

Weaving Ecologies of Care: Communities' Experiences in Cultivating Regenerative Economies

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"This responsibility of care...is caring for land and territory, it is a more spiritual kind of care, it is even caring for ourselves. [...] It is a matter of reciprocity with our neighbors, and it is a matter of redistribution within the community."

Rosa Mamani, Red Chimpu Warmi (Bolivia)

A collective cry for care

Building on a long trajectory of collective work connecting gender and economic justice, rights to land, and sexual and reproductive health and rights, ESCR-Net members issued a collective cry for care as central to sustaining life in a historic moment. At the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, as the world reckoned with the indispensability of care in responding to and recovering from cascading crises, a cross-regional group of members of ESCR-Net's [Women and ESCR Working Group](#) (WESCR WG) drafted a [Social Pact on Care](#) as a far-reaching vision for a 'new normal' dedicated to the interconnected well-being and rights of people and the planet. Drawing on their own lived realities within their domestic workers' and trade unions, movements, Indigenous communities, and feminist organizations, members used an expansive definition of care. All work that sustains life is care – paid and non-paid activities that make social reproduction possible, such as caring for the sick and collecting water, but also farming, healthcare, education, community organizing and human rights defense, and environmental stewardship. As such, members do not view care as an isolated gender justice issue, but rather, as intertwined with intersectional struggles for climate and debt justice, as well as substantive equality, and workers' rights more broadly.

Confronting the systemic roots of care crises

Crises of care did not, of course, start with pandemic¹. By design, neoliberal capitalism ensures profit for the few over the basic necessities, dignity and human rights of the majority, as well as the health of the planet. This leads to a dehumanization and commodification of life, disproportionately impacting women in their diversity and other communities. Long histories of patriarchy – often imposed via colonialism and entwined with the dominant economic system and systemic racism – have made social reproduction invisible, naturalized care as women's responsibility, deepened the feminization of impoverishment, and intensified exploitation. These same systems also shape the global organization of care, giving rise to global care chains in which women, particularly from the Global South, migrate to fill care deficits in wealthier countries while structural inequalities remain unaddressed.

Thus, the denial and devaluing of care is not an anomaly or unfortunate side-effect of intersecting care, debt, and climate crises facing our economies and governments across the world, but rather, a defining feature of the global operating system. In contrast, the Social Pact on Care outlines the contours of feminist alternative futures that are more just, equitable, and sustainable for everyone. As the antidote to this dominant logic, ESCR-Net members and their communities are imagining into being regenerative economies centering care for people and the planet².

This brief explores communities' lived experiences of cultivating regenerative economies centering care. Rather than presenting an abstract model for the future, it makes visible the diverse practices through which communities are already organizing life around reciprocity, solidarity, and the conditions that sustain people and the planet.

Six Rs to chart pathways forward

Members articulated a '**6R framework**' as a sort of blueprint for **how** to achieve this new social pact on care: recognition, redistribution, reduction, rights, representation, and reframing the economy as a caring economy.³

¹ Care is a key pillar in ESCR-Net members' [Common Charter for Collective Struggle](#). See the "[Women and ESCR Working Group Response to the COVID-19 Crisis](#)", as well as ESCR-Net's "[Global Call to Action in response to COVID-19](#)" for members' in-depth analysis on the pandemic as a crisis of care.

² We understand the economy as a social system in which we live and experience our lives to meet our needs and wants, shaped by political, cultural and legal norms and values. The economy is about the way we organize our societies; how we live together in relation to ourselves, each other, and the planet; and how we access and manage resources and provide essential services to meet human needs in specific contexts.

³ Members' 6Rs share elements with other similar frameworks, including the [International Labor Organization's 5R Framework for Decent Care Work](#). However, as detailed below, members make a unique contribution with their 6th R - reframing the economy as a caring economy, which charts a transformative vision.

1. Recognition means making the value of care and those who care visible, as a first step – all forms of care and all carers, paid and un/der/paid. Value must be understood holistically – as the colossal economic contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), but far beyond, as integral to sustaining life. This visibility is required to reveal and dismantle patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes, to inform policies that result in concrete change, and to secure respect as a universal right.

2. Redistribution means making care a shared responsibility within households and communities, the State, and across societies. This could require gender transformative care policies such as non-transferable paid parental leaves, an enabling environment for community care cooperatives and networks, as well as, more broadly, public services and public investment in care infrastructure.

3. Reduction means creating policies that reduce the burden of un/der/paid care work through public investment in high quality and accessible services and care infrastructure, including water, education, sanitation, healthcare, as well as care for children, the elderly, and those living with disabilities.

4. Rights means recognition of the human right to receive quality, sufficient, and adequate care; provide and receive care under dignified conditions, whether paid or unpaid; and to exercise self- and collective care to ensure well-being. This includes guaranteeing labor rights, universal social protection, and access to justice. A substantive equality and intersectional approach are key to non-discrimination.

5. Representation means ensuring that care workers, as well as community-based care networks and systems are central to the governance of care. Practically, they must be playing a leadership role in shaping policies, including regarding the allocation of resources.

6. Reframing the economy as a caring economy means meaningful advances vis-a-vis all the other 5Rs, which would vastly improve our current systems, and therefore, material conditions for care givers and receivers. Yet care cannot simply be added on to an economic model organized around endless growth, extraction, and profit. This reframing also demands confronting intersecting crises, including through debt cancellation and progressive taxation as fundamental to ensuring maximum available resources for human rights, public provision of care, and gender-transformative climate action and finance. The ultimate aim is to tackle the root causes of injustice via systemic transformations that make possible regenerative economies centering care of people and the planet.

In the words of **Mae Buenaventura, of the Asian Peoples' Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD)**, "The work of building a truly caring society is also akin to transforming society, of changing the system". This is a different way of being, thinking, and feeling. Reframing the economy means solidarity, interdependence, collectivity, and the commons, instead of

self-interest, individualism, competition, and privatization. This is a vision focused on transformation, rather than just reform, constituting a challenge to the power structures that maintain the status quo so entrenched. Hence, members understand the work of reframing the economy as a caring economy to be fundamentally political.

There is obviously significant overlap between the 6Rs and the blueprint they provide should not be interpreted as a prescriptive or linear pathway from one R to another. In practice, members are developing strategies tailored to their particular contexts – specific manifestations of systemic challenges and political openings – that tackle different dimensions of care and combinations of the Rs, often in parallel. For example, some members are working to advance different components of the first 5Rs via strong regulatory and normative frameworks that can be used to push States and other actors for comprehensive care policies and infrastructure, as well as progressive and sustainable financing. Other members are building informal solidarity economies that largely exist “outside” of the system.

The next sections **bring the social pact on care to life**, stepping inside concrete examples of how, across diverse movements and territories, members and their communities are advancing plural understandings of and approaches to care that are seeding transformative alternatives. Some of these have long existed – for example within Indigenous communities, others have emerged out of necessity in response to crises. By amplifying, connecting, and creating spaces for learning between these experiences, including through ESCR-Net’s [Feminist Participatory Action Research \(FPAR\) on care centered economies](#), we deepen solidarity, clarify points of unity as a collective, and strengthen shared demands towards imagining and cultivating regenerative economies centering care for people and the planet. **The goal is not to arrive at a singular or universal definition of how the 6R framework should be operationalized or what constitutes “regenerative economies centering care”. Rather, what emerges is a rich tapestry of what care means, how worlds centering care could be and feel, and the multiple, co-existing, and intersecting pathways to get there.**

Care as a social right

Understood as a social right, care is essential to an adequate standard of living as guaranteed to all persons by Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and interdependent with the other rights and commitments of the ICESCR. As emphasized by **Claribed Palacios, president of Unión de Trabajadoras Afrocolombianas del Servicio Doméstico (UTRASD)**, “without care, there is no social justice; and without social justice, there are no human rights. That is why States must embrace the care agenda as a right and

recognize it as a cornerstone of social justice and gender equality, moving beyond the historical view that has placed this responsibility almost exclusively on women.”⁴

A key milestone in advancing the recognition of care as a social right is the landmark legal decision of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR, [Advisory Opinion 31/25](#)). Aligned with a [joint intervention](#) by over 10 members across regions, the Court recognized the right to care as an autonomous human right; particularly, the right to receive quality, sufficient, and adequate care; provide care under dignified conditions, whether paid or unpaid; and to exercise self-care to ensure well-being.

Members are exploring innovative strategies to utilize the decision, including through advocacy grounded in the lived realities of care workers. The decades of experience and longstanding leadership of domestic workers unions⁵, as well as feminist organizations, are critical on this front. Their organizing processes illustrate how care work sustains entire economies, while workers – predominantly racialized and economically marginalized women – remain excluded from rights and protections, underscoring the urgency of advancing care as a human right.

As expressed by **Valentina Contreras from the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (GI-ESCR)**, “In the face of the increasing austerity measures that many countries are adopting, the recognition of the human right to care and related commitments to deepen investments become an important path to further our advocacy work.” In this context, regional spaces such as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) – through its initiative to build “*care societies*” – have become relevant platforms where many members are advancing demands and strengthening advocacy. As a result of this advocacy, the [Tlatelolco Commitment](#), adopted at the 16th session of the Regional Conference on Women in the Latin America and the Caribbean (August 2025), provides a policy roadmap toward the care society.

Care as reparation for debt and climate injustice

Reframing the economy with the goal of ultimately cultivating regenerative economies centering care requires us to tackle the debt-care-climate polycrisis. Loss and damage are not a distant future, but rather, a reality of the already existing climate crisis, which will only continue to intensify the disproportionate care burdens that fall to women in all their diversity. Even when there is political will to remedy the deficit of care infrastructure or put forward people-led climate solutions, nations drowning in illegitimate and unsustainable debts are subjected to conditionalities and austerity measures that decimate public spending, strip away labor protections and workers’ rights, raise

⁴ ESCR-Net, “[Inter-American Court Recognizes Care as a Human Right: A Victory for Feminist and Human Rights Movements](#)” August 26, 2025. See ESCR-Net’s interview with Claribed Palacios, “[We Move the World”: Domestic Workers, Anti-Racism and Collective Power in Colombia](#)”.

⁵ This includes members such as the National Union for Domestic Employees (NUDE) in Trinidad and Tobago, Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras del Hogar (SINACTRAHO) in Mexico, and Unión de Trabajadoras Afrocolombianas del Servicio Doméstico (UTRASD) in Colombia.

regressive taxes, and intensify the privatization of essential services and goods. When expenditures on public services and care are cut, amid escalating prices for other basic necessities, many – particularly women – are forced to take on unsustainable personal debt to ensure the well-being of their families. Sovereign debt crises become personal debt crises. This is an upside down world.

“This mortgaging of the future should and must be stopped. Part of this is really resisting fiscal austerity that the IMF imposes because this compromises the rights that are key to building caring economies and societies. ” **Mae Buenaventura, Asian Peoples’ Movement on Debt and Development (APMDD)**

In contrast, members are imagining and building possible futures anchored in an understanding that investment in care sectors is simultaneously investment in low-carbon sectors. Hence, care is a fundamental pillar in just and equitable transitions away from a fossil fuel-driven economy. Indigenous Peoples’ ecological stewardship, often led by women, offers critical models for climate action. Reparations reflective of historical colonial responsibility channeled directly to frontline communities can redress harms and be a vital support for people-led solutions. Grants-based and gender-transformative climate finance is critical to ending vicious cycles of debt that disproportionately harm women and other gender oppressed people.

In Tanzania, Maria Matui of ESCR-Net’s FPAR partner **Women Action Towards Economic Development (WATED)** highlights how rising foreign/external debt, shrinking public funds, and escalating climate impacts such as droughts, soil degradation, water scarcity, and devastating floods are deepening care burdens in climate-vulnerable communities. Women and girls carry the dual responsibility of sustaining households and ecosystems. Their paid and unpaid care work – including sustainable agriculture, water collection and protection, seed preservation, and renewable energy adoption – underpins community survival, despite remaining largely invisible in mainstream economic systems. Women-led initiatives such as reforestation and composting, sustainable and clean fuel production for cooking, cooperatives to mobilize resources, and collective childcare demonstrate how community-led care practices/systems are already building climate resilience that can be a model for larger-scale climate action rooted in intergenerational and Indigenous knowledge. This underscores how women’s land ownership and Indigenous Peoples’ self-determination and territorial sovereignty are fundamental to climate justice. Initiatives such as these are a foundation for gender-transformative climate financing and reparations and, ultimately, regenerative economies that value life over debt repayment. In the words of Maria from WATED, “If debt is what drains our future, care is how we can reclaim it.”

In the SWANA region, one of our FPAR partners⁶ is organizing around women’s agricultural work as care, highlighting its central role in economic and climate resilience. Rural women sustain ecosystems and livelihoods while advancing environmental sustainability, yet continue to face barriers to organizing, social protection, and legal recognition. Strengthening women’s agency to

⁶ Name withheld for security reasons.

form unions and cooperatives is critical to securing their rights, expanding their participation in decision making, and facilitating their food sovereignty through collective ownership of key means of life, such as seeds, livestock, and land.

Care as nurturing and healing the body-territory

Juana Toledo from the **Consejo de Mujeres Ix Nab'il** in Guatemala has shared how Indigenous women in her community understand and live care as a spiritual, political, and collective act that unites the nurturing and healing of the body and the land as inseparable territories. Care is rooted in reciprocity and interdependence – with each other and the natural world, sustaining both people and place. Within the Mayan cosmovision, everything and everyone is connected – ancestors, animals, spirits, plants, forests. Care of the body depends on care of the soil, water, and community...the nurturing of life in all forms in equilibrium. A rupture anywhere destroys the balance. Keeping ancestral memory and knowledge alive is essential. Yet the past and present are stories of the violence of colonization, armed conflict, and extractivism. Daniel Santi from the **Pueblo Sarayaku** in Ecuador articulates the same reality; neither States, nor companies – mining, wood, timber – understand this cycle of equilibrium, life, and care. Lacking a spiritual understanding of what it is to be human, theirs is a consciousness rooted in discrimination and extermination.

The exploitation and harms disproportionately impacting the bodies of women in all their diversity have the same systemic roots as that perpetrated by transnational corporations against Mother Earth – patriarchy, capitalism, and racism as intertwined systems of oppression and dispossession. Often, the link is even more direct, it is actors employed by or complicit with mining companies, for example, who threaten, assault, or kill women and environmental defenders. Care is practices and spaces for healing from the repercussions of this violence – acknowledging physical and emotional injuries over time and strengthening connections to each other and the land.

This is also the journey of FPAR partner **Porgera Red Wara (River) Women's Association**, a grassroots, women-led organization in Papua New Guinea supporting Indigenous communities impacted by decades of environmental and human rights abuses caused by the Porgera Gold Mine. Women and their communities have developed collective care practices to survive and heal from these violations – including sexual abuses. Centering both their stories of harm and their solutions is key to advancing culturally grounded forms of remedy and restorative justice rooted in healing, spiritual reconciliation with the land, and the restoration of social harmony, and capable of informing just legal frameworks. As expressed by Juana from Consejo, to heal is to struggle, with the possibility of emancipation..."pain is transformed into an offering for others, a song becomes a guide...because when you heal, so do I, and when I heal, you do as well."

Care as resistance and resilience

“Here care is more of survival and its defiance. Every act of care – feeding a family, helping a neighbour, keeping kids learning – is a way of saying we’re still here, we’re still connected, and we won’t be erased.” **Aseel Tork, Bisan Center for Research and Development (Palestine)**

Aseel describes how care is a form of resistance and resilience within the context of the Palestinian struggle for liberation and self-determination. Communities across the world are facing myriad forms of violence and injustice, from development aggression to genocide, with organized abandonment a constant. Not despite, but precisely because of this violence, women are simultaneously self-organizing in solidarity networks, mutual aid groups, cooperatives, community protection groups, healthcare nodes, and other collectives to ensure basic needs and rights. These alternatives centering care emerge out of necessity, often in response to crisis, filling gaps and keeping life going when formal systems fail. Resistance is not an end point, but a bridge to transformative change.

For example, in the face of immense aggression by State and corporate actors impacting the Afro-Indigenous Garifuna people, social movement **Organización Fraternal Negra Hondureña (OFRANEH)** has advanced food security/sovereignty through women-led initiatives for community kitchens and care networks, collective maintenance of subsistence agriculture, and land reclamation. Faced with the catastrophic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, South African member **Abahlali baseMjondolo** – a movement of over 180,000 shack dwellers – reinforced a food solidarity network amid mounting hunger and record unemployment rates while confronting mounting repression. In Argentina, an emboldened far right has not only stalled critical progress in relation to a care agenda, but also rolled back hard-fought gains. The Milei government has eliminated key ministries dedicated to women, gender, and diversity, as well as the environment, and its “economic reforms” have been described as a “chainsaw plan” of austerity via drastic public spending cuts and the elimination of critical subsidies. In the context of this precarity, FPAR partners **Sindicato de Obreros Curtidores de la República Argentina (SOCRA)**, a trade union member of ESCR-Net, and the “Delia Parodi” workers’ cooperative are advancing the recognition of community care work as work. Specifically, they are highlighting how the women and LGTBQ+ members of the coop function as a community-based care network, providing elder and childcare services through “territorial action nodes”. Their efforts support advocacy for legal frameworks for dignified labor conditions, including recognition and formalization of community caregiving roles as essential to economic and social well-being.

Returning to Palestine, the work of **Bisan Center for Research and Development** brings into focus how women are navigating caregiving and economic survival in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, where life is shaped by systems of control that render every community an isolated enclave, socially and physically. Checkpoints block movement, there are scarce childcare options, and social protections are non-existent. In this context, women are mobilizing solidarity-based informal care economies for pooling and sharing resources (compost, seeds, food, kitchen space for cooking), caring for children and the elderly, and selling each other’s products in markets. With the

destruction of refugee camps, kids have lost access to schools, so a group of displaced women turned shelters into schools and daycares. Amidst demolition and fragmentation, ensuring children's rights and education is political. Teaching younger generations about their villages, heritage, and ancestral traditions maintains culture and memory alive. Another group of mothers created sensory boxes to share and exchange when their children with autism were experiencing regression as a result of losing access to programs in schools and charity centers. Women gather to exchange ideas, work together, and support each other emotionally and financially, resisting isolation and the erasure of their children's needs. These are approaches to care rooted in steadfastness, cooperation, mutual accountability, and trust. For Bisan, the goal of amplifying these projects is to shape policies to improve social protection, market access, and institutional support for women-led informal economic activities, making visible and investing value in the everyday acts of care labor that sustain life. Achieving these improvements in the current context would be transformative, creating a foundation for further steps towards regenerative economies centering care in Palestine.

A common thread emerges

Across these interconnected territories and struggles, a common thread emerges: care is not just an add-on to the profit-driven economy, nor a private virtue confined to households. It is a collective, political force that sustains life in the midst of abandonment, extraction, and structural violence. From rural women cultivating drought-resistant crops in Tanzania, to Indigenous women defenders healing body-territories in Guatemala and Papua New Guinea, to Palestinian mothers transforming shelters into schools, these practices do more than fill gaps left by the State – they prefigure a different horizon. They show us that economies can be organized around reciprocity rather than exploitation, around memory rather than erasure, around solidarity rather than profit. In this sense, the Social Pact on Care is not only about policy reform, but a collective commitment to reorganize our societies around the dignity of life.

To weave ecologies of care, then, is to build power by connecting struggles across the world – for debt justice, climate justice, gender justice, labor rights, land and self-determination, and liberation. It is to affirm, in practice, that another system is not only necessary, but already being cultivated in the everyday acts through which communities keep each other – and the planet – alive. This tapestry will be a work in progress, growing and changing as members and their communities continue to chart multiple, co-existing, and intersecting pathways to regenerative economies centering care for people and the planet.

Rosa from Red Chimpu in Bolivia closed our [“Weaving Ecologies of Care” webinar](#) (October 2025), inviting words of solidarity with Palestine while sharing her screen to show us her landscape – the wind moving through grasses and trees in her territory, which she cares for and which cares for her.

