Environmental Peacebuilding through a gender-transformative approach: Addressing Trafficking in Persons
Vani Bhardwaj

<u>*Legal Context*</u>

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNCTOC) and its two related protocols: the United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and the United Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air.

<u>*Context Setting*</u>

Gender aspects to climate related risks involve trafficking in persons. Unsafe migration and trafficking pathways are heightened due to climate emergency, especially for disadvantaged groups who lack documentation ([Bharadwaj et al., 2021](#)). UNSCR1325 is formed around four mutually interlinked thematics: Prevention, Protection, Participation, Relief and Recovery. Women centric land governance and natural resource management can enhance integration of environmental peacebuilding for communities ([Castillejo and Domingo, 2022](#)). Queer peacebuilding requires going beyond binary thinking in terms of citizenship and taking to multicultural citizenship, particularly in terms of climate-displaced refugee cis and non-heteronormative population ([Bhardwaj, 2022](#)).

Climate change has implications for women's security as they are exposed to higher probabilities of gender-based violence while accessing resources for livelihood ([Chiu and Smith, 2022](#)).Climate induced vulnerabilities and risks must be coalesced with Women, Peace and Security (WPS) National Action Plans (NAPs) ([Smith, 2020](#)). Out of 80, only 17 states acknowledge climate change in their WPS NAPs ([UN Women, 2020](#)).

Disaster recovery efforts are riddled with instances of gender based violence, therefore women's leadership to build community resilience becomes crucial ([Dutta, 2020](#)). Gender norms can be transformed owing to gender-based resilience efforts being integrated for disaster risk resilience ([UN Women, 2016](#)). Objective 9 of the Sendai Framework Gender Action Plan states 'prevention and response to gender-based violence in the context of disasters'.

For sustained gendered arrangements to succeed, transitional support to ex-female combatants becomes indispensable to socio-economic reintegration ([UN, 2006](#)). The essentialization of the vocation projects for reintegration into society for such combatants however reiterates gender norms rather than changing them ([Hague, 2020](#)). Nonetheless, structural issues in the economy that is already plagued by human trafficking and sex trafficking networks makes the combatants equally vulnerable to get absorbed into such livelihoods ([Hague, 2008](#)) sans their agency or autonomous decision making.

Climate change sustainability must induce measures for prevention of sex slavery, lest multi dimensional deprivations and insecurities implicate women and girls into sex trafficking (Paul, 2024). Challenging hyper-masculinist military-industrial complexes, ecological perspectives urge us to go beyond 'adding women and stir' approach in peacebuilding practices (Yoshida, 2019). In such a context, the role of extractivist economies in the conflict cycle must be critically analyzed and dispelled. Several incidents and prolonged human trafficking and sexual exploitation have been reported in cases of mining industries across the Majority World, therefore the private sector has a responsibility to carry out ethical business practices, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that prevent greenwashing practices in their markets in the 'Global North' (UNODC, 2022).

United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs) operating in the post-conflict stages create an atmosphere conducive to human trafficking in its areas of mandate (Horne, 2019). Racial discrimination, gender based violence, sexual exploitation all get conflated with climate related mobility and displacement. Non-state armed groups engage in sexual violence and human trafficking as a strategy for continuing of conflict (OHCHR, 2022). The interlinkage of kidnapping and gender-based violence of women while accessing education in climate emergencies or going for collection of water for household chores need further exploring.

Every UNPKO whether directly or indirectly is involved with tackling human trafficking and other forms of migration (Lijn, 2019). Transnational synergization of laws requires queering of international law (Kotiswaran, 2019, Otto, 2018) and remains crucial for mitigating and preventing human trafficking networks. In extreme danger are LGBTQ children who flee from home and end up being vulnerable to sex trafficking (Talyor and Davidson, 2022).

Recommendations

- In operating National Referral Mechanism (NRM), climate justice oriented civil society organizations must be included along with anti-trafficking organizations.
- Integrating capacity building modules on ecological masculinities as preventive measures for gender-sensitive prevention.
- To gauge gender-based health equity, use heat distress, availability of sanitation and menstrual facilities as indicators of human trafficking while profiling Potential Victims of Human Trafficking.
- Survivor-Centric design of human trafficking must include Environmental Trafficking and Crime as a Case Classification with cases hitherto not proven as trafficking to be scrutinized under gender-responsive interpretation of International Environmental Law.
- Objective 9 of the Sendai Framework Gender Action Plan states 'prevention and response to gender-based violence in the context of disasters' (UNDRR, 2024). Mapping out of human trafficking routes and networks is required.