

Empowering Female Climate Change Activists in the Global South

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Empowering Female Climate Change Activists in the Global South: The Path Toward Environmental Social Justice

BY

PEGGY ANN SPITZER

State University of New York at Stony Brook, USA



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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*This book is dedicated to Steven I. Levine
teacher, mentor, and friend for life*

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Contents

About the Author	<i>xi</i>
Acknowledgments	<i>xiii</i>
Endorsements	<i>xv</i>
Introduction	<i>1</i>
Chapter One Why a Female-centered Approach?	<i>5</i>
New Ways of Thinking About Women's Leadership	<i>6</i>
Results from Field Studies	<i>7</i>
Reframing a Female-centered Approach	<i>9</i>
Complexities of Implementation	<i>13</i>
Conclusion	<i>17</i>
Chapter Two The Case for Gender Equity	<i>19</i>
UNESCO, Climate Change, and Gender Equity	<i>22</i>
Results from Field Studies	<i>27</i>
The <i>Bhungroo</i> Story	<i>31</i>
The Possibility of <i>Bhungroo</i> in Turkana County, Kenya	<i>35</i>
Conclusion	<i>40</i>
Chapter Three Reflexive Feminist Methodologies	<i>43</i>
Oral Histories in Transnational Advocacy	<i>43</i>
Reflexive Feminist Methodologies	<i>46</i>
Features of Female Empowerment	<i>55</i>
Conclusion	<i>57</i>
Chapter Four Oral Histories from Around the World	<i>59</i>
<i>Fragments of Hope (FOH)</i> /Belize	<i>60</i>
<i>Todos Juntos MealFlour</i> Project/Guatemala	<i>65</i>
<i>FUNDAECO</i> /Guatemala	<i>72</i>

<i>ENDA/Colombia</i>	74
<i>Improved Cookstoves (ICS)/Vietnam</i>	79
Female Activists/Thailand	83
<i>Progetto Quid</i> [Project Quid]/Italy	88
Solar Age Project/Türkiye	93
RUCODE/Uganda	97
AEEFG/Tunisia	101
 Chapter Five Environmental Social Justice in Rural Indian Communities	 105
Literature Review on Traditional Practices in Women's Oral Histories	105
Exercise: Bridging Experiences Across Communities	110
Oral Histories in Gujarat, India	111
Conclusion	119
 Chapter Six Supporting Female Empowerment Through Visual Arts and Social Media	 123
Digital Feminist Movements	124
Social Action	127
Computer Science	129
Small Business Development	131
International Development	132
Environmental and Health Sciences	134
Journalism and Mass Communication	136
Cross-cultural Communication	138
Visual Arts	140
Film Production	143
 Conclusion	 147
Focus on Africa	147
Develop Climate Finance	148
Encourage Youth	148
Involve Women Farmers	149
Include Climate Migrants	149
Use Digital Technology	150
Transform the Arts and Heritage Culture	150
Listen to Latin America	151
Implement a Global Stocktaking	151
Conclusion	152

Appendix: Actors and Affiliations	155
Notes	161
Glossary of Organizations and Terms	175
Bibliography	179
Index	187

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About the Author

Peggy Ann Spitzer is a Research Professor in the College of Arts and Sciences at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota and master's and doctoral degrees from American University in Washington, DC – all in International Relations. She studies women's leadership in global climate change adaptation through environmental and gender equity strategies and oral histories.

Between 2017 and 2021, she co-authored four articles and four book chapters (two of which won awards) on the social and cultural aspects of climate change; and one case study on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, she developed two digital oral history projects, one on women in US–Asian relations and the other on the implementation of a women-led irrigation technology in India. Prior to her work in climate change, she wrote a series of short biographies on women leaders in local communities; and served as a Program Consultant, with a specialty in Asian and Asian American studies, in Washington, DC for the Kluge Center for International Scholars (Library of Congress), Freer and Sackler Gallery (Smithsonian), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and the East-West Center.

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Acknowledgments

It is an understatement to say that this book would not have been possible without the support of many – climate change/feminist activists, college and university students, colleagues, and friends. Initially, in thinking about the type of book I wanted to write – one that would appeal to undergraduate and graduate students and their professors, as well as researchers and social activists – I talked with Sue (Ruth) Bottigheimer, who urged me to formulate key questions into chapters. In addition, with, Elizabeth Monroe-Cook, I discussed the psychology of female empowerment. As a Humanities Institute fellow at Stony Brook University, I worked with Adrienne Unger and Susan Scheckel, and two other fellows in my cohort – Shirley Jennifer Lim and Kristina Lucenko – with whom I shared many dinners and conversations about the women pioneers we were all researching. To get over the hump of writing and gain fresh perspectives, Karina Yager, an environmental anthropologist, provided important feedback. And, to help me streamline the hordes of terms, acronyms, and names of international organizations – I am thankful to Mary Diaz.

I could not have followed this path without conducting field interviews in Gujarat, India in 2019. I am thankful to Trupti Jain and Biplab Paul who invited me and my colleague, Jamie Sommer, to interview the farmers, who generously shared their stories with us. Trupti and Biplab arranged for Hetshee Kangad and Dhruti Thaker to serve as interpreters in the field work. Long before I considered writing this book, I had many opportunities to discuss this field experience; and it led to the creation of a digital collection through my university's library, thanks to the Digital Projects Librarian, Victoria Pilato, the then Acting Dean of Stony Brook University Libraries, Shafeek Fazal, and the Principal of *Schema Design*, Christian Marc Schmidt.

All would not have been possible without support from the Faculty in the Arts, Humanities and lettered Social Sciences (FAHSS) Fund; and the careful attention and enthusiasm of those at Emerald Press. Once I decided to write this book, Jamie continued to encourage me; and Trupti and Biplab helped me obtain a deeper, empathetic understanding about the lives of rural women in the developing world. They are my extended family.

My first encounters with female climate change entrepreneurs came from the *Women for Results* awards program through the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC). In 2016, Jamie, Aïdée Saucedá Davila, and I interviewed some of the early awardees. Later and up until 2022, I worked with several students at Stony Brook University to research and conduct oral history

interviews with several *Gender Just Climate Solutions* (GJCS) award winners (also through the UNFCCC). All are named, and their projects discussed, in this book. It was gratifying to witness students from my home institution of Stony Brook University—Erin Byers, Kunika Chahal, Jasmeet Kaur, Leio Koga, Martha Maria Chavez Megrete, and Yasmeen Watad—learn from the entrepreneurs and decide upon their own career paths.

Over the past two years, I served as a judge for the GJCS awards program and was inspired by many of my colleagues. In the Woman and Gender Constituency, I learned from many, particularly Anne Barre, Patricia Bohland, Bridget Burns, and Hwei Amy Lim, Gina Cortés Valderrama, and other “fierce feminists” who patiently helped me understand the trajectory of international climate change negotiations.

The world remains very unsure about how to deal with climate change and female empowerment. Because of this, I am thankful for the encouragement of Susan Hinely, a great scholar and teacher of global women’s history, and Steven I. Levine, my lifelong friend and mentor to whom this book is dedicated. He and his partner, Madeline Levine, helped me navigate many peaks of sureness and valleys of uncertainty. I could not have accomplished this without them and the support of my husband, Jay Raphaelson, my daughters, Emily Christoff and Caroline Christoff, and our long-time family friend, Anna McCreight.

For Christmas 2021, Caroline sent me a postcard with the following quote from Greta Thunberg: “Adults keep saying we owe it to the young people to give them hope, but I don’t want your hope. I want you to act as if the house is on fire, because it is.” In fact, ongoing intergenerational actions are crucial, and I am thankful for all who recognize that the fire still is burning.

Endorsements

Inspiring citizens to act to solve the global climate crisis in every aspect of their lives certainly is one of the most crucial missions of humanity today. Dr. Peg Spitzer's wonderful book *Empowering Female Climate Change Activists in the Global South: The Path Toward Environmental Social Justice*, provides such a galvanizing inspiration, with a wide variety of diverse and stunning true stories. But most importantly, this book reveals the untapped potential of tackling structural gender norms and empowering women to speak up for their rights, to create and to implement relevant and just climate solutions that serve people and the planet. As a university professor, mentor and jury member of the Gender Just Climate Solutions Awards, granted each year during the climate COPs, Dr. Peg Spitzer has had the opportunity to collect numerous oral stories of impressive female and feminist grassroots climate activists from all regions of the world. She offers these life jewels to the reader in a fascinating literary piece.

Anne Barre, Gender & Climate Policy Coordinator,
Women Engage for a Common Future

It is well known that women are uniquely and disproportionately impacted by climate change in the Global South. Alarming, many scholars ignore what these women have to say about their lived experiences and the solutions that follow from them. In *Empowering Female Climate Change Activists in the Global South: The Path Toward Environmental Social Justice*, Dr. Peg Spitzer draws on oral history interviews to give a voice to women affected by climate change and, in the process, describes solutions that not only empower women but also improve the environment. This book is a must read. It leaves the reader with a sense of hope that if women, who find themselves in difficult circumstances across the planet, can leave the world better off for all of us than we surely can do the same.

John M. Shandra, Professor of Sociology,
State University of New York at Stony Brook

Professor Spitzer is committed to expanding access to scholarship on historically underrepresented communities. Her work offers a critical look at the effects of climate change on rural populations around the world. Through oral histories, field studies, and interviews, she examines the effects of patriarchal social structures and cultural practices on rural women's ability to pursue social justice related to climate change and the environment in Africa, Central America, and South/Southeast Asia.

Dana Haugh, Harvey Cushing/John Hay Whitney Medical Library,
Yale University

Dr. Spitzer is answering the question of our time: how do we address climate change while building a more equitable, diverse, and beautiful society? This book tells the stories of the women who are leading the charge to protect and regenerate their environment, their communities, and the women and girls around them. Dr. Spitzer shares with us the struggles, desires, and successes of those who have been without a voice in their words. We need these stories. Dr. Spitzer reminds us why justice matters for climate solutions. She helps us to see past technocratic solutions to climate change to the heart and soul of our path forward, place-based solutions through stories, community, and the women who hold the world together. This book is a must-read for anyone who is interested in the power of narratives, the power of women, and the power of hope in the face of adversity. This book connects us to each other and to women all around the world transforming their communities and each other. Dr. Spitzer introduces us to solutions that put justice, equity, and survival right in the center of how we talk about our changing climate. Dr. Spitzer writes with kindness, beauty, and heart that draws you in and introduces you to women in India, Guatemala, Tunisia, Colombia, Uganda, Vietnam, and more like they were old friends. You will laugh, you will cry, you will get angry at injustice, but mostly you will be empowered, and you will gain the insight that empathy is one of the strongest tools we have for creating a more just, more vibrant, and more sustainable future.

Andrew Hargrove, PhD,
University of South Florida

Dr. Spitzer's book serves as an inspirational handbook guide to empowering woman from the Global South. She combines oral histories with scholarly research and provides deep insights into the challenges and opportunities that rural women from the Global South face with climate change and power dynamics. Spitzer gives voice to underrepresented women in the discussion and navigation of finding translational knowledge and employing new perspectives on gender theory. Her book provides an insightful and thorough examination of the necessary policies that must include women in the decision-making and carry through of climate action initiatives and pathways for sustainable empowerment of rural communities. Dr. Spitzer's book incorporates inspirational stories of women and the ways in which they have bridged the rural and transnational networks to create innovative and empowering opportunities to tackle climate change at the local level. Weaving women's oral histories, scholarly research on gender and power, and an examination of international institutions, Spitzer provides numerous insightful and uplifting reflections on justful and woman empowering movements across the Global South. Any researchers of climate change and practitioners working on the forefront of climate change adaptation planning, and especially relevant to women, will find enlightening and beneficial information in this book on how to realize climate actions that benefit rural to global society.

Karina Yager, School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences
and Sustainability Studies,
State University of New York at Stony Brook

Introduction

This book introduces several ways that empowering women in climate-challenged regions of the developing world (aka the Global South) enables us to become part of a critical mass for social change. The common feature of these diverse ways is a determination to connect our own individual lives with a worthwhile collective purpose that can best be achieved by joining together with others who share our vision. My own story may serve to illustrate this point.

I now live in a village on the north fork of Long Island in New York state, yet I retain vivid childhood memories of a very different place several hundred miles to the south. My paternal grandparents' farm in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia was the gathering place for family reunions throughout my childhood and into early adulthood. Some forty years later, I still can clearly picture the rooms in my grandparents' house and my grandmother's vegetable garden, and I can hear the deep southern accents of my relatives' voices as they exchanged stories and laughed together. I often wondered how members of my family made a living: Farming is an incredibly hard life! As it happens, my relatives (especially women in my generation and the one before me) graduated high school and attended college where they learned new farming techniques. However, down the lane from my grandparents' farm, perching on their neighbor Mabel's kitchen stool and straining to understand her Appalachian accent, I recognized early in life that many other farmers lacked the luxury of a formal education, and many struggled to make a living. Mabel and her husband rented the farm until he died. Visiting her before she died, I witnessed her gradually shrinking away. I am extremely grateful to my grandparents for encouraging me to keep in touch with Mabel whom I remember fondly.

Much later, in my professional career as a teacher and mentor, as weather-related disasters severely affecting the Global South increased, I wanted to know much more than I knew about how women farmers survived in these hard times. As caretakers of the home, bearing multiple responsibilities, how did they adapt to weather-related disasters? In this book, I provide some answers derived from

**Empowering Female Climate Change Activists in the Global South:
The Path Toward Environmental Social Justice, 1–4**



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field studies and oral histories conducted in Africa, Central America, and South and Southeast Asia.

My initial reading revealed a troublesome truth. I learned that all too often women's opportunities to lead movements to change agricultural practices and adopt eco-friendly approaches are severely limited by patriarchal social structures and dominant cultural practices. I wanted to understand more about what "the world" was missing when women were denied a chance to contribute. From field work and oral histories, I became convinced that while rural women's deep knowledge of natural resource management and indigenous oral traditions often were ignored, the women themselves were fully capable of becoming leaders in the pursuit of environmental social justice. In this book, I make the case for foregrounding both women's potential and their achievements.

Between 2016 and 2022, my students, colleagues, and I conducted over a hundred oral history interviews to understand the dynamics of women's empowerment and agency. We discovered many positive models, which included women farmers in the Global South who described their daily challenges – how they felt when their crops were ruined by droughts or floods, when moneylenders charged exorbitant interest rates to keep the farms going, and when, for weeks on end, they and their families did not have food to eat.

In Chapter One, I reframe the ways traditional societies can use a woman-centered approach to better address climate-related disasters. This chapter provides several examples to emphasize the importance of (1) continuing to advocate for integrating female perspectives; (2) confronting inevitable challenges with better communication skills; (3) breaking down binary (either/or) thinking by proposing multiple solutions; and (4) cultivating future generations of leaders.

To present a nuanced picture of women's potential in which self-actualization is an integral part of contributing to the goal of bettering the world, Chapter Two provides an oral history of Trupti Jain, one of the founders of the *Bhungroo* irrigation technology program in India – and relates how she gained acceptance at state and local levels, recognized the value of women's deep agricultural knowledge, and determined what women needed to regain a sense of dignity after enduring climate-related disasters. She describes how she found kindred spirits sharing a common purpose in international women's organizations and elicited outside support to identify the types of expertise needed to transfer technical and cultural knowledge to other countries and regions.

Chapter Three discusses how oral histories elicited from rural women in local communities facilitate the accurate representation of women's lives, nurtures trust, and builds support. It demonstrates that oral history interviewers, including both scholars and lay persons, play an important role in informing the outside world and thereby garnering support for community projects. An aggregation of oral histories from diverse rural settings constitutes an intricate mosaic of experiences that serves as a foundation for civil society and the work of women's international and domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Furthermore, the web of connections fostered by the dissemination of oral histories facilitates and energizes social change directed toward climate change adaptation and community survival in the face of new challenges. In essence, when stories constructed

from oral histories enter the mainstream, they have the potential to influence public opinion and secure support from policymakers and power brokers.

Chapter Four presents ten such oral histories as case studies:

1. A women-led project in the western highlands of Guatemala that involves the cultivation of mealworm farms to provide a source of protein for *indigenous Mam communities*.
2. The establishment of healthcare centers and midwife training in the protected rural areas of Guatemala among indigenous and non-indigenous people outside of the court system to *address domestic violence*.
3. A women-led community education initiative in Tunisia to help local *communities influence decision makers* to get rid of dangerous chemicals such as lead in paint, amalgam in dentistry, pesticides, and hazardous chemicals in makeup products.
4. The *establishment of women's collectives* for recycling in Colombia to enable men and women to work alongside each other to protect the land.
5. A training program for local women to secure community recognition and receive monetary compensation to restore endangered coral reefs in Belize while *gaining cooperation from male peers* and integrating the achievements of women scientists of color.
6. The multiple strategies individual women activists use to gain acceptance and rally public opinion to address environmental degradation in the rural areas of Thailand, where spiritual and cultural centers have been affected by *male migration to urban areas*.
7. A social enterprise in Verona, Italy, which was established to recycle the waste created by the fashion industry to *combat larger social problems* like climate change and provide job opportunities for poor and disenfranchised women.
8. An initiative in Uganda that provides financial support for women farmers, who are uniformly marginalized, to *implement innovative farming methods* to reduce carbon emissions and enhance their social status.
9. A program that involves working with the women's union in Vietnam to *facilitate the dissemination* and use of environmentally friendly cookstoves.
10. A project that produces solar batteries in Syrian refugee camps in Türkiye to provide women with *jobs* and prepare their children to take advantage of *educational opportunities*.

In the above case studies and throughout this book, I focus on women's empowerment and climate change programs from the perspectives of the social entrepreneurs who worked with rural communities in the Global South. In Chapter Five, I present the voices of the "Mabels" in the Global South – that is, working farmers with limited opportunities whose lives could be vastly improved by properly addressing the problems of endemic poverty. This chapter profiles oral histories of 42 agriculturalists arising from the work of social entrepreneurs who introduced a new women-owned and operated irrigation technology, *Bhungegroo*, to help farmers in Gujarat, India adapt to severe weather-related events.

4 *Empowering Female Climate Change Activists in the Global South*

The farmers' oral histories reveal that climate change has led to unstable family structures; and that, to make incremental changes that endure, intergenerational cooperation between females and males is required. Furthermore, while no single technological innovation can transform the male-dominated social hierarchy, innovations can serve as catalysts, expanding opportunities for females to work for changes that recognize and valorize their vital contributions to their families and communities.

Chapter Six answers a question that many sympathetic persons who want to contribute to a better world ask: "What can I do?" In a climate-changed world that appears to be beyond our control, it is difficult to figure out how best to contribute our time and talent (in the arts, business, computer science, education, health sciences, law, journalism, and so forth) to make a palpable difference. In this chapter, I demonstrate that visual arts and social media, which most of us are affected by and use to one degree or another, can help rural women and social entrepreneurs in the Global South deal with seemingly insurmountable problems of endemic poverty that are made worse by climate change.

In sum, I describe numerous ways by which we can learn to empathize with women farmers. Not only do they "hold up half the sky," as a Chinese saying goes, but they also are indispensable in providing a broad spectrum of solutions that, taken together, can contribute substantially to a world concerned about the environment and our relation to it. Consider this book an extended invitation to embark on life journeys that will provide both meaning and personal satisfaction to the voyager undertaking the journey and contribute to the dual and connected causes of climate justice and female empowerment. I hope you will take to heart the stories and lessons in this book and think of how to include in your life at least one important element – one or more of the kinds of service activities or, perhaps, even the full-scale careers that I introduce in these pages.

Chapter One

Why a Female-centered Approach?

Rural women in developing countries suffer disproportionately from the disastrous effects of climate change. As caregivers, subsistence food producers, water and fuel collectors, and reproducers of human life, their health and wellbeing are severely degraded by constant exposure to climate change disasters. Increased global awareness of this situation has led some organizations to bring to the task remediation and adaptation for women and girls in the Global South.

One such initiative began in 2011 when the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) obtained observer status in the United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC). This constituency worked to ensure that women's voices were heard, and that their rights were protected. To support and advocate for those whose lives are constantly threatened by massive floods, droughts, food insecurity, and migration, the WGC established a network of 33 women's and environmental civil society organizations and over 600 private citizens from around the world.¹ Gaining momentum from the Paris Climate Accords in 2015, it also developed awards programs to showcase women-led environmental projects: Most notable is *Gender Just Climate Solutions (GJCS)*, which holds an annual ceremony at the UNFCCC's climate change conference to announce the three top projects, presents the winners with seed grants (over time, between 2,000 and 3,000 Euros to each awardee), and organizes mentoring opportunities through its extensive network. Past award winners include feminists who promote women-led irrigation systems in rural areas, clean energy cookstoves, train-the-trainer education, and recycling programs.² In addition, the *GJCS* recognizes several other entrepreneurs and innovators who are engaged in devising ways to empower women to help their communities adapt to and mitigate against climate change.

While awards programs are laudable, the fact remains that many United Nations (UN) member countries pay lip service and provide little support for addressing climate justice. As a result of a report issued by the UN and another

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The Path Toward Environmental Social Justice, 5–18**



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one from the medical journal, *Lancet*, in October 2022, the *New York Times* published the following assessment:

Countries around the world are failing to live up to their commitments to fight climate change, pointing Earth toward a future marked by more intense flooding, wildfires, drought, heat waves and species extinction The [*Lancet*] report raised concerns not only about the direct health consequences of rising temperatures, including heat-related mortality, pregnancy complications and cardiovascular disease, but also the indirect costs, including the effects that drier soil could have on malnutrition and how a changing climate can expand habitats suitable to mosquitoes that carry dengue fever or malaria, ticks that carry Lyme disease, and the pathogens that cause diseases like cholera and Valley fever.³

One year earlier, the UNFCCC ignored requests from the WGC and other groups to offer an online platform for those who could not travel to Glasgow, Scotland, during the pandemic to attend its climate change conference (COP26). Thus, the voices of rural women from developing countries – where the effects of climate change are the most severe – were largely unheard.⁴ And, at the 2022 conference in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, the WGC felt that it was necessary to distribute guidelines on the safety and likely surveillance of women who were attending COP27. It also developed hashtags (such as *#SilencedCOP27*) to show solidarity for political prisoners and environmental defenders.

It is worthy to understand the historical context within which the above actions occurred: In 2015, the UN General Assembly established Sustainable Development Goals (aka SDGs), which included a commitment “to empower all women and girls.” Within this frame, the UN focused on females as victims of violence and discrimination – with respect to a lack of access to equal wages, education, and health care. In taking this stance, however, it minimized the many ways women and girls promoted solutions and challenged the rising numbers of those who are suffering from the effects of climate change.⁵

In this chapter, I introduce an American environmentalist – one of the WGC’s early awardees – who developed a new way of thinking about women’s empowerment in climate-challenged regions of the developing world. Second, to address potential leadership roles for women, I discuss findings from recent field studies to identify problems and prospects in climate change adaptation in the Global South. Third, building upon the field studies, I present a female-centered approach to climate change initiatives that, I believe, integrates women’s agency into existing structures. Finally, I set forth the complexities of intersecting social, economic, and political structures as revealed in a project that sought to establish a women-led irrigation technology in India.

New Ways of Thinking About Women’s Leadership

One of the first UNFCCC award recipients, Jeanette Gurung, an American environmentalist who worked for many years in South Asia, asserts that women’s political

participation must radically change the hierarchical, male-dominated status quo to garner the benefits of women's intellectual capacities.⁶ Gurung notes that “radical change” does not mean promoting women's agendas to the exclusion of men; rather, it incorporates women's strengths and perspectives to “hold up half the sky.” As founder and director of Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture (WOCAN), Gurung drew upon her extensive experience in Asia working with international aid organizations (such as CARE and the Peace Corps), where she pushed against the glass ceiling for over 30 years in the male-dominated field of forestry. After leaving that work, Gurung set about creating tools for women to become part of a critical mass for collective change.⁷ Here are the key elements of her training program:

1. *Transformation.* The woman must have experienced an “awakening” to move from a low-to-high level of self-confidence. (The process of internal development and consciousness-raising essentially enables the woman to acknowledge her leadership potential.)
2. *Transcendence.* She must move beyond the official title and the established class hierarchy.
3. *Cooption.* Her impulse is to focus on ways to bring others along – to use or take control for her own purposes.
4. *Eloquence.* She effectively and forcefully communicates messages.
5. *Articulation.* She listens deeply to others and, in response, articulates a vision that her audience/colleagues can appreciate.
6. *Ownership.* She works toward gaining an economic advantage on behalf of the organization to which she belongs.
7. *Breakthrough.* She “breaks through” existing levels of secrecy within existing male-dominated institutions.⁸

Gurung's initiatives were the result of her own experiences in dealing with sexist attitudes emanating from the Global North in organizations such as CARE and in the Peace Corps where she had worked as a volunteer.

The above elements are cornerstones of her training; and now they need to be integrated into how a woman masters the subject matter of the field in which she is engaged. Because of gender bias, a woman may need to be *more* knowledgeable and *more* expert than her male colleagues to have her worth and value recognized and accepted, even if grudgingly or resentfully by patriarchal mossbacks. Her experiences may be directly applicable to racial, religious, caste, class, and other obstacles to egalitarian opportunity and leadership roles as well as to the gender dimension. One can find numerous examples of women and others who have been disadvantaged by hierarchical, male-dominated social structures that have culminated in the *Black Lives Matter* and *MeToo* movements. Thus, Gurung's approach applies to women who champion women's rights globally.

Results from Field Studies⁹

Current research on women's roles in climate change adaptation serves to reinforce the complexities Gurung deals with in developing her WOCAN training

programs in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cameroon, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Nepal, the Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, and Zimbabwe. My analysis of current scholarly research, based on field work that took place in Africa, provides policy recommendations for programs in Central America and Asia. For example, one in-depth study of 156 households in rural Kenya by M. W. Ngigi, U. Mueller, and R. Birner found that government programs do not support women in leading climate change initiatives.¹⁰

At the community level, women often are hindered by insecure land rights and limited access to capital, which empowers men in their communities to pursue agroforestry and conservation agriculture. Consequently, rural women focus on how to achieve a measure of financial independence and financial stability by creating safety net programs through individual and group-based income generating activities, often achieved through savings and loans and access to credit through women's organizations. Yet, their opportunities to lead a movement to change agricultural practices to adopt eco-friendly approaches are severely limited.

Another study, conducted in Nicaragua by N. Gonda, noted that the government's climate policy merely reinforced "hegemonic masculinities and patriarchy" and, as a result, undermined women's confidence in their abilities to implement climate change adaptation projects.¹¹ In short, *climate policies ignored women's deep knowledge of natural resource management and indigenous oral traditions*. Field researchers in Nicaragua concluded that the only way to change the status quo was through a systematic transformation within the government to alter climate change politics. In Ethiopia, research by S. Balehegy, G. Tesfay, and M. Balehegy revealed that while women contribute more labor to their communities than men during droughts and famines, they do not have access to capital, nor do they have the power to make decisions to implement environmentally sustainable activities.¹² In yet another study conducted by R. B. Kerr et al., in addition to the lack of land rights, lack of self-confidence, and limited financial resources, interviews with 425 Malawian farmers indicated that, although women were the ones to develop informal networks to promote eco-friendly farming techniques, men had the final decision in whether the techniques would be implemented.¹³

All four of the above studies demonstrated that women's power to make changes is severely limited, even though they are more inclined than men to participate in programs that: (1) build community and a collective identity; (2) make visible agency and capabilities in enacting different subjectivities; and (3) visualize diversity and differences in unity.¹⁴ To date, scholars have not yet developed a "patriarchy index" in which countries could be classified, using a composite of factors including land ownership, primary head of household, voting trends, educational level, and so on.¹⁵ If this were created, countries could receive a rating according to the degree of patriarchy embedded in their cultures, societies, and political institutions. Obviously, many other factors could go into developing such an index.¹⁶

Correspondingly, N. Rao et al. conducted a literature review of research throughout Asia and Africa that reveals that women are more apt to participate in decision making in smaller settings with fewer people.¹⁷ In fact, if given the opportunity, they may serve as intelligence gatherers and consensus builders by