

# The Significance of Women- and Mother-led Social Change ..... .....in the Pacific-Asia Region

## Background & Overview

**Background:** The Pacific-Asia Region is one of the most geographically vulnerable regions to climate change due to its many low-lying areas encountering effects such as: coastal erosion, sea-level rise, ocean acidification, and extreme weather events.<sup>1</sup> Climate change also poses its greatest threat to youth and future generations, while disproportionately impacting women, Indigenous people, and marginalized communities who are under-resourced.

To address the disproportionate climate-related effects felt by these groups, it is imperative to address the intersections of gender, intergenerational equity, and geographic vulnerability in the designs of solutions. To mitigate the risks that perpetuate these inequalities, lasting social change is needed.

**Overview:** The impact generated by women and mothers at the epicenter of catalytic movements has been made clear through history. There is an opportunity to uplift the roles of women and mothers as a priority population of focus to accelerate climate action and increase positive peacebuilding within the Pacific-Asia Region. In addition to mobilizing Indigenous knowledge and intergenerational relationships to foster innovative solutions, society can channel their wisdom to address the relevance of climate change impacts at local and global scales. There are numerous challenges and disparities that occur as a result of climate change, yet frontline communities and grassroots groups led by women and mothers in the region are broadening and deepening what climate mitigation, adaptation, and resiliency efforts can look like when we are in the right relationship with one another, the environment, and those for whom we care.

**Approach:** This research was carried out by conducting a literature review, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, gray literature, and popular press, news, and media, at the intersection of climate change, peacebuilding, women, mothers, and social well-being. Its scope looks at the areas of Women and Mother-led Social Change Movements and Programs, Intergenerational Approaches and Studies, Cohort Implementation, Indigenous Voices, and Gender-Responsive Climate Change Attitudes, Effects, and Adaptability, with a location focus in the Pacific-Asia region.

## Significant Findings

Findings suggest the need to address the following 5 areas:

(1) The Mental Health and Well-being of Women and Mothers



(2) Psychological Dimensions of Climate Change and Ecological Degradation



(3) Uplifting and Educating Women and Girls in Climate Change



(4) Deeper Levels of Engagement with Local and Community-Based Programs



(5) Utilizing Intergenerational Approaches and Indigenous Knowledge





### Mental Health and Well-Being of Women and Mothers

The barriers women and mothers face in their daily lives—and throughout their lifetimes—can challenge their ability to thrive and contribute to the world. Women have a powerful influence within social justice and peacebuilding arenas, and can greatly contribute to creating an equitable, safer, and sustainable society for themselves and their descendants. Peer-support, self-care, and engaging in meaningful activities that support whole person care are some ways to improve the well-being of women, to effectively advance and sustain women’s representation.



### Psychological Dimensions of Climate Change and Ecological Degradation

Climate change effects are associated with depression, suicide, post-traumatic stress disorder, mood disorders, and disruptions in medication usage.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the negative psychological implications that many people experience, eco-anxiety is a new psychological consequence due to climate change. Individual and collective action to mitigate climate change is proven to mitigate negative mental health outcomes,<sup>3</sup> in addition to peer-support and engaging in courageous conversations. By focusing on the psychological dimensions of climate change and increasing our agency for women, mothers, and their children, there is a significant opportunity to invest in preventative health to mitigate learned helplessness that follows eco-anxiety, solastalgia, and fear of climate change.



### Uplifting and Educating Women and Girls in Climate Change

Research indicates that uplifting women can reduce carbon emissions, strengthen conservation efforts, advance climate mitigation policies, improve children’s health and education levels, and advance peacebuilding efforts.<sup>4</sup> Women remain an underutilized social and political resource, signifying the need to advance gender equality and climate action by creating entry points and opportunities for capacity building, education, advocacy and activism, and in leadership and decision-making positions. By prioritizing women, girls, and gender-diverse education, they are better equipped to respond to the changing climate and emerge as global leaders.



### Deeper Levels of Engagement with Local and Community-Based Programs

Implementation of international dialogue in local and sub-national levels is a challenge many organizations face in a region as vast as Asia and the Pacific. Leveraging ground-up approaches, place-based solutions can be tailored to the specific impacts certain communities face whether atoll or metropolis. Further engaging people at the local and community level can unlock the potential to form creative solutions, and advance social cohesion and community resilience. As environmental changes have the potential to spur conflict, when mobilized from a community-centered approach, communities are better apt to respond to challenges and contribute to achieving long-term sustainable peace.



### Utilizing Intergenerational Approaches and Indigenous Knowledge

Intergenerational approaches recognize the multidimensional influence generations have on each other as significant intervention points for climate-resilient actions. To create long-term behavior change within individuals, and systems, shared cultural values activate social change. Thus, ancient wisdom carried by Indigenous peoples creates experts steeped in local ecological knowledge whose holistic approaches help to enhance the resilience and conservation within their ecosystems. Through diverse perspectives, creative solutions, and meaningful connections, multicultural and intergenerational approaches kindle significant action and lasting change for protection and peace.

## References

1. [Climate Change in Asia and the Pacific. What’s at Stake?](#), UNDP: Asia Pacific (2019)  
 2. [Crisis Care: Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency](#), National Library of Medicine (2021)

3. [Climate Psychology 101](#), Climate Psychology Alliance  
 4. [Why Women Are Key To Solving The Climate Crisis](#), OneEarth (2022)

## Contact Information

### Primary Researcher:



Healani Goo  
B.A Psychology | Certificate in Peace and Conflict Studies  
University of Hawai’i at Mānoa  
Intern/Apprentice, Institute for Climate and Peace  
healani@climateandpeace.org

### Faculty Advisors:



Dr. Maya Soetoro-Ng  
Co-Founder, Institute for Climate and Peace  
Practicum Advisor, Matsunaga Institute



Dr. Kealoha Fox  
President and Senior Advisor  
Institute for Climate and Peace  
kealoha@climateandpeace.org