

The Role of Women in Historical Climate Resistance: Lessons for Modern Youth Policy

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Abstract

This paper analyses the essential involvement of women in two groundbreaking climate resistance movements from the twentieth century – the Chipko Movement from the Garhwal Himalayas, India (1973-1980), and the Green Belt Movement from Kenya (1977-present). Using the findings obtained from archival research, legal cases, and current policy sources, the analysis shows that women were not mere participants in these movements but rather leading figures who initiated ecological resistance through their personal experiences of dependency on nature for survival. Comparing these movements within an ecofeminist perspective and finding important similarities with the modern global youth climate movement, this paper extracts valuable lessons for formulating youth climate governance policies. Moreover, it describes how these movements found their place within the international community via such frameworks as the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan and the SDGs. Finally, conclusions are drawn regarding youth policy design and implementation.

Keywords: Chipko Movement, Green Belt Movement, Wangari Maathai, Gaura Devi, ecofeminism, climate resistance, youth climate policy, grassroots activism, UNFCCC Gender Action Plan, SDGs, environmental governance.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Motivation

During the spring of 1974, in the far-off Reni village of Uttarakhand (formerly known as Uttar Pradesh), India, a group of twenty-seven women, led by Gaura Devi, head of the local Mahila Mangal Dal (Women's Welfare Group), went into the forest where commercial loggers had been assigned to fell. The men of the village had been intentionally diverted to a district headquarters in order to hear the compensation case. When the loggers appeared in the forest, there were only women left to oppose them. According to one report, Gaura Devi told the foresters: "This forest is our maika (mother's home). We will not let you cut it. Cut us before you cut the trees." The loggers retreated. The story of the women of Reni made its way throughout the Garhwal Himalayas and beyond, lending name and inspiration to one of the most important environmental movements in history: Chipko, "to hug" or "to embrace."

Three years later, another story played itself out thousands of miles away in Kenya, in a speech given by a Kenyan biologist named Wangari Maathai to a group of rural women in Nairobi. "We must," Maathai said, "plant trees." This initial 1977 grassroots tree-planting campaign of the National Council of Women

of Kenya would eventually grow to form the Green Belt Movement, whose members planted hundreds of millions of trees in protest against Moi regime's authoritarian land-grabs during decades of activism. By 2025, the movement had planted over 51 million trees in Kenya, and its leader had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004 becoming the first African woman and the first environmentalist in history to receive such an honour.

Though these stories take place on opposite sides of the world, separated by culture and even language, their underlying logic bears similarities: in both cases, women whose subsistence livelihoods depended directly upon the continued health of their local natural ecosystems were compelled, out of material necessity, to become their most effective protectors. In these situations, the motivations behind women's activism were not ideological, but material bound to the practical experience of collecting firewood and fodder and water from disappearing forests.

It is precisely this material understanding of environmental activism that motivates this study, which seeks to apply the historical insights offered by the Chipko and Green Belt movements in the development of contemporary youth climate policy. The rise of youth-led climate movements in the past decade, whether through weekly strikes like the Fridays for Future campaign or participation in COP discussions, poses an important challenge in international policy design. How can these movements be supported, cultivated, and understood?

1.2 Scope, Research Questions, and Methodology

The paper is structured around three research questions:

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: What structural conditions enabled women to lead large-scale climate resistance in the Chipko Movement (India) and the Green Belt Movement (Kenya)?

RQ2: What are the comparative convergences and divergences between these two movements in terms of strategy, political context, and institutional outcome?

RQ3: What specific, actionable lessons do these historical movements offer for the design of contemporary youth climate policy at national and international levels?

The approach employed in this study is comparative-historical, utilizing both archival primary sources (Shobhita Jain's ground-breaking 1984 ethnography published in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, documentation from the awarding of the Right Livelihood Award to Chipko activists, and documentation by the movement itself) as well as scholarly secondary sources on ecofeminism and environmental governance, and current policy documents like the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan modules (2025) and German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) analysis.

While this paper makes no claims that these two movements are the same - quite the contrary, see Chapter 4 for their differences it considers them paired case studies through which emerges some key structural and strategic observations that transcend national contexts. Both were launched by women in the Global South in the 1970s in rural environments in protest against the extraction of natural resources that were

either state-sanctioned or tolerated by the government. Both cantered women, not because it was a conscious decision made in keeping with feminist ideals, but rather out of necessity.

1.3 Significance for Contemporary Youth Climate Policy

For all its dynamism and global appeal, the modern youth climate movement is routinely accused of having a disproportionate youth leadership that is primarily composed of wealthier, urban, and Global North individuals, and making policy requests that while urgent from a moral perspective, do not reflect the conditions of those worst affected by climate breakdown. This criticism is not meant as a slight on the importance of the movement; rather, it highlights an important trend that must be addressed through the implementation of relevant policy.

In contrast, the Chipko and Green Belt movements are a reminder of how such problems may be overcome. Both movements were initiated by local communities that experienced significant environmental degradation and both resulted in tangible and long-lasting policies: India's Forest Conservation Act of 1980 and the 15-year ban on Himalayan logging in the late 70s; Kenya's Environmental Management and Co-ordination Act of 1999 and a constitutional requirement for 10 percent tree cover as per article 69 of the 2010 constitution.

As shown later on in this paper, these results were accomplished not in spite of, but precisely because of, the nature of these grassroots, women-led protests. In both cases, climate resistance was hyperlocal in its organization, environmentally specific in its demands, and tied directly to the material interests of the respective communities. Such characteristics should be more widely incorporated into modern youth climate policies as much as possible.

Thus, this paper is written based on the idea of intergenerational environmental justice put forward by some international development scholars, which implies that there are already many lessons about how to govern climate issues in the future learned from the history of communities fighting for environmental protection without much outside attention over the decades. Written from the perspective of India, it respects the legacy of Chipko in the field of environmental law in India while paying tribute to the similar work done by the Green Belt movement of Kenya.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 provides a detailed historical and analytical account of the Chipko Movement. Chapter 3 does the same for the Green Belt Movement. Chapter 4 conducts a systematic comparative analysis through an ecofeminist framework. Chapter 5 translates the

THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT: WOMEN, FORESTS, AND RESISTENCE IN INDIA

2.1 Historical and Ecological context

The Garhwal Himalayan mountains of Northern India are among the world's most environmentally sensitive mountain ranges. The flooding that struck the valley in 1970 and resulted in hundreds of deaths and the destruction of agricultural lands occurred after it became evident that the Alaknanda River basin

central to the Chipko story was vulnerable to deforestation. Uncontrolled exploitation of catchment forests was listed as one of the causes by environmental historians. However, it wasn't until 1973 when the Indian Forest Department granted rights to cut trees in this very area to commercial enterprises such as Simon Company, whose members were allowed to fell ash trees needed for sports equipment production. At the same time, DGSS, a local co-operative founded by Chandi Prasad Bhatt, was denied similar rights to fell trees for the production of basic farming equipment.

Such an inequality between locals and businessmen provided the immediate stimulus to the Chipko movement, yet the reasons were deeply rooted in the structure of Indian village society. Garhwali village economy is known to divide the labour sphere according to gender lines. As pointed out by the economist Shobhita Jain, the "subsistence economy" of Garhwali villages relied heavily on women. It was the women's responsibility to collect firewood, fodder, and water for the community and cultivate crops. While men could often be found employed in the city or the civil service, women worked in the forests. Thus, it was a work space for women.

It follows that deforestation affected women directly, as opposed to men. Women were obliged to walk increasingly long distances to collect materials they needed – the distance covered increased five to ten kilometres. Without trees, hillsides would erode and springs, a primary source of village water supply, would dry up. And in 1970, flooding destroyed the terraced lands cultivated by women for years, as well as cattle. Garhwali women perceived such a phenomenon as an event with immediate repercussions for their lives, rather than an abstract environmental problem.

March 1973	DGSS holds a public meeting in Gopeshwar to protest the allotment of ash trees to the Simon Company while local villagers are denied wood for farming tools.
APRIL 1973	First physical confrontation at Mandal village: approximately 100 villagers march to block Simon Company loggers. Contractors retreat without felling a single tree.
MARCH 1974	The Reni Incident: State officials divert village men to Chamoli. Gaura Devi leads 27 women to physically block logging. Loggers withdraw; the confrontation galvanizes the movement nationally.
1977-78	Bachni Devi leads resistance in Advani (Tehri-Garhwal), famously opposing her own husband, a local forest contractor. Women adopt the slogan: "What do the forests bear? Soil, water, and pure air."
1980	Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposes a 15-year ban on felling green trees above 1,000 meters altitude in the Himalayan region. The Forest Conservation Act is enacted.

2.2 Women as Architects of Resistance

The conventional historiography of the Chipko Movement has sometimes centered Chandi Prasad Bhatt and the DGSS as its organizational spine and this is accurate, to a point. The DGSS provided logistical infrastructure, ideological framing rooted in Gandhian non-violence, and connections to the national political elite. But as Jain's 1984 ethnographic research makes clear, the women of the movement were not auxiliaries or followers. In community after community, it was women who organized the most immediate and effective physical resistance, who mobilized their social networks through the Mahila

Mangal Dals (Women's Welfare Groups) that existed in Garhwali villages, and who were most willing to place their bodies between the trees and the loggers.

Gaura Devi is the movement's most iconic female figure. Born in Lata village (near Reni) and widowed at a young age, she raised a child alone while managing a small farm a life that embedded her intimately in the subsistence economy that the forests sustained. As head of the Reni Mahila Mangal Dal, she had organized women around local welfare issues for years before the Chipko confrontation. When the loggers arrived at Reni on 25-26 March 1974 in a transparent manoeuvre to catch the village without its men Gaura Devi did not hesitate. Her reported words to the forest contractors "This forest is our maika. We will not let you cut it. Cut us before you cut the trees" encapsulate the movement's core moral logic: the women of Garhwal were not defending an abstraction but their own home, their own sustenance, their own children's future.

Bachni Devi of Advani offers a complementary portrait. Whereas Gaura Devi's resistance was directed at external commercial contractors, Bachni Devi's was directed at her own husband, a local forest contractor who had been awarded felling rights in the Advani forest. In 1977, she organized the women of Advani to resist the felling despite their husbands' economic interest in it a remarkable act of civic courage that revealed the degree to which women's relationship to the forest was structurally at odds with men's commercial interests in many Garhwali contexts. The women of Advani wrapped their arms around trees and sang, coining the ecological slogan that would become one of the movement's most enduring: "What do the forests bear? Soil, water, and pure air. Soil, water, and pure air are the basis of life."

"WHAT DO THE FORESTS BEAR? SOIL, WATER, AND PURE AIR. SOIL,
WATER, AND PURE AIR ARE THE BASIS OF LIFE."

SLOGAN OF THE ADVANI WOMEN, 1977, ATTRIBUTED TO BACHNI DEVI
AND THE WOMEN OF ADVANI VILLAGE, TEHRI-GARHWAL.

The Sudesha Devi of Rampur represents a third dimension of women's Chipko leadership: the activist willing to face legal consequence. Sudesha Devi spearheaded the 1974 drive to protect the Rampur forests and was subsequently imprisoned for her activism. Her willingness to accept incarceration rather than stand down marked the movement's transition from spontaneous resistance to organized civil disobedience a transition crucial to its eventual political impact.

Collectively, these women operated through a form of what contemporary scholars of social movements call "everyday resistance" action embedded in the routines and relationships of daily life rather than in formal political organizations. The Mahila Mangal Dals were not revolutionary cells; they were village welfare associations. But they provided a ready-made organizational network that, when the crisis arrived, could be activated with remarkable speed. This is a structural feature with direct relevance to youth policy: the most durable and effective climate activism tends to grow from pre-existing networks of community relationship, not from newly constructed movement organizations.

2.3 Policy Outcomes and Lasting Ecological Legacy

The Chipko Movement produced two landmark policy outcomes that remain structurally significant nearly half a century later. The first was the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 — legislation that dramatically curtailed the ability of state governments to divert forest land for non-forest purposes without central government approval. This represented a fundamental shift in Indian forest governance, from a primarily commercial orientation toward a conservation framework a shift that Chipko activism made politically possible by demonstrating, with unmistakable clarity, that unregulated commercial forestry threatened not only ecological systems but human communities.

Key Policy Outcomes of the Chipko Movement

Forest Conservation Act (1980): Restricted diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes without central government approval a foundational shift in Indian forest governance.

15-Year Himalayan Logging Moratorium (1980): Banned felling of green trees above 1,000 m altitude; directly credited to pressure from Chipko activists and their allies.

Right Livelihood Award (1987): The Chipko Movement received the Right Livelihood Award, establishing its international standing as a model of community-led environmental governance.

The second outcome was equally significant: in 1980, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, responding directly to the movement's demands, imposed a 15-year moratorium on the felling of green trees above 1,000 meters altitude in the Himalayan region.^[7] For the women of Garhwal who had organized their lives around these forests, this was not an abstract policy victory. It was a reprieve a guarantee, at least for a generation, that the ecological basis of their subsistence economy would be legally protected.

The movement's ecological legacy was also material. Environmental scientists studying the Alaknanda basin in the decades following the protests documented improvements in soil stability and spring survival in areas where Chipko resistance had prevented logging a localized but measurable verification of the women's own ecological knowledge. The women of Garhwal had, in effect, conducted an informal ecological experiment whose results would eventually be confirmed by professional science.

Perhaps equally significant is the movement's influence beyond Uttar Pradesh. The "Appiko Movement" of Karnataka (1983) and the "Save Silent Valley" campaign of Kerala drew directly on Chipko's strategy and moral framing, demonstrating that the movement's tactics were exportable across India's ecological and cultural diversity. In this sense, the Chipko women did not merely protect their own forests; they modelled a form of resistance that became a template for Indian environmental activism for decades.

FEATURE	CHIPKO MOVEMENT	SIGNIFICANCE OF YOUTH POLICY
Organizational Base	Mahila Mangal Dals (pre-existing village networks)	Pre-existing community networks are more durable than newly constructed activist organizations.
Leadership Model	Distributed, village level: multiple women leaders across different sites.	Distributed Leadership is more resilient than centralized, charismatic leadership.
Motivation	Material: direct subsistence dependency on forests.	A policy that links climate action to material well-being generates more durable mobilization.
Tactic	Non-violent physical interposition; tree hugging and folk songs	Cultural and embodied tactics can be more effective than formal petitioning.
Policy Outcomes	Forest conservation act 1980; 15-year logging moratorium	Grassroots movements can achieve structural legislative change when sustained over years.

THE GREEN BELT MOVEMENT: WOMEN, LAND, AND DEMOCRACY IN KENYA

3.1 Historical and Ecological Context

The environmental degradation experienced by rural Kenyan women during the latter half of the 1970s was the culmination of both colonial and postcolonial exploitation. Years of agricultural expansion in the form of tea, coffee, and pyrethrum plantations, which had been established during British rule, had resulted in deforestation and soil erosion in the central Kenya highlands, Rift Valley escarpments, and regions near Nairobi, including the disappearance of dependable springs, the erosion of soils on hillsides that lacked protective cover, and brown rivers full of runoff that farms could no longer retain.

These same consequences of deforestation in rural Kenya created the same personal stakes for rural Kenyan women as those in Himalayan deforestation created for the women of Garhwal. In rural Kenyan households, women bore the responsibility of gathering food, fetching water, and collecting wood for fuel. Upon her return to Kenya, after earning her doctorate in the United States, Wangari Maathai observed that many fig trees she had played among as a child had disappeared, their roots cut down and replanted with tea. Their roots had been said by her mother to house spirits, and their shade provided protection for the sources of water that her mother gathered for the family. The streams were silting. The springs were waning. The rivers feeding the city of Nairobi were deteriorating.

This was the environmental context against which Maathai came to see the need to empower rural women. The connection between environmental degradation and the oppression of rural women was a concrete one, rather than one that could be presented theoretically in a research paper, based on her observations of

the effects of such degradation on the lives of these women the same structural relationship of material reality that led Gaura Devi and Bachni Devi to take to the forests of Garhwal three years before.

In the political context of Kenya in the late 1970s, there existed a specific possibility and a set of associated risks to any environmental activism taking place in the country. With the death of Jomo Kenyatta in 1978, his successor Daniel arap Moi had come to power, ostensibly continuing the tradition of Kenyan nationalism, but quickly turning repressive. Political dissenters were harassed; political land was awarded to political favourites. Land-grabbing, when practiced by political elites, meant that environmental activism, when it addressed such corruption, was not just inconvenient, but outright dangerous. This was the political climate in which the Green Belt Movement was to operate for the next two decades.

3.2 Wangari Maathai and the Architecture of Grassroots Power

The Green Belt Movement, then, was officially founded in 1977 as an affiliate organization of the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK).[2] As Maathai conceived the idea, its basic principle was straightforward: provide modest monetary compensation to women for establishing native trees in community nurseries and planting them on farms, riverbanks, in schoolyards, and on degraded slopes. The trees would serve practical purposes as sources of wood, fodder, lumber, and fruit. But Maathai grasped from the outset that the practice of tree planting entailed civic education.

"When we plant trees, we plant the seeds of peace and seeds of hope. We also secure the future for our children."

— Wangari Maathai, Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, Oslo, December 2004.[2]

The organizational structure Maathai created for the movement was deliberately diffuse and localized. Women's groups, drawing upon extant networks of cooperation that already pervaded rural Kenyan communities, became the core unit of the movement. Each group had its own nursery, kept track of its own success rates, and was paid for them. By the early 1990s, the Green Belt Movement had educated over 30,000 women in matters of forestry, food security, and sustainable livelihoods and had formed a nationwide network of grassroots tree nurseries.[12]

Such an organizational structure based on networks of women, rewarding them financially in such a way as to connect ecological restoration with household earnings, and cultivating local leaders rather than concentrating power offers important lessons for designing modern youth policies. What makes the Green Belt Movement remarkable is that it did not recruit masses into a new movement. It mobilized pre-existing networks and helped organize them. Its secret lies not in invention but in activation.

Maathai's professional background enriched her environmental activism further. Her specialization in veterinary anatomical pathology at the University of Nairobi provided her with a systemic perspective on ecology that shaped her pedagogical approach within the movement. Community seminars organized by the Green Belt Movement instructed women not only how to plant trees but also why to teach them about the connection between forest coverage and water preservation, soil fertility and crop yields, degradation and disenfranchisement. This is what Maathai referred to as "civic and environmental education."

1977	The Green Belt Movement was founded under the National Council of Women of Kenya (NCWK). The first community tree nurseries were established in the Central Highlands.
1989	Maathai Leads protests against the Moi government’s plan to build a story office complex in Uhuru Park, Nairobi’s principal public green space. International pressure forces abandonment of the project one of the first victories of African civil-society environmentalism.
1992	Mothers of political prisoners launch a hunger strike at Freedom Corner, Uhuru Park. When riot police violently disperse them, international outrage follows. Mathaai is arrested and beaten. The episodes mark the movement’s full transition into political democracy advocacy.
1998-99	Defense of Karura Forest, Nairobi: GBM members and allies physically block illegal land-clearing for politically connected developers. Maathai and volunteers are beaten by hired thugs on government-allocated land. The campaign attracts global media coverage and eventually halts the clearing.
2004	Wangari Mathaai receives the Nobel Peace Prize- the first African woman and first environmentalist to be so honoured. The Nobel Committee explicitly links her tree-planting work to peace, democracy, and women’s rights.
2025-26	The Green Belt Movement reports over 51 million trees planted since 1977. The Wangari Youth Foundation is launched to mentor youth in civic and environmental leadership, explicitly continuing the intergenerational mission.

3.3 Political Resistance and Institutional Outcomes

However, while the conflicts of the Chipko movement centered mainly on private commercial interests enabled by governmental policies, Green Belt Movement's most important battles took place directly against the Moi regime. It is important because this difference helps us understand what risks the movements faced and what could be learned by modern activists concerned about the state of the planet.

The campaign against the construction of a 62-story office tower in the centre of Nairobi's favourite park, Uhuru Park, was the first important step. When the regime started building the tower, GBM launched an international lobbying campaign that resulted in the withdrawal of investments and diplomatic recognition of the project. Consequently, the project was cancelled. However, Moi called Maathai "mad woman," which meant that the movement's ecological activism became political and needed serious attention from the side of the state.

The campaign for freedom in 1992 continued the battle. The mothers of political prisoners occupied the Freedom Corner within Uhuru Park and stated that they would stay there until their sons were released.

Riot police brutally evicted the protesters. They stripped and beat the women, which could be considered a taboo in Kenyan culture because attacking women was considered cursed. This incident brought more pressure on the regime because of international condemnation, and soon, most of the political prisoners were released. Just like the confrontation in Reni in 1974, this battle showed that women's bodies in conflict with the state can be an instrument for achieving victory.

Finally, the Karura Forest campaign in 1998-99 exemplified how effectively the GBM managed to engage international civil society in local environmental struggles. After the politically-connected developers began illegal clearance of 2,562-acre forest outside Nairobi, which had been allocated to them previously, Maathai together with GBM members occupied the territory. The protesters were beaten by the hired guards; Maathai even needed stitches after this encounter. However, she came again the next day.

As a result, the resistance led to the appropriate institutional changes. The first and the only in history legislation concerning environmental problems EMCA of 1999 was adopted. EMCA set up the National Environment Management Authority, established environmental impact assessment regulations, and guaranteed the public access to the process of environmental decision-making. In addition, all of Kenya's national parks, game reserves, and forests have gained a legal protection status, which is a significant step in environmental protection legislation development. Moreover, environmental rights received constitutional protection by means of the 2010 Constitution of Kenya, which states that no less than 10% of the country's lands must be covered by forests.

Key Policy Outcomes of the Green Belt Movement

Environmental Management and Coordination Act (EMCA), 1999: Kenya's first comprehensive environmental law; established the National Environment Management Authority and mandated environmental impact assessment for major projects.

2010 Constitution of Kenya, Article 69: Mandates a minimum of 10% national forest cover; enshrines the right to a clean and healthy environment as a constitutional guarantee.

Nobel Peace Prize, 2004: The Nobel Committee explicitly linked Maathai's tree-planting work with peace and democracy—reframing environmental activism as a human rights and governance issue on the world stage.

51+ Million Trees Planted (as of 2025): A measurable, material legacy of the movement's decades of community-based ecological restoration across Kenya.

International impact of the movement was just as impactful. With its choice to present the 2004 Peace Prize to an environmentalist, stating that deforestation and land grabbing were directly detrimental to peace and security, the Nobel Committee recognized one of the most basic premises of the Green Belt Movement – namely, that there could be no separation between environmental justice and human rights. This premise remains a pillar of international environmental policy today, as seen in the UNFCCC Gender

Action Plan modules of 2025, which use the Green Belt Movement as a prime example of women as environmental activists.

FEATURE	GREEN-BELT MOVEMENT	SIGNIFICANCE FOR YOUTH POLICY
Organizational Base	Decentralized women’s community groups; existing rural cooperative networks.	Paying communities for ecological outcomes (e.g., seedling survival) links activism to material well-being.
Leadership Model	Centralized visionary leader (Maathai) + highly distributed community execution.	Strategic vision and grassroots execution can be separated—celebrity advocacy amplifies local action.
Pedagogy	“Civic and Environmental education”: consciousness-raising alongside technical training.	Youth climate literacy programs should integrate political agency alongside ecological science.
Political Confrontation	Direct physical resistance to state-backed land-grabbing; international advocacy networks.	Effective climate movements build both local resilience and international solidarity infrastructure.
Policy outcomes	EMCA 1999; constitutional environmental rights (2010); 51M+ trees, Nobel 2004.	Sustained multi-decade movements that engage both grassroots and international institutions can achieve constitutional-level change.

COMPARITIVE ANALYSIS: CONVERGENCES AND DIVERGENCES

4.1 Structural parallels Across Geographies

Though separated by more than five thousand kilometres, as well as by the significant difference in the settings between the Garhwali Mountain village and the Kenyan highland farm, the Chipko Movement and the Green Belt Movement nonetheless possess an array of similar structures too consistent to be a coincidence. An analysis of these commonalities reveals a generalized model of women-led environmental resistance that applies beyond either particular case, while at the same time offering lessons directly applicable to organizing climate change movements today.

The most basic similarity is what these paper terms the material dependency thesis in both movements, the women's involvement and leadership came not out of any abstract ideological commitment to environmental protection, but out of their day-to-day experience of having their livelihoods directly dependent upon healthy ecosystems. The Garhwal forest was shrinking: thus, the women had to walk farther to access their resources. Similarly, the clearing of hillside foliage in Kenya meant that women had less access to fresh water, as well as decreased agricultural productivity and food security. In both cases, the environment was not something to be protected for its own sake it was the workplace, larder, and source of clean water. This made both movements unusually focused in their aims and unusually dedicated

to achieving those goals, qualities which are rare for movements based on abstract ideas about nature conservation.

Second, both movements utilized preexisting social structures as the basis for activism rather than constructing a completely new set of relationships and social ties from scratch. Both movements were initiated and led by organizations that had been previously created to serve entirely different needs: the Mahila Mangal Dals were originally created to promote the well-being of child-rearing mothers, while in Kenya, women's cooperatives existed to help with farming. In both cases, however, once the ecological crisis had struck, this organization turned into the core of the movement's structure which allowed for rapid mobilization, as well as the accumulation of necessary expertise and social capital within a short period of time. A number of works in the sociology of social movements confirm that historically, the most quickly formed and sustained social movements are those which channel the new movement's causes through existing organizational networks. In other words, this strategy makes a movement more likely to succeed.

Thirdly, both movements used the concept of "embodied resistance," using women's bodies as the actual shield against extractive practices. In Reni, the women hugged the trees. In Kenya, women took over contested territories. In both cases, this technique leveraged the particular cultural-moral position of the woman within their respective societies: hurting or threatening women engaged in self-defence against harm brought against their children was simply not an option for those responsible for maintaining order. Thus, the bodies of the protesting women in both locations became a symbolically powerful barrier against extraction.

Finally, both movements secured lasting changes to laws regulating the use of natural resources, not just temporary victories: whereas the Indian Forest Conservation Act of 1980 and the incorporation of environmental rights into the constitution of Kenya in 2010 are not tactics in themselves, they represent permanent changes to the laws regarding land usage. Neither could have been accomplished without a years-long campaign involving both direct action, political lobbying, and raising international awareness.

Four Parallels in Structure: Chipko and Green Belt Movements

- 1. Hypothesis of Material Dependency:** Women's leadership was a result of material dependency of the group on healthy natural environment leading to strong and clear motivation.
- 2. Activating Pre-existing Organizational Structures:** Both groups relied on pre-existing structures of women's organizations and not new organizations were formed which brought quick success.
- 3. Bodies as Weapons:** Both movements relied on women's bodies becoming barriers for extraction, using cultural and moral consequences involved in such attacks to the advantage of the movement.
- 4. Legislation:** Both brought about structural changes in the legal system concerning natural resources management.

4.2 Divergences in Strategy, Scale, and State Response

The structural similarities outlined above must not distract from the equally important differences between the two movements. These divergences show how context shapes the form of women-led climate resistance, and they caution against treating either case as a universal blueprint.

The most significant difference lies in the nature of the adversary. In the Chipko Movement, the primary opponents were commercial logging companies' profit-driven actors operating under licenses granted by the Indian state. The state itself was not neutral, but it was not the direct target of resistance, and in key moments it ultimately responded to pressure: the Forest Conservation Act of 1980 and the logging moratorium reflected at least partial state alignment with Chipko's demands. In contrast, the Green Belt Movement confronted the Kenyan state under Moi directly. The projects it resisted whether at Uhuru Park, Freedom Corner, or Karura Forest were state-led or enabled through politically allocated land deals. Here, the movement was not appealing to a potentially responsive government but resisting an actively hostile one that publicly delegitimized Maathai and used police force against activists.

This difference in adversary produced sharply different risk environments. Chipko participants did face confrontation with loggers and occasional legal consequences, including imprisonment in some cases. However, they operated within a democratic framework with functioning courts and media, and they were not routinely exposed to systemic state violence. The Green Belt Movement, by contrast, functioned under authoritarian conditions where repression was recurrent and personal risk was significantly higher: Maathai herself faced physical attacks, imprisonment, and prolonged harassment. This is more than historical context it highlights how political systems fundamentally shape what forms of activism are possible, and at what cost. The same tactic occupying contested land carried very different consequences depending on whether it occurred in democratic India or authoritarian Kenya.

A second divergence concerns leadership structure. Chipko was broadly decentralized, with figures such as Gaura Devi, Bachni Devi, Sudesha Devi, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, and Sunderlal Bahuguna playing leadership roles across different villages and phases, without a single dominant centre. The Green Belt Movement, by contrast, was strongly anchored in Wangari Maathai as a central, charismatic, internationally visible leader with academic credentials and global networks. Both models have trade-offs: distributed leadership tends to enhance resilience, since the removal of one leader does not collapse the movement, while centralized charismatic leadership can accelerate international visibility, strategic coherence, and access to global institutions as seen in the Nobel Prize trajectory. At the same time, the GBM's reliance on Maathai also created a succession challenge after her death in 2011 that the movement continues to manage.

A third difference is scale and geographic reach. Chipko remained primarily regional, rooted in the Garhwal and Kumaon Himalayas and shaped by relatively cohesive cultural and linguistic contexts, even though its influence on national forest policy was significant. The Green Belt Movement, by contrast, scaled more quickly to a national footprint across Kenya's diverse ecological and ethnic landscapes and later developed a strong international dimension through Maathai's engagement with UNEP, global NGOs, and diplomatic networks. This difference in scale shaped strategy: Chipko worked mainly through domestic political channels, while the Green Belt Movement complemented domestic activism with sustained international advocacy, which proved especially important in confronting an authoritarian state.

DIMENSION	CHIPKO MOVEMENT	GREEN BELT MOVEMENT
Primary Adversary	Commercial loggers and the complicit state forestry bureaucracy	Directly the authoritarian Moi state and state-enabled land-grabbers.
Political Context	Democratic, responsive to pressure, independent judiciary	Authoritarian, state violence a real risk, civil society suppressed
Leadership Structure	Distributed: multiple leaders in different villages and phases	Centralized visionary (Maathai) + decentralized community execution
Geographic Scale	Regional (Garhwal/Kumaon Himalayas); national policy impact	National from early stage; parallel international advocacy track
Primary Tactic	Physical interposition, non-violent tree-hugging, folk songs	Tree-planting + civic education + direct occupation + international advocacy
Primary outcome mechanism	Domestic political pressure on democratic state	Combined domestic pressure + international embarrassment of authoritarian state

4.3 An Ecofeminist Theoretical Framework

The structural parallels and differences outlined above point toward a broader theoretical synthesis. The most useful interpretive lens for understanding both the Chipko and Green Belt Movements and for situating them within contemporary climate politics is ecofeminism. Emerging in the 1970s and significantly developed throughout the 1980s and 1990s, ecofeminist scholarship examines the interconnected systems through which the domination of women and the exploitation of nature reinforce one another.

At its core, ecofeminism developed by thinkers such as Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, and Karen Warren argues that many patriarchal systems construct both women and nature as subordinate “resources” to be controlled, extracted, and managed by a dominant masculine subject. From this perspective, the liberation of women and the protection of ecological systems are not separate struggles but structurally linked projects requiring the dismantling of a shared logic of domination. Although neither the Chipko nor the Green Belt Movement originated from ecofeminist theory, both later became key empirical reference points for it, often cited as real-world cases in which women’s roles in sustaining ecological life translated into forms of environmental leadership and resistance.

Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (1988), one of the most influential early ecofeminist interpretations of Chipko, argues that Garhwali women were not acting out of abstract environmental ideology but from their position as subsistence producers whose survival depended directly on forest ecosystems, and whose everyday knowledge revealed ecological relationships ignored by commercial forestry systems. Wangari Maathai develops a closely related argument in her memoir *Unbowed* (2006), emphasizing that the rural Kenyan women involved in the Green Belt Movement were motivated less by environmental philosophy than by immediate needs such as fuelwood, water access, and soil fertility necessary for food production.

This convergence has significant implications for practice. If women's leadership in both movements arose primarily from material dependence rather than ideological alignment with environmentalism, then the policy takeaway is more specific than simply increasing women's representation in climate spaces. It suggests that effective and durable climate action is most likely to emerge where communities are directly defending the ecological systems that sustain their daily survival, and where mobilization is rooted in pre-existing social structures rather than externally imposed organizational forms. In this sense, ecological awareness is most powerful when it is not externally introduced but generated internally through lived dependence on specific environments.

This perspective is increasingly reflected in international climate governance. The UNFCCC Gender Action Plan (2025 modules) draws on both the Chipko and Green Belt Movements as foundational evidence for recognizing women as "agents of change" in climate policy not merely as populations disproportionately affected by climate impacts, but as historical actors with demonstrated leadership in environmental protection and knowledge production. Likewise, analyses from the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) frame these movements as illustrative of "Global South knowledge systems" relevant to contemporary COP negotiations, particularly in highlighting the role of historically marginalized communities in shaping climate responses.

Together, the ecofeminist framework performs two key functions in this analysis. First, it provides a structural explanation for why women played central roles in both movements, linking this leadership to material conditions such as subsistence dependence, community-based labour, and gendered ecological responsibility. Second, it connects these historical struggles to present-day climate governance debates, positioning both movements not as isolated historical episodes but as enduring reference points in ongoing discussions of gender, environment, and political agency.

FROM HISTORICAL MOVEMENTS TO MODERN YOUTH POLICY

5.1 What Youth Climate Movements Inherit

The contemporary youth climate movement most visibly expressed through Fridays for Future, the Sunrise Movement, youth constituencies at successive COP conferences, and numerous national and local equivalents is often framed as an unprecedented global awakening: the first time an entire generation has organized explicitly around the Defense of its ecological future. That framing is not entirely wrong, but it is incomplete in ways that matter. The Chipko and Green Belt Movements show that large-scale, women-led, community-rooted climate resistance is not a new phenomenon of the twenty-first century. It is part

of a longer, well-documented history of effective environmental action spanning at least half a century one that contemporary youth movements can draw on more deliberately than they currently tend to.

The most important inheritance is strategic. The successes of Chipko and the Green Belt Movement—in the concrete sense of shaping forest policy, constitutional provisions, and environmental governance frameworks came from the combination of four elements that youth climate activism has often struggled to integrate at the same time: deep local material grounding, reliance on pre-existing community structures, long-term organizational persistence, and the ability to convert local action into sustained political pressure at national and international levels. Contemporary youth climate movements have often been especially strong in visibility and agenda-setting at the global level, including through social media and COP platforms, but less consistently rooted in the first three dimensions. That imbalance helps explain why moral urgency has not always translated into comparable structural policy change.

The question of material grounding is the most difficult, and also the most central. Women in Garhwal did not become environmental defenders because they encountered climate discourse; they acted because deforestation immediately increased the distance and labour required for survival. Women in Kenya did not engage in tree-planting as symbolic environmentalism; it was tied directly to fuelwood, water access, and agricultural productivity. In contrast, many participants in contemporary youth climate movements particularly in the Global North experience environmental crisis more indirectly, mediated through education, media, and policy discourse rather than subsistence conditions. This is not a critique of legitimacy, but a structural observation: movements tend to gain durability when they are anchored in direct dependence on the systems they seek to protect. For youth climate politics, the implication is not exclusion but rebalancing stronger connections with communities whose livelihoods are directly shaped by ecological change, including farmers, coastal populations, Indigenous communities, pastoralists, and others already living the material reality of climate disruption.

The second lesson concerns organizational infrastructure. Both historical movements did not begin by forming climate organizations. They activated existing social structures women's welfare associations in Garhwal, and cooperative and mutual-aid groups in Kenya. These networks already carried trust, norms of reciprocity, and everyday coordination. The implication for youth climate organizing is that effectiveness often depends less on building new, centralized youth institutions and more on embedding climate action within existing social ecosystems: schools, universities, labour groups, religious communities, and local associations where collective identity and coordination already exist.

The third inheritance is temporal. The most significant policy outcomes associated with both movements were not immediate responses to isolated protests but the result of sustained, multi-decade pressure. India's Forest Conservation Act (1980) followed years of organizing that began in the early 1970s. Kenya's 2010 constitutional environmental protections emerged from more than three decades of Green Belt advocacy. This long horizon challenges the rhythm of contemporary digital-era activism, which often operates in shorter cycles of attention and mobilization. It suggests that durable climate impact depends not only on visibility or momentary mobilization, but on the slower work of institutional engagement: policy development, legal strategies, electoral participation, and sustained organizational continuity over time.

Taken together, these lessons do not diminish contemporary youth climate movements; they situate them within a longer genealogy of environmental resistance. The Chipko and Green Belt Movements do not offer a simple template to replicate. Instead, they offer a set of constraints and conditions under which environmental movements tend to become effective in structural terms. For today's youth climate politics, the challenge is not only to expand global awareness, but to integrate that awareness with the kinds of material grounding, organizational depth, and temporal endurance that historically have turned environmental concern into durable political change.

5.2 Embedding Lessons in International Frameworks (SDG'S and UNFCCC)

The lessons of the Chipko and Green Belt movements are not only available as historical reference points; they have also been partially though unevenly absorbed into the international institutions that structure global climate governance. Understanding this process of institutional uptake, and its limits, is essential for identifying what remains missing in current policy design.

Within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the clearest incorporation appears in the Gender Action Plan, whose 2025 modules explicitly reference both movements as case studies supporting the principle that women should be recognized as agents of change in climate governance, rather than solely as vulnerable populations requiring protection. Earlier frameworks, including the Lima Work Programme on Gender (adopted at COP20 and strengthened in later COPs), require countries to integrate gender considerations into Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). Similarly, the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture acknowledges women's agricultural knowledge as a relevant resource for climate adaptation. Taken together, these mechanisms represent real, if partial, institutional uptake of the ecofeminist insight that ecological knowledge is often gendered and socially embedded.

However, this incorporation remains limited in practice. Much of the Gender Action Plan is advisory rather than binding: it encourages states to "consider" gender-responsive approaches rather than requiring enforceable implementation. Youth participation within the UNFCCC structure is also constrained. Through YOUNGO, youth actors are formally recognized as observers, but they do not hold decision-making authority in negotiations. This creates a notable mismatch between historical precedent and institutional design: movements such as Chipko and the Green Belt Movement demonstrate that locally rooted, women-led environmental action has been capable of producing durable legislative change, yet contemporary governance frameworks still largely position youth and women as consultative voices rather than co-decision-makers.

A similar pattern appears in the Sustainable Development Goals. The relevant commitments are distributed across multiple goals rather than integrated into a unified framework. SDG 5 (Gender Equality) contains the clearest link, particularly in its targets on women's access to land and natural resources (5.a) and enabling technologies (5.b). However, SDG 13 (Climate Action) does not explicitly address gendered leadership or knowledge systems in its core targets. Likewise, SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) and SDG 15 (Life on Land)—both directly connected to the ecological systems central to Chipko and the Green Belt Movement—do not explicitly incorporate women's leadership as a governance principle. The result is a fragmented institutional recognition of relationships that, in practice, are deeply interconnected.

More promising developments are emerging outside these formal frameworks through direct institutional engagement with the movements' legacies. The Wangari Maathai Institute for Peace and Environmental Studies at the University of Nairobi has convened intergenerational dialogues at major regional climate summits, explicitly using Green Belt Movement history as a pedagogical foundation for youth climate leadership. The Wangari Maathai Youth Hub Foundation, established in 2026, similarly extends this legacy by integrating environmental stewardship with civic leadership training rooted in Maathai's philosophy of linking ecological restoration with democratic participation. In India, the Chipko Movement continues to inform contemporary environmental activism in Himalayan regions, particularly among youth groups responding to ongoing infrastructure expansion and land-use change in ecologically sensitive areas.

Analyses such as those produced by the German Institute of Development and Sustainability (IDOS) further situate both movements within an emerging "Global South voice" in international climate diplomacy. This framing emphasizes not vulnerability but historical agency: the capacity of communities in the Global South to generate effective, scalable environmental governance responses under conditions of ecological and political constraint. In this sense, the legacy of Chipko and the Green Belt Movement challenges dominant narratives in global climate policy not by asking for recognition of suffering, but by asserting the documented effectiveness of locally rooted, women-led environmental action as a foundation for future climate governance.

5.3 Policy Recommendations for Youth-Inclusive Climate Governance

Based on the comparative analysis presented in Chapters 2 through 4 and the framework mapping in Section 5.2, this section outlines five concrete, actionable policy recommendations for designers of youth climate governance—ranging from national governments and multilateral institutions to civil society organizations and university-based policy programs.

Policy Recommendation 1: Support Existing Youth Networks Rather Than Creating New Movement Organizations

Both historical movements succeeded because they activated organizational structures that were already in place: the Mahila Mangal Dals in Garhwal and the women's cooperative networks in rural Kenya. Youth climate policy should adopt the same logic by channeling funding and institutional support toward existing youth organizations such as student unions, agricultural youth cooperatives, faith-based youth groups, and Indigenous youth councils and enabling them to integrate climate action into their existing missions. This approach enables faster mobilization, stronger community trust, and greater long-term resilience than repeatedly establishing stand-alone "youth climate organizations" that often lack deep social roots.

Policy Recommendation 2: Align Climate Action with Material Well-being, Not Only Ecological Values

The Chipko and Green Belt movements mobilized large-scale participation not through abstract appeals to environmental ethics, but by linking ecological protection to immediate material needs: firewood, water access, soil fertility, agricultural productivity, and protection from flooding. Youth climate policy that relies primarily on ecological literacy and values-based education without an equally strong emphasis on the tangible economic and livelihood impacts of environmental degradation, including food security, employment, water availability, and community resilience risks systematically under-engaging the very communities most affected by climate change and most capable of sustained environmental action. Policy frameworks should therefore require climate education initiatives to incorporate concrete analysis of local material consequences, not only broad global temperature trends.

Policy Recommendation 4: Institutionalize Historical Climate Resistance as a Curriculum Resource

The histories of the Chipko and Green Belt Movements as well as similar women-led climate resistance efforts across the Global South should be formally integrated into national school curricula, university-level environmental studies programs, and training modules for international climate diplomacy. Both movements demonstrate that effective climate action is a learned practice with a documented historical lineage; this history should be as foundational for youth climate advocates as frameworks like the Paris Agreement or IPCC assessment reports. Existing initiatives, such as the Wangari Maathai Institute's intergenerational dialogues and emerging Chipko-related curriculum efforts in Indian educational contexts, provide models that should be expanded, institutionalized, and adapted for international use.

Policy Recommendation 3: Require Youth Participation in Formal Climate Governance, Not Merely Consultation Processes

Both historical movements ultimately achieved success by securing legislative and constitutional change that is, by altering formal rules and governance structures, not only by influencing public discourse. The current positioning of youth within UNFCCC processes as observers and advocates, rather than as participants with decision-making authority, reflects a form of exclusion that both Chipko and the Green Belt Movement confronted in their respective national contexts. National climate legislation and Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) processes should therefore include youth representatives with voting rights or co-authorship roles, rather than limiting them to consultative participation. The experience of both movements suggests that durable climate outcomes are more likely when they are shaped by communities with direct material stakes in ecological systems, and that excluding such actors from formal governance is both a democratic deficit and a practical weakness.

Policy Recommendation 5: Create a Global South Youth Climate Leadership Pipeline Rooted in Historical Movements

The IDOS analysis identifies both movements as central to the emergence of a Global South voice in climate governance. Youth climate policy should build on this insight by establishing structured leadership development pathways such as fellowships, mentorship programs, policy residencies, and international exchange initiatives that explicitly ground participants in the history, strategies, and methodologies of successful Global South climate resistance movements, including Chipko and the Green Belt Movement, as well as comparable cases from Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. These programs should not be designed as isolated or short-term interventions; instead, they should function as sustained, multi-year professional development trajectories that reflect the long temporal horizons required for both historical movements to achieve structural and legislative transformation.

This is far from an exhaustive set of recommendations; rather, these five are those most strongly supported by the comparative evidence presented in Chapters 2 through 4. Taken together, they point toward a reorientation of youth climate policy away from models centered on symbolic participation and values-based education, and toward approaches grounded in material realities, organizational embeddedness,

formal governance inclusion, historical literacy, and long-term institutional capacity building the same combination of factors that made both the Chipko Movement and the Green Belt Movement not only ethically compelling, but demonstrably effective in producing structural change.

CONCLUSION

This paper began with three central research questions, and it is important to return to them directly in conclusion.

The first question asked what structural conditions enabled women to lead large-scale environmental resistance in the Chipko and Green Belt Movements. The historical evidence examined throughout Chapters 2 and 3 points to a consistent answer across both cases: women emerged as leaders because they were the members of their communities most materially and immediately dependent on the ecosystems under threat. This forms the paper's central argument the material dependency thesis. In the Garhwal Himalayas, deforestation lengthened women's daily labour, depleted water sources, and destabilized the terraced agricultural systems on which households depended. In Kenya, ecological degradation driven by colonial land-use patterns, post-colonial extraction, and political land allocation produced similar consequences: shrinking water access, declining soil fertility, and increasing hardship for rural women responsible for sustaining household livelihoods. In both contexts, women's activism did not arise primarily from ideological environmentalism, but from structural necessity. They had the greatest stake in ecological survival, and they already possessed collective organizational capacity through local welfare networks and community associations.

The second research question examined the convergences and divergences between the two movements. Chapter 4 identified four major structural similarities: material dependency, the activation of pre-existing community networks, forms of embodied resistance, and the achievement of durable legislative outcomes. At the same time, the chapter identified several significant differences. The movements confronted different types of adversaries: Chipko primarily opposed commercial logging contractors operating within a democratic system, whereas the Green Belt Movement confronted an authoritarian state directly involved in land allocation and political repression. Their leadership structures also differed. Chipko functioned through distributed local leadership across villages and organizers, while the Green Belt Movement relied more heavily on Wangari Maathai as a central and internationally visible figure. Finally, the movements operated at different scales: Chipko remained regionally rooted even while influencing national policy, whereas the Green Belt Movement evolved earlier into a nationally and internationally connected campaign. These differences matter because they clarify the conditions under which each model is most transferable. The decentralized Chipko model may be especially effective where democratic institutions remain partially open to pressure, while the Green Belt model demonstrates strategies more applicable in contexts where state power itself is the principal obstacle.

The third question asked what lessons these movements offer for contemporary youth climate governance. Chapter 5 responded with five policy recommendations: support existing youth networks instead of constantly creating new organizations; connect climate action to material well-being rather than only abstract environmental values; provide youth with formal governance roles instead of limiting them to consultation; institutionalize the study of historical climate resistance within educational systems; and

develop long-term Global South youth leadership pipelines rooted in the history of successful environmental movements. These recommendations are not speculative. Each emerges directly from observable structural features that contributed to the effectiveness of the historical movements studied.

Together, these findings challenge two widespread assumptions within contemporary climate discourse. The first is the idea that meaningful climate activism began in the twenty-first century, particularly after the Paris Agreement. The histories of Chipko and the Green Belt Movement demonstrate otherwise. Long before climate governance became a dominant international agenda, communities in the Global South were already organizing sophisticated environmental resistance campaigns capable of producing legislative and constitutional change. Their experiences suggest that contemporary movements have as much to learn from historical struggles as from new institutional frameworks.

The second assumption concerns the role of women in climate governance. International climate policy has often framed women primarily as vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by ecological disruption. The movements examined here expose the limits of that framing. The women of Garhwal and rural Kenya were not passive recipients of protection; they were organizers, strategists, ecological knowledge-holders, and architects of durable governance change. Wangari Maathai was recognized internationally not because she symbolized vulnerability, but because she demonstrated political agency, institution-building, and sustained resistance. Similarly, Gaura Devi's confrontation at Reni represented an assertion of authority and stewardship rooted in lived dependence on the forest. The continued tendency within international governance frameworks to treat women primarily as policy subjects rather than governance actors reflects a significant lag behind the historical evidence.

This paper is written from the perspective of India, where the legacy of the Chipko Movement remains deeply embedded in legal memory, environmental education, and public discourse. The Forest Conservation Act of 1980 continues to shape debates over development and land use in forested regions, and the names of women such as Gaura Devi and Bachni Devi remain associated with environmental citizenship and resistance. Yet the structural pressures these women confronted resource extraction, ecological displacement, and unequal environmental burdens have not disappeared. Under contemporary climate change, they have intensified and expanded in scale.

The central question raised by the women of Chipko who has the right to defend the ecosystems on which communities depend remains central to present-day climate politics. It appears in negotiations over Nationally Determined Contributions, in debates at COP summits, and in conflicts over land, water, and development projects across the world. The answer offered by both the Chipko and Green Belt Movements was remarkably consistent across geography and history: ecological systems are most effectively defended by those who depend upon them most directly, understand them most intimately, and are prepared to sustain long-term, organized collective action in their Defense.

That principle—and the organizational knowledge embedded within these movements—may be the most important inheritance that women-led environmental resistance offers contemporary youth climate governance. It is a legacy not only of protest, but of institution-building, political endurance, and historically demonstrated effectiveness.

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