEAT, Bolivia; CJP, Colombia; Forum ACT, Brazil, Christian Aid.

Where women are addressed within Amazon-focused research, the focus has tended towards indigenous women, primarily through their environmental knowledge and their participation in local environmental governance. Indigenous women are shown to be integral to sustainable forest management, yet often have limited engagement with formal climate processes (Shanley et al., 2011; Schmink and Gómez-García, 2015; Larson et al., 2018)²². A growing body of evidence highlights that women are successfully engaging with local processes through groups such as *guerreiras da floresta* (women warriors of the forest) and by translating their ecological knowledge and spiritual engagement with the forest into positions of leadership and advocacy (Schmink and Gómez-García, 2015; Thalji and Yakushko, 2018²³). A forthcoming research study by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) will specifically address the roles that women play in conservation and sustainability, with aims to promote gender sensitive conservation in the Amazon Sustainable Landscapes (ASL) programme.

Alliances have been formed across interfaith and indigenous lines (see Berry and Albro, 2018²⁴), but there are also tensions. These tend to occur when collaboration is approached uncritically with regards to the role of women. The Pan-Amazon Ecclesial Network (REPAM, Red Eclesial Pan-Amazónica), formed in 2014, was set up in 2014 as a way to encourage dialogue and action with indigenous groups across the Amazon. Two scholars based in Ecuador, Cobo and Moreno (2021), suggest that the Pan Amazonian Synod and REPAM's implementation of integral ecology, though progressive in terms of rainforest protection and eco-territorial struggles, is interwoven with conservative notions of sex and gender. Though indigenous peoples' engagement is encouraged, they suggest that the participation of indigenous women may be limited by the hierarchical structures in place. Conversely, others argue that the uptake of integral ecology, might in fact have the potential to lead to the inclusion of more women in decision-making, in part due to REPAM's reckoning with its historic complicity in the exploitation of indigenous peoples and land (Deneulin 2021 and Desierto and Schnyder von Wartensee, 2021).

Differing perspectives on women's roles have quite deep roots. Being an *ecofeminist* in Latin America is difficult, according to Ivone Gebara²⁵ (2003), particularly given the "twin superiorities" in Latin American Christianity, of humans over nature and men over women. Yet, on a grassroots level, Catholic and Evangelical Churches have also served

22 These scholars work at the intersections of academia and practice have analysed women's role in forestry across the Amazon, with a particular focus on Brazil, Peru and Bolivia.

23 Thalji and Yakushko consider the psychological and therapeutic dimensions and impacts of ecological destruction by addressing the revival of shamanism amongst Amazonian women.

24 This edited collection presents a diverse and far-reaching picture of faith-based (particularly Catholic and Evangelical) and indigenous engagements with environmentalism across Latin America. It includes the voices of sociologists, anthropologists, theologians and political scientists, many of whom work at the intersection of practice, policy, activism and academia.

25 Ivone Gebara is a Brazilian Catholic nun and theologian who has written extensively on ecofeminism, feminist theology and its intersections with (Catholic) Christianity in Latin America.

as early promoters of local women's organisations and socio-political leadership in the Peruvian Amazon, setting the groundwork for confident female participation in local environmental policy (Oliart, 2008²⁶). Sempértegui (2021), who conducts research on the political dimensions of environmentalism and works with an anti-extractivist group in the Ecuadorian Amazon, presents a similarly ambivalent allyship between secular ecofeminists and indigenous women. However, indigenous women are increasingly being engaged with on their own terms and setting their own agendas. Sempértegui proposes that it is the legacy of cooperation between indigenous communities, religious groups (or, historically, missionaries), and environmentalists against extractivist projects that helped lay the groundwork for this relationship.

This cooperation has been realized through *Somos Amazonía (We are the Amazon)*²⁷, a campaign launched by two Jesuit NGOs, Alboan and Entreculturas, which aims to bring together indigenous and ecumenical voices for environmental protection and indigenous land rights. The campaign is explicitly "ecofeminist" in approach, focuses on prioritizing gender and socio-environmental justice, and brings the ecofeminist perspective to bear on the notion of integral ecology (Somos Amazonía, 2022).

Congo Basin

Research in the Congo Basin region has primarily addressed the roles of women in forest conservation and decision-making, with a particular focus on REDD+ (Peach Brown, 2011; Stiem and Krause, 2016; Samndong and Kjosavik, 2017; Guillaume, 2017)²⁸. Increasing global emphasis from organizations such as CIFOR on the importance of including women in local governance has led to a re-evaluation of existing processes in the Congo through a gender lens. Efforts to include women in REDD+ initiatives and in forestry decision-making processes may be limited when top-down approaches to gender equity are employed without engagement with local contexts. For example, Samndong and Kjosavik (2017)²⁹ suggest that women, despite holding specific knowledge of forests in relation to health and food security, faced barriers to participation in REDD+ projects due to insufficient policy knowledge and lack of local bargaining power (see also Stiem and Krause, 2016). The issue they present is not merely one of women's measurable participation, but that their issue-specific knowledge and concerns, particularly related to health and food security, may be overlooked.

26 Particia Oliart works in Latin American studies with a focus on creative, youth and women's activism.

27 <https://www.somos-amazonia.org/>

28 A number of these scholars have conducted research with or for the CIFOR and work at the intersections of policy, practice and academia.

29 These scholars work on researching environmental governance processes and the political dimensions of climate and development.

Whilst socio-cultural norms and religion are in some cases presented as a hindrance (Trefon, 2006; Guillaume, 2017; Samndong and Kjosavik, 2017; Tegegne et al., 2022)³⁰, religious leaders and local churches in the Congo Basin are seen as actual and potential conduits of women's participation. Stiem and Krause (2016), in an evaluation of women's participation in forest governance, suggest that religious groups, particularly the Catholic Church have played an important role in local forest governance and environmental conservation in the Congo Basin. Local church-based organizations, given their influence, are identified as important partners for future REDD+ projects. This could provide a platform to encourage women's participation and put into practice what Peach Brown (2011)³¹ has suggested are the somewhat limited high-level statements on the need to include women.

The Ecclesial Network for the Congo River Basin (REBAC) has taken steps to assure religious engagement with climate change and rainforest conservation (it is seen as the Congo-based counterpart to REPAM)³². Separately, CIFOR (2019) has emphasised the need for more focus on the land and forest rights of indigenous women through mainstreaming gender in forest conservation and prioritizing local indigenous knowledge.

There does not appear to be much research focused on religion, gender, *and* climate change in the Congo, taken together, these existing initiatives demonstrate the potential for more targeted engagement and advocacy from inter-faith and faith-based groups which builds on the work from gender and forest research.

Southeast Asia

Research in Southeast Asia on climate change is perhaps the most diverse of all three regions. The Asia Indigenous People's Pact (AIPP) has been instrumental in researching and advocating for the rights and roles of indigenous peoples across the region, with part of their work dedicated to the role of women (AIPP, 2013; AIPP, 2015; Bhattachan and Thapa, AIPP, 2020). An AIPP 2015 report highlights good practice examples of indigenous women's contribution to sustainable resource management and forest conservation in two villages in Vietnam. Recognition of the role of indigenous women in the preservation of traditional ecological knowledge and in forest conservation is part of the story, but without formalization of their rights in policy and adequate mechanisms in place to participate in local environmental governance, climate change measures may fall short (Bhattachan and Thapa, AIPP, 2020). Indigenous groups have also been supported in an interfaith context, notably through the Interreligious Climate and Ecology Network

30 These scholars, in research and evaluation on industrial logging, forest decision-making, REDD+ governance, and forest rule compliance have pointed to the impact of local sociocultural norms on women's participation.

31 Carolyn Peach Brown has spent a more than decade working in international development in Central Africa and now focuses on researching environmental governance from an interdisciplinary perspective.

32 <https://rebacongobassin.org/>; see also: <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/511/churches-partner-to-preserve-tropical-forest-in-dr-congo-appreciate-laudato-si>

(ICE). Their non-hierarchical structures may well have allowed for equitable and reflexive participation with grassroots faith-based and indigenous groups as well as for the (up and coming) participation of women (Parry, 2019³³). Closely connected to the ICE Network is the International Network of Engaged Buddhists (INEB), headquartered in Thailand, which support programs on climate change and the environment, as well as gender and women's empowerment³⁴. The challenge here is to demonstrate the important connection between the often existent, yet often distinct operational programs of many faith groups on climate change and women/gender.

On a more grassroots level, creative engagement with both formalised religion and traditional spirituality is one way in which women engage with environmental protection. An anthropological study on the Karendi people in Sumba, Indonesia demonstrated that women retain traditional environmental practices despite their conversion to Christianity through a process of experimentation with beliefs and practices (Fowler, 2003). A more recent anthropological study on the matrilineal structure of the Minangkabau, in which a hybridized form of Islam is practiced, has been suggested to be instrumental to the retention of women's land ownership and leadership (Berta, 2014). McKay et al. (2014)³⁵ suggest that, to encourage women's participation, it may be important to engage with these groups in future environmental initiatives. Yet, others highlight the risks associated with the institutionalisation of indigenous knowledge and practices through which women's spiritual role may in fact be diminished or instrumentalized (Thambiah et al. 2018)³⁶.

Much research on religion and climate change in Southeast Asia focuses on the Indonesian context. Whilst the focus is often on Islamic responses to climate change through environmental activities, schools, and laws there is also a significant contingent of Christian, Hindu, indigenous well as hybrid and creative forms of faith-based environmentalism (McKay et al., 2014; Ardhana 2017; Mangunjaya and Praharawati, 2019³⁷). A series of interfaith statements were released in 2007 at COP13 in Bali which specifically addressed the issues of climate change and deforestation and brought together leaders and representatives from six Indonesian religious groups: Muslim, Christian, Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucian (Mangunjaya 2008).

33 Whilst published academic research on the ICE network appears limited, Emilie Parry conducted two years of in-depth sociological research with ICE as part of an MLitt thesis.

34 <https://www.inebnetwork.org/engagements/gender-women-empowerment/>; <https://www.inebnetwork.org/engagements/climate-change/>

35 Jeanne McKay has worked on developing and supporting natural resource management and conservation projects with a particular focus on Southeast Asia and Latin America.

36 Thambiah et al. (2018) in a sociological study of two indigenous groups in Malaysia demonstrate the important role of the forest to their cosmology and the way that women's sacred role may be diminished through external influences which prioritise male leadership and representation.

37 Fachruddin Majeri Mangunjaya is a leading environmental activist, researcher, practitioner and advisor in Indonesia and internationally, with a particular focus on Islamic environmental initiatives.

A project in West Sumatra focused specifically on developing an Islamic faith-based approach to conservation through training religious leaders and developing environmental school curricula. Part of the assessment of this project involved addressing the gender dimensions of its success, in which women demonstrated greater uptake and understanding of Islamic environmental teachings and were more likely to be directly involved in conservation activities. However, women were at the same time less likely to be engaged with in faith-based conservation projects in the first place where priority was given to Muslim men and religious leaders (McKay, 2013; McKay et al., 2014). In contrast, illustrating a distinctly women-led response to climate change, 'Aisyiyah³⁸, an Indonesian Muslim women's organisation, has called on Muslim women to observe an Eco-Jihad and encouraged practical involvement in forest conservation and environmental education (Amri, 2014³⁹).

INTERFAITH, INDIGENOUS, *and* GLOBAL-LOCAL DIMENSIONS

Three intertwined topics emerge across the three very different rainforest regions: the important and often complex roles of indigenous groups including women's diverse roles in these communities, the practicalities of interfaith cooperation, and global-local dimensions of climate action.

Including indigenous groups, and particularly indigenous women, has been critical in forest conservation, though it is not without challenges. Various studies demonstrate that categorizing indigenous beliefs and practices as necessarily "religious" can be contentious. It is important always to reflect context and give priority to localized understanding of indigeneity and ecological knowledge. Here striking a balance between recognizing indigenous women's ecological knowledge while avoiding superficial or instrumental engagement is key (see the aforementioned study by Thambiah et al., 2018).

38 <http://lhpb.aisyiyah.or.id>

39 Ulil Amri, in environmental studies, traced the practice of "eco-jihad" In Indonesia, which has now been taken up by 'Aisyiyah. See also <https://www.reuters.com/article/indonesia-environment-women-idUSL8N2MY3YH>

Some global level priorities and approaches, notably in interfaith responses to climate change and an emphasis on women's participation, however desirable, can often overlook the very localized ways in which indigenous women are organising outside more formalised religious settings or climate policy processes. Some criticism has been levelled against interfaith initiatives, that indigenous beliefs and practices have not been fully understood or engaged with (Bagir, 2019; Lemvik, 2021)⁴⁰. These global-local dimensions of faith-based and interfaith climate action are critical for understanding women's roles in all three regions.

Much literature examined for this review stresses the importance of putting the local context at the front and center in appraisals of, or advocacy for women's participation in climate processes. The necessarily global response to climate change complicates the challenge, including the ways that interfaith and faith-based actors are organizing at an international level. Despite these complexities, interfaith and faith-based initiatives do, at local and global levels, engage successfully with indigenous women and promote the roles and interests of women in forest conservation, or at least have the potential to do so⁴¹.

WHERE NEXT? KEY QUESTIONS *and* OMISSIONS

This review was thorough but far from comprehensive⁴². Gaps and omissions vary by region. In the Amazon, research has tended to focus on roles of indigenous women and forest conservation, with some attention paid to spiritual dimensions, or on more formalized religious engagements, with little or no mention of women. In the Congo Basin,

40 Zainal Bagir, speaking from a more philosophical perspective, suggests that indigenous groups have not received enough serious attention in faith-based and interfaith environmental initiatives. Karen Lemvik, who conducted postgraduate sociological research on the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative, noted the significant inclusion of indigenous groups but highlighted potential issues of mutual trust across interfaith-indigenous collaboration.

41 See research, already discussed, by McKay et al. 2014; Stiem and Krause 2016; Sempértegui 2021.

42 Some omissions may be due to language barriers, as it focused on English resources.

women and gender have been addressed through research on REDD+ processes, with religion rarely discussed. Unlike the Amazon, there is a paucity of research on religion and climate action, and the faith-based initiatives in place do not engage with gender explicitly. Southeast Asia presents a more comprehensive picture, where indigenous women are again often the focus of research on forest conservation and climate action and research on other interfaith and faith-based initiatives do engage with the role of women, though mainly to report on their limited formal engagement.

A key takeaway from the review of published literature is the narrative, across the three regions, that indigenous women are critical to rainforest conservation and protection in several ways: through their knowledge of local ecological practices, their preservation of traditional cultural and religious beliefs, and their active role in local forest conservation. Yet it is these same practices which may make women less likely to participate in meaningful ways in climate and forest policy, as they often fall outside formal leadership and policy literacy. Women are more likely than men to be affected by climate change when it comes to issues of health, food security, and local agriculture. A recurrent theme in the literature is that care must be taken not to frame women solely in the light of their (sacred) roles, interests, and vulnerabilities. Those arguing for intersectional responses to climate change emphasize the ways that framing women, and particularly indigenous women, as vulnerable, or as bearers of sacred knowledge may limit equitable participation.

Local faith-based and interfaith groups are important partners (actual and potential) in promoting women's roles in forest conservation. Despite some criticism that religious groups and the somewhat coded "socio-cultural norms" may be hindrances to women's roles in environmental processes, they are also recognized as groups which at the least, must be engaged to develop context appropriate gender-sensitive responses to climate change, and at best are key promoters of women's roles and local leadership.

The increasing focus in academic research and literature on women's increasing roles in climate change and rainforests, alongside increasing roles of interfaith and religious groups, point to opportunities for mutual learning. Research and action on gender and the environment or gender and forests could develop a richer engagement with faith-based and interfaith actors and as such respond to their own calls for more intersectional and context-appropriate responses. Likewise, faith-based and interfaith actors could engage with the tools and approaches on gender-sensitive climate action and use their local, national and international voices to help advocate for women's participation in climate and forestry processes.

Based on the key takeaways and omissions in this review, future research and practice would benefit from considering the following questions:

- What roles do women play in specifically *interfaith* rainforest conservation initiatives and climate action in the Amazon, Congo Basin and Southeast Asia?
- Can research on gender and forestry and models for gender-sensitive climate action be usefully adapted to the needs of interfaith groups?

- To what extent have interfaith initiatives on rainforest conservation adequately engaged with local indigenous (women's) beliefs and practices?
- How can an intersectional approach to women and gender be practically applied to faith-based and interfaith climate action?
- What does successful participation of women in interfaith climate action and forest conservation look like? Are representation and participation necessary or sufficient for gender sensitive faith-based climate action? The stories and narratives of the women involved can offer meaningful insights and guides to future action.

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