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MenEngage Alliance  
working with men and boys for gender equality



## ***Food systems, climate and human rights: Addressing patriarchal masculinities structures and norms to advance care and justice***

**30 January 2026 | Joint submission<sup>1</sup> to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Climate Change and Human Rights** for the report “transforming food systems to protect human rights and prevent climate harm”

Transforming food systems is indispensable to achieving global climate and biodiversity objectives, including the Paris Agreement and the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.<sup>2</sup> Yet in many contexts, “**gender mainstreaming**” in food and climate policy is narrowly interpreted to focus on the rights of women, without examining how patriarchal structures, masculinity norms and men’s roles shape land ownership, governance, financial structures, militarised industries, food cultures, chemical use and exposure, informal labour, and access to justice. **Our submission draws on insights from a global consultation** with civil society and academic actors. Collectively, we identified where violence, control, exclusion, and gender-based discrimination occur across the food system, from production and distribution to fisheries, chemicals, biodiversity, labour, financing, consumption, waste, and access to remedy. Our analysis underscores that **patriarchal masculinities must be composted**, to create space for transformative pathways based on care, gender equity and non-violence. This requires bringing men and boys, alongside women, girls and gender-diverse people together to address systemic change in food systems.

### **Box 1: Definition**

#### ***Patriarchal structures and masculinities***

Refer to structures, ideas, norms, and practices rooted in ideologies of male supremacy practiced through the dominance of men over women, girls, gender-diverse people, and men who do not conform to hegemonic norms. These structures and norms are dominance-based, seek to consolidate power, and put forward false technological solutions to problems which already have proven solutions; such as community-led transformation. As such, patriarchal masculinity must be unpacked as an important root cause to the environmental and climate crises and development of norms of care, non-violence and justice needs attention and resources.

<sup>1</sup> This submission is the outcome of a global consultation with 22 organisations, on 4 December 2025. This document was **written by**: Women Engage for A Common Future (WECF) International; YouthNet Global, Bangladesh; MenEngage Global Alliance; Zambia Social Forum (ZAMSOF); Feminist Diplomacy Lab as well as the following individuals: Diadira Esperanza Riaño Peña (COOPSUMERCE); Souad Abdulrahman; Alain Bisimwa Kauchu (FCPEEP); Laura Sims (Université de St.-Boniface, Canada).

<sup>2</sup> Chandrasekhar, A., Dunne, D., & Viglione, G. (2022, April 27). UN land report: Five key takeaways for climate change, food systems and nature loss. Carbon Brief. <https://www.carbonbrief.org/un-land-report-five-key-takeaways-for-climate-change-food-systems-and-nature-loss/>

Please note that examples below from specific countries are used to **illustrate patterns identified** through the consultation and reflect contributors' lived experiences and expertise. These examples are **not exhaustive**, nor do they imply that similar dynamics are confined to the contexts referenced.

**Question 5: Nexus Planning – What are the areas of progress, persisting and new challenges, good practices and lessons learned in relation to planning the transformation of food systems at the nexus of climate, nature, food, water, energy and health?**

Transforming food systems in line with international human rights obligations requires **addressing the underlying systems of violence and discrimination, extractivism, and gender inequality** that shape climate harms across land- and ocean-based food economies. Gender-transformative approaches, including explicit attention to working with men and masculinities in an accountable way, is essential for dismantling entrenched power structures that affect access to rights and gender justice in food, health, land, remedy, culture, participation, and a clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

### *Areas of progress*

Throughout the consultation, we observed that: 1) **Systems change**, not individual behaviour change, is the primary driver of progress; 2) Access to rights improves when control over food systems is **redistributed**; 3) **Climate resilience** is strengthened when patriarchal pressures tied to provision and control are reduced; 4) Engaging men and boys is most effective when it is **embedded in collective and rights-based** processes; 5) **Legal and policy frameworks** matter as enabling conditions; 6) **Alternative governance** models expand the scope of rights.

- **Bangladesh:** Youth-led, gender-transformative **climate adaptation and mitigation** initiatives demonstrate good practice at the intersection of climate, food, health, and gender equality (see Box 3). One such example is **EcoMen Initiative**, a youth-led initiative that engages boys and men in climate-vulnerable communities to critically reflect on patriarchal provider norms, caregiving roles, and shared responsibility for household nutrition. By **engaging boys and men** in care work, food security, and community-based climate adaptation, EcoMen has contributed to improved household wellbeing, reduced stress, and increased community support for women's equitable participation in food systems and climate resilience strategies.
- **Zambia:** **Food sovereignty initiatives** have improved access to rights within food systems by changing how land use, agricultural labour, income, and market participation are decided and governed at household and community levels. In contexts where **agricultural decisions** were previously oriented toward cash crops and controlled by a narrow group of, predominantly male, actors, these initiatives

have supported more inclusive and equitable decision-making over production and marketing. Women now participate in regional enterprise markets, control income, and make independent decisions on savings, household consumption, and reinvestment in production. Men's roles have shifted toward shared agricultural labour, while decision-making has become more balanced. Such outcomes are reinforced by **enabling legal frameworks**, including the *Zambian Constitution*<sup>3</sup> and the *Gender Equality Act*,<sup>4</sup> which recognise women's rights in agriculture and climate-related work and support community-led, rights-based food system transformation.

## Box 2: Story of change

### *Coocampo Cooperative, Colombia*

In Colombia, NGO IMPACT<sup>5</sup> supported Coocampo dairy cooperative in Boyacá, to practice and embody masculine norms rooted in care and cooperation. Through training on gender equity and masculinities with two community representatives (one woman and one man), the cooperative created spaces through educational outreach and meaningful public participation processes to question harmful gender norms while improving economic opportunities.

As a result, women hold 40 per cent of board positions (as of 2021), have increased access to administrative and technical roles, and have established women-led enterprises. Household income is more often shared between partners, contributing to greater economic security and autonomy for women, alongside improved wellbeing for men. Participants also reported more balanced sharing of domestic responsibilities and increased respect for women and youth in community decision-making.

These changes were enabled by improved livelihoods, increased awareness of gender inequalities, and collective action at the community level. The experience demonstrates that reducing reliance on patriarchal gender norms, can expand access to economic, participation, and care-related rights, while strengthening social cohesion. At the same time, it highlights that **work engaging men must be accompanied by sustained, parallel efforts to support women, girls, gender-diverse people**, and other marginalised groups, to achieve lasting, rights-based transformation.

- Similarly, in **Nigeria (Niger Delta)**, community- and women-led mangrove restoration initiatives demonstrate how a **rights of nature** approach can drive systemic change across climate, food, and governance systems. By recognising ecosystems as rights-holders and **prioritising restoration over extraction**, these initiatives challenge patriarchal leadership models rooted in resource control and profit. Grounded in Indigenous knowledge, mangrove restoration has strengthened biodiversity, revitalised fisheries and culturally significant foods, and supported livelihoods, while

<sup>3</sup> Parliament of Zambia. (2016). Constitution of Zambia Act, 2016 (Act No. 1 of 2016). [https://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/documents/amendment\\_act/Constitution%20of%20Zambia%2020\(AMendment\),%202016-Act%20No.%202016\\_0.pdf](https://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/documents/amendment_act/Constitution%20of%20Zambia%2020(AMendment),%202016-Act%20No.%202016_0.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Parliament of Zambia. (2015). *The Gender Equity and Equality Bill, 2015*. <https://www.parliament.gov.zm/sites/default/files/documents/acts/The%20Gender%20Equity%20and%20Equality%20Bill.%202015.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Co-operative Development Foundation of Canada. (n.d.). *Improving Economic Performance of Agricultural Co-operatives (IMPACT)*. CDF Canada. <https://cdfcanada.coop/projects/improving-economic-performance-of-agricultural-co-operatives-impact>

advancing the rights to culture, food, and a healthy environment. This approach illustrates how shifting governance toward care, stewardship, and ecological limits can reduce climate vulnerability and enable more resilient and equitable food systems.

- **Democratic Republic of Congo:** The ecofeminist organisation FCPEEP, based in Bukavu, has implemented a **multi-stakeholder approach** to address gender-based barriers that undermine food security and resilience, and which are exacerbated by climate change. The approach combines gender-mixed dialogue on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights, youth-led initiatives to prevent gender-based violence, and training of Congolese National Police officers to address discrimination within security institutions. The “National Strategy on the Promotion of Positive Masculinity”<sup>6</sup>, launched with the support of UN Women, has further contributed to an **enabling legal and policy environment for change**. Since then, the perception of the “model” household has totally shifted. Spouses are reframed as partners, making decisions consensually and even with their children. Households with fairer co-parenting are more prosperous. Nutrition-wise, this shift shows in better protein distribution to women and children, as opposed to men keeping the meat for themselves, traditionally seen as their privilege and sole need to “power their masculinity.”

## *Persisting and emerging challenges*

Multiple structural barriers impede rights-based food system transformation:

### **1) Governance, power, and political economy** - *who decides, who controls, who benefits*

- **Patriarchal masculinities within food system governance:** In extractive contexts such as the **Niger Delta**, women’s exclusion from land inheritance prevents them from accessing compensation for environmental harm, effectively denying recovery, remedy, and participation in decision-making. These patterns shape who holds authority, whose knowledge is recognised (including gendered and epistemic violence<sup>7</sup>) and undermine equality, access to remedy, and public participation rights. In several contexts, patriarchal masculinities function as gatekeeping mechanisms within institutions and policy processes, excluding women and gender-diverse as well as people from multi-marginalised communities from shaping food, climate and agricultural strategies.
- **Global economic systems:** overwhelmingly shaped and governed by patriarchal masculinities, constitute a major barrier to food system transformation. These systems

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<sup>6</sup> 7sur7.cd. (2024, October 16). Stratégie nationale de la masculinité positive en RDC : les résultats attendus sont la réalisation de l’équité genre et l’égalité des sexes.

<https://7sur7.cd/2024/10/16/strategie-nationale-de-la-masculinite-positive-en-rdc-les-resultats-attendus-sont-la>

<sup>7</sup> See **Annex 1** for definition on “**epistemic violence**.”

are organised around patriarchy and racialised hierarchies rooted in colonial domination through control, extraction, competition, and perpetual growth, prioritising profit and market dominance over care, sustainability, and human rights. Import–export imbalances, trade agreements, and agricultural policies grounded in these logics have favoured large–scale agribusiness while eroding food sovereignty, biodiversity, and local resilience, including in **Minority World**<sup>8</sup> contexts. The maintenance of this economic order has frequently relied on coercive power, including militarisation, occupation, and violence against communities, to secure economic and geopolitical interests. At the same time, the debt–burden borne by many **Majority World** countries, rooted in colonial histories and reinforced by contemporary financial architectures, has constrained public investment in sustainable food systems, climate adaptation, and social protection. Together, these dynamics **undermine the right to development** and limit States’ capacity to pursue rights–based, gender–transformative food system transitions.

- **Colonial and authoritarian governance in climate transitions:** Large–scale “green” infrastructure projects, such as mega–solar installations in **Turkey** and **India**<sup>9</sup>, have displaced communities and reproduced patriarchal and authoritarian decision–making. Framed as climate solutions, these projects often function as false solutions by prioritising energy production and investment returns over rights–based, integrated planning, undermining rights to land, food, culture, participation, and development, and reinforcing patterns of colonial resource control that mirror technocratic approaches increasingly promoted across food and agricultural systems.<sup>10</sup>
- **War and armed conflict constitute severe disruptions to food systems:** The **global** military–industrial complex which prioritises war over peace destroys agricultural land through bombing, contamination, and landmines, amounting in many contexts to **ecocide**, rendering soils and ecosystems unusable for decades and undermining fundamental human rights and the **rights of nature**. Conflict also disrupts food systems by fracturing supply chains and increasing reliance on humanitarian food provision, which is frequently obstructed, restricted, or rendered unsafe. Starvation has been used as a method of warfare, causing not only physical harm but also the erosion of social bonds, cultural practices, and collective dignity.

Climate change acts both as a risk multiplier for conflict, through resource scarcity, environmental degradation, and extractive competition over fossil fuels and minerals, and as a consequence of war, given the destruction of infrastructure, increased emissions, and the climate burden of reconstruction. These dynamics are **sustained**

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<sup>8</sup> See **Annex 1** for definitions for **Minority** and **Majority World**.

<sup>9</sup> Alevgul H. Sorman, Ryan Stock, Solar masculinities from the south: Patriarchal and ethnoreligious authoritarianism through solar infrastructures in Turkey and India, *Energy Research & Social Science*, Volume 114, 2024, 103583, ISSN 2214–6296, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2024.103583>.

<sup>10</sup> Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (2023). False solutions: Climate colonialism and the tragedy of the commons (p. 10). <https://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/FALSE-SOLUTIONS-BRIEFER-Final.pdf>

by **militarised masculinities** and a militarised political economy that prioritises investment in war over peace, resilience, and rights-based food system transformation.

In the **Niger Delta**, petromasculinity<sup>11</sup> manifests through large-scale oil extraction, militarised violence, colonial property systems, and the exclusion of women, girls and gender diverse peoples. Western oil companies and authoritarian governments have enforced violent repression of environmental protests (Ogoni case<sup>12</sup>), showing that domination is aligned with masculinity norms, as well as corporate and state power. Gender-based violence is directly tied to petro-conflict and militarised masculinities<sup>13</sup>.

## **2) Production models, extractivism and technofixes - how food is produced and at what cost**

- **Informal labour and exploitation:** Women and multi-marginalised people's work across informal agricultural, fisheries, and food processing sectors remains largely invisible in policy and unprotected in labour law, impeding their rights to social protection, safe working conditions, and non-discrimination. Even where gender-responsive legal frameworks exist, **persistent gaps in enforcement, widespread impunity, corruption and fluctuating political priorities** privilege short-term interests over the public good. In some contexts, colonial-patriarchal legal systems have weakened or displaced community-based accountability mechanisms, resulting in limited reporting, normalisation of gender-based violence, and lack of effective remedy.
- **Chemical-dependent food production** remains a major barrier to rights-based transformative food systems. The widespread use of fossil fuel-intensive pesticides, fertilisers, plastics, and other toxic inputs generates serious health harms that are gender-differentiated due to **gendered labour roles, exposure pathways, and physiological factors**, and are embedded in food systems prioritising productivity and scale over care and prevention. Men are over-represented in formal agricultural roles involving direct handling of agrochemicals, while women more often experience cumulative and less visible exposure through informal food production, processing, cooking, and contact with contaminated water, soil, and household environments. In some cases, **physiological factors** may interact with **exposure patterns**, particularly in relation to pregnancy and reproductive health, increasing health risks where regulation and protection are inadequate. The omission of the **precautionary principle** and the lack of gender-responsive chemical regulation undermine the rights to health, a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, and safe working conditions.

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<sup>11</sup> See **Annex 1** for definition on "**petromasculinity**."

<sup>12</sup> Amina Adebisi Odofin, *Petro-sexuality in the Niger Delta: tracing back the colonial roots of toxic geographies and masculinity* (PhD research project, Conflict Research Group, Ghent University, 2022–2026), a study on gendered violence, environmental harm, and extractive power dynamics in the Niger Delta.

<sup>13</sup> Meger, S. (2016). War as Feminized Labour in the Global Political Economy of Neoimperialism. *Postcolonial Studies*, 19(4), 378–392. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2016.1317389>

In **Honduras**, pesticide dealers have been known to threaten violence against small-scale farmers pursuing alternative-to-pesticide-intensive-agricultural practices. Dominant agro-industrial actors have used intimidation and coercion to protect their economic interests. In **Colombia**, different armed groups have prevented small-scale farmers from selling food locally, controlling territory and food access. Addressing these harms requires integrated nexus planning that links food systems with chemical regulation, occupational health and safety, water protection, and environmental governance. Such planning should include differentiated risks shaped by gendered labour, informality, and regulatory gaps rather than biological determinism.

- **Industrial agriculture, ownership and political economy:** Oil-intensive, industrial agriculture remains a structural barrier to defossilising food systems. Large-scale, capital-intensive farming models rely on mechanisation and petrochemical inputs, including synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, reinforcing fossil fuel dependency across production, processing, and distribution. In the **Netherlands**, for instance, farms have gotten bigger and less diverse. Large-scale acquisitions, which are disproportionately controlled by wealthy, predominantly male actors,<sup>14</sup> focus on high-value business opportunities, such as monoculture production for export, neglecting biodiversity and externalities. In **Majority World** countries, such as **Pakistan**, the dependency on fossil fuels and imported industrial inputs has been entrenched through neocolonial trade policies and structural adjustment programs through the IMF and World Bank. This replicates and intensifies the crisis as severe environmental degradation from intensive pesticide use results in a deepening of socio-economic inequalities, locking these nations into a cycle of debt, resource extraction, and vulnerability to global market shocks.
- **Technofixes framed as climate adaptation and mitigation:** such as Climate-resilient Agriculture, genetically modified crops, and proprietary seed systems have increasingly been promoted as solutions to climate risk. In practice, these approaches often deepen farmers' dependence on fossil fuel-intensive inputs, intellectual property regimes, and corporate supply chains, undermining food sovereignty and reproducing colonial patterns of control over seeds, land, and knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

### **3) Social reproduction and health: How systems are lived**

- **Mental health, agricultural models, and the right to health:** Dominant agricultural models generate severe mental health impacts that are disproportionately borne by small-scale farmers. In contexts such as **France**, the **United States** or **India**, high

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<sup>14</sup> Seed World Staff. (2025, Dec). Fewer farms, bigger businesses: How Dutch agriculture is reshaping. Seed World. <https://www.seedworld.com/europe/2025/12/18/fewer-farms-bigger-businesses-how-dutch-agriculture-is-reshaping/>; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2018). *Gender and Land Rights Database: Distribution of agricultural landholders by sex* (Indicator 5.a.1). FAO. Less than 15 % of agricultural landholders are women globally.

<sup>15</sup> Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD). (2023). False solutions: Climate colonialism and the tragedy of the commons (p. 10). Retrieved from <https://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/FALSE-SOLUTIONS-BRIEFER-Final.pdf>

suicide rates<sup>16</sup> among farmers reflect class-based economic precarity, debt, market volatility, and increasing exposure to climate-related environmental shocks. These pressures are intensified by the absence of effective just and green transition policies that include small-scale producers, instead shifting the burden of adaptation onto those with the least capacity to absorb risk. Climate-induced crop failure or **yield instability** can trigger immediate financial crisis for small-scale farmers, given the widespread lack of labour and social protections such as social protection floors, parental leave, or sickness benefits<sup>17</sup>. These structural vulnerabilities intersect with gendered norms that valorise self-reliance and productivity, compounding psychosocial distress and undermining the right to health. Failure to address these conditions in food system transitions risks entrenching classed and gendered inequalities across the food-climate-health nexus.

- **Food cultures and diets:** Food cultures shaped by patriarchal masculinities constitute a significant barrier to defossilising food systems, particularly in relation to industrial livestock production. Food choices are shaped by a multitude of factors, including race, class, gender, culture, as well as income and socio-economic situation. Across multiple contexts, high meat consumption is closely associated with masculine identity, social status, and economic success, reinforcing demand for fossil-fuel-intensive animal agriculture reliant on petrochemical inputs, long supply chains, and industrial feed production. In **Denmark** and the **Netherlands**, men often dominate leadership within the animal-industrial complex, while dietary narratives promoted through media, wellness industries, and social platforms frame meat and high-protein consumption as a marker of strength, dominance, and productivity. These individualised narratives obscure the structural drivers of overconsumption and deflect attention from corporate, trade, and subsidy regimes that lock food systems into fossil fuel dependence.

Industrial livestock systems further exacerbate ecological harm through their reliance on fossil fuels, plastics, and petrochemicals, including phosphorus-based fertilisers. Phosphorus pollution from animal agriculture contributes to severe environmental degradation, such as marine dead zones, undermining biodiversity, fisheries, and the rights to health and a healthy environment. Yet, imposing dietary restrictions without cultural sensitivity through coercive or majoritarian food policies, such as forced vegetarianism in some contexts<sup>18</sup>, can reproduce exclusion, caste-based violence, and discrimination against minorities.

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<sup>16</sup> Behere, P. B., & Bhise, M. C. (2009). Farmers' suicide: Across culture. *Indian journal of psychiatry*, 51(4), 242–243. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.58286>

<sup>17</sup> Van Touch, V., Tan, D. K. Y., Cook, B. R., Liu, D. L., Cross, R., Tran, T. A., Utomo, A., Yous, S., Grunbuhel, C., & Cowie, A. (2024). Smallholder farmers' challenges and opportunities: Implications for agricultural production, environment and food security. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 370, Article 122536. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2024.122536>; International Labour Organization. (2024). World Social Protection Report 2024–26: Universal social protection for climate action and a just transition. International Labour Organization. [https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/WSPR\\_2024\\_EN\\_WEB\\_1.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-09/WSPR_2024_EN_WEB_1.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Najeeb, H. (2023, Nov 24). Culinary fascism and cow politics: How food is used to marginalise Muslims in India. <https://feminisminindia.com/2023/11/24/culinary-fascism-and-cow-politics-how-food-is-used-to-marginalise-muslims-in-india>

***Question 1: The role of food systems in relation to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and loss and damage – Are there any good practices, examples of solutions being co-developed with affected communities or individuals?***

**Patriarchal economic norms**<sup>19</sup> shape food systems that prioritise and maximise *profit, extractive production, and market dependence* over care, sustainability, and food sovereignty. Within this model, men are socialised to associate masculinity with breadwinning through wage labour, while women shoulder responsibility for food provision and care. As climate change undermines agriculture and fisheries, men often migrate in search of work, leaving women and other multi-marginalised groups to manage food insecurity and unpaid care. Research in the field of food production prioritises the commercial, marketable crops that men are producing, rarely the crops that women produce for the family sustenance. ***The story of change below from coastal Bangladesh illustrates how community-led food sovereignty initiatives can interrupt these dynamics, and strengthen community resilience.***

**Box 3: Story of change**

***Shifting breadwinner masculinity norms through community-led climate resilience***<sup>20</sup>

In **coastal Bangladesh**, climate impacts such as salinity intrusion, flooding, river erosion, and declining fish stocks have undermined food systems and livelihoods. Patriarchal gender norms place disproportionate responsibility on women for food provision and care, while men face pressure to fulfil breadwinner roles that are increasingly unattainable under climate stress. These dynamics exacerbate inequality, food insecurity, household stress, gender-based violence and early marriage..

In Shukdara village, a community-based initiative on **indigenous seed conservation** and **food sovereignty** demonstrates a rights-based, gender-transformative response. Around 200 women organised the cultivation, exchange, and preservation of indigenous seeds through community seed vaults, strengthening access to diverse and nutritious food, reducing reliance on climate-vulnerable hybrid seeds, and improving household resilience. The initiative contributed to climate adaptation and addressing loss and damage by improving food and nutrition security, preserving biodiversity and indigenous knowledge, reducing exposure to agrochemicals, limiting forced migration, and decreasing dependence on corporate-controlled agricultural inputs.

The dominant breadwinner model of masculinity is both climate-vulnerable and socially unsustainable. As food access stabilised, men were more able to participate in shared care, collective livelihoods, and non-dominant roles without stigma. Recognising these pressures does not absolve patriarchal power or violence, but helps expose how rigid gender norms harm everyone while disproportionately harming women and girls. By reducing livelihood insecurity and food stress, these shifts enabled more equitable sharing of food provision, income-generating activities, and care responsibilities within households. Building on transformations, **EcoMen** is a youth-led initiative of YouthNet Global that engages men and boys in climate-vulnerable communities to challenge harmful patriarchal norms and promote shared responsibility for care, food, nutrition security, and climate adaptation. Working alongside women-led initiatives, fostering local nutrition dialogue, and promoting agroecological practices, it has improved household wellbeing, reduced stress, and strengthened acceptance of women's leadership in food systems and climate action.

<sup>19</sup> See **definition** in **Annex 1**.

<sup>20</sup> For more information about this **project**, see **Annex 2**. See **Annex 1** for definition on **“breadwinner masculinity.”**

This example highlights how food system transformation rooted in collective food sovereignty practices can advance climate resilience, human rights, and gender justice. For such approaches to be **sustainable**, it is also **crucial to engage men and boys in unpacking harmful patriarchal norms** that shape expectations and pressures on them. This engagement must be carried out in **accountable ways** that align with feminist movements, centre women's rights, gender equality, and respect the rights of gender-diverse people.

## **Recommendations** - *Transform patriarchal masculinities, transform systems*

### **1. Engage men and boys as accountable actors in rights-based climate and food system transformation.**

States and other duty-bearers should support programmes that engage men and boys, alongside women, girls, and gender-diverse people, to dismantle patriarchal and colonial norms that sustain inequality, gender-based violence, environmental harm, and militarisation. Such engagement must be accountable to feminist, Indigenous, youth, and LGBTQIA+ movements, and contribute to advancing gender equality, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) for all, demilitarisation, and climate justice.

### **2. Address patriarchal masculinities as a structural driver of climate and food system harms**

States should explicitly recognise and address how patriarchal masculinities shape governance, leadership, and decision-making in food systems and climate policy, including through land ownership, industrial agriculture, militarisation, and extractive economic models. In line with their obligations to ensure equality and non-discrimination, States must dismantle gendered power structures that sustain environmental harm, violence, and exclusion, and prevent severe environmental destruction that may amount to **ecocide**, including the large-scale degradation of ecosystems essential for food systems, climate stability, and the realisation of human rights.

### **3. Ensure gender-transformative and intersectional food system governance grounded in human rights and the right to development**

States must integrate gender equality, intersectionality, and substantive equality at the core of climate mitigation, adaptation, and just transition strategies related to food systems. This includes addressing not only the rights of women and girls, but also the role of men and masculinities in sustaining or transforming harmful systems. Such measures must be implemented in accordance with States' obligations under international human rights law, including the **right to development**, ensuring that climate and food system transformations expand, rather than constrain, policy space, livelihoods, and self-determination for communities historically marginalised through colonialism, extractivism, and debt.

#### 4. **Protect the rights to health, a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, and the rights of nature**

States should regulate pesticides, petrochemicals, plastics, and other toxic inputs used across food systems through gender-responsive approaches that account for differentiated exposure pathways, labour roles, and cumulative risks. In line with the **precautionary principle**, States must prevent foreseeable harm to workers, communities, and future generations, and recognise that the degradation of ecosystems undermines both human rights and the rights of nature, particularly where ecological destruction compromises food systems, water, biodiversity, and climate resilience.

#### 5. **Guarantee meaningful participation, access to information, and access to justice**

States must ensure meaningful, safe, and **inclusive participation** in food and climate governance, in line with the **Aarhus Convention**, the **Escazú Agreement**, and international human rights law. This includes Indigenous peoples, smallholder farmers, workers, women, gender-diverse people, youth, and affected communities. Decision-making over land, resources, and livelihoods must not be concentrated in centralised, militarised, or corporate structures, and effective remedies must be available where environmental harm, land dispossession, or violations of the rights of nature occur.

#### 6. **Prevent gender-based violence, conflict-related harms, and starvation**

States must prevent and respond to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, including in militarised agricultural contexts, extractive economies, and insecure labour conditions. In conflict and climate-affected contexts, States must comply with international human rights and humanitarian law by preventing starvation as a method of warfare, protecting food infrastructure, ensuring humanitarian access, and addressing climate-related displacement, “climate migration”, and loss of livelihoods, including where such harms intersect with environmental destruction and ecocide-related risks.

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# Annex 1

## Glossary

Term	Definition
<i>Breadwinner masculinities</i>	In their work <i>Ecological Masculinities: Theoretical Foundations and Practical Guidance</i> (2018), Hultman & Pulé describe the term as referring to masculinities that are deeply tied to industrial capitalism, growth, and extractive systems: industrial/breadwinner masculinities have “come at terrible costs to the living planet” and are contrasted with approaches that promote care and ecological wellbeing. (source: <a href="#">Hultman &amp; Pulé</a> )
<i>Epistemic violence</i>	“Epistemic violence is a concept first coined by theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her 1988 essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ In it she outlines epistemic violence as being the process whereby the ability of particular social groups to formulate their own epistemologies is systematically denied. Epistemology here refers to a theory of knowledge, or how one comes to know things. Epistemic violence results in subjugated knowledge, which are knowledges that have been rendered inadequate or below a certain scientific standard (Spivak, 1988). This epistemic violence marks certain kinds of knowledge, such as colonial or European knowledge, as being legitimate while delegitimising other kinds of knowledge, such as indigenous knowledge.” (Source: <a href="#">Muhammad Naufal Ubaidi</a> )
<i>Gender-based violence</i>	Violence directed against a person because of that person’s gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately. Source: <a href="#">European Commission</a>
<i>Hegemonic patriarchy</i>	A power structure, which you can compare with a pyramid. Where your gender, racialised identity, culture, religion and other identity factors determines your position in the pyramid. It makes assumptions about social expectations of what it means to be a “real man” and tends to prioritise traits such as strength, assertiveness, emotional resilience and dominance as superior to other traits. Hegemonic masculinity contributes to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles and can impact various

Term	Definition
	<p>aspects of social life, including relationships, work, and personal identity. It also upholds racism and colonialism. (Source: <a href="#">WECE Masculinities Glossary</a>)</p>
<i>Majority World</i>	<p>The Majority World refers to the regions of the world where the majority of the global population lives, primarily in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East."</p>
<i>Minority World</i>	<p>The Minority World refers to the economically privileged regions of the world, primarily North America, Western Europe, Australia, and Japan, which contain a minority of the world's population but control a majority of its wealth and resources.</p>
<i>Patriarchal economic norms</i>	<p>Assumptions, values, and institutional practices that organize economies in ways that privilege men, patriarchal masculinity, and male-dominated roles, while devaluing women's and gender-diverse peoples' labor, care work, and non-market contributions.</p>
<i>Patriarchal masculinities</i>	<p>Patriarchal masculinities are ideas and practices that reinforce a hierarchy of masculinity over femininity, and certain types of masculinity over others. These masculinities manifest individually (through attitudes and behaviors), institutionally (in policies and laws), and ideologically (through social and cultural norms), perpetuating power imbalances between men and women and within society as a whole. (Source: <a href="#">MenEngage</a>)</p>
<i>Petromasculinity</i>	<p>Petro-masculinity* refers to the entanglement of fossil fuel dependence with masculinised political and economic identities that defend extractive, productivist, and hierarchical systems. In the context of food systems, petro-masculinity manifests through industrial agriculture models reliant on fossil fuels, petrochemicals, and long supply chains, as well as resistance to climate regulation, agroecological transition, and gender-transformative change, particularly when these are perceived to threaten established power, status, or livelihoods. (Source: Daggett, Cara. "Petro-masculinity: Fossil fuels and authoritarian desire." <i>Millennium</i> 47, no. 1 (2018): 25-44.)</p>

## Annex 2

Written Submission for the Online Consultation  
Grounded Realities: Masculinities, Food Systems and Climate Change

**Submitted by:** YouthNet Global  
**Date:** 3rd December 2025

### Introduction

This submission draws on recent evidence generated by YouthNet Global through two key documents: the Consolidated Nutrition Dialogue Report based 12 grassroots Nutrition dialogues part of listening campaigns and the Nutrition–Climate Policy Brief,

based on dialogues across Satkhira, Khulna, Barishal, and Kurigram districts of Bangladesh led by local young leaders. These reports capture lived experiences from climate-vulnerable and marginalized communities including Munda indigenous groups, Manta fisherfolk, char residents, urban slum dwellers including sanitation workers, and women-headed households like tiger widows. The insights highlight how climate impacts, food systems, gender roles, and evolving masculinities shape community well-being and human rights.



### Key Themes Linking Masculinities, Climate Change and Food Systems

#### 1. Climate impacts on food and nutrition security

Communities face worsening food insecurity due to salinity intrusion, river erosion, flooding, fish scarcity, and rising food prices. Crop losses, declining fish stocks, and unstable income directly disrupt families' ability to maintain nutritious diets. These environmental pressures intensify stress on household roles and responsibilities.

#### 2. Gendered nutrition and care responsibilities

Women overwhelmingly manage household nutrition, care work, hygiene practices, and food decisions. In the dialogues, 77 percent of participants were women, reflecting their central role in food systems. Yet they continue to face heavy workloads, limited decision-making power, and social barriers affecting their ability to ensure adequate nutrition.

#### 3. Climate-stressed masculinities

Patriarchal expectations around men as the primary providers create pressure when climate impacts erode fishing and farming livelihoods. Among Manta fisherfolk and river-dependent households, men described distress linked to declining fish stocks, loss of income, and inability to fulfil expected roles. In several contexts, men are less engaged in nutrition-related knowledge, sometimes due to social norms that position nutrition as “women’s work.”

#### 4. Human rights and structural inequalities

Marginalized groups face intersecting challenges: insecure land rights, unsafe water, poor healthcare access, and weak institutional support. Gender inequalities and climate impacts combine to undermine rights to food, health, adequate housing, and safe livelihoods.

## **Manifestations of Patriarchal Masculinities in Food Systems**

- Provider pressure: Men express anxiety when declining fisheries, crop losses, or low wages prevent them from providing food or income.
- Limited male involvement in nutrition: Some men lack awareness of nutrient needs; for example, one participant avoided vegetables like tomatoes due to misconceptions.
- Control over resources: Even when women manage food, men often retain control of land, income, and market decisions, shaping what food is accessible.
- Increased burdens on women: Male migration or livelihood collapse shifts unpaid care work and food responsibilities disproportionately to women.

These dynamics demonstrate how gender norms directly influence food access, nutrition outcomes, and household resilience.

## **Examples of Resilience and Positive Change**

- Women's leadership in homestead gardening, food processing, and micro-enterprises. • Youth-led nutrition education in schools and communities.
- Adoption of climate-resilient agriculture such as saline-tolerant crops, rooftop gardens, small livestock rearing, and organic farming/ agro-ecology.
- Community water filtration initiatives and cooperative savings groups in char and slum areas.

These examples illustrate emerging shifts toward shared responsibility, collective action, and local innovation.

## **Recommendations**

1. Integrate gender-transformative approaches into climate and nutrition policy Address harmful gender norms, encourage men's engagement in nutrition, and promote shared household responsibilities within adaptation planning.
2. Strengthen women- and youth-led local food systems  
Support micro-loans, vocational centres, community gardens, and small-scale enterprise development to reinforce local resilience.
3. Embed nutrition within climate adaptation strategies  
Ensure that local climate plans incorporate diet diversity, nutrition education, and gender-responsive agricultural practices.
4. Expand climate-resilient agriculture  
Scale up saline-tolerant crops, rooftop and sack gardening, floating seedbeds, and sustainable farming methods.
5. Improve WASH and healthcare services  
Invest in water filtration, arsenic mitigation, drainage systems, and mobile health units to reduce nutrition-related vulnerabilities.
6. Engage men and boys in nutrition, caregiving, and climate resilience  
Promote community programs that challenge restrictive masculinities and encourage men's participation in diet, caregiving, and climate-resilient livelihoods.
7. Strengthen market governance and price monitoring  
Ensure food affordability and safety for low-income households by enhancing local market surveillance and regulation.



### Case Story

#### Seeds of Resistance: How Coastal Women Are Reclaiming Food Sovereignty in Bangladesh

In the coastal belt of Khulna, where saltwater reaches far inland and storms strike each year, a quiet revolution has taken shape. Across seventeen villages, nearly two hundred women are conserving, exchanging, and cultivating native seeds to protect family nutrition, strengthen climate resilience, and reclaim community control over agriculture. Their efforts are rooted in tradition but have become a powerful act of resistance against climate threats, corporate dependency, and the erosion of rural livelihoods.

One of these women is Shyamoli Sarkar from Shukdara village. In her courtyard she grows around eighty varieties of indigenous seeds. Gourds, pumpkins, cucumbers, and leafy greens flourish around her home, each grown from seeds passed down through generations. She says, “I plant these seeds in my courtyard. The vegetables we harvest provide essential nutrition for my family.” Her words reflect the right to adequate food, which becomes real when families can grow diverse, safe, and nutritious crops.

The movement also grows from frustration with rising corporate control. Chandana Sarkar explains, “Hybrid seeds have placed farmers under the influence of a few companies. Prices keep increasing, and more chemicals are needed. Farmers have become dependent on the market.” This dependency undermines the right to a secure livelihood because families must spend more for seeds that often fail under harsh climate conditions. For men, who are commonly expected to provide financially, this creates pressure and sometimes emotional distress. Women’s leadership in seed saving helps reduce this burden and opens space for more cooperative and less pressured forms of masculinity.

Custodians like sixty one year old Namita Sarkar maintain a seed bank of four hundred and twenty three varieties, while Lakshmi Rani Mandal preserves two hundred and forty eight. These seed banks protect

community access to natural resources, which is part of the right to manage land and ecological knowledge. Because these seeds are shared freely among women, almost every household now has a safe and productive kitchen garden, strengthening the right to food and the right to health through improved diets and fewer chemical exposures.

Women in these villages meet regularly to exchange seeds, teach each other new techniques, and pass on traditional knowledge. These gatherings strengthen cultural identity and honour the right to participate in cultural life, which includes the preservation of farming practices handed down over generations. For fifteen years an annual seed fair has brought entire communities together, and local organisation Lokoj supports the women with training and tools that make seed preservation possible.

Indigenous seeds offer more than cultural value. They survive in saline soil, require no chemical fertiliser, resist pests, and endure floods and storms. In a region where climate hazards are increasing, these seeds protect the right to safety, the right to life, and the right to resilience. They allow families to withstand shocks without losing their food supply, reducing the need for men to migrate or take on high risk work during crises. As a result, responsibilities within households can be shared more fairly, supporting healthier gender relations.

Bangladesh has already lost thousands of native rice varieties. According to Delower Jhahan of Prakritik Krishi, more than three thousand varieties have disappeared. The women of Khulna are protecting what remains. In doing so, they safeguard biodiversity, strengthen community independence, and uphold the right of people to shape their own food systems.

This movement is not simply a return to older farming practices. It is a forward looking strategy grounded in justice, dignity, and ecological wisdom. Against climate threats, corporate domination, and economic insecurity, these women are planting seeds of hope and collective strength. Their leadership supports human rights, expands women's roles, and encourages new forms of masculinity based on shared responsibility rather than pressure.

As more communities adopt this model, Bangladesh can move toward an agricultural future guided by sovereignty, resilience, and fairness. In such a future, women's leadership, community rights, and evolving masculinities all work together to build a stronger and more sustainable food system for everyone.

#### Conclusion:

The evidence from Bangladesh demonstrates that climate change affects not only food systems but also the social norms and gendered expectations underpinning household roles. Climate stresses are reshaping masculinities, increasing care burdens on women, and creating new vulnerabilities in already marginalized communities. At the same time, women, youth, and community groups are leading innovative, locally grounded solutions that strengthen resilience.

Insights from the Munda indigenous, Manta fisherfolk, char islands, and urban slum communities like untouchable sanitation workers offer powerful examples of how climate, food systems, and masculinities intersect in everyday life. These grounded realities can meaningfully inform global policy discussions and contribute to the policy brief being developed for the UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change.

END