

PERSPECTIVE

Greener through gender: What climate mainstreaming can learn from gender mainstreaming

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Abstract

Addressing the urgent global climate crisis demands a rapid and meaningful expansion of “climate mainstreaming,” which refers to the integration of climate objectives in all aspects of development programs and policies. However, progress remains slow and uneven due to bottlenecks in policy and institutional change. Considering the parallel struggle recorded over decades to mainstream gender across the same policy arenas, a key question emerges: what can climate mainstreaming learn from gender mainstreaming? To answer this question, we review 57 policy, strategy, and guidance documents of United Nations agencies, all of which integrate these themes into food security and broader development programming. Our analysis identifies gaps in climate mainstreaming efforts and derives lessons from gender mainstreaming to bridge these gaps. It underscores the importance of adapting programmatic mainstreaming strategies in response to evolving contexts, for example, by simultaneously considering both mainstreaming and targeted interventions. Additionally, it highlights the need to adopt organizational climate mainstreaming and establish mechanisms for accountability. Finally, it emphasizes the urgency of embracing a climate justice lens; in practice, this involves prioritizing populations at greater risk of climate change impacts and actively engaging diverse perspectives in decision-making, particularly communities facing multiple forms of discrimination.

This article is categorized under:

Integrated Assessment of Climate Change > Assessing Climate Change in the Context of Other Issues

Climate and Development > Sustainability and Human Well-Being

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KEYWORDS

climate mainstreaming, food security, gender mainstreaming, international development, United Nations

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1 | INTRODUCTION

Climate mainstreaming—the integration of climate considerations into development programs and policies—is increasingly seen as critical for advancing climate-resilient development and ramping up urgently needed climate action (IPCC, 2007, 2023a). There are different types of climate mainstreaming. For instance, within an ongoing program focused on improving food safety in informal, outdoor markets through enhanced hygienic practices, programmatic mainstreaming might entail additional activities related to climate adaptation—referring to actions to reduce vulnerability to climate impacts—such as raising awareness among food vendors about the importance of refrigeration during heatwaves to prevent bacterial growth (Lam et al., 2023). Conversely, organizational mainstreaming could involve integrating climate considerations into existing structures, including mission statements, strategies, and performance frameworks (Wamsler & Osberg, 2022).

However, climate mainstreaming is often narrowly interpreted as simply integrating climate adaptation planning into relevant programs and organizational structures, resembling a “just add climate and stir approach” (Braunschweiger & Pütz, 2021; Runhaar et al., 2018; Wamsler & Pauleit, 2016). While a good start, it is important to recognize that mainstreaming varies in extent, from less transformative to more transformative. More transformative approaches involve reshaping the development logic of programs in favor of environmental concerns. This deeper reorganization, referred to as “mature mainstreaming” (Bleby & Foerster, 2023), places climate considerations at the forefront of policy and activity design. Each level of extent plays a key role in advancing climate action.

Climate mainstreaming is particularly crucial in development efforts aiming to enhance food security, as more frequent extreme weather events are already threatening food production, access, safety, and stability (Mbow et al., 2019). The global food system is on an inequitable and unsustainable trajectory and current policy commitments are not strong enough to divert it (Ruggeri Laderchi et al., 2024). Failing to integrate climate considerations into programs and policies risks perpetuating disruptions to food security, maintaining this status quo. More “mature” climate mainstreaming with the lens of climate as the primary focus supports broader calls of decolonial development scholars to transform the global food system (Dale, 2020; Grey & Patel, 2015). Moreover, this approach to mainstreaming comprises not only climate adaptation, but also guards against maladaptation, wherein development actions inadvertently increase risks for food security and development outcomes (IPCC, 2023b).

Importantly, climate mainstreaming extends to various contexts beyond food security and development, such as energy and transportation. Its relevance is significant both within and outside development communities. This stems from its origins, which trace back to environmental integration within the global sustainable development framework (UN, 1987), and particularly in climate policy integration where climate action was viewed as essential for sustainable development (Collier, 1997). Debates about climate mainstreaming have intensified since the 2007 Fourth Assessment Report, which emphasized mainstreaming climate issues into decision making is a key prerequisite for sustainability (IPCC, 2007). This approach emerged in response to shortcomings in previous strategies, notably the siloed approaches to mitigation, adaptation, and sustainable development.

Climate mainstreaming continues to gain traction as international agendas underscore the importance of prioritizing climate considerations across sectors and policies (Lesnikowski et al., 2016). In 2017, the United Nations (UN) adopted core principles for a system-wide approach to climate action, which include “facilitate integrated climate action that maximizes synergies and co-benefits across the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG)” (UN, 2017, p. 12). Since then, many UN agencies have committed to climate mainstreaming—particularly in adaptation—although variation in implementation progress persists across programs and policy levels (Lam et al., 2021). This systematic approach mirrors other policy coordination strategies, such as gender mainstreaming, which preceded it. In 2012, the System-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) was introduced to facilitate tracking toward organizational gender mainstreaming against a common set of standards (UNEG, 2018).

Several political and institutional factors pose challenges to effective climate mainstreaming. These include lack of political commitments (Zea-Reyes et al., 2021), vested private sector interests obstructing efforts to cut emissions (Allwood, 2020), insufficient organizational prioritization of climate action (Rogers et al., 2023), scarce financial and human resources for climate action (Bhandary, 2022; Runhaar et al., 2018), the view that climate action is the responsibility of a single sector rather than the collective (Scott et al., 2022), and incremental approaches to climate action inconducive to transformation—conceptualized as the shift leading to long-lasting changes in how we perceive and engage with ourselves, others, the world, and future generations (Wamsler & Osberg, 2022).

Because climate mainstreaming parallels other forms of policy coordination, like gender mainstreaming, lessons from decades of gender mainstreaming could propel climate-resilient development. This perspective explores lessons

from gender mainstreaming that could accelerate climate mainstreaming by drawing on a case study of UN agencies. We begin by making the case for exploring gender mainstreaming within UN contexts. Secondly, to identify gaps in the climate mainstreaming framework, we examine distinctions between gender and climate mainstreaming, supported by a thematic analysis of high-level UN documents. Finally, we examine climate mainstreaming against the wealth of experiences in gender and consider what can be learned to advance climate mainstreaming.

2 | WHY LEARN FROM GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN UN CONTEXTS?

Many UN agencies have recognized the importance of gender mainstreaming, broadly referring to processes for integrating gender equality considerations into all programs and policies (UN Women, 2023a). The concept of gender mainstreaming was first used at the Third World Conference on Women, which took place in Nairobi in 1985 (UN, 1985). A decade later, the UN adopted the first resolution on gender mainstreaming in 1997, based on the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (UN, 1997), which triggered a widespread formation of gender-mainstreaming units led by gender equality specialists (Rai, 2003). In 2012, UN-SWAP was introduced (and updated in 2018) as an accountability mechanism (UNEG, 2018). In 2022, 73 entities (96% of UN entities) reported on the UN-SWAP indicators, with 67% of ratings meeting or exceeding requirements (UN Women, 2023b).

Despite advancements, gender mainstreaming faces important obstacles. Inadequate resourcing often undermines the realization of intended outcomes (OECD, 2023a). Mainstreaming faces the risks of bureaucratic co-optation and depoliticization of feminist, women's rights, and queer agendas, resulting in limited potential for transformative change (Acosta et al., 2019; van Eerdewijk, 2016). Institutional processes inadequately support the integration of gender expertise, contributing to uneven implementation (Hunting & Hankivsky, 2020; Kunz et al., 2019). Narrow conceptualizations of gender fail to account for other social identities (e.g., race, age, sexuality), constraining inclusiveness (Lamprell & Braithwaite, 2017). Overall, gender mainstreaming has been characterized as slow and inconsistent (Gupta et al., 2023).

Yet, despite its slow and inconsistent progress, drawing lessons from gender mainstreaming remains a valuable source of information for accelerating climate considerations. The longer-standing gender mainstreaming literature, coupled with investments in gender mainstreaming practice across many development institutions and national machineries since the 1990s have contributed to advances in analyzing policy structures and institutional processes. These developments could help in addressing the political and institutional challenges flagged in climate mainstreaming. Moreover, gender mainstreaming approaches have continuously evolved, leading to processes of what scholars have called “slow revolution” as well as more transformative and, to some extent, subversive gender mainstreaming practices that challenges conventional development paradigms (Davids et al., 2014). A notable example is gender mainstreaming 2.0, which advocates for re-politicizing gender equality commitments and redefining them on local and institutional levels (Novovic, 2023). This process of drawing lessons is crucial because despite a substantial body of climate mainstreaming literature supporting implementation across various policy domains and contexts (Runhaar et al., 2018; Wamsler & Osberg, 2022), progress remains insufficient in translating climate mainstreaming commitments into outcomes on the ground.

Considering the challenges of climate mainstreaming, its parallels to gender mainstreaming, and the climate and gender responsibilities of UN agencies, we ask: what lessons from gender mainstreaming can help to accelerate climate mainstreaming? To answer this question, we first identified gaps in the climate mainstreaming framework. To do so, we characterized and compared elements of mainstreaming reported in 57 high-level documents (including policy, strategy, and guidance documents) of UN agencies working in the field of food security (FAO, IFAD, UNEP, UNDP, UNICEF, and WFP). Details on the review procedures and literature reviewed are cataloged in Box S1 and Tables S1–S3. We then drew on insights from the broader mainstreaming literature to derive lessons aimed at addressing the shortcomings in climate mainstreaming.

3 | OVERVIEW OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN UN AGENCIES

After the UN formally committed to mainstreaming gender in 1997, UN agencies working on advancing food security engaged in formal gender mainstreaming attempts, primarily through gender strategies (also called action plans). UNEP was the first among them to develop a gender strategy in 2000, mainstreaming gender in its programs and

policies (UNEP, 2012). This step was followed by IFAD and WFP in 2003, UNDP in 2005, UNICEF in 2010, and FAO in 2012.

After the initial wave of gender strategies and plans, UN agencies formulated gender policies to reinforce commitments toward gender equality, aligned with their institutional mandates. These policies embraced a dual strategy (also called twin track), encompassing both mainstreaming and targeted gender action. Gender policies, strategies, and plans were often revised to reflect new international frameworks and mechanisms for implementation, such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. IFAD, for example, revised its gender strategy to emphasize gender-transformative approaches, in line with the 2030 Agenda's emphasis on structural transformation (IFAD, 2019). Today, each of the UN agencies explored in this study has published evaluations sharing gender mainstreaming processes, outcomes, and/or lessons learned. For example, FAO curated case studies illustrating how gender equality issues can be addressed in agricultural policies and practices (FAO, 2018).

Many gender policies distinguish gender mainstreaming in programming and internal structures and processes:

- *Program level:* Gender is mainstreamed by accounting for the differential needs and priorities of different groups of women and men across all phases of program and policy development—from design to evaluation.
- *Organizational level:* Gender equality is positioned as an integral part of the organization, where it is fully reflected in organizational values, resource allocation, operating procedures, performance measurements, and learning processes.

Operationalization of mainstreaming in programs and institutional processes varied among UN agencies, reflecting distinct organizational contexts (Box S2). Broadly, alignment with UN-SWAP performance indicators was discernible (Table 1). Yet, certain aspects displayed agency-specific nuances, not strictly adhering to UN-SWAP. To illustrate, all

TABLE 1 Elements of gender mainstreaming among UN agencies working on food security (shaded cells indicate the presence of the element).

United Nations Agencies		FAO	IFAD	UNEP	UNDP	UNICEF	WFP
UN-SWAP performance indicators	Strategic planning gender-related SDG results	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Reporting on gender-related SDG results	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Programmatic gender-related SDG results	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Evaluation	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Audit	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Policy	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Leadership	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	White	White
	Gender-responsive performance management	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	White	White
	Financial resource tracking	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Financial resource allocation	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Gender architecture	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Equal representation of women	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Organizational culture	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Capacity assessment	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Capacity development	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Knowledge and communication	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
Coherence	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	
Agency-specific	Partnerships	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Advocacy	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Integration and specialization	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded
	Disaggregated data by gender and other social identities	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded	Shaded

agencies acknowledged the importance of forging partnerships and enhancing capacity to collectively attain objectives. In addition to communication, IFAD, UNDP, UNICEF, and WFP explicitly emphasized advocacy efforts. WFP is committed to gathering and using data differentiated by gender, age, disability, and other sociodemographic attributes. UNDP underscored endeavors in integration and specialization, signaling a move toward supporting country offices in transitioning from mechanistic approaches to gender equality toward dismantling structural barriers.

All strategies included guidance on monitoring and reporting on gender mainstreaming and supporting accountability for gender mainstreaming. For example, UNICEF's gender strategy includes a subset of indicators drawn from the results framework of the UNICEF Strategic Plan 2022–2025 (UNICEF, 2022b). These indicators serve as tracking tools to gauge advancements in both programmatic and institutional gender outcomes. Moreover, certain UN agencies have devised distinct guidelines dedicated to the assessment of gender mainstreaming endeavors. Notable examples encompass FAO (2017), UNICEF (2019), and WFP (2014) each outlining specific procedures for evaluating mainstreaming progress.

4 | OVERVIEW OF CLIMATE MAINSTREAMING IN UN AGENCIES

In contrast to gender, the adoption of climate mainstreaming commitments occurred later. Mainstreaming was first adopted by UNEP in its climate change strategy in 2008, followed by IFAD in 2010, UNDP and UNICEF in 2015, and WFP and FAO in 2017. In comparison, gender mainstreaming was first adopted by UNEP in 2000 and lastly by FAO in 2012. Given the interconnectedness of climate change with other global challenges, it often found its place within multifaceted “development nexuses.” This was particularly evident in cases like IFAD, where the interconnected themes encompassed environment–climate–gender–nutrition–youth.

Climate integration frequently occurred at the program level, where distinct initiatives undertook the task of incorporating climate action into programmatic frameworks. Within IFAD, the Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme emerged as a conduit for channeling climate financing into country-level programs tailored to advance climate-focused endeavors (IFAD, 2018). For UNEP and UNDP, the collaborative Poverty–Environment Initiative assumed the role of advancing climate mainstreaming at the country level (UNDP–UNEP, 2011). WFP and FAO's early-warning endeavors factored in climate shocks as pivotal criteria, underscored by their enlistment of meteorological expertise to provide technical support (FAO, 2015; WFP, 2023).

UN agencies delineated strategies aimed at incorporating climate action into programs, encompassing the following aspects:

1. *Climate risk analysis*: Incorporate an evaluation of climate risks in programs.
2. *Climate impact analysis*: Consider how programs might increase climate vulnerability.
3. *Climate response*: Consider climate action in programs, potentially by piloting new approaches or scaling up proven methods.

A noteworthy parallel to gender mainstreaming is the practice of program screening and categorization (IFAD, 2021; UNDP, 2021). Similar to gender-based analysis as observed in gender mainstreaming, screening is undertaken to understand the dual aspects of (1) climate change's impact on programs and (2) programs' influence on climate change. Categorization of risk (ranging from low, moderate, and high) help to determine the subsequent depth of climate analyses and response. This approach operates under the assumption that certain programs have minimal climate risks and impacts, thereby avoiding the need for further climate considerations.

This contrasts with gender mainstreaming, wherein the integration of gender is expected to span all programming, provided there are budgetary allocations for gender-specific measures.

In a few instances, climate mainstreaming was also conceptualized at the organizational level. Within IFAD, climate considerations extend internally to encompass resource mobilization, learning, and staff training (IFAD, 2018). UNICEF and WFP stated climate change would be considered in internal operations and practices without elaborating on what this looks like (UNICEF, 2021, 2022a; WFP, 2018). Notably, gender mainstreaming is distinguished between programs and organizational mainstreaming through gender policies. WFP was the sole UN agency with a climate policy elaborating on its organizational commitments which included building staff capacity, integrating specialized climate change funding into its financial framework, and developing more specific guidance for staff and partners (WFP, 2017).

Upon adapting UN-SWAP indicators to the context of climate change, we found UN agencies' approach to climate mainstreaming was less systemized compared with gender (Box S3). Elements aligned to some extent with UN-SWAP indicators (Table 2). However, there were notable gaps related to 9 of 17 indicators: strategic planning for climate-related SDG results, audit, policy, leadership, climate-results performance management, financial resources tracking, climate architecture, representation of diverse voices, and organizational culture. For example, in terms of representation of diverse voices, FAO was the only entity reporting a focus on the engagement of women, youth, and Indigenous Peoples in climate debates. Regarding agency-specific components, the commitment to partnerships was mentioned by all agencies. Except for WFP, all agencies discussed advocacy alongside communications. IFAD, UNEP, UNDP, and WFP emphasized finding an entry point whereas UNICEF urged leveraging existing structures, highlighting a need to first set the stage for climate mainstreaming.

5 | ADVANCING CLIMATE MAINSTREAMING THROUGH LEARNINGS FROM GENDER MAINSTREAMING

In characterizing and comparing elements of gender and climate mainstreaming, we pinpointed gaps in climate mainstreaming. Drawing on insights from the broader mainstreaming literature, we identified three strategies for improving climate mainstreaming. These include: enhance programmatic mainstreaming, scale up organizational mainstreaming, and move toward climate justice.

TABLE 2 Elements of climate mainstreaming among UN agencies working on food security (shaded cells indicate the presence of the element).

	United Nations Agencies	FAO	IFAD	UNEP	UNDP	UNICEF	WFP
UN-SWAP performance indicators	Strategic planning climate-related SDG results ^a						
	Reporting on climate-related SDG results ^a						
	Programmatic climate-related SDG results ^a						
	Evaluation						
	Audit						
	Policy						
	Leadership						
	Climate-responsive performance management ^a						
	Financial resource tracking						
	Financial resource allocation						
	Climate architecture ^a						
	Representation of diverse voices ^b						
	Organizational culture						
	Capacity assessment						
	Capacity development						
	Knowledge and communication						
	Coherence						
Agency-specific	Partnerships						
	Advocacy						
	Finding an entry point						
	Building on existing structures						

^aFor these indicators, we replaced “gender” with “climate.”

^bFor this indicator, we replaced “equal representation of women” with “representation of diverse voices.”

5.1 | Programmatic climate mainstreaming

Updating programmatic mainstreaming is crucial to ensure its continued effectiveness and relevance in a changing climate. Considering additional constructs of dual strategy and transformation could help ensure a more nuanced and impactful response, as well as address the identified climate mainstreaming gap related to strategic planning for climate-related SDG results (of which a ‘transformative’ result is a key part).

5.1.1 | Dual strategy

Targeted climate action was not well reflected in the considered documents, likely due to interpretations of mainstreaming as an integrated strategy (Ayers et al., 2014). In the context of gender, mainstreaming does not dismiss the need for specific targeted interventions. As explained by WFP, “gender mainstreaming is the underlying approach to systematically integrating gender considerations across programming, while gender-targeted actions include specific measures in instances where issues cannot be addressed through gender mainstreaming alone” (WFP, 2022, p. 5). Accordingly, for climate considerations, a dual approach becomes imperative, entailing a combination of mainstreaming and targeted actions. A comparative study evaluating the advantages of mainstreaming versus dedicated climate plans indicated that both avenues are optimal for addressing climate issues (Reckien et al., 2019).

5.1.2 | Transformative change

As with gender, climate mainstreaming can face the same critiques in terms of failing to challenge structures that lead to harm (Theobald et al., 2017). Reportedly difficult to accomplish and largely seen as unachieved in practice (Bustreo et al., 2023), gender-transformative approaches, as advocated in gender mainstreaming strategies, seek to not only promote gender equality but also address the root causes of gender disparities. In the reviewed gender mainstreaming documents, such actions often meant promoting the economic empowerment of women or addressing restrictive norms. In the context of climate mainstreaming, more emphasis could be placed on not only improving climate resilience but also actively considering the root causes of climate risks, including social and economic factors. Indeed, transformative change refers to a system-wide change that requires more than technological change through consideration of social and economic factors that, with technology, can bring about rapid change at scale (IPCC, 2023b). Transformations involve deeper changes than transitions, including changes to underlying values, worldviews, and structures.

Researchers have highlighted pathways to achieve transformative change (Denton et al., 2015; Mapfumo et al., 2017) along with examples of such change (Hochachka, 2021; Schreuder & Horlings, 2022). One notable example comes from Nepal, where farmers have embraced nature-based solutions to regulate water use—including the adoption of climate-resilient crops and the establishment of community-appointed members—leading to enhanced resilience, knowledge, and material resources (Palomo et al., 2021). This call for climate mainstreaming with a view toward fostering transformational change aligns with the growing emphasis on involving both political and personal dimensions in the climate mainstreaming process (Wamsler & Osberg, 2022).

5.2 | Organizational climate mainstreaming

In advancing programmatic mainstreaming, it becomes imperative to regard organizational mainstreaming as an established procedural standard. Core requisites for organizational mainstreaming include guaranteeing the availability of technical expertise and establishing robust accountability mechanisms. These efforts serve to address identified climate mainstreaming gaps related to policy, leadership, organizational culture, climate-results management, financial resources tracking, climate architecture, and audit.

5.2.1 | Procedural norm

The emphasis of included climate mainstreaming documents was on programming, mirroring the initial decade of gender mainstreaming, which witnessed an imbalance between programming and organizational focus (Mehra & Rao

Gupta, 2006). Mainstreaming across organizational structures and processes is key as it forms the basis for developing programs.

As lessons from gender mainstreaming suggest, organizational commitments to mainstreaming are critical for ensuring adequate resources are allocated to technical processes and accountability mechanisms, which helps to address implementation gaps (Caglar, 2013). As such, climate mainstreaming could benefit from not only integrating climate action into programmatic frameworks, but also organizations. Importantly, sustaining practices at the organizational level must be accompanied by cultural change, which can be supported by mechanisms and structures for education and learning to influence individual and collective values (Wamsler & Osberg, 2022). Leveraging climate policies, leadership, and climate-results performance management could also support shifts in organizational culture.

5.2.2 | Technical expertise

Ensuring access to technical expertise—a key facet of climate architecture—was not a focus of included documents. In gender mainstreaming, gender experts play a critical role in providing technical assistance to implementing staff as well as deepening knowledge and willingness to examine gender considerations (Hunting & Hankivsky, 2020). Lessons from gender mainstreaming also remind us of the risk that the presence of gender expertise might inadvertently legitimize institutions merely offering lip service toward gender equality (Kunz et al., 2019). As such, climate experts must pay attention to unintended consequences that result from practice. Importantly, the success of climate experts' endeavors requires not fewer but additional resources, as well as financial resource tracking for accountability.

5.2.3 | Accountability

Although reviewed documents underscored the importance of evaluation, our review of UN evaluation guidance revealed a scarcity of insights into “asking the climate question” (Figure 1). They often referenced climate change indirectly through environmental sustainability. Many evaluation policies reported following United Nations Evaluation Group's Norms and Standards for Evaluation (UNEG, 2016), encompassing human rights and gender equality. Adopting language around climate change as another cross-cutting issue could drive its integration into assessments. Additionally, none of the included documents reported on the role of audit. In gender mainstreaming, UN-SWAP is the key mechanism supporting this effort (UNEG, 2018). Developing similar mechanisms could serve to ensure

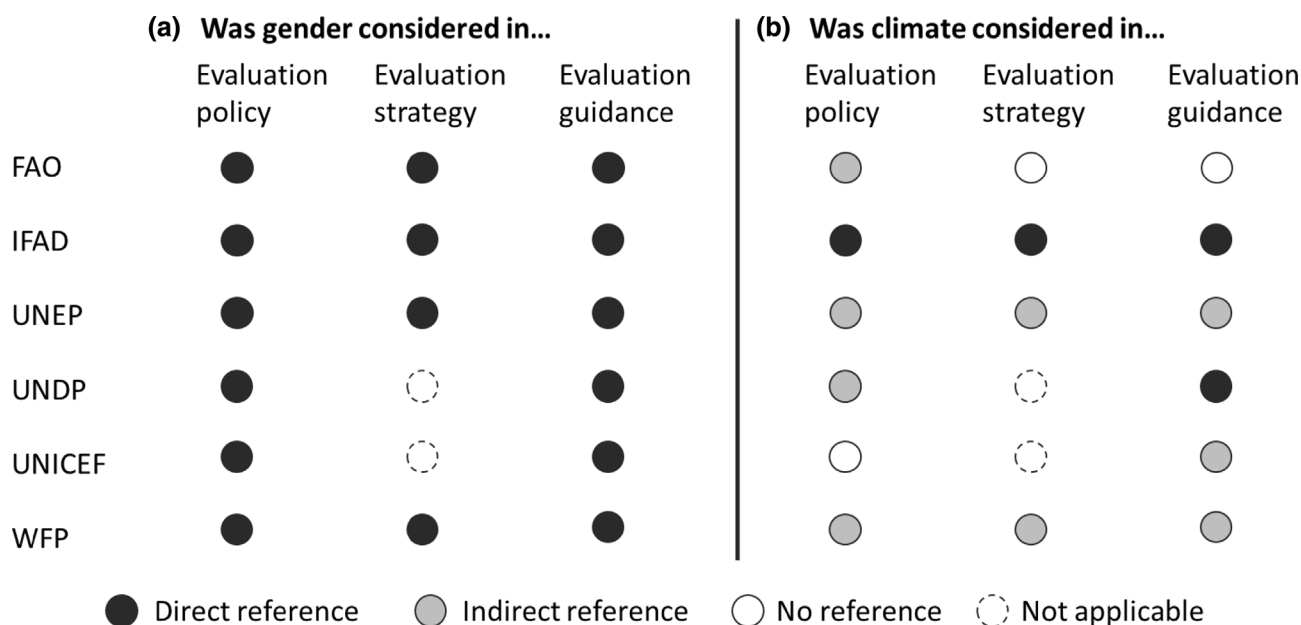


FIGURE 1 Considerations of gender (a) and climate (b) in UN evaluation policies, strategies, and guidance documents.

commitments to climate considerations in evaluations are held. Of note, developing gender approaches to evaluation and more recently, feminist evaluation, has required considerable time and effort (Crupi & Godden, 2023; Podems, 2010). Learning from these long processes of conceptualizing accountability for gender action and applying them to climate initiatives becomes vital in avoiding “green washing” or making commitments devoid of concrete plans (UNHLEP, 2022).

5.3 | Climate justice

A shift from seemingly technical and value-neutral climate action to climate justice has grown in prominence due to increased recognition of the disproportionate impacts of climate change on the world’s most marginalized populations. Ignoring the root causes of climate emergencies risks shifting a focus away from transformative change, a trend that has been recorded over decades of technocratic gender mainstreaming (Caglar, 2013). Climate justice entails not only the equitable distribution of the benefits of climate action, but also responsibilities in addressing climate emergencies, while recognizing the disproportionate contributions of wealthy nations to climate degradation (Newell et al., 2021; Whyte, 2020). Additionally, it involves considering the pre-existing social inequalities stemming from structural racism, socioeconomic marginalization, and other forms of social exclusion that heighten and are heightened by vulnerability to climate change impacts.

5.3.1 | Inclusion

Few climate mainstreaming documents expressed a clear commitment to inclusion of diverse stakeholders into the development and implementation of climate action. In contrast, all gender mainstreaming documents emphasized the need to involve women and other historically marginalized groups in decision-making processes to shape programs and policies. Because the climate crisis disproportionately affects populations already victims of socio-political and economic marginalization, climate mainstreaming approaches must confront exclusionary systems; one strategy is to value diverse perspectives and epistemological pluralism (Beaumont & De Coning, 2022). Furthermore, climate action objectives are not technically neutral—they are intrinsically political and mediated by the paradigms and influence of mainstream development actors; centering programming around local priorities could help ensure programs and reflect local realities (IPCC, 2023b). Small island nations, for instance, are most vulnerable to climate impacts and require different solutions than more climate-resilient countries.

Of note, including diverse perspectives and engaging with power structures is not straightforward, prompting scholars to recently develop relevant tools (Devkota et al., 2022; UN Women, 2023a). In the context of evaluation, “Voices from the Margins” is an emerging approach that encourages practitioners to look for and include those who might not normally be heard due to discriminatory practices (Stephens et al., 2018). Tools have also been developed to focus attention on the social, political, and economic areas of engagement in which different actors interact (IPCC, 2023b). Keeping up to date with theoretical developments is important for meaningfully embracing inclusion in climate contexts.

5.3.2 | Intersectionality

Vulnerability to climate change is mediated by gender and other social identities. Among the UN agencies examined, only one agency emphasized the importance of disaggregating data by gender and other social identities. Just as gender mainstreaming aims to consider how programs can meet the needs and priorities of diverse gender groups, so too should climate mainstreaming (Hankivsky, 2013). Notably, climate efforts should understand and address challenges faced by Indigenous youth and women who are disproportionately impacted and are at the forefront of climate resilience; one strategy is to include them as decision makers in plans to address the crisis (Middleton et al., 2020). Intersectional analysis could facilitate this understanding (Amorim-Maia et al., 2022; Lam et al., 2019). Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of social identities, such as gender and race, which intertwine to shape unique experiences of discrimination and privilege (Collins et al., 2021; Crenshaw, 1991). Applying an intersectional approach helps to assess the potential impacts—positive or negative—of initiatives on diverse groups of people, enabling the early

identification of risks and creation of mitigation strategies. In this pursuit, qualitative and participatory methodologies hold particular relevance as they allow for context-specific understandings (Abrams et al., 2020).

6 | CONCLUSION

Drawing lessons from gender mainstreaming, this Perspective emphasizes three crucial aspects for researchers, decision makers, and international and national development partners to consider:

1. *Implement multiple climate mainstreaming strategies:* As implemented in gender mainstreaming, a dual strategy approach—involving both programmatic mainstreaming and specific/add-on interventions—should be considered to address climate concerns effectively (FAO, 2018). And like gender, climate mainstreaming might also fall short in challenging underlying structures that perpetuate issues; transformative approaches are suggested.
2. *Develop institutional accountability to ensure tracking of organizational climate mainstreaming,* akin to a proposed accountability framework similar to UN SWAP 2.0 for gender (UN Women, 2023b). The adopted principles for a UN system-wide approach to climate action should be accompanied by guidance on how UN agencies evaluate climate mainstreaming progress. Organizations should consider how they will assess mainstreaming process and outcomes.
3. *Adopt a climate justice perspective,* viewing nature as having rights just as humans have rights. In practice, this involves prioritizing populations at greater risk of climate change impacts, as well as engaging diverse perspectives in the decision-making processes, particularly communities facing intersecting forms of discrimination. Because both gender and climate mainstreaming share similar goals (e.g., supporting underserved populations), an integrated gender-climate mainstreaming approach could yield co-benefits, such as advancing sustainable development and equity objectives simultaneously (Allwood, 2020).

Applying these lessons from gender mainstreaming could help in addressing climate mainstreaming implementation gaps. Of note, this article places emphasis on the programmatic and organizational dimensions of climate mainstreaming, akin to the gender mainstreaming approach taken by UN agencies reviewed in this piece. Wamsler and Osberg (2022) proposed six climate mainstreaming strategies, which include add-on, internal, inter-organizational, and educational in addition to programmatic and organization mainstreaming. We focused on the latter two, broader categories, which we see as corresponding to different policy scales of mainstreaming implementation (e.g., program and institutional levels), as these are where core lessons from gender are emerging. Future research should consider using these six strategies as a framework to identify entry points into areas of intervention as well as understand how mainstreaming is applied across diverse policy domains and contexts (Braunschweiger & Pütz, 2021; Wamsler & Pauleit, 2016).

Importantly, to expedite progress in climate mainstreaming, the consideration of climate and official development assistance financing is imperative. High-income countries are mandated by Article 9 of the 2015 Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015) to mobilize an annual sum of 100 USD billion to aid less affluent nations, a target that remains unattained and characterized by uneven distribution. In 2020, out of the provided 83.3 USD billion, only 8% was allocated to low-income nations, which are often the most climate-vulnerable (OECD, 2022). Moreover, low-income countries grapple with the dual challenge of investing in both development and climate action. In 2022, official development assistance reached 204 USD billion, leaving nearly half of the humanitarian requirements unmet (OECD, 2023b). Weighing other development benefits against climate benefits is a key factor influencing the decision regarding the adoption and extent of climate mainstreaming. Hence, ensuring sufficient funding is critical to propel climate justice and development agendas forward.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Steven Lam: Conceptualization (lead); formal analysis (lead); methodology (lead); writing – original draft (lead); writing – review and editing (lead). **Gloria Novović:** Conceptualization (supporting); formal analysis (supporting); writing – original draft (supporting); writing – review and editing (supporting). **Kelly Skinner:** Conceptualization (supporting); writing – review and editing (supporting). **Hung Nguyen-Viet:** Conceptualization (supporting); writing – review and editing (supporting).

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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