Cultivating a more enabling environment:

Strengthening women's resilience in climate-vulnerable and conflict-affected communities

Summary Brief

Around the world, climate crises and conflicts are on the rise. The most climate-vulnerable communities are also some of the most affected by conflict and economic insecurity; communities that have contributed the least to the climate crisis. This confluence of risk and vulnerability threatens the lives and livelihoods of communities - and especially women - caught in the middle.

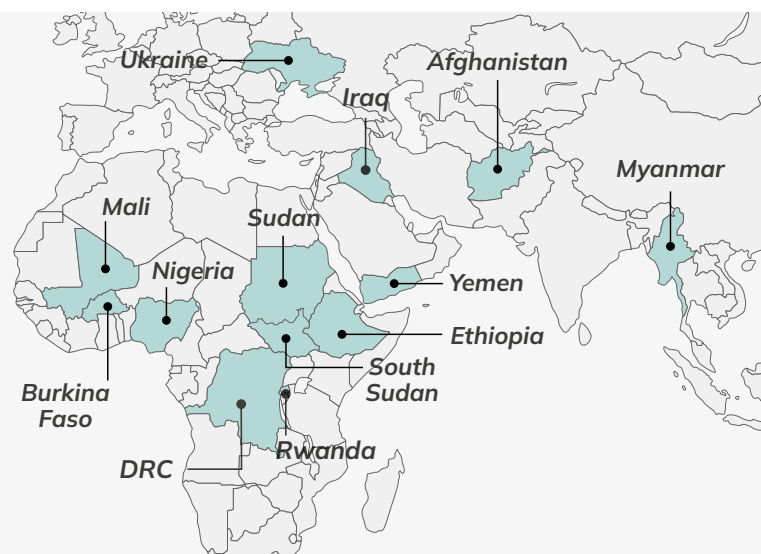### Across climate and conflict-related crises:

- There is significant overlap between fragile and conflict-affected states and the most climate-vulnerable states in the world;

- Women are uniquely and disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change and conflict;

- Women are excluded from decision-making and leadership on solutions despite their unique perspective on impacts and commitment to a holistic approach to addressing challenges. This exclusion widens the gaps in conflict and gender-responsive programming and decision-making spaces regarding land, agriculture, and climate action.

This report provides an overview of women's experiences of climate and environmental impacts in the conflict-affected - and often under-represented and marginalized - communities where we work. This evidence contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the intersection of gender, conflict, and environment in settings that are climate-vulnerable, fragile and conflict-affected, and with high rates of gender inequality.

We propose recommendations for action to cultivate an enabling environment to better strengthen women's resilience and adaptation to intersecting climate and conflict risks, while actively advancing gender equality and building lasting and sustainable peace.

Who we asked

Between August and October 2023, Women for Women International reached out to **nearly 1,000** women through individual surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs), and interviews with women's rights organizations (WROs) across communities where Women for Women International implements programs in **Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Iraq, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Sudan** and where we support partners in **Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Mali, Myanmar, Sudan, Ukraine,** and **Yemen.**

What we found

OVERALL TOP 5 ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS				
AFGHANISTAN	**DRC**	**IRAQ**	**NIGERIA**	**RWANDA**
1 Drought	Lack of food	High cost of goods	High cost of goods	Lack of food
2 Flooding	Inflation	Excessive Heat	Lack of food	High cost of goods
3 Lack of food	Flooding	Pollution/unclean air	Cattle/livestock theft	Water scarcity
4 High cost of goods	Banditry	Water scarcity	Inflation	Cattle/livestock theft
5 Pollution/unclean air	Water scarcity	Drought	Water scarcity	Excessive Heat

Out of 14 environmental impacts given as options to all women responding to the survey, each woman was asked to select between 1 to 5 of their top concerns. The five concerns that were selected by the most women responding are presented in the table above.

Intersecting impacts on women's resilience

The environmental shocks and concerns highlighted by the women and WROs we spoke to for this research, coupled with worsening global and local crises, are driving down gains made across the following dimensions of women's resilience and are compounded by weak infrastructure and systems:

- **Strengthened ability to earn and save money**
- **Health and well-being**
- **Claiming and exercising decision-making power**
- **Sustainably accessing meaningful support networks**

Conflict and the environment

The results from surveys, FGDs, and interviews reinforce the urgent need to address climate change and environmental protection and conflict as interrelated - rather than separate - challenges. While climate change drives environmental degradation and destruction with short- and long- term impacts, so too does conflict. Women also describe the lost gains in their livelihoods and safety due to intersecting environmental shocks and the subsequent cyclical outbreaks of conflict.

Climate and gender justice: women's civil society inclusion and participation

The pursuit of more equitable and effective climate mitigation and adaptation must go beyond women's vulnerability and include a justice lens which examines the gender and power inequalities that exist within institutions and decision-making around environmental management. Without a justice lens that recognizes unequal burden of impacts and responsibility and the power dynamics preventing women from participating in decisions that so significantly affect their lives and future, it is possible for climate mitigation to create additional environmental responsibility for women "without corresponding reward."

Recommendations for Action

Programming Prioritization and Approaches:

1 **Break down siloes between sectors and actors when working across gender and climate in conflict settings.**

2 **Prioritize holistic, community-led climate adaptation approaches in global climate change action agendas and through increased financing for climate adaptation in climate-vulnerable and conflict-affected countries.**

3 **Strengthen infrastructure and national level warning systems for people ahead of climate events and shifts in weather patterns.**

Funding:

4 **Climate financing, including plans around Loss and Damage Funds, should include support for smaller scale projects and provide flexible, long-term funding for locally-led climate adaptation led by WROs and civil society.**

Women's Participation and Inclusion:

5 **Civil society and WROs should be meaningfully included not only in project implementation but also in diplomacy and negotiations for peace and environmental management, including natural resource management.**

6 **To strengthen technical capacity and enable meaningful participation of WROs in climate mitigation, adaptation, and financing discussions, provide WROs and women-led civil society with opportunities to attend climate adaptation trainings, conferences, and convenings with other WROs operating within climate-vulnerable and conflict-affected settings.**

7 **Pursue creative and context-specific solutions to raise awareness about environmental issues in contexts where women cannot access formal education.**