

# UNPACKING GENDER INTEGRATION IN NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS (NDCs) OF ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES

Photo: UN Women/Antoine Raab

*The first-ever ‘global-stocktake’ assessment report has confirmed that global emissions are currently deviated from the pathways required to limit global warming to 1.5 degree Celsius above pre-industrial levels in line with the Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2023).<sup>1</sup>*

There is a global urgency to address climate change and reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions; it is especially pressing in Asia and the Pacific region which accounted for more than half of the global GHG emissions in 2020.<sup>2</sup> Despite alarming trends in the region, a recent report has raised concerns that countries in the region are not on track with their nationally determined contributions (NDC) commitments to reduce emissions and achieve the desired 1.5-degree pathway.<sup>3</sup> The region stands at a critical juncture and as pressure builds to shift towards low-carbon economies, there is also a growing imperative to make sure that the pathway is inclusive. This is crucial as climate change exacerbates inequalities. Social factors such as gender, class, caste, ethnicity, age, and disability all influence one’s ability to cope with climate impacts. The Paris Agreement establishes that actions to address climate change must ‘respect, promote and consider’ the rights of different groups including women and ensure gender equality and women’s empowerment.<sup>4</sup>

The Lima Work Programme on Gender also calls for gender-responsive climate plans and policies.<sup>5</sup> In view of this, the integration of gender in NDCs is essential to advance inclusive climate commitments that leave no one behind.

The recent NDC Synthesis Report 2023 highlights that countries are increasingly addressing gender issues in their climate commitments.<sup>6</sup> In the Asia-Pacific region, out of the 49 countries<sup>7</sup> with NDCs developed and updated by 2023, 37 of them have included gender in one way or the other. Seventeen out of these 37 countries ensured they finalized their NDCs through a gender-responsive process by conducting consultations with relevant stakeholders and ministries. For example: Georgia consulted with civic organizations working on climate change and gender issues during the preparation of its NDC in 2021.<sup>8</sup> Tajikistan also specifically consulted with civil society and the Committee on Women’s Affairs and Family while updating its NDC in 2021.<sup>9</sup> This notable progress in gender integration has been a gradual process since the last review in 2021.<sup>10</sup> Between September 2021 to November 2023, 24 countries of the Asia-Pacific region submitted updated NDCs and 19 countries have built on their existing references to gender or added gender aspects for the first time.

1. <https://unfccc.int/documents/631600>
2. <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2023/race-net-zero-accelerating-climate-action-asia-and-pacific>
3. <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2023/2023-review-climate-ambition-asia-and-pacific-just-transition-towards-regional-net-zero>
4. [https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris\\_nov\\_2015/application/pdf/paris\\_agreement\\_english.pdf](https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_english.pdf)
5. [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2019\\_13a01E.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2019_13a01E.pdf)
6. [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023\\_12.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cma2023_12.pdf)
7. The analysis refers to 49 ESCAP members states of the Asia-Pacific region. [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Assessment%20of%20AP%20Climate%20Ambition\\_Final\\_update.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Assessment%20of%20AP%20Climate%20Ambition_Final_update.pdf)
8. [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC2022-06/NDC%20Georgia\\_ENG%20WEB-approved.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC2022-06/NDC%20Georgia_ENG%20WEB-approved.pdf)
9. <https://policy.asiapacificenergy.org/sites/default/files/Updated%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contributions%20of%20NDC%29%28EN%29.pdf>
10. [https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Assessment%20of%20AP%20Climate%20Ambition\\_Final\\_update.pdf](https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/Assessment%20of%20AP%20Climate%20Ambition_Final_update.pdf)

While this trend of increasing gender integration in NDCs in the Asia-Pacific region is notable, the degree and extent of integration vary significantly between the countries, with only a few setting out comprehensive strategies to address the interlinkage of gender and climate change. Standout countries from this year's review include Pakistan and Sri Lanka as their latest NDC submissions highlight how to address gender across multiple climate-relevant sectors. Others such as Armenia and Tonga lack robust strategies to address gender and only report that their planning process was gender-responsive, with no further details. Despite this, gender references are important and set the foundation for further strategies and commitments to comprehensively link gender and climate action in the future.



## A CLOSE ANALYSIS OF GENDER REFERENCES IN ASIA-PACIFIC NDCS

Of the 37 countries with NDCs containing gender references, eight of them identify women as vulnerable to climate change while ten countries recognize women as agents of change and decision makers crucial in driving climate action. Indonesia's NDC of 2022 mentions the importance of amplifying women's capacity and leadership roles in climate action.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Kyrgyzstan, in its updated NDC of 2021 addresses the vulnerability experienced by women due to climate change but also acknowledges the necessity to view them as 'active actors' in climate action.<sup>12</sup> The Federated States of Micronesia's NDC of 2022 has set a high benchmark by adopting a gender-responsive approach at a sectoral level, particularly in agriculture and energy. It has a specific goal to increase the number of women in senior positions in the energy sector and reiterates its commitment to ensure gender balance in design, planning and implementation of climate action.<sup>13</sup> Nepal's NDC of 2020 recognizes gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) as one of the cross-cutting areas and stipulates that local governments will prepare and implement gender-responsive adaptation plans by 2030 with focus on not just women but also the differently abled, children, senior citizens, youth, indigenous people, economically marginalized communities, and those residing in climate-vulnerable areas.<sup>14</sup> Box I presents the case of Vanuatu which has comprehensive integration of gender in its NDC and recognizes women as agents of change.

### Box I: Vanuatu<sup>15</sup>

Vanuatu's NDC acknowledges that women and girls are at a heightened risk of adverse social, economic and health impacts of climate change. The NDC also recognizes them as 'impactful agents of change' especially in driving adaptation and mitigation activities due to their prominent roles in core climate change sectors such as agriculture, livestock management, energy, forestry, and water management. It has included Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI) as one of the adaptation priority areas and commits to ensure gender equity and responsiveness during implementation of climate action. Moreover, it recognizes the diversity of women and girls and commits to include a focus on widows, women-headed households, adolescent girls and elderly women and those with disabilities. The targets and indicators under other adaptation priority areas such as infrastructure, water, agriculture also prominently include gender.

11. [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-09/23.09.2022\\_Enhanced%20NDC%20Indonesia.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-09/23.09.2022_Enhanced%20NDC%20Indonesia.pdf)  
12. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/%D0%9F%D0%9D%D0%A3%D0%92%20ENG%20%D0%BE%D1%82%2008.10.2021.pdf>  
13. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-10/Updated%20NDC%20of%20the%20MICRONESIA.pdf>  
14. [https://climate.mohp.gov.np/attachments/article/167/Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20\(NDC\)%20-%202020.pdf](https://climate.mohp.gov.np/attachments/article/167/Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution%20(NDC)%20-%202020.pdf)  
15. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-08/Vanuatu%20NDC%20Revised%20and%20Enhanced.pdf>

**14 out of the 37 countries** explicitly highlight gender in adaptation activities. Currently, only Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Solomon Islands and Kiribati integrate gender in both adaptation and mitigation. Cambodia's 2021 NDC update stands out as a best practice example. It coordinated stakeholder engagement with line ministries to finalize mitigation and adaptation activities to be added in the revised NDC by creating a standard template

with a scoring system which also included gender as an indicator.<sup>16</sup> Other countries such as Kazakhstan, Sri Lanka, Turkmenistan, Vanuatu mention their plan to ensure women's participation in the planning process, and decision-making of adaptation activities. Box II highlights Turkmenistan's effort to integrate gender in adaptation activities.

## Box II: Turkmenistan<sup>17</sup>

The National Action Plan on Gender Equality in Turkmenistan for 2021-2025, is the national strategy of Turkmenistan to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women, which is also applicable to the implementation of climate change projects. Turkmenistan considers gender equality as an important element in the implementation of local adaptation measures and ensures that decision-making and planning process are inclusive. As part of the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) project, *Supporting climate-resilient livelihoods in agricultural communities in drought prone areas of Turkmenistan*, it also organized seminars to raise awareness of women on the adaptation planning process to improve local adaptation plans through their participation. This solidifies Turkmenistan's commitment to gender equality especially in climate adaptation and its focus on the role of women as agents of change as mentioned in its NDC.

### NORMATIVE COMMITMENTS ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN NDCS

Few countries in the Asia-Pacific region have linked their normative gender equality commitments to their NDCs. This includes references to gender equality as a guiding principle of climate action, empowerment of women, gender-sensitive programming or gender mainstreaming in general. For example, Timor Leste's NDC affirms that empowerment of girls and women is essential for climate action, Pakistan considers gender-sensitive programming as one of its guiding principles, Solomon Islands prioritizes gender considerations in planning and implementation of climate action and Indonesia considers ensuring gender equality as one of its obligations in climate action. Interestingly, no country in the region has yet linked their normative commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), nor their commitments to the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission of the Status of Women Session 66 (CSW66) on Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes to their NDCs.



Photo: UN Women/ Nguyen Linh Vinh Quoc

16. [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/20201231\\_NDC\\_Update\\_Cambodia.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/20201231_NDC_Update_Cambodia.pdf)

17. [https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2023-01/NDC\\_Turkmenistan\\_12-05-2022\\_approv%20by%20Decree\\_Eng.pdf](https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2023-01/NDC_Turkmenistan_12-05-2022_approv%20by%20Decree_Eng.pdf)

Among the countries that highlight their commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment in climate action, only a few elaborate how they will achieve their commitments at a sectoral level. One example is Nauru. Nauru's NDC specifies its strategy to increase participation of women in the energy sector through capacity building.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Sri Lanka prioritizes gender-responsive strategies to enhance participation, increase funding and fully materialize gender-specific skills and capabilities for climate adaptation activities.<sup>19</sup> It

specifically focuses on technology and knowledge transfer to implement adaptation measures in the livestock sector by considering gender-sensitivity. Notably, in its 2021 NDC update, Cambodia provides actionable pathways to implement gender mainstreaming in climate commitments; for many countries in this region this is one of the crucial next steps. Box III describes Pakistan's action plans to ensure gender mainstreaming in climate action.

### Box III: Pakistan<sup>20</sup>

Pakistan has made significant strides in integrating gender and climate both at policy and institutional levels through its updated NDC in 2021. It recognizes gender-sensitive programming as a guiding principle and gender-equality as one of its cross-cutting themes.

The National Climate Change Gender Action Plan (ccGAP) published in 2022 has been formulated and finalized through an inclusive process to mainstream gender strategies in climate action across key economic sectors of the country. It has laid out a comprehensive plan for gender mainstreaming actions and potential targets across sectors such as agriculture, forestry, land-use change, water, energy, disaster management, waste, health, research, and knowledge management. The primary focus lies on capacity building, increasing investments, enhancing participation in decision-making, implementing legal reforms favoring women's land ownership, improving access to loans and technology, and raising awareness including sensitizing men to prevent violence and assault. Pakistan has also embedded gender-responsive practices in its ongoing programs and projects and is committed to collecting gender-disaggregated data to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation efforts.



Photo: UN Women/SaiKat Mojumde

18. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Nauru%20Updated%20NDC%20pdf.pdf>

19. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Amendmend%20to%20the%20Updated%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contributions%20of%20Sri%20Lanka.pdf>

20. <https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/NDC/2022-06/Pakistan%20Updated%20NDC%202021.pdf>

## FINANCING FOR AND MONITORING OF GENDER COMMITMENTS IN NDCS

Of the 37 Asia-Pacific countries with NDCs which include gender references, only eight of them refer to the integration of gender in climate budgeting and financing. In its revised NDC, Vanuatu states its commitment for gender-responsive budgeting for climate change that specifically prioritizes climate financing tools for women-led grassroots initiatives. Similarly, Fiji, in its NDC, commits to including gender as a key component when 'programming finance' and Sri Lanka focuses on fostering women's participation during budget allocations to ensure gender-responsive actions. Box IV highlights the case of Sri Lanka and its focus on integrating gender in climate finance.

There is also negligible reference to gender integration in the measurement, reporting, and verification (MRV) system of NDCs in the region. Only nine out of the 37 countries have referred to the collection of gender-disaggregated data in climate projects or included gender in the MRV process. For example: Kazakhstan explicitly refers to the inclusion of gender in its MRV processes. Sri Lanka also refers to the engagement of women in the planning and monitoring of its NDCs. Pakistan has several programs under implementation that intend to generate gender data sets to supplement the monitoring and evaluation process.

### Box IV: Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's updated NDC in 2021 comprehensively presents gender mainstreaming strategies for climate action. It underscores the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment as prerequisites for successful implementation of the Paris Agreement. The NDC recognizes that gender-responsive strategies that consider differentiated needs of men and women will be instrumental to "improve access to knowledge, technology and financing to create enabling conditions for adaptation" and gender-responsive NDCs can create equal opportunities for both men and women to benefit from "new technologies, climate-smart production, and water management practices" for improved agricultural productivity, food security and income. It acknowledges the need to harness and tap into the vast array of knowledge, experience, and potential of women in climate action.

The NDC focuses on developing gender-responsive actions and ensuring their implementation through allocation of budgets and resources and increasing women's participation in planning and monitoring.

There is a positive trajectory among the Asia-Pacific countries towards recognizing and addressing the interlinkage of gender and climate change in their NDCs. The inclusion of gender by 37 out of 49 countries with NDCs reflects a growing commitment to ensuring gender-responsive and inclusive climate action. There is also an increasing shift from the narrative of women as a vulnerable group towards recognizing their role in driving climate action.

However, amidst the overall progress, the analysis also reveals variations in the depth and extent of gender integration. While there are countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia with noteworthy action plans to accompany their gender equality commitments, the majority of the countries in the region make

minimal references to gender. There is a need for a comprehensive approach to gender integration in climate policies and action across the region. The focus must shift towards creating detailed gender-responsive strategies that also reflect diversity within women and girls, including gender issues in mitigation activities, strong linkages between normative gender equality and climate change commitments, and financing and MRV systems that are needed to ensure robust action delivers on both gender and climate outcomes.