

# Research on Climate Change Impact on Women in Lebanon and Syria



The background is a textured green. On the left, there is a collage of images: a cloud made of plastic bottles at the top, a circular landscape with a tree and hills below it, and a cutout of a person with arms crossed wearing a striped shirt and jeans. There are also some abstract red and green shapes.

## Executive Summary

Lebanon and Syria sit at the crossroads of a deepening climate crisis, long-standing political instability, economic collapse, and protracted displacement. In both countries, women, girls, and gender-diverse people shoulder a disproportionate share of the social and economic cost of environmental degradation and climate shocks, while also sustaining families, food systems and community survival. This combined report, commissioned by Doria Feminist Fund (DFF), highlights how feminist and grassroots actors are navigating these overlapping crises to sustain their communities and food systems under conditions of extreme precarity.

Across the two countries, the symptoms of the climate crisis are similar, with hotter and longer heatwaves, increasingly erratic rainfall, repeated droughts, intensified wildfires, and growing water stress. These hazards don't operate in a vacuum; they interact with entrenched governance failures, privatization and austerity, and the material and psychological impacts of war and military aggression. In Lebanon, climate impacts unfold amid severe financial and banking collapse, institutional paralysis, crumbling infrastructure and recurrent Israeli aggression, including ecocide-like damage of forests, farmlands, coasts and water systems. In Syria, successive multi-year droughts, geopolitical control over rivers and water stations, wildfires, years of armed conflict sustained by authoritarian rule and unregulated fuels have destroyed agricultural systems, polluted air and water, and undermined the conditions for safe return and just reconstruction. In both contexts, climate change functions less as a distant risk and more as a present, structural amplifier of existing injustices and vulnerabilities.

The gendered and intersectional impacts of these compounded crises cluster around livelihood and labor, health and bodily integrity, and safety, mobility and coping strategies. Rural women farmers and seasonal workers are seeing harvest failure and surging input costs while navigating labor regimes that often treat their work as an extension of unpaid domestic labor. In Lebanon, the coastal crisis, driven by invasive species and storm surges, threatens the livelihoods of marginalized fisherfolk. In Syria, agricultural collapse has fueled a rural exodus, pushing women into exploitative and informal urban wage labor.

Beyond livelihoods, environmental degradation manifests as a crisis of bodily integrity. Communities living near polluted rivers, landfills, and makeshift oil refineries report alarming rates of cancer and respiratory illnesses. Women specifically face reproductive complications, miscarriages, and waterborne diseases like Cholera, exacerbated by failing WASH systems and extreme heat. Safety and mobility are similarly constrained; as water and fuel become scarce, women must travel further through unsafe or militarized zones, increasing their exposure to harassment and gender-based violence. In the most desperate cases, households in Syria have resorted to harmful coping strategies, such as child and early marriage, as a means of reducing financial pressure.


Despite these challenges, a diverse ecosystem of feminist and environmental actors is practicing "climate justice" through embodied action. In Lebanon, ecofeminist collectives lead initiatives in seed saving, agroecology, marine biodiversity, and the bioremediation of war-contaminated lands. In Syria, women-led organizations and feminist journalists are contesting exclusionary reconstruction plans and documenting the gendered impacts of drought, food insecurity, and rising temperatures. These movements frame "care" not just as a domestic duty, but as a political orientation toward land and water, linking environmental struggles to broader agendas of decolonization, food sovereignty, and demilitarization.

The progress of these movements is hindered by a "projectized" funding landscape that favors short-term, technocratic outputs over long-term movement building. Many grassroots and informal collectives, particularly in rural or securitized zones, are excluded from support due to rigid legal and banking requirements. Furthermore, internal power imbalances within coalitions and the pervasive threat of burnout among activists responding to multiple crises simultaneously limit strategic alignment.

In response, the report proposes a set of strategic recommendations aimed at feminist funders and other donors, national and local authorities, and movements themselves. For donors, it calls for a shift from narrow project funding to core, flexible and multi-year support; the creation of accessible funding pathways for informal and unregistered groups;

the establishment of feminist rapid-response mechanism and fund for climate and conflict-related environmental disasters; the resourcing of knowledge-exchange and collective learning spaces led by feminist and grassroots actors; and investment in feminist research, monitoring and narrative work on climate, conflict, and social reproduction. For public authorities, it recommends integrating feminist climate justice into national policy, reforming ecological governance, protecting climate-exposed workers and communities, and partnering seriously with feminist and women-led organizations. For movements, it emphasizes cross-movement alliances, stronger internal governance and care, and the consolidation of feminist climate narratives that link environmental struggles to decolonization, demilitarization, and economic justice. Taken together, the findings show the reconstruction, adaptation, and green transition agendas in Lebanon and Syria cannot be neutral or technocratic; without feminist, anti-colonial, and anti-militarist perspectives, they risk reproducing the very structures that produced the ecological collapse and gendered injustice.

## Introduction and Methodology



Doria Feminist Fund (DFF) works to resource feminist movements across the region, with a particular focus on contexts shaped by crisis and conflict. As climate change accelerates and its effects become more visible in people's daily lives, DFF partners increasingly operate at the intersection of gender justice, environmental harm, and crisis response. Lebanon and Syria are critical sites from which to explore these intersections. Both are acutely climate-vulnerable and marked by severe political-economic fragility and conflict. At the same time, they host dynamic feminist, women-led, and allied environmental actors who have been pushing back against environmental destruction and experimenting with alternative ways of relating to land, water, food systems and community care. The study pursues three interrelated objectives:

- Analyzing how climate crises are experienced in gendered and intersectional ways, particularly by women, girls, displaced communities, and other groups at the margin.
- Mapping feminist, and women-led actors working on gender and climate justice.
- Determining the structural challenges these actors face and specific types of funding, policy change, and movement-level support most useful to these actors.

The research employed a shared qualitative design across countries. Each country team began with a desk review of existing reports, academic work, policy documents, and publications by activists. This foundation informed structured interviews with approximately 10 actors per country, including DFF partners, feminist and women's rights organizations, environmental and climate NGOs and community groups, youth climate activists, journalists, and practitioners working on water, land and urban planning. A joint event was convened to co-define core themes and ensure the final report reflects the priorities and language of those directly engaged in the work. While data collection was conducted semi-independently, the team co-developed a comparative synthesis to draw out regional patterns while remaining attentive to national specificities. At every stage, the analysis was guided by a feminist, intersectional, and political-economy lens. While this merged report draws from two comprehensive country-level studies, for a more granular exploration of country-specific findings, including detailed interviews and localized environmental trends, please refer to the individual reports for Lebanon and Syria.

There are important limitations to keep in mind. The research centers women and feminist actors; it doesn't offer a full representation of how all marginalized groups experience environmental change. Furthermore, the sample was composed of individuals already engaged in climate or environment-related work; thus, their framing provides insight into climate politics rather than representing the total population. Finally, the report focuses on consistent, key dynamics rather than an exhaustive catalogue of every impact, particularly in high-securitized areas.

## Climate, Conflict & Ecological Crises in Lebanon and Syria

Lebanon and Syria face intensifying climate stress layered onto fragile political and economic conditions. Both are experiencing rising average temperatures, more frequent and prolonged heatwaves, irregular rainfall, and increasing droughts and wildfires. In agricultural areas, rainfall has declined, delayed or fallen in intense bursts, causing erosion and flash floods rather than supporting crops, while shrinking snow cover reduces water storage and long-term availability. Wildfires have become recurrent, increasingly affecting the landscape, and destroying forests, orchards, and pasturelands.

These environmental changes are deeply entangled with governance crises. In Lebanon, decades of mismanagement of water, waste, and land use have left infrastructure dilapidated and institutions weak. The financial and banking collapse has gutted public budgets, limited basic services, and transformed even routine environmental management into an emergency, pay-to-play affairs. The detonation at Beirut port and the more recent Israeli bombardment and use of incendiary weapons in the South have destroyed and contaminated swathes of land, damaged water and waste infrastructure, and compromised coastal and marine ecosystems; leading many actors to describe the destruction as ecocide; a broader project of violence and dispossession.



In Syria, climate discussions are dominated by drought and water politics. Multi-year droughts, especially in the North and Northeast, are pushing rainfed agriculture and pastoralism to the brink and accelerating rural-urban migration. Water availability is frequently manipulated as a leverage point in regional power struggles. Furthermore, environmental damage from armed conflict—including the destruction of agricultural land and the bombing of power plants and oil facilities—as well as wildfires in coastal and interior regions, are pervasive, contaminating air, soil and water, and adding to deforestation and erosion.

In both contexts, women and feminist actors insist that climate change cannot be understood separately from war, sanctions, austerity, and the erosion of public institutions. Climate hazards act as stress multipliers; they deepen poverty, accelerate displacement, strain social relations, and intensify already existing inequalities in land, labor, care, and political voice. At the same time, formal climate policy and reconstruction agendas often ignore or downplay these connections, treating environmental issues as technical problems to be solved by experts and donors, rather than as deeply political questions about power, responsibility and justice.

## Gendered and intersectional impacts of climate change

The gendered and intersectional impacts described by interviewees and documented in reports cut across three interlocking domains: livelihood and labor; health and bodily integrity; and safety, mobility and coping strategies. These areas reinforce one another, producing complex patterns of vulnerability that are deeply influenced by class, displacement, and patriarchal social structures.

Related to livelihoods and labor across both countries, rural women, small-scale farmers, seasonal workers and women involved in food processing and preservation describe a shared landscape of uncertainty as harvest calendars become unpredictable. Drought, heatwaves and shifting rainfall patterns upset planting times and compress harvest windows, making work more physically demanding and economically risky and increasing unpaid care responsibilities on women. Farmers are increasingly forced to rely on expensive pesticides to combat new pests and diseases, adding environmental and health risks. These climate shifts collide with an unequal labor regime where women hold only a small fraction of agricultural land in their own names (7% only in Lebanon), undermining their access to credit, compensation or adaptation support.

In Lebanon, coastal communities report invasive marine species that destroy nets and fish stocks, eroding incomes that are already fragile. Displaced and refugee women are pushed into the most precarious niches or agricultural value chains, where heat stress, pesticide exposure and harassment are daily realities and where employment disappears overnight when climate shocks wipe out yields. In Syria, where agriculture has witnessed a significant collapse, resulting in rural exodus toward cities, women describe being forced to seek alternative forms of labour, often in overcrowded urban centres. This work is frequently informal and exploitative, offering little bargaining power and exposing women to heightened risks of abuse.

Climate and environmental degradation also manifest in people's bodies, with community members linking rising temperatures, pollution, and water scarcity to a wide range of health problems. Heatwaves exacerbate cardiovascular and respiratory conditions, making domestic chores and outdoor work particularly dangerous for pregnant women and the elderly. In Lebanon, high rates of cancer are reported near polluted rivers and landfills. In Syria, makeshift refineries and war-related contaminants have contributed to widespread contamination of water, soil, and air, while armed conflict has degraded water and sanitation systems, increasing vulnerability to waterborne diseases such as cholera. Women and girls bear the brunt of caring for sick family members and trying to secure water for drinking, cooking and hygiene.

Reproductive and sexual health are recurrent themes of concern. In drought-affected Syria, women and practitioners report miscarriage, birth complications, and menstrual irregularities associated with rising temperatures, extreme heat exposure, toxic pollution, and chronic stress. In camps and informal settlements, managing menstruation, pregnancy and postpartum care becomes difficult with water scarcity and underfunded services. At the same time, in Lebanon and Syria alike, mental health burdens are heavy: anxiety, depression and trauma are worsened by constant worry of failing crops, rising temperatures and disappearing water sources.

Safety risks are closely linked to resource scarcity. Women and girls often travel longer distances to access water, sometimes crossing militarized or unsafe areas, increasing exposure to harassment and violence. Wildfires and floods drive sudden displacement, while environmental hazards make certain livelihoods more dangerous. In Syria, economic and climatic pressures have pushed some households toward harmful coping mechanisms, including child and early marriage, and domestic violence increases under conditions of environmental stress. Female environmental defenders face targeted harassment, and refugees' legal precarity creates mobility constraints during disasters.

Despite this, women and feminist actors describe everyday strategies that mitigate harm and build resilience, including informal savings and solidarity networks, women-led knowledge exchange, community-led fire prevention, seed-saving of climate-resilient varieties, mutual aid around water and food, documentation of women stories and feminist perspectives on land, heritage and ecological stewardship. Rarely recognized in official climate adaptation plans, these practices nonetheless constitute a vital, embodied repertoire of feminist climate action.

# Feminist and Climate Justice Actors, Strategies and Narratives

Feminist and climate justice work is already active in both Lebanon and Syria, though it remains more consolidated and visible in Lebanon and more emergent and fragmented in Syria (Please refer to the standalone Lebanon and Syria reports). The landscape of actors is diverse and uneven, bringing together long-standing feminist organizations, newer women-led collectives, environmental NGOs, agroecology and food sovereignty initiatives, youth groups, professional networks and individual journalists and researchers. Many organizations attempt to work holistically, with gender justice groups engaging with environmental issues and rural development actors adopting feminist lenses to address gendered inequalities in land ownership and decision-making.

In Lebanon, agroecology initiatives and seed networks frame their work around sovereignty and community control while simultaneously challenging patriarchal land relations and experimenting with collective care forms. Marine protection and coastal conservation groups combine ecological defense with advocacy for fishers' rights and public access to shores. In Syria, women-led organizations and researchers are critically engaging with housing, land, and property rights, water governance, and urban planning, particularly within reconstruction and debates about return. They highlight how legal ambiguity, fragmented governance, and the absence of clear planning frameworks leave widows and

Across both countries, loosely displaced women without secure tenure or effective pathways to compensation or return. organized youth initiatives utilize social media and arts to raise awareness about droughts, waste and air pollution.

Across both contexts, feminist and climate justice actors combine practical interventions such as seed banks in Lebanon, community training, tree planting, land rehabilitation, and alternative livelihoods with research, documentation, advocacy, and political education linking environmental harm to gender, class, militarism, and governance. Coalition building remains central despite resource constraints, with groups mobilizing around specific campaigns, from opposing the Bisri dam and the 2015 waste crisis in Lebanon to wildfire response across both countries, sometimes developing longer-term alliances.

Their narratives center care, sovereignty, and justice. Care is framed as an ethical and political orientation toward land, water, bodies, and communities. Food sovereignty and agroecology are seen as ways to reduce dependency on volatile markets, resist corporate control and uphold rural women's knowledge and agency, especially in Lebanon, with emerging echoes in Syria.

Environmental destruction linked to war and occupation is named as political violence and, in some cases, as ecocide, particularly in relation to Israeli attacks on Lebanon. In reconstruction and return debates, feminist actors stress that rebuilding without land rights, water justice, gendered labour, and environmental repair cannot be just or sustainable.



## Structural Challenges and Needs

Across Lebanon and Syria, the findings converge around a set of recurring patterns that shape feminist and climate justice work. Feminist and women-led actors are navigating projectized and restrictive funding architectures, hostile or unstable institutional and legal environments, depoliticized technocratic climate governance, unequal movement ecologies and a crisis of care and burnout. These patterns look different in each context, but together they define the terrain on which climate justice organizing is taking place.

Despite their creativity and resilience, feminist and climate justice actors in both countries operate within funding systems that undermine continuity and experimentation. Organizations in Lebanon and Syria describe a project culture dominated by short-term, rigidly structured grants, leaving little space for political work, experimentation, or the slow relational labor of coalition-building. Core costs such as salaries, rent, administration, legal support, and care are chronically underfunded or excluded, stretching groups thin and pushing them toward burnout. Newer and informal collectives, especially in rural, displaced, or marginalized areas, face significant barriers to accessing funding, as eligibility criteria favor established organizations with administrative capacity, English-language proficiency, and bank accounts in stable jurisdictions.

The broader institutional environment compounds these pressures in distinct ways. In Lebanon, the post2019- economic and banking crisis, including capital control, dysfunctional banking channels and recurrent losses to fees or informal cash handling, makes it difficult for organizations and informal groups to receive, hold, and disburse funds, and adds uncertainty and loss on top of already thin budgets. Several interviewees, particularly in Lebanon, situate environmental harm within long-standing patterns of sectarian and elite capture, where decisions over land, water and infrastructure are shaped by political and clientelist relationships rather than transparent rules. In Syria, feminist and environmental actors operate within a landscape shaped by fragmented governance and policy ambiguity, as the country emerges from decades of authoritarian rule. These conditions create multiple layers of risk and uncertainty for groups trying to address sensitive issues such as land, water, pollution or reconstruction, and they narrow the space for critical, independent organizing. In both contexts, the institutional environment is an active constraint that shapes what kind of work is possible, where and its consequences.

Climate and environmental governance often reinforces these constraints rather than easing them. Across Lebanon and Syria, climate policies, adaptation plans, and reconstruction frameworks are largely technocratic and top-down, with gender reduced to checklists or targets rather than examined as intersecting with war, labour, and care. Feminist and women-led groups are occasionally consulted, but these spaces are often tokenistic, with limited time or scope to challenge militarised or extractive approaches or to foreground issues such as ecocide or water as a geopolitical tool. As a result, climate governance rarely reflects the knowledge and priorities of those most affected by environmental harm.

Movement dynamics also limit collective power. Larger, better-funded organisations often dominate agendas and partnerships, while smaller grassroots groups with strong local legitimacy are sidelined or relegated to sub-contractor roles. Political, class, geographic, and identity differences create tensions that are intensified by competition over scarce resources. Many activists describe deep exhaustion as they respond simultaneously to conflict, economic crisis, displacement, climate disasters, and everyday care responsibilities, increasing the risk of fragmentation and burnout without intentional support for care, rest, and internal governance.

From this landscape, a clear set of needs emerges. Actors across Lebanon and Syria emphasise the importance of more accessible, flexible and long-term funding that can sustain organisations and collectives beyond project cycles; legal and policy environments that recognise feminist and women-led groups as legitimate partners in climate and environmental governance rather than marginal consultees; and movement-level infrastructures, such as alliances, learning spaces and care arrangements, that can distribute power and responsibility more equitably. Meeting these needs is essential if feminist climate justice work in both countries is to move beyond survival mode and gain the strategic depth, continuity and collective capacity required to transform the systems that produce climate and ecological harm.





## Recommendations:

The following recommendations emerged from the research addressing patterns identified across the two contexts, unless otherwise indicated:

### For Feminist Funders and Other Donors:

- Shift from project-based to core, flexible and multi-year support: Prioritise grants that cover organisational infrastructure, staff time, and care, including psychosocial support and space for rest and reflection. Allow partners to adjust activities as climate, economic and political conditions change, recognising that rigid plans are ill-suited to volatile contexts.
- Create accessible funding pathways for informal and unregistered groups: Develop mechanisms such as fiscal sponsorships, pooled funds and community-based intermediaries that can channel resources to rural and emerging collectives without forcing them into precarious legal arrangements in both Lebanon and Syria. Simplify application processes, using Arabic-language forms, voice notes and minimal paperwork, and allow community references and peer nominations as part of due diligence.
- Establish feminist rapid-response climate and ecology funds: Design funding windows that can be activated quickly in response to wildfires, floods, droughts, pollution incidents and war-related environmental disasters affecting communities in Lebanon and Syria. Ensure that such funds support not only immediate relief but also medium-term recovery and community-led environmental repair.

- Invest in feminist knowledge production, monitoring and narrative work: Support research, documentation and storytelling that connect climate change with war, occupation, sanctions, labour regimes and social reproduction. Fund community-based monitoring of environmental damage, as well as regional learning spaces where actors from Lebanon, Syria and beyond can exchange strategies on drought, wildfires, water governance, land rights and ecofeminist organizing across the two countries.

### For National and Local Authorities and Policy Spaces:

- Integrate feminist climate justice into national climate and reconstruction agendas: Ensure climate policies, adaptation plans, and reconstruction frameworks recognise the differentiated impacts of climate change on women, refugees, rural communities, and other marginalised groups, and engage them as rights-holders and decision-makers rather than beneficiaries. Treat war-related environmental destruction, including ecocide-like practices, as central climate and justice issues rather than separate security concerns, particularly in relation to Israeli attacks in Lebanon and conflict-related contamination and destruction in Syria.

## For National and Local Authorities and Policy Spaces:

- **Reform water, land and environmental governance:** Strengthen public water systems, regulate groundwater extraction and industrial discharge, and invest in wastewater treatment to reduce pollution and inequities in access. In reconstruction and return processes, recognise women's housing, land and property rights and reform legal and administrative barriers that prevent women and displaced people from securing tenure, compensation and participation in planning.
- **Protect climate-exposed workers and communities:** Develop and enforce labour and occupational health standards for workers in agriculture, fisheries, construction and other climate-exposed sectors, including measures for heat stress, pesticide exposure and wildfire risk in both contexts. Establish early-warning systems and community-centred fire management structures that draw on local knowledge and prioritise women's participation and leadership in wildfire- and drought-affected areas of Lebanon and Syria.
- **Recognise and partner meaningfully with feminist and women-led organisations:** Move beyond tokenistic consultations by involving feminist and women-led groups in advisory bodies, technical committees and monitoring mechanisms in both countries. Provide them with the information, resources and security guarantees needed to contribute substantively, and respect their political independence within Lebanese and Syrian climate and environmental governance processes.
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## For Movements and Ecosystems

- **Strengthen cross-movement alliances:** Build sustained relationships between feminist, environmental, labour, anti-war, refugee-led and disability-rights movements, recognising climate as a shared political terrain that cuts across sectors in both Lebanon and Syria. Develop joint campaigns and platforms that connect struggles over land, water, energy, livelihoods, care and bodily autonomy across the two contexts.
- **Invest in internal governance and collective care:** Create transparent and participatory governance structures within coalitions to address power imbalances between larger NGOs and smaller collectives in both settings. Allocate resources and time for internal reflection, conflict transformation, political education and shared care practices, treating these as essential components of effective climate and feminist organising for movements in Lebanon and Syria alike.
- **Consolidate and amplify feminist climate narratives:** Continue articulating narratives that frame climate change as a question of justice, decolonisation, demilitarisation and care, rather than a purely technical or environmental issue in both countries. Document and disseminate stories of women's leadership in drought response, wildfire prevention, land defence, pollution struggles and reconstruction debates, so that they inform public discourse and policy at local, national and international levels for both Lebanon and Syria.

