

## FROM POLICY TO ACTION: ASSESSING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GENDER-RESPONSIVE CLIMATE STRATEGIES IN PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

Over the past three decades, climate discourse has evolved progressively from viewing women as passive victims to recognising them as active agents of change and environmental resilience. Various research has shown how gender and climate change are deeply interlinked through structures of vulnerability, resource access, and decision-making power. Within Pakistan, this intersection has become increasingly visible as recurrent floods, heatwaves, and water stress have differentiated the burdens carried by women. The analyses of the policies and interviews with key stakeholders from the government departments, international development institutions, and national commissions. This research explores Pakistan's climate policy landscape, anchored in the National Climate Change Policy 2021, the Climate Change Gender Action Plan 2022, and the National Adaptation Plan 2023, and assesses the critical junction of gender responsiveness. As a result, there is a noticeable policy evolution from rhetorical recognition of gender to explicit institutional commitments, yet implementation shows weak enforcement, ineffective coordination, and inadequate financing. In recent policies, gender is integrated across priority sectors with proposed quotas, helplines against GBV, and training measures; however, there is a lack of binding mandates, budgetary commitments, and comprehensive gender-disaggregated data procedures. The analysis identifies the persistent gaps in gender-responsive climate governance in Pakistan and the need for institutional reforms, political commitment, and women's leadership at all levels to ensure inclusive and equitable climate action. The study argues that real transformation requires regulatory and fiscal reform, including: insurance of gender budgeting in Pakistan's climate finance framework, institutionalising gender focal points across ministries, empowering women-led organisations, strengthening local engagement, and integrating women's perspectives in policy-making and implementation.

**Keywords** gender-climate nexus; gender-responsive climate policy; Pakistan; policy effectiveness; climate adaptation; gender mainstreaming.

### INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 21st century, rapidly accelerating climate threats and unprecedented challenges have confronted the world. Over time, threats of climate change have become more

evident with significant impacts on gender. As a result, literature and efforts on the nexus between gender and climate change have been developed over the years. It has been found that climate

change has exacerbated existing gender inequalities. Different gender norms and power dynamics have contributed to women's insecurity in an already climate-changing world as a threat multiplier. Various research initiatives now focus on understanding the intersectionality between gender and climate change. It thus provides opportunities to explore the linkages between both as a cross-cutting lens, mainly through human experiences. It has also highlighted the need for a comprehensive framework and integrated actions to address the interconnectedness.

While discussing the intersection between gender and climate, it is important to understand the gender perspective and its core concepts. Climate Change impacts women and men differently. Their capacities to cope with, limit, and respond to climate change impacts are also distinct. Frequent disasters resulting from climate change increase women's vulnerabilities and create a link to their social position, where social institutions, ethnicity and gender identity play important roles (Kabeer, 1999). Vulnerabilities and gender inequality are also linked; when women face limited access to services, scarcity of natural resources and increased vulnerability to rights violations, and, especially in risk-prone and conflict areas, the instances of Gender-based Violence (GBV) also increase (UN Women, 2022). Therefore, the impacts and vulnerabilities related to climate change can exacerbate existing gender inequalities. Gender characteristics and social norms serve as social barriers that make it difficult for women to seek shelter during disasters. As vulnerability traits are linked to physical, social, economic, and environmental aspects, they increase individuals' and communities' susceptibility to disasters (Ahmed & Eklund, 2021). Similarly, various climate stressors and environmental changes affect the security of a state by exaggerating social stress related to resource scarcity, development and competition. If such dynamics go beyond the adaptive capacity of a state, it can lead to increased instability.

In recognition of gender and climate vulnerabilities and building an effective response, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 38/4 "to conduct, from within existing resources, an analytical study on the integration of a gender-responsive approach into climate action at the local, national, regional and international levels for the full and effective enjoyment of the rights of

women..." (OHCHR, 2018), driving from the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The resolutions aim to address challenges of climate change, and related gender inequalities and promote sustainable peace and development. Practitioners and policymakers, as an outcome of increased Non-traditional Security Threats, intend to contribute and enhance the capacity of women in environmental and human security to gain peace and security. Exploration of the issues of climate change, gender inequalities, and sustainable development has thereby become more evident. Understanding gender and climate linkage has been found important in forming inclusive, effective and operative strategies to address climate change and promote gender equality. By identifying and working on the unique experiences of different genders, policymakers can work in the direction of sustainable and impartial solutions.

This article examines the critical intersections of the gender-climate nexus by assessing gender-responsive approaches to climate change within Pakistan's adaptation strategies. It also assesses whether these policy agreements have translated into tangible and enforceable actions. The article is divided into three main sections: a **literature review section** outlining the historical and contemporary discussions on the gender-climate nexus at both international and national levels; a **methodology section** describing an exploratory qualitative research approach based on primary data through interviews of key stakeholders, including government officials, climate and gender experts, climatologists and academics, along with a critical review of governmental climate policy documents; and lastly a **data and analysis section** that assesses Pakistan's three core climate policies; the *National Climate Change Policy 2021*, the *Climate Change Gender Action Plan 2022*, and the *National Adaptation Plan 2023*. The article contends that within Pakistan's climate policy landscape, there is growing gender awareness, yet the absence of implementation mechanisms, budgetary commitments, and disaggregated data systems continues to restrain Pakistan's transformative potential in gender-responsive climate action.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

More than 30 years ago, in 1988, the first-ever textbook that talked about women and the environment was published (Dankelman &

Davidson, 1988). Ever since, many aspects of the nexus of women and the environment have endured significant changes. Of all environmental challenges, climate change was a major challenge as it exacerbated all other related issues of the 1980s: water, energy, land use and biodiversity conservation. At the same time, the human rights factor underwent major changes, and the relationship between men and women surfaced as a diverse issue to be dealt with. Having manifestations of dynamic gender characteristics, the discourse of the environment expanded with the inclusion of women as a subject matter.

Firstly, Denton (2002) in his paper explores the dimensions of gender, climate change vulnerability, its consequences, and adaptation. The paper examines the relationship between gender roles and norms and various inequalities, and how they shape men's and women's experiences of adaptive capabilities in the face of climate change. The importance of gender-responsive adaptation strategies came out as a crux of the research that concluded how climate change vulnerabilities and adaptation are crucial for women, and there is a need for emphasis on gender-sensitive approaches to address the differentiated impacts of climate change on women and men to promote gender equality in different policies and practices.

Moreover, Kabeer (2005) critically examined the third Millennium Development Goal of gender equality and women's empowerment. The progress made to achieve this goal and the inherited challenges of gender inequality remained widely unknown. The paper intends to highlight the need for targeted interventions and the role of policy-makers to address the root causes of gender inequalities while economically, socially and politically empowering women (Kabeer, 2005, pp.13-25). To achieve sustainable development, gender equality must be addressed, and while the issue has been problematized, significant gaps still exist.

In the meantime, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment (2005) and the Fourth Assessment Reports of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2007) highlighted some unprecedented environmental changes due to human interventions and innovations. The severity of the matter called for an urgent need to understand the environmental changes going on and their impacts on human livelihoods and

human lives. For the first time, this concluded to draw the attention of students, scholars and policy-makers to develop a basic knowledge of climate change and related dimensions, of which the gender perspective came out to be evident.

Congruently, the collective struggle for gender equality and climate action to explore women's vulnerabilities and adapt mechanisms to overcome the issues became more evident by incorporating a gender lens to view and problematize various climate issues by the states. This gender-transformative lens may seek ways to improve the socio-political and economic elements of a state to understand adaptation efforts in an advanced manner. More recently, international commitments are being manifested in the form of the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan (2018-2023) that sets out areas of priority for adaptation, mitigation and financing programs to mainstream gender in climate change. These range from increasing women's capacity and knowledge through workshops and exchange programs, and pursuing full, equal and meaningful participation of diverse women in national and international delegations. Moreover, it seeks to prioritise gender considerations in the areas of concern for the "All Parties Conference (CoP)" to enhance climate-related resources and integrate gender priorities (P. Resurrección et al., 2019, p. 38).

### *Climate Change and Gender Responsiveness in Pakistan's Strategies*

This theme focuses on various gender-responsive climate change policies and strategies adopted by Pakistan to address gender-specific impacts of climate change. It examines the initiatives that aim to enhance women's participation in decision-making processes to improve their access to resources while assessing the gender considerations in Pakistan's initiatives in climate change policies and strategies.

Firstly, the National Climate Change Policy (2012) serves as a guiding paper on climate change to achieve climate-resilient development socially and economically. In early 2011, the Ministry of Environment, along with UNDP Islamabad, developed Pakistan's 1<sup>st</sup> policy on climate change. After being approved by the Federal Cabinet in September 2012, it was launched by the newly developed Ministry of Climate Change. Keeping in view the gender analysis, Pakistan's National Climate Change Policy 2012 deliberates, "Pakistan

fully recognises that women are powerful agents of change. It is therefore vital to ensure participation of women and gender experts in all policies, initiatives and decisions relating to climate change” (Chaudhry, 2017, pp. 43-46). However, its implementation as part of the policy-making is still lagging. To date, women's vulnerabilities in climate change and their role in Pakistan's sustainable development are overlooked.

Concurrently, the Ministry of Climate Change in Pakistan, as a relatively new institution, by then worked effortlessly to address and evaluate the threats and challenges related to climate change in Pakistan. It demanded climate change financing and institutional capacity that led to the formation of the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Ever since, it has closely worked with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) to strengthen its capacity of key stakeholders. The GCF remained the first climate finance mechanism that mainstreamed the gender perspective in Pakistan. It recognises gender-responsive climate programmes to develop sustainable adaptation and mitigation. It also demanded women's engagement, gender focal points and the enhanced role of the Ministry of Women's Affairs to enhance cross-sectional and institutional capacity on gender-climate change issues (Green Climate Fund, 2019).

In the midst of climate-related extreme events, Pakistan updated its policy of the NCCP in 2021, focusing on adaptation to nature-based solutions. With a perspective on gender, it highlighted that climate change has differentiated drivers and impacts on women, children and underprivileged regions. Communities and people in such areas are disproportionately marginalised, more vulnerable and least resourced. In Pakistan, women of rural areas engaged in the agriculture and forest sector are highly climate-sensitive. Further, women are more susceptible to extreme climate events and calamities mainly due to their gender roles and division of labour, with far fewer assets and resources to recover from disasters. NCCP 2021 stands comprehensive in admitting these challenges and vulnerabilities of women to advocate a sustainable and resilient path for women to be powerful agents of change. National Climate Change Policy also include women in greater climate action to work and collaborate in enhancing gender-responsiveness at national and regional levels (Ministry of Climate Change, 2021).

IUCN and the Ministry of Climate Change, Government of Pakistan, with the economic support of the Green Climate Fund, launched Pakistan's 1<sup>st</sup> ever Climate Change Gender Action Plan (ccGAP) in 2022. Pakistan is ranked among the most vulnerable and cross-sectoral states to be affected by climate change, with women being left out of the picture when it comes to decision-making regarding climate action. The ccGAP aims to ensure women's influence and participation in climate decisions to increase its effectiveness. It includes inclusive policy dialogue, capacity enhancement and pilot projects for women to increase gender equality. The process of ccGAP-making included the collaboration of key sector experts from IUCN, civil society, think tanks, academia and leadership to bolster and strengthen women in climate action (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). Lastly and recently, Pakistan developed the National Adaptation Plan 2023 to build more resilience against the impacts of climate change. The plan proposes to form climate adaptation into development planning. It also recognises the need to counter the gender gap to enhance climate resilience. The plan identifies vulnerabilities of some key sectors of a state that have impacted the progress of the adaptation strategies. The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) for 2023-2030 further acknowledges the role of the Climate Change Ministry to work and collaborate in countering growing climate risks (Ministry of Climate Change & Government of Pakistan, 2023). However, the search results do not give sufficient information on how the National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Plan will address gender issues and show a lack of clarity in its plans of action.

## METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative research based on exploratory and evaluative approaches. The research methodology for this article employs a combination of primary and secondary research methods to assess climate-related strategies and policies through a gender-responsive lens. The primary data in this research has been collected through interviews of key stakeholders, including government officials, climate and gender experts, climatologists and advocates from the relevant government ministries, the National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF), The World Bank, National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW), International Water Management

Institute (IWMI) and Asian Development Bank (ADB). The sample size included 8 interviews in total. The interviews gave valuable insights into the governmental roles and development, implementation, and effectiveness of policies in Pakistan, with a keen analysis of gender considerations and integration in decision-making. In addition to interviews, the research involved analysis and extensive review of governmental reports, databases, policy documents and frameworks, significantly National Climate Change Policy 2012, its updated version of 2021 and the recently adopted Climate Change Gender Action Plan (ccGAP) 2022 and lastly, National Adaptation Plan 2023. The analysis offered a comprehensive understanding of the present dynamics and integration of gender considerations into Pakistan's climate-related strategies. It also highlighted the intricacies of decision-making processes, key barriers and challenges involved and the future of gender responsiveness in Pakistan. The results of the interviews and policy review helped in understanding the current dynamics and

the necessary need for well-informed, actionable policies that must address environmental challenges and gender-specific vulnerabilities. Resultantly, the research presents a holistic perspective on climate policy refinement and curbing the impacts of climate change more effectively.

Subsequently, the research used secondary data analysis techniques to find out and study the relevant literature on gender-responsive climate action and strategies adapted globally and nationally. This provided a broader context and background information with a comprehensive assessment of gender considerations in existing policies and identified any gaps or inconsistencies. The findings from both primary and secondary data sources were thematically analysed, allowing for the detection of recurring themes in the interviews. This enabled a combined, comprehensive and nuanced approach to enhance responsiveness in Pakistan's climate-related strategies.

**Table 1: Sample Overview**

Interviewee Code	Position	Organization	Mode of Interview	Audio Recording
IR 1	Social Safeguard Specialist	National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF)	In-person	Yes
IR 4	Climate & Gender Expert	National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF)	In-person	Yes
IR 5	Consultant on Climate Policy	The World Bank	Online	Yes
IR 6	Technical Expert on Gender and Climate	National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW)	In-person	Yes
IR 7	Gender and Social Inclusion Expert	International Water Management Institute (IWMI)	Online	Yes
IR 8	National Specialist on Gender, Climate, and Heat Stress	The Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Online	Yes

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### *Comprehensive Analysis of Pakistan's Gender-Inclusive Climate Strategies*

To conduct a comprehensive analysis of Pakistan's gender-inclusive climate strategies, it is essential to analyse key documents, including the National Climate Change Policy of 2021, the Climate Change Gender Action Plan (ccGAP) of 2022, and the National Adaptation Plan spanning 2023. Pakistan's recent climate policies show a strong evolution from merely a rhetorical acknowledgement of gender to increasingly more explicit and operational commitments.

The updated National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) 2021 presents the first significant step in this trajectory. Whereas the first National Climate Change Policy (2012) overlooked references to gender, the NCCP 2021 recognised the differential roles and responsibilities of women and men, and stressed gender mainstreaming across all stakeholders, including ministries, policies, and different levels of government. It enumerates a detailed list of gender-specific actions, mainstreaming women into water, food, energy, and livestock management, creating gender-sensitive criteria and indicators on adaptation, empowering women's groups, and incorporating local and indigenous knowledge possessed by women into adaptation strategies. It also employs strong policy verbs ("adopt rules," "mandatory," "include") and demands gender-responsive budgets, curricula changes and youth involvement (Ministry of Climate Change, 2021).

However, there are lagging operationalisation mechanisms, particularly with no leading agencies, timelines, or mechanisms. Moreover, gender-budgeting is recommended but not operationalised, Climate Change Cells and Implementation Committees are suggested, but no gender centred and focus points are assured. Intersectional issues are still provisional, making occasional mentions to indigenous knowledge and priorities in the evacuation of the elderly and disabled. Overall, the policy lacks a systematic approach to class, rural-urban differences and the danger of Gender Based Violence (GBV). NCCP 2021 is therefore a transition to a new visibility but without binding institutional obligations, financial allocations or coordinated surveillance and reporting of gender outcomes.

The Climate Change Gender Action Plan 2022 (ccGAP) aims to transform these top-level

commitments into action. It is the inaugural specific national agenda to mainstream gender in six key areas of priority, namely in disaster risk reduction, agriculture and food security, forests and biodiversity, integrated coastal management, water and sanitation and energy and transport. It also positions climate change not only as a gender-specific issue but also outlines the disproportional vulnerability of women in sectoral terms, as well as recognises them as agents of change with local expertise. It moves the generalisation of women to a further category of indigenous women, older women and women with disabilities. Action plans are sector-specific and they are constituted by capacity building, policy and management mechanisms, gender balance and adaptation and mitigation, like institutional coordination structures, sectoral gender analysis, women's organisations training and pipeline gender responsive projects (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). Yet again, there is a well-known gap between policy and action. It suggests gender-sensitive resource distribution, but does not impose gender budgetary models or gender-disaggregated climate investment indicators on all climate investments; hard funding pledges, time-related goals and binding obligations are imprecise; and intersecting approaches to class, youth, trans and non-binary individuals or GBV mitigation are not present. In the absence of ring-fenced budgets, compulsory indicators and provincial working groups, ccGAP seems to be an ambitious gender commitment that falters at its execution.

The National Adaptation Plan 2023 (NAP-2023) focuses on gender and social inclusion as the key elements of the national adaptation framework. It takes a two-pronged strategy, committing an entire chapter to "Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion" whilst instilling inclusivity in the vision and values of its work. It singles out several at-risk populations: women, young people, individuals with disabilities, transgender, religious minorities, poor rural families and how climate stress increases the burden of obtaining water, caring for and interrupting the education of the children. Social justice is explicated through two guiding principles, which are "Leave No One Behind" and "Address Inequity" (Ministry of Climate Change & Government of Pakistan, 2023). However, similarly to the previous policies, the gender-based commitments of the NAP tend to aim high. It guarantees focused education, training and

livelihoods assistance, but without special credit lines, timelines and roles of women institutions within the Pakistan Climate Change Council. Gender-responsive budgets and gender-disaggregated indicators are neither required nor prohibited, and the suggested monitoring platforms are mentioned as promising instead of mandatory. The intersectional recognition has been enhanced, though it does not have specific strategies to tackle landless women farmers, indigenous communities, or urban poor women. Together, these three documents can be seen as a path of visibility (NCCP-2021), operational draft (ccGAP-2022) and strategic integration (NAP-2023). Gender equality moves from being sidelined to a cross-cutting principle, and in the NAP, as a separate chapter. In each case, funding and enforceability remain the limited outcomes, while gender budgeting, disaggregated indicators, and mainstreaming as the repeated themes, lacking institutionalisation. However, to translate the intent into transformational intervention, Pakistan must institutionalise gender sensitive budgets and indicators, institutionalise the role of women's bodies, create intersectional statistics and vulnerability indexes, along with GBV protection under the disaster preparedness plans.

### *1. Recognition of Gendered Vulnerabilities in Climate Policy*

All three policies, the National Climate Change Policy 2021 (NCCP 2021), the Climate Change Gender Action Plan 2022 (ccGAP-2022), and the National Adaptation Plan 2023 (NAP-2023), explicitly acknowledge that climate change impacts are not gender-neutral. The NCCP-2021 recognises women as excessively exposed to climate conditions and stresses due to their importance in rural water, food and energy provisioning, livestock management and unpaid care work, thus identifying gendered burdens (Ministry of Climate Change, 2021), ccGAP-2022 goes further to recognise gendered burdens by creating a framework of six priority areas, such as disaster risk reduction, agriculture, water and sanitation, and energy/transport (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). NAP-2023 makes the lens more inclusive, including marginalised women, youth, persons with disabilities, transgender communities and religious minorities, as well as attributes climate vulnerability to structural inequalities, including low human capital and poor labour market

performance (Ministry of Climate Change & Government of Pakistan, 2023).

Yet, this awareness does not translate into effective implementation, with a disjunction between recognition and actual planning, indicating a significant gap in policy execution. While gender impacts are foreseeable, the policies remain inadequate in practical terms. An Interviewed Respondent also highlighted a gap between awareness and implementation, noting that while there is recognition of gender impacts, policies lack effective integration and planning to address these vulnerabilities.

If you see the connection and ask me about it, the people are sensitised, especially the decision-makers, that gender-wise, there is a need to do work on how females are getting affected by climate change. Recognition has a place, but there is no incorporation of planning in the policies. While keeping gender aside, we are at the stage where normal strategies are not even devised or implemented with results.

(IR 1 Interview Transcript 1)

The lack of gender-specific strategies exacerbates the disproportionate impact of climate change on women, reflecting a broader oversight in policy frameworks. Another responses signify how climate change poses significant challenges globally, impacting vulnerable populations disproportionately, with women often bearing a greater burden in disaster scenarios (Interview Respondent 5). And despite policy frameworks, such as the Climate Change Gender Action Plan 2022, launched by the Ministry of Climate Change, the integration of gender considerations remains inconsistent and often insufficient in Pakistan's climate-related policies (Interview Respondent 8).

### *2. Intersectionality and Inclusive Representation*

The path between the NCCP-2021, ccGAP-2022 and NAP-2023 indicates a gradual expansion of the inclusivity framework. NCCP-2021 initiates the issue of women's vulnerability. Yet, it excluded or only sporadically referenced the role of masculinities and intra-household inequalities, and intersectional groups, like indigenous people, landless people or migrants (Ministry of Climate Change, 2021). Taking a step further, ccGAP-2022 mentioned older women and women with disabilities, as well as indigenous women, as a priority stakeholder. It also proposes sector-specific

gender analysis to take action (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). Lastly, NAP-2023 goes even further by integrating Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion into its text (as one of the dedicated chapters, 4.6), adopting the principles of “Leave No One Behind” and “Address Inequity”. It demanded that women must be accorded quotas in joining the disaster risk management bodies, as well as the setting up of gender-based violence helplines in the event of disasters (Ministry of Climate Change & Government of Pakistan, 2023). However, there are still important intersectional breaches. None of the three policies offers any detailed or costed strategies to address the vulnerabilities of existing classes (e.g. landless women farmers), and none of the policies distinguishes the needs of rural women picking fuelwood or the needs of low-income urban women under heat stress with poor Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH). This restricts the policies to operationalise the SDG principle of focusing “furthest behind first”.

The expert also highlighted how the understanding of gender is limited to women and does not include other vulnerable segments of society in policy planning and decision-making. These include diverse groups of people, including women and girls, people with disabilities, transgender, elderly and Indigenous communities, “are not made part of, there is not even an effort to make them part of this whole process” (Interview Respondent 4). Addressing the needs of socially excluded groups, including women from minority communities and individuals with disabilities, ensures equitable access to resources and support during climate emergencies. This inclusive approach fosters community cohesion and resilience.

### 3. *Status of Gender Equality: Cross-Cutting Principle or Stand-Alone Pillar*

Throughout the policy cycle, there is a visible shift from rhetorical add-ons to mainstreamed frameworks. Gender equality is a cross-cutting principle in NCCP-2021, which requires gender to be mainstreamed into the national and regional initiatives in climate change efforts. The requirements are integrated within a larger scope of sectoral action, but do not present a standalone operational plan (Ministry of Climate Change, 2021). By contrast, ccGAP-2022 specifically aims to mainstream six priority areas, thus merging the separate plan with the cross-cutting strategy (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). Instead, NAP-2023 takes a two-

fold approach because gender is not only a pillar standing on its own (Chapter 4.6) but also a principle to be applied in all other areas of adaptation, including agriculture-water, urban resilience and human capital (Ministry of Climate Change & Government of Pakistan, 2023). This development is a good international practice in the context of the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan; however, it lags and requires provincial and line ministries to accommodate Chapter 4.6 within their own sectoral budget and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) mechanisms.

As the National Expert on Gender and Climate critique existing policies as gender-blind, emphasising the necessity for targeted gender considerations to effectively address women's vulnerabilities in climate resilience efforts. The response highlighted the policies and plans as being “not really gender-responsive” and lying somewhere between gender-blind and gender-neutral while also arguing that “gender neutrality doesn't help...We have to integrate gender consideration and focus on women within the policies” (IR-8, Interview Transcript 8). In forming policies, it is important to align different aspects and ensure gender considerations that are culturally sensitive and contextually applicable. While there has been an advancement in integrating a gender lens when it comes to policy-making, the lack of implementation remains a recurring theme.

### 4. *Gender-Responsive Provisions: Concrete Actions versus Rhetorical Commitments*

All three policy documents contain gender-specific provisions but vary in their operational strength. NCCP-2021 enumerates different gender-specific measures; mainstreaming gender attitudes and the importance of women in managing resources, making gender-responsive budgets, and including gender in the curricula (Ministry of Climate Change, 2021). Yet, they remain mostly aspirational due lack of implementation rules, timelines, and enforcement mechanisms. For example, the section “Adopt rules under which all MoCC projects must take gender considerations into account” is rhetorically sound but procedurally weak. The ccGAP-2022 represents a partial corrective and offers sector-specific action plans that are aimed at capacity building, institutional mechanisms, gender balancing, and adaptation measures (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). It

includes: developing sector-specific gender analysis reports, training women's organisations and gender focal points, and enhancing a series of gender-responsive projects, when in reality the processes lack legally binding mandates for ministries. Furthermore, the NAP-2023 continues to place concrete measures, such as the quotas of women in disaster-risk management authorities, helplines against GBV, gender-neutral education, and mapping stakeholders with timeframes and responsible entities (Ministry of Climate Change & Government of Pakistan, 2023). This signals a transition from high-level intention to operational specificity. However, financing and enforcement remain weak since their provision depends heavily on provincial governments and their capacity to execute. Together, even though gender visibility has improved but implementation remains a recurring theme.

One of the respondents highlights the need for the integration of gender-responsive approaches in climate policies based on empirical evidence of heightened vulnerabilities among women and children in disaster scenarios. This imperative is needed for the policies that not only acknowledge but also effectively address gender disparities in climate resilience strategies.

There's a lot of research on this already...women and children are 14 times more likely to die in the case of a natural disaster or climate disaster...You cannot argue against the fact that there are benefits when it comes to integrating gender-responsive approaches...

(IR-6 Interview Transcript 6)

Similarly, another respondent largely emphasised the advancements in gender integration within climate strategies, and also recognised the need for robust implementation to realise the full potential of gender-responsive policies (Interview Respondent 7). This suggests a positive trajectory towards inclusivity but underscores ongoing challenges in achieving comprehensive gender equality in climate adaptation and mitigation.

### ***5. Institutional and Implementation Mechanisms***

The institutional architecture for the gender-climate nexus shows a clear trajectory. NCCP-2021 refers to the formation of the Climate Change Policy Implementation Committees and the Climate Change Fund and Authority under the 2017 Act at the federal and provincial levels

(Ministry of Climate Change, 2021). Yet, it lacks a mandate to form dedicated gender focal points in each cell and gender expertise within the Implementation Committee. The policy represents the Ministry for Women's Development as discretionary rather than guaranteed. Further, ccGAP-2022 calls upon structural institutional coordination on gender focal points (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). It signals the formation of the National Gender and Climate Change Committee, collecting gender-disaggregated data, and various monitoring and evaluation frameworks. However, no binding accountability mechanism compels provincial or sectoral bodies to include gender budgets or markers. NAP-2023 improves this by defining structural coordination through the Ministry of Climate Change & Environmental Coordination, provincial and local governments, and the Pakistan Climate Change Council. Table 4.6.1 names accountable agencies for gender and social inclusion, like NDMA, PDMAs, DDMA, MoE, and MoI, while section 5.2 sets out a reporting process and an M&E flowchart (Ministry of Climate Change & Government of Pakistan, 2023). Still, the plan leaves enforcing mechanisms, dedicated funding and a staffed National Gender-Climate Unit.

As an interview response, another important barrier that came forward was the institutional inertia that exists within government bodies. Regardless of having policy mandates and policy frameworks for gender mainstreaming, the organisational and bureaucratic processes often prioritise the conventional and developmental agendas over gender-specific interventions (Interview Respondent 4). This institutional inertia hinders the effective completion and implementation of gender-responsive strategies, enabling gender inequalities that fester into and weaken climate-resilient initiatives. Restructuring institutional practices to incorporate gender considerations into decision-making frameworks is primary for achieving sustainable and inclusive development. Moreover, Pakistan's Consultant on Climate Policy in the World Bank also acknowledges governmental efforts in policy formulation but highlights significant challenges in translating policy intentions into tangible outcomes at the local level. The respondent mentioned that the government of Pakistan has launched the Climate Change Gender Action Plan shows that gender considerations are part of policy

design. "When it comes to implementation, especially at the local level, that is where it becomes challenging" (Interview Respondent 5). This gap stresses the need for strengthened implementation strategies that prioritise gender-responsive approaches in climate resilience initiatives.

#### **6. Participation and Decision-Making Power**

Meaningful participation of gender, including women and different marginalised groups, in climate governance is a recurring subject across Pakistan's climate policies. Overall, Pakistan's gender-responsive efforts and trajectory from NCCP-2021 to NAP-2023 show a shift from rhetorical acknowledgement to evolving institutionalisation. National Climate Change Policy 2021 demands incorporating enhanced women's roles in climate decision-making and valuing their indigenous knowledge, but there is a lack of quotas, selection criteria, or formal mechanisms to ensure representation in significant bodies such as the Climate Change Implementation Committee or sectoral Climate Cells. In this regard, the Climate Change Gender Action Plan 2022 (ccGAP-2022) takes a stronger step by advocating "enhance women's participation in climate decision-making and implementation," promoting training for women's institutions and gender focal points, and recommending an organisational coordination structure (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). Yet, it still falls short of mandating women's representation in national or provincial committees or Disaster Risk Management authorities.

Including and representing more women in decision-making processes reflects diverse perspectives and needs, advancing resilient and adaptive communities. This inclusivity and diversity in governance ensure that climate adaptation is more comprehensive and effective. As emphasised, "It will improve governance as more women will be included in decision making and forming it more inclusive with diversifying community representation" (IR-6, Interview Transcript 6). Hence, inclusive governance, facilitated by gender diversity in decision-making processes, is a direct reflection of varying needs and perspectives, and is key to strengthened and adaptive communities. This emphasises the value of integrating female perspectives into policy processes to ensure a comprehensive

understanding and effective mitigation of climate impacts.

Further, the National Adaptation Plan 2023 (NAP-2023) takes the key role in embedding in Chapter 4.6, "Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion," and presenting practical actions such as quotas for women in district and municipal DRM bodies, forming GBV helplines, and gender mainstreaming into school curricula signalling various agencies like NDMA, DDMA, PDMA, MoE, MoI for operational intent (Ministry of Climate Change & Government of Pakistan, 2023). However, the lack of enforcement mechanisms risks the participation goals, and without binding quotas, funded leadership programs, women's decision-making would remain concentrated within bureaucratic structures. By focusing on research and data-driven solutions, policymakers can better address gender-specific vulnerabilities and tailor interventions. The national expert on gender and climate from the ADB had also underlined an increasing need to involve women in policymaking. This enables diverse insights and experiences, leading to targeted responses against specific vulnerabilities faced by women and girls. "My priority would be ... engaging them at the policy level, and getting first-hand knowledge from them" (Interview Respondent 8).

#### **7. Knowledge, Data and Evidence Gaps**

Other important elements remain advocacy and technical education of women to strengthen inclusivity and diversity in policy formulation. In Pakistan's climate policymaking, there is recognition but insufficient response to knowledge and data gaps on gender-climate adaptation. The National Climate Change Policy (2021) extensively calls for a "comprehensive study of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change" and developing gender-sensitive indicators and criteria. That shows a strong textual commitment, but the documents neither assign a lead organisation nor allocate the funding. This plays a pivotal role in overcoming implementation challenges by advocating for research-based and data-driven policies and ensuring that gender considerations are prioritised in decision-making processes.

The Climate Change Gender Action Plan, however, advances context-specific research and development, sector-specific gender analysis as part of its four action themes: capacity building, policy

mechanisms, gender balance, and adaptation/mitigation (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). But, there is still a lack of publicly available summaries and a baseline research methodology and conduct in project designs. The data deficit consequences were acknowledged by the NAP 2023, stating that “lack of data on vulnerable populations leads to their exclusion,” and promising a web-based dashboard and “Pakistan Transparency Platform” for monitoring and evaluation (Ministry of Climate Change & Government of Pakistan, 2023). M&E process is set out in Section 5.2 of the policy, but there is no official indicator list, funding for surveys or a procedural timeline for producing intersectional baselines (gender × income × age × disability × location).

#### **8. Capacity Building, Sectoral Integration, and Protection Systems**

Within Pakistan’s climate policy architecture, gender mainstreaming and capacity building are interlinked themes to shift rhetorical recognition to partial implementation of gender-responsive climate action. The National Climate Change Policy (2021) highlights “increasing understanding of gender roles and responsibilities” and promoting gender integration and climate action into school curricula and livestock management. The Climate Change Gender Action Plan 2022 (ccGAP-2022) also explicitly prioritise training for women’s organisations, sector-specific professionals and gender focal points to work across six priority sectors, aiming to institutionalise gender capacity (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). The National Adaptation Plan (2023) further sets out capacity building in its “Gender, Youth and Social Inclusion” and educating and training vulnerable groups in DRM initiatives. Additionally, gender integration into sectoral priorities and inclusion of GBV protection also interlink the need for progress and persistent gaps in Pakistan’s climate policy landscape. NCCP 2021 mainstreams gender considerations across sectors, ccGAP operationalise this mainstreaming across six key sectors: disaster risk reduction, agriculture, forests, coasts, water, and energy signalling interventions under four themes: capacity, policy mechanisms, gender balance, and adaptation/mitigation and finally NAP 2023 embeds gender mainstreaming across all adaptation pillars with a dedicated chapter (4.6) linking gender, youth and their social

inclusion to urban resilience, water-agriculture nexus and human capital. NAP-2023 also remained first to introduce GBV mechanisms, indicating a shift towards GBV prevention and climate resilience. Despite this progress, financial backing and time-bound targets are needed for operational intent, institutional clarity and measurable outcomes in the shape of enhanced capacity building, sectoral integration, and protection systems.

#### **9. Policy-Practice Gaps and Implementation Risks**

In all the policies, there has been a strong rhetorical recognition, yet a lack of implementation and weak operationalisation remain persistent challenges. There is a call for gender-responsive budgets, gender-disaggregated mainstreaming and indicators in all three policies, but none provided a binding mechanism to ensure compliance. NCCP mandates all the projects of the Ministry of Climate Change to take gender considerations, but there is no approval channel. Similarly, ccGAP called for resource allocation through gender-responsive pipeline projects but did not allocate a budget or a national unit for implementation. NAP 2023 enlisted quotas, GBV helplines and accountable entities, but left assured budget lines for enforcement. This creates weak institutional mechanisms with ineffective implementation. With scarce funds and a vulnerable budget floor, gender initiatives cannot be streamlined. Similarly, without centralised gender indicator sets and binding quotas, progress cannot be tracked, and women’s representation cannot be ensured and mainstreamed.

#### **10. Progress, Continuity or Regression: A Comparative Policy Trajectory**

As discussed, there is a clear policy trajectory from NCCP-2021 to ccGAP-2022 and NAP-2023. In terms of visibility, NCCP-2021 indicates a significant improvement. It dedicates a sub-section to gender, enlists mainstreaming measures and demands gender-responsive indicators and budgeting. Yet, it remained a policy statement with constrained implementation. As a response, ccGAP worked to fill the gap by forming the first national plan to operationalise gender-responsiveness and gender mainstreaming across six priority sectors (IUCN & MoCC, 2022). It came up with sector-specific action plans, women’s

organisations and their trainings, and pipeline projects for gender mainstreaming. NAP 2023 further mapped a high-level adaptation plan, which included gender as a cross-cutting principle and dedicated an exclusive chapter (4.6) to it. This represents improvement and continuity rather than regression. Gender is no more a peripheral but a core part of the climate adaptation framework. Therefore, NCCP formed a strategic framework, ccGAP provided an operational blueprint, and the NAP mainstreamed gender into the national adaptation plan. While there has been an advancement in integrating a gender lens when it comes to policy-making, the lack of implementation remains a recurring theme. Policies are moving in an inclusive direction, but there are no practical steps to realise the intended outputs. There is a commitment to gender disaggregated data, research and development, quotas and mainstreaming, but lack an appropriate funding, and it remains weakly enforced. The policy language is lagging behind financing and accountability mechanisms. Therefore, there is a positive evolution on paper, but it has yet to be truly gender-responsive in practice.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING GENDER-RESPONSIVE CLIMATE ACTION

In practical terms, the first and foremost step is to make gender considerations operational through Gender Action Plans and mandating the Gender Assessment Checklist for all climate adaptation projects that must be approved with a dedicated budget. There must also be a compliance body under the MoCC responsible for issuing gender rules and reporting to Climate Change Cells, having a gender focal person with Terms of Reference (TORs) and a specific budget for audits, training, and outreach. The implementation committees must include a representation and coordination from the Ministry of Women's Development, gender experts and women's rights. To commit to financial accountability, there is a need for gender-responsive budgeting and setting a minimum percentage of funds for gender-responsive and gender-sensitive adaptation. In parallel, a set of national gender indicators must be set to integrate the Measurement, Reporting and Verification/ Nationally Determined Contribution (MRV/NDC) reporting system and an annual Gender and Climate Progress Report to

assure accountability and implementation. Lastly, there is a need for extensive research and intersectional data to mandate GBV protocols, including helplines, shelters, and referral systems funded within Disaster Risk and Management DRM. This needs an extension and capacity building for climate experts on gender analysis and GBV-related risk mitigation through training programs. Together, these reforms will help Pakistan's climate governance and climate security in an institutional setting.

However, for operative implementation, there is a need for political will and capacity for effective and impactful policy-making. While interviewing different stakeholders, the role of leadership and political prioritisation for gender equity emerged as critical factors in enhancing the effectiveness of climate policies. Different experts highlighted the need for women's leadership and integration of gender considerations in policy planning and budgeting processes. "The key challenges include lack of women leadership and political priority on climate policy" (IR-5, Interview Transcript 5). There is a growing need for women's leadership and local governance to drive effective climate actions. Policy frameworks that prioritise gender equity and enable women to make their voices heard in decision-making processes are essential building blocks for developing more inclusive pathways toward sustainable development. Integrating measures like engaging women in policy-making and leadership, political prioritisation for effective policy implementation, gender-inclusive technical education and advocacy, empowerment through local engagement and ensuring social inclusion and accessibility, is crucial for addressing the unique vulnerabilities of women and girls to climate change in Pakistan. By focusing on research and data-driven solutions, policymakers can better address gender-specific vulnerabilities and tailor interventions. The national expert on gender and climate from the ADB had also underlined an increasing need to involve women in policymaking. This enables diverse insights and experiences, leading to targeted responses against specific vulnerabilities faced by women and girls. "My priority would be ... engaging them at the policy level, and getting first-hand knowledge from them" (Interview Respondent 8).

Other highlighted elements remain advocacy and technical education of women to strengthen

inclusivity and diversity in policy formulation. In bringing effectiveness and talking about specific measures to promote gender inclusivity in climate resilience, there is a need to enhance women's participation in technical education and empowerment in economics. As stated, "Promote technical education among women ... beyond traditional roles" and "Create employment opportunities in relevant sectors" (Interview Respondent 8). By empowering and diversifying skill sets and income sources, women are better able to withstand and recover from climate-related impacts.

Local engagement emerges as a critical factor in enhancing the efficacy of climate strategies. By understanding local contexts and involving community stakeholders in policy design, policymakers can foster ownership and sustainable practices that resonate with local needs and capabilities. There is a need to advocate for a system where local communities have a significant role in decision-making and implementation, emphasising the importance of Community-Based Adaptation (CBA) rooted in indigenous knowledge. This approach supports inclusive disaster risk management and ensures that resources and policies are tailored to the specific needs of different regions. As quoted from the response:

Vulnerability is anchored in access to health, access to education, access to better infrastructure, and access to representation at the local level... The only way that will happen is if there is a representation of those people at the local level so they can come up with solutions that are... Community-Based Adaptation. It is based on indigenous knowledge, and it leads to inclusive disaster risk management.

(IR-5 Interview Transcript 5)

Overall, there is a concerted need for efforts and aid in institutional change, building capacity and foremost empowering women's leadership in the political realm. Curbing these barriers also needs comprehensive long-term and short-term approaches, for instance, working for stable and reformed governance structures, institutional modifications, resource mobilisation, coordination among stakeholders, community engagement, education and promotion of gender-sensitive policy frameworks and gender parity in decision-making roles. By incorporating female voices and mainstreaming gender considerations at all levels

of policy planning and decision-making, the development and implementation of responsive climate action can be achieved. This affirms a holistic approach to climate adaptation and resilience that ensures equitable environmental security for all members of the community.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of Pakistan's gender-responsive climate policies unveils an advancing but patchy trajectory from acknowledgement to action. Over the past decade, the National Climate Change Policy (2021), the Climate Change Gender Action Plan (2022), and the National Adaptation Plan (2023) have progressively recognised gender as a cross-cutting principle critical for sustainable climate governance. Together, they indicate a visible shift from rhetorical inclusion to a more structured awareness of gender-based vulnerabilities. However, this rhetorical progress remains unmatched with an adequate and equivalent implementation. The policies express persistent gaps in institutional capacity, monetary allocation, and monitoring mechanisms, stalling the implementation of gender commitments. As a consequence, the vulnerable segment, particularly the poor, rural and marginalised women, remain on the periphery of adaptation and resilience planning. The article highlights the recognition of women's disproportionate vulnerabilities to climate risks within policies, but fails to identify enforceable mechanisms. The analysis shows the absence of gender-disaggregated data, outlined indicators, and gender-responsive budgeting. Moreover, the interviews with policymakers and experts reveal the presence of institutional inertia and weak political prioritisation. There is also a lack of binding quotas and women's leadership roles within structures of climate governance that limit gender inclusion and the potential of climate resilience.

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that gender remains inadequately intersectional in practice. The NAP 2023 introduces an inclusivity layout for youth, persons with disabilities, and transgender individuals, but overlooks the spatial inequities of landless women farmers, indigenous communities, and low-income urban populations. Bridging this gap demands more systematic data generation, institutional collaboration, and accountability instruments. It is also inevitable to address this; gender sensitivity needs to be increasingly

embedded in every aspect of climate policy, from preliminary planning to final implementation, to ensure that women's voices are not just heard but central to decision-making processes. To translate gender responsiveness into concrete outcomes, respective reforms are imperative. Primarily, Pakistan's climate governance must institutionalise gender budgeting and integrate measurable gender indicators within its climate finance framework. There is a need for a national compliance mechanism where the Ministry of Climate Change should integrate gender perspectives across provincial and sectoral climate agendas. Secondly, there must be technical gender focal persons and inter-ministerial coordination bodies, including the Ministry of Women's Development, to enhance accountability. Thirdly, climate councils must institutionalise women's binding quotas within disaster risk management authorities and adaptation committees. This would ensure women's informed policy formulation and implementation within climate governance. Lastly, there is a need to strengthen women's adaptive capacity and community engagement through the enhancement of technical education, digital literacy, and economic empowerment. The enhancement of local participation through community-based adaptation (CBA) programs will also help improve indigenous knowledge and create context-sensitive and equitable solutions. As well, integrating GBV response and protection mechanisms within disaster preparedness frameworks would improve the resilience and security of vulnerable women during climate-induced crises.

In conclusion, Pakistan's gender-responsive climate policy frameworks demonstrate clear policy progression but limited practical transformation. Future progress will be contingent on the alignment of political will, fiscal reform, and inclusive governance. Improving accountability mechanisms, gender-responsive budgeting, and participatory decision-making can shift the results from rhetorical integration to real empowerment. To form a truly transformative and gender-equitable climate adaptation, women's participation in policy-planning, intersectional representation, and local engagement is imperative.

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