WECAN
Women's Earth & Climate Action Network, International

March 2026

Women's Earth and Climate Action Network Submission to the COP30 Presidency Roadmap for Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels (TAFF)

The Women's Earth and Climate Action Network (WECAN) is a climate justice-based organization established to unite women in worldwide movement building for social and ecological justice.

Introduction

For years, governments, corporations, and global financial institutions have enabled the rapid expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure and extraction while ignoring the devastating impacts of fossil fuel-based energy. Fossil fuels are the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, driving record-setting temperatures over the past few years. 2026 is set to be among the four hottest years since 1850.[1] According to the Copernicus Climate Change Service, 2023-2025 marked the first time that planetary warming exceeded the 1.5 °C guardrail.[2] Importantly, research indicates that with high ambition, it is still possible to recover from this guardrail breach.[3] To fulfill the Paris Agreement and keep long-term 1.5 °C within reach, governments and businesses must implement a fossil fuel phaseout.

Below, please see WECAN's submission to the open call for submissions by the COP30 Presidency in regard to the Roadmap for Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels.

[1] Niranjan, Ajit. 2025. "Met Office: 2026 Will Bring Heat More than 1.4C above Preindustrial Levels." The Guardian. December 18, 2025. [LINK]
[2] "Copernicus: 2025 Was the Third Hottest Year on Record | Copernicus." 2026. Copernicus.eu. Copernicus. January 8, 2026. [LINK]
[3] Climate Analytics and PIK, 2025. "Rescuing 1.5°C: New evidence on the highest possible ambition to deliver the Paris Agreement." Climate Analytics. November 6, 2025. [LINK]

Critical Barriers Preventing a Transition Away from Fossil Fuels

Economic Inequities

Countries that have profited little from fossil fuel-driven growth lack the necessary financial and technical resources to develop fossil fuel phase-out and Just Transition plans. This is exacerbated by deeply unequal trade and credit systems that foster fossil fuel dependence and debt distress. Over half of low-income countries are in, or are on the verge of debt distress, with few avenues for debt relief.[4] Furthermore, low-income countries spend more than five times on external debt payments than they do on climate adaptation.[5]

The energy transition requires a paradigm shift in capitalist principles that underpin the world's dominant economy and who it benefits. Without addressing these underlying dynamics, the transition away from fossil fuels will replicate the same extractive practices at the root of the climate crisis. False solutions like carbon capture and storage, carbon offsets, and rampant mining threaten to reproduce extractive economies under a green banner. In particular, a rapid capital-driven mining buildout to supply transition minerals will exacerbate and proliferate risks to human and planetary health. Instead, the energy transition must rethink the very foundations of dominant economic systems and prioritize human and ecological well-being over ceaseless economic growth.

Systemic Inequities

The energy transition is deterred by current social, economic, and legal systems which are rooted in colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and anthropocentrism. All of these systems reinforce unequal power structures that drive interlocking crises.

Low-income, Global South, Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities bear the primary burdens of energy extraction and industrialization. The most recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report acknowledges that these global inequities place many low-income countries on the frontlines of climate impacts, despite contributing the least to global emissions.[6] As a result, countries that have benefitted little from fossil fuel-driven growth lack the necessary resources for climate mitigation,

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[4] Merling, Lara et al. "The Rising Cost of Debt: An Obstacle to Achieving Climate and Development Goals." Center for Economic and Policy Research, April 2024. [LINK] ; "Debt crisis: Developing countries' external debt hits record $11.4 trillion." UN Trade & Development. March 17, 2025. [LINK]

[5] "Lower income countries spend five times more on debt payments than dealing with climate change." Jubilee Debt Campaign, October 2021. [LINK]

[6] Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023. "Climate Change 2023 Synthesis Report. Summary for Policymakers." 2023. [LINK]

adaptation, and response to loss and damage.[7] Without addressing these systemic barriers, efforts toward a just future will fall short, reinforcing existing inequalities instead of fostering healthy and just communities for all.

Further fossil fuel production is a threat to public health. Across the globe, women and frontline communities are disproportionately experiencing the harmful impacts of fossil fuel production, including air, water, and soil pollution, as well as negative impacts on women's fertility, maternal and fetal health, mental health, and daily work and responsibilities.[8] At the same time, environmental defenders are risking their lives to lead fights against fossil fuel operations that threaten the health of ecosystems, Indigenous territories, and human well-being, yet they remain vastly underrepresented in decision-making processes. These risks must be addressed and remediated in a transition away from fossil fuels, protecting the health and well-being of communities most impacted by fossil fuel extraction and production.

For more information on the gendered and racial impacts of the fossil fuel industry in North America, view WECAN's report:
https://www.wecaninternational.org/divestment-report

No Managed Phase-Out Framework
There is no international framework to ensure that the fossil fuel phaseout does not impose disproportionate burdens on workers, communities, and fossil fuel-dependent nations. High-emitting countries that have profited from fossil fuel-driven growth continue to invest in fossil fuel expansion, false solutions, carbon-intensive industries such as the military-industrial complex, and fossil fuel subsidies. Historical and ongoing inequalities enable wealthy nations to profit at the expense of climate-vulnerable nations. To enable an equitable transition, governments must support a fossil fuel phaseout framework, and costs must be distributed equitably to ensure that communities impacted by fossil fuels do not bear disproportionate responsibilities.

A Fossil Fuel Treaty, which is currently supported by 18 nations, can create the conditions under which States will be able to coordinate a managed phase-out of fossil fuel

[7] Adapted from *Justice-Based Climate Finance for COP30 and Beyond*, WECAN (2025).
[8] Canipari, R., De Santis, L., & Cecconi, S., 2020. "Female Fertility and Environmental Pollution." International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. November 26, 2020. [LINK]; Boslett, A, Hill, E., Ma, L., Et al., 2021. "Rural light pollution from shale gas development and associated sleep and subjective well-being." Resource and Energy Economics. May 2021 [LINK]; Perera, F.,2016. "Multiple Threats to Child Health from Fossil Fuel Combustion: Impacts of Air Pollution and Climate Change." Environmental Health Perspectives. June 21, 2016. [LINK];
Lam, Bourree. 2014. "Who Stays Home When the Kids Are Sick?" The Atlantic. October 28, 2014. [LINK]

production, end new expansion, and support a global Just Transition.[9] A Treaty complements the Paris Agreement by addressing the root causes of the climate crisis, clarifying existing obligations, and adopting an ambitious model to facilitate a Just Transition away from fossil fuel production.

Moving Away from Extraction Towards Caring, Rights-Based Approaches

Human and Indigenous Rights

A Just Transition demands that human rights and the rights of communities, especially Indigenous communities and communities dependent on the fossil fuel industry, are fully upheld and respected.[10] Indigenous Peoples' rights, sovereignty, traditional knowledge, systems of governance, and connection to the land are vital to the effective protection and well-being of both people and the environment. Indigenous Peoples have long championed, led, and contributed to conservation efforts, biodiversity restoration, and solutions to the climate crisis, and studies consistently show the link between Indigenous sovereignty and the health of Earth's ecosystems.[11] Indigenous communities have decades of experience fighting the injustices that result from industrial activity, including fossil fuel extraction and infrastructure, and upholding Indigenous rights, specifically the right to Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC), which is a critical lever for stopping the harms of extraction.

In 2025, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the world's highest court, affirmed that states have a legal obligation to mitigate climate change and protect human rights. In the face of worsening climate disasters, where states are increasingly shirking their climate responsibilities, this ICJ Advisory Opinion offers a vital mechanism to communities, giving a legal backbone to states' climate responsibilities and outlining consequences for climate polluters. The ruling emphasized the importance of human rights and the right to a healthy environment, while recognizing that existing legal frameworks are binding and pave a pathway for states to take immediate climate action. Meeting climate and human rights responsibilities with the highest ambition possible is now the law.[12] The Advisory Opinion is a critical tool for ensuring a rights-based approach to a transition away from fossil fuels

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[9] "The Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative." The Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative. [LINK]

[10] "Indigenous Principles of a Just Transition." Indigenous Environmental Network. [LINK] ; Adapted from *Rights of Nature as a Central Pillar of a Just Transition*, WECAN (2025)

[11] Baragwanath, Kathryn and Ella Bayi, 2020. "Collective property rights reduce deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon." PNAS. August, 2020. [LINK] ; "Indigenous knowledge is crucial in the fight against climate change – here's why." UNDP. July, 2024. [LINK] ; Adapted from *Indigenous Rights are Vital to a Healthy and Just World: Guidance and Recommendations for the UNFCCC and Governments*, WECAN (2025)

[12] Adapted from press release, *WECAN Responds to ICJ Advisory Opinion: Landmark Ruling Marks Step Forward for Climate Justice & Accountability*, WECAN (2025)

that also aligns with current climate goals to keep long-term global warming below the 1.5C guardrail.

Rights of Nature

Instead of extraction and endless consumption, the energy transition must be guided by systems that uphold agreed upon rights-based frameworks and integrate human activity within the planet's ecological limits and natural laws. Key to this is the Rights of Nature; an ecocentric legal and cultural framework that recognizes the inherent value of ecosystems, natural entities, and all species, independent of human use. Rights of Nature laws, policies, and court rulings recognize that humans are embedded within the natural world and that therefore, socio-economic systems must be nested within environmental rights in economic and legal systems. Policies and initiatives like Rights of Nature, environmental personhood, and other non-Western legal traditions currently exist in 61 countries.[13] The Rights of Nature framework is deeply rooted in long-standing Indigenous cosmologies and knowledge systems that exemplify harmony with nature. For example, *Buen Vivir*, or *sumak kawsay*, roughly translating to "good living," is a philosophy originated by the Quechua Peoples of the Andes that prioritizes human and ecological well-being over material consumption.[14]

The Kukama Indigenous women of Santa Rita de Castilla, Peru have led decades-long resistance against oil pipelines operating along the Marañón River. Devastating oil spills and toxic pollution have caused high levels of exposure to dangerous metals like arsenic, cadmium, lead, and mercury in the Kukama community.[15] In 2024, a group of Kukama Indigenous women won a landmark legal case to secure the rights of Marañón River as its own entity.[16] The court recognized rights for the river, including the right to flow, be free from all contamination, be restored, and be protected.[17] This case study demonstrates how a Rights of Nature framework can enable an equitable transition away from fossil fuels. In its 2025 Advisory Opinion, the Inter-American Court of Human Rights recognized

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[13] "Eco Jurisprudence Monitor." 2025. Eco Jurisprudence Monitor. 2025. [LINK]

[14] Villalba, Unai, 2013. "Buen Vivir vs Development: a paradigm shift in the Andes?" Third World Quarterly. 2013. [LINK]

[15] O'Callaghan-Gordo, Cristina, et. al., 2021 "Blood lead levels in indigenous peoples living close to oil extraction areas in the Peruvian Amazon." Environment International, September 2021. [LINK] ; O'Callaghan-Gordo, Cristina, et. al., 2023 "Levels of Arsenic, Cadmium, and Mercury in Urine of Indigenous People Living Close to Oil Extraction Areas in the Peruvian Amazon." Environmental Health Perspectives, May 2023. [LINK]

[16] Vera Delgado, Juana, 2024. "A River's Rights: Indigenous Kukama Women Lead the Way with Landmark Legal Victory." Global Forest Coalition, September 2024. [LINK]

[17] Vera Delgado, Juana, 2024. "A River's Rights: Indigenous Kukama Women Lead the Way with Landmark Legal Victory." Global Forest Coalition, September 2024. [LINK] ; "Peru Court Case on the Rights of the Marañón River." n.d. Eco Jurisprudence Monitor. [LINK] ; Adapted from *Rights of Nature as a Central Pillar of a Just Transition*, WECAN (2025)

the Rights of Nature as a critical framework for addressing the climate crisis.[18] Rights of Nature laws and initiatives enhance States' abilities to uphold a safe and healthy environment by safeguarding the natural systems and processes necessary for life. It offers a cultural shift that challenges extractive systems and relationships with nature. Rights of Nature can also serve as a tool to strengthen Indigenous community power and protect human rights.

For more information on Rights of Nature as a central pillar of the Just Transition, view WECAN's report: https://www.wecaninternational.org/ron-just-transition-report

Care Economies

Broadly, society must reorient itself away from expansion and growth, and toward sufficiency and care. Economic models should not depend on increased demand and extraction of resources or the continued overproduction of goods. Instead, they must prioritize quality of life, social cohesion, and ecological health. The Care Economy offers a viable and established economy that, through investment, can support nations in reducing economic dependence on fossil fuels while strengthening job creation and economic resiliency. A predominately low-carbon sector, paid and unpaid care work, including childcare, elder care, education, healthcare and domestic services within formal and informal sectors make up the Care Economy. Environmental protection can also be considered care work. The demand for care work is rapidly rising due to social and climate impacts. Studies estimate that just a 2% of GDP investment in the care economy would generate increases in overall employment in OECD countries and emerging economies.[19] This would create up to 4.2 million new jobs in Brazil, 13 million in the US and 24 million in China.[20] Care jobs are less vulnerable to automation, and can provide a source of employment for the workforce transition away from fossil fuel employment.

Investment in a care economy supports women workers, addressing gender pay gaps and gender imbalance in the workforce, improving livelihoods. The care economy requires the creation of rights-based work standards for women and calls for the establishment of human and Indigenous rights safeguards for women land defenders caring for the environment. This includes policies, incentives, and financial partnerships at the national and subnational level to boost investment. Standards and guidelines outlined by workers and civil society are needed to support a resilient and equitable care economy. At the international level, the UNFCCC and other international actors must support national

[18] "Advisory Opinion OC-32/25 OF 29." Inter-American Court of Human Rights. May, 2025. [LINK]
[19] De Henau, Jerome, et al., 2016. "Investing in the Care Economy." International Trade Union Confederation, March 2016. [LINK]
[20] Adapted from *Prioritizing Care Work Can Unlock a Just Transition for All*, WECAN

transition plans, including support of gender-disaggregated data to identify gaps and successes.

For more information, see WECAN's report, Prioritizing Care Work Can Unlock a Just Transition for All: https://tinyurl.com/WECAN-Care

Regional Examples of Community-Led Energy Models

Rethinking how communities access their energy can present unique opportunities for the Just Transition. Distributed renewable energy resources generate electricity at or near the point of consumption, allowing communities to rely on their own generation rather than drawing additional power from the grid. This reduces strain on the broader grid during peak demand—the periods when the system must operate at maximum capacity.

For more information, view WECAN's report, *How Local Community Power is Central to a Just Renewable Energy Shift*:
https://www.wecaninternational.org/renewable-energy-report

Ending Fossil Fuel Subsidies

A critical step towards moving away from fossil-fuel dependent economies is ending publicly funded subsidies for fossil fuels that offset the real cost of petroleum and crude oil. Governments spent $620 billion on fossil fuel subsidies in 2023, which continue to distort global markets and enable the persistence of a carbon-intensive economy.[21] Unsurprisingly, studies have found that fossil fuel subsidies increase emissions, with high-subsidy countries emitting 11.4% more than high-tax countries.[22] Funds must also be redirected away from high-emitting industries that exacerbate global conflict, monopolize funding sources, and perpetuate environmental degradation. For example, military spending reached an all-time high in 2024, with governments investing $2.7 trillion annually in military expenditures.[23] In addition to undermining human rights and global stability, the military-industrial complex is one of the world's heaviest emitters. Some estimates show that global militaries are responsible for 5.5% of the world's emissions, which when summed equates to the fourth largest national carbon footprint in the

[21] "Tracking the impact of government support: fossil fuel subsidies." IEA 50, Accessed: November 2024. [LINK]
[22] Arzaghi, Mohammad and Jay Squalli, 2023. "The environmental impact of fossil fuel subsidy policies." Energy Economics, October 2023. [LINK]
[23] Exaras, Ileana, 2025. "Military spending worldwide hits record $2.7 trillion." UN News, September 2025. [LINK]

world.[24] Diverting even a small percentage of funds from these institutions can catalyze critical financing for the Just Transition.[25]

"Critical" Mineral Extraction for a Just Transition

The rapid expansion of renewable energy is crucial for addressing climate change, but it also brings significant environmental and social risks, especially due to increased demand for transition minerals like lithium and cobalt. Mining these materials can cause ecosystem damage, water pollution, and harm to local and Indigenous communities, potentially repeating the injustices of the fossil fuel system. Although mining should be a last resort, it is often driven by profit and geopolitical competition rather than true sustainability goals. To achieve a Just Transition, societies must reduce energy consumption—especially from sectors like transportation—by rethinking systems like car dependency and investing in public transit to lower mineral demand.

In addition to addressing consumption patterns, global actors must adopt economic incentives and policies to ensure minerals remain in circulation for as long as possible. This would include designing renewable energy infrastructure for longevity, reuse, repairability, and recyclability; banning planned obsolescence practices; overturning policies that limit the repair or reuse of renewable energy technologies; and targeting recycling standards for batteries, electronics, and industrial metals to dramatically reduce demand for new mining.

Women Leading the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels

It is critical to amplify lived experiences and firsthand knowledge through the integration of frontline voices and leadership, especially when decisions are being made that directly affect their own lives and communities. Women's wisdom and knowledge, in particular, must meaningfully shape the solutions that are enacted to combat climate chaos and ensure a Just Transition. Studies and data across the world have continuously shown that when women lead and have agency, societies experience immense benefits. Research indicates that women's involvement in environmental management and decision-making leads to more successful outcomes and improvements in conservation.[26] Women in

[24] "New estimate: global military is responsible for more emissions than Russia." Conflict and Environment Observatory, November 2022. [LINK]
[25] Adapted from *Justice-Based Climate Finance for COP30 and Beyond*, WECAN (2025).
[26] Reid Bell, A.. "Financial incentives often fail to reconcile agricultural productivity and pro-conservation behavior." Communications Earth & Environment. February 8, 2023. [LINK]

frontline communities, then, are uniquely positioned at the forefront of innovative solutions that challenge fossil fuel extraction and expansion.[27]

Numerous studies have demonstrated the crucial role of women's leadership in successfully addressing the climate crisis and specifically lowering carbon emissions.[28] Research has demonstrated that a one-unit increase in a country's Women's Political Empowerment Index score correlates to an 11.51% decrease in a country's carbon emissions.[29] By enhancing women's participation and including their diverse perspectives throughout the transition to renewable energy, the outcomes can be more socio-ecologically sound and equitable. Studies show that women's leadership at all levels can significantly improve communities and ecological systems.[30]

[27] Adapted from *Gendered and Racial Impacts of the Fossil Fuel Industry in North America and Complicit Financial Institutions*. WECAN (2025)
[28] WECAN International. (n.d.)." Why Women." [LINK]
[29] Lv, Z., Deng, C., 2019. "Does women's political empowerment matter for improving the environment?" Sustainable Development. January 3, 2019. [LINK]
[30] Paul, S.,2024August. "Gender, Climate and Energy in the United States." WEDO. August, 2024 [LINK]