The historic US$1.7 billion pledge made at the UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow by governments and donors in support of Indigenous Peoples and local communities is a step in the right direction, but much more funding is needed. It's imperative that climate finance for global conservation and biodiversity loss mitigation fully reaches the communities – and the Indigenous, Afro-descendent, and local community women – doing the heaviest lifting of protecting and restoring our landscapes.

At the United Nations 66th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW66), integrating gender perspectives into climate change and environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programs take center stage. Climate finance must not remain blind to the invaluable contributions that Indigenous, Afro-descendent, and local community women make toward mitigating climate change, preserving traditional knowledge, strengthening gender justice, and supporting human and tenure rights movements. In turn, this financing must also strive to prevent and mitigate the adverse impacts of climate initiatives on the lives of women and their communities.

In 2016, the Intergovernmental Economic Organisation (OECD) found that nearly US$10 billion was earmarked for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) fighting for gender justice. Yet, just 8% of these funds reached CSOs working in developing countries, and only a fraction reportedly went to grassroots women's rights organizations directly. In fact, Indigenous women's organizations received only 0.7% of all recorded human rights funding between 2010 and 2013 despite them using, managing, and conserving community territories that comprise over 50% of the world's land and support up to 2.5 billion people. Where resources are reaching Indigenous women's organizations, they are typically small-scale and short-term.

Global and regional studies addressing women's access to this funding are lacking, and data is virtually non-existent for Afro-descendant and local community women's organizations in the Global South specifically, painting a bleak picture in terms of funding for women's grassroots organizations overall.

Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women experience a broad, multifaceted, and complex spectrum of mutually reinforcing systemic human rights violations. These act together to limit their self-determination and control of natural resources, all influenced by patriarchal power structures and multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization based on gender, class, race, ethnic origin, customs, and socioeconomic status.

So, what can Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women's organizations do differently? And in joining the celebration of International Women’s Day and the #BreakTheBias campaign, how can governments, donors, and allies recognize and support the invaluable contributions these women make
to their communities and toward achieving global development and climate goals?

The cultural, economic, and spiritual significance of land, territory, water, and natural resources lie at the heart of what it means to be an Indigenous, Afro-descendant, or local community woman. Women’s grassroots organizations work at the intersection of equality and non-discrimination, environmental justice, land and forest tenure, and livelihoods rights – all of which are necessary for climate change mitigation on a global scale.

We call on international donors and governments to prioritize funding for Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women’s organizations – including their human rights, tenure rights and development agendas – who have historically been excluded from decision-making processes and in the design and implementation of programs and finance instruments that affect them.

To forge women’s empowerment worldwide, governments and donors must take action for gender equality and gender justice to #BreakTheBias and urgently make funding available and accessible to Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women’s organizations in countries in the Global South who have been historically under-supported and under-funded.

In particular, we call for funding for the following initiatives in partnership with Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women’s organizations and economic initiatives:

- Secure women’s land, forest, and water tenure rights by helping to improve and/or create gender-sensitive policy reforms and actions and coordinate advocacy platforms for women’s food security and resource rights.
- Enhance Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local community women’s leadership formation and capacities by promoting knowledge-sharing amongst and between Indigenous women elders and community youth.
- Establish and enforce safeguarding mechanisms to fortify Indigenous, Afro-descendant and local community women’s autonomy and their right to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), self-determination, and due process as outlined in national and international laws.
- Contribute to women’s empowerment and self-determination by supporting women-led initiatives and livelihood enterprises.
- Build capacity to ensure women know and understand their rights and are confident in their abilities to negotiate within and outside their communities.
- Create inclusive spaces for dialogue and economic planning at the international, national, and local levels where women can analyze and communicate structures of gender-based violence and discrimination and propose mechanisms for prevention.

To ensure funding goes directly to women’s organizations and these initiatives, we recommend that donors and allies:

- Prioritize specific allocation of funds for Indigenous, Afro-descendant and local community women’s organizations and their livelihood enterprises, economic initiatives, and their human and tenure rights agendas.
• Devote funds to developing women’s organizational capacities and administrative systems as a clear way to establish future pathways for them to secure sustainable resources.

• Adapt funding approaches that use a bottom-up approach to gender-inclusive climate finance, and create monitoring frameworks for climate adaptation, resilience, and mitigation informed by women’s experiences in accessing and managing these funds.

• Engage in direct dialogue with Indigenous, Afro-descendant and local community women to make certain this bottom-up approach recognizes their leadership, expertise, and vision.

• Establish arenas for ongoing dialogue and collaboration between governments, donors, CSOs, women’s organizations, and grassroots advocacy groups.

• Prioritize gender-sensitive legislation and policy reforms that are consistent with the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

• Open new lines of funding to support women’s roles as frontline environmental, land, and water rights defenders and leaders, and guarantee that the funding as well as grievance redress mechanisms ensure their long-term protection and capacity building.

• Recognize the ethnic and cultural diversity of Indigenous, Afro-descendant and local community women and respect their culturally-grounded expertise and experiences. Support the critical roles women play in their communities as equal partners in the fight for climate justice.

• Donors must motivate governments and implementing agencies to ensure women’s representation and protection in ongoing reforms through improved monitoring and impact evaluations and channeling of funds.

List of organizations that have endorsed this Call to Action:

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