

FROM THE PANDEMIC TO 2030: FEMINISTS WANT SYSTEM CHANGE ENSURING ACCESS TO SUSTAINABLE ENERGY

Liliya, an 80 year old Albanian Roma woman, lives with her two grandchildren, who she raises. For many years she worked in the informal sector and so she does not receive a pension. Without a pension or other forms of financial support, she cannot heat the room where the three of them live together. Liliya is one of millions of women, girls, and gender non-conforming people who live in energy poverty. The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately harms people holding multiple, intersecting marginalized identities.



Meanwhile at the end of March 2020, with millions of people living in poverty without access to basic services, like Liliya, a global pandemic raging, and demand for oil unprecedentedly low, TC Energy, the company behind the notorious Keystone XL pipeline, received [US\\$1.1 billion from the government of Alberta](#), Canada, to begin construction.

If it continues, the construction of the pipeline would go through **Indigenous lands** in the United States, endangering the health of affected communities. The Indian Health Service in the United States suffers from ["structural deficits"](#) that make it ill-equipped to respond to the health needs of Indigenous People even outside of a pandemic. Moreover, the "man camps" where workers will reside are often sites of **violence against women** at a time when rates of violence are already increasing. Meanwhile, during the pandemic, state governments in the United States have taken action to protect oil and gas infrastructure as "essential" while criminalizing civil disobedience and protests against the pipeline.



HOW DID WE GET HERE?

In 2015, the world agreed to a roadmap to sustainable development made up of 17 goals: the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#). If achieved, we would live in a more just world with [clean and affordable energy](#) and [sustainable consumption and production](#), among other achievements. With this roadmap, achieving [gender equality](#) would be a goal in and of itself and a cross-cutting aim necessary to achieving the whole Agenda.

Five years into implementation, however, the world is [off track](#) to achieve the 2030 Agenda because of systems, such as **patriarchy**, **extractivism** and the **consolidation of corporate power**, which create and maintain the inequalities that determine who will be most affected by and who will profit from this crisis.

With the widespread implementation of shelter in place orders, access to reliable electricity and appliances has never been more important. And yet nearly [1 billion people do not have access to electricity](#), while 3 billion people do not have access to **clean cooking**, relying on solid biomass, coal, or kerosene instead.

This is especially devastating for women and girls since **patriarchal gender norms** put the onus of domestic and [care work](#) on them, including cooking, heating, and gathering fuel. In the context of the pandemic, unpaid care work is increasing. For people living in energy poverty this includes added difficulties and stress surrounding food and fuel procurement, storage, and preparation, and the increased demands around cleanliness and hygiene.

Lack of access to electricity, heating, and clean cooking fuel does not just increase unpaid care work, it is also deadly because it increases exposure to [indoor air pollution \(IAP\)](#), which [disproportionately impacts women and girls](#). As the COVID-19 pandemic spreads in areas with high rates of IAP, and with the added effect of shelter in place orders, we may see mortality rates climb for women and girls.

The lack of electricity may also be deadly in areas where hospitals and health clinics do not have reliable energy access. For example, in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, only [28% of health facilities](#) have access to reliable electricity.

While women and girls labor to meet these demands and [women energy entrepreneurs](#) – an important link to decentralized cleaner, more accessible energy – struggle to survive, fossil fuel companies are using this opportunity to **consolidate their power** and carve out special protections and benefits for themselves. The industry has [lobbied for](#) direct financial support, deregulation, and even criminalization of protests. Many of the interventions these companies seek [directly contradict](#) the science-based recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and would violate the human rights of workers and land, environmental and human rights defenders.

WOMEN'S MAJOR GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

Though bad actors are taking advantage of the worry, chaos, and confusion caused by the pandemic to deepen inequalities, governments can take just, equitable, and sustainable actions. By following the recommendations below, we can emerge from the COVID-19 crisis ready to build a better future for all and achieve the 2030 Agenda.

- Eliminate all **subsidies for the fossil-fuel industry** and biomass energy. Redirect these funds to essential public services and social protection programs.
- Make **sustainable energy access** and **clean cooking solutions** part of COVID-19 recovery plans in recognition of the connections between gender equality, energy justice, climate change, and the exploitation of natural resources. Design these plans with women and girls directly to ensure their suitability and sustainability.
- Support **energy democracy**, where energy is owned and governed by communities, not corporations. Focus on decentralized, citizen-owned energy with a bottom-up approach and reverse top-down, market-based approaches for energy production, distribution, and control.
- Ensure that actors at all levels, local, regional and national, are -energy-accountable through developing and implementing their energy and climate plans
- Provide financial, political, and legal support to **women's energy enterprises and entrepreneurs** to guarantee they survive the COVID-19 crisis.
- Guarantee **access to electricity** during the pandemic through flexible payment plans, fee waivers, or cash transfers targeted at the poorest and most marginalized communities and women.
- Quickly ensure access to electricity for all [healthcare facilities](#) through sustainable sources, such as mini-grids and off-grid systems.
Protect the **human rights of land, environmental and women human rights defenders**, including the right to information, freedom of assembly and speech, as well as protection from harassment, intimidation, violence.