

Impact Of Climate Change On Women In South Asia A Need For Immediate Legislation

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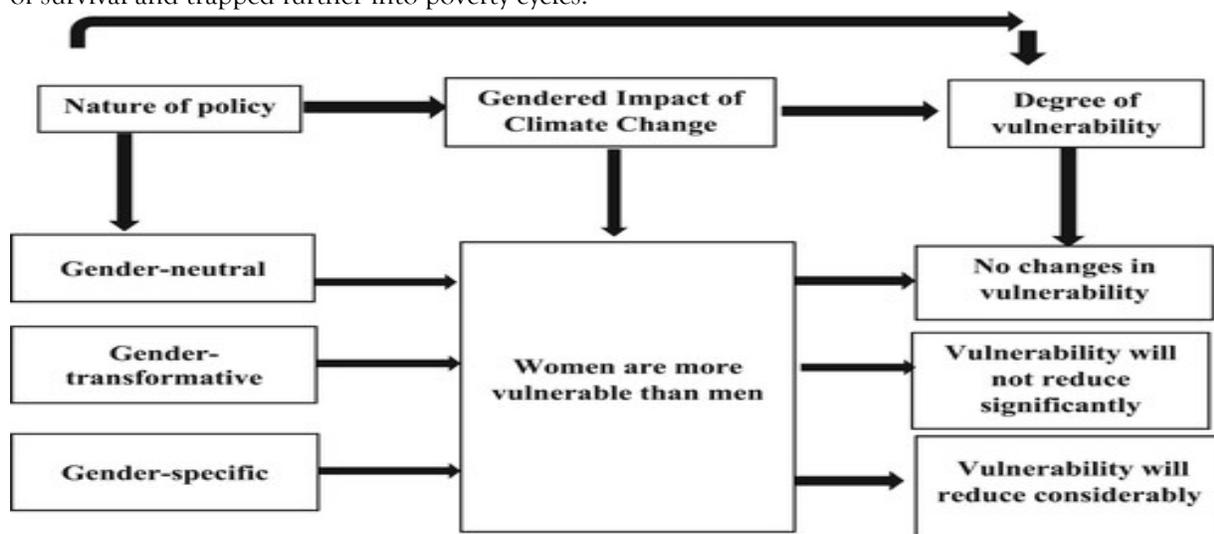
Abstract

Climate change poses an escalating threat to women in South Asia, deepening pre-existing gender inequalities and exposing millions to heightened risks of displacement, violence, health crises, and economic marginalization. This paper investigates the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change across India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, emphasizing the critical gap in legal protections and policy responses. Using qualitative analysis and secondary data from international reports, national policy documents, and comparative statistics, the study reveals that while women play a vital role in sustaining household and community resilience, they remain largely excluded from formal climate governance and adaptation strategies. This study illustrates an extreme failure in the gender-sensitive disaster planning, access to land rights, and funding of climate financing. An inter-nation study indicates lack of legally stipulated obligations and the institutional support networks which are underfinanced. The paper demands speedy passing of the law where the rights of women have been mainstreamed into the law of climate- accountability, representation and resilience. Such reform is essential without which the adaptation of climate in South Asia will remain incomplete and unfair.

Keywords: Climate justice, South Asia, gender and climate change, women rights, environmental laws, disaster risk, displacement, land rights, climate susceptible and feminist policy reform

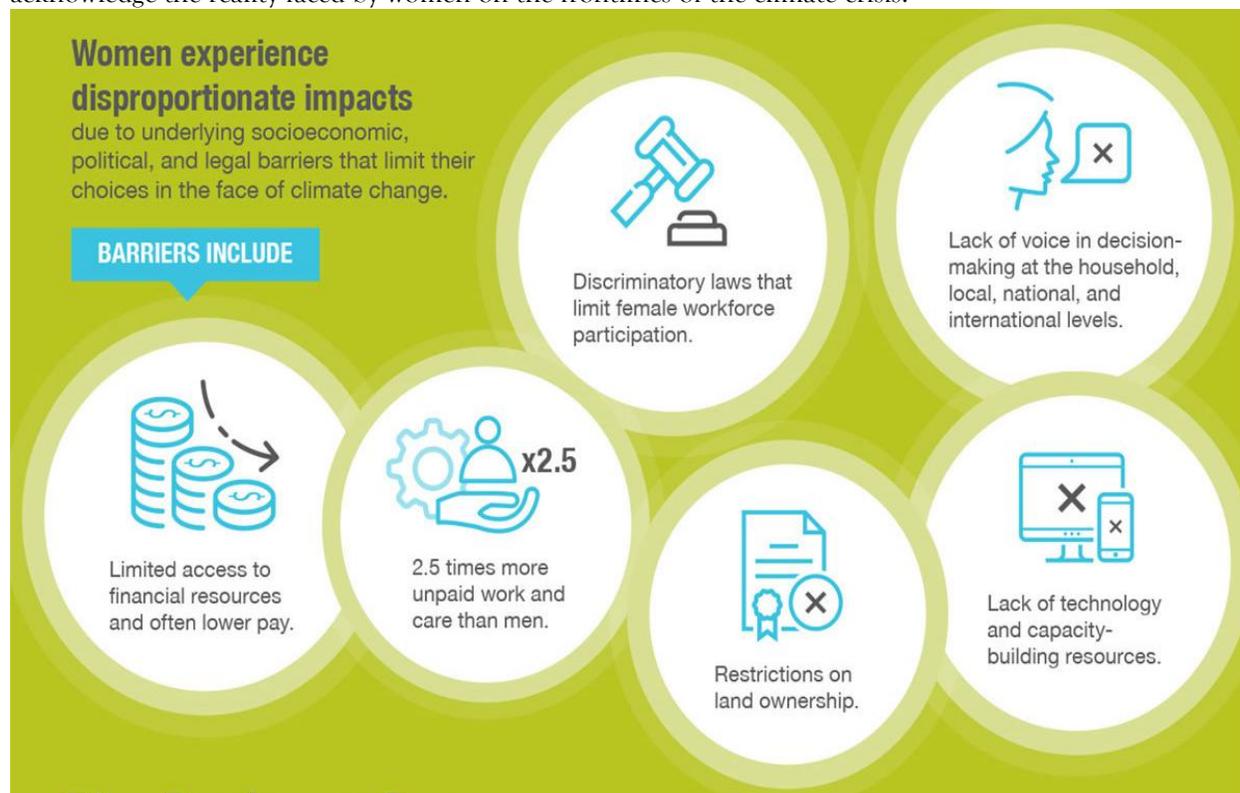
1. INTRODUCTION

The climate-related problems are not gender-neutral. Women are particularly affected by climate change in South Asia, which is the region ecologically vulnerable, economically unequal, and socially structured. Regional popular live in it, consisting of more than a quarter of the world, millions of people depend on climate-sensitive activities, like agriculture, fisheries and informal labor activities. When a weather shock, say floods, droughts, rising sea levels or cyclones occur then it is the woman who is the most affected owing to the socially constructed role and low access to resources. Women in rural regions of some countries, such as Bangladesh, Nepal, India, and Pakistan are the ones who commonly have to gather water and engage in subsistence cultivation as well as nutrition of the house. These responsibilities only get several times harder with the worsening of environmental deterioration, and women and girls become more precarious in terms of survival and trapped further into poverty cycles.



The meaning of intersection of climate vulnerability and gender inequality is that there is higher work output by women, our level of malnutrition is increasing, school failures, as well as violence to women during climate displacement, and limited access to relief and recovery systems. Although the subject of climate justice is being debated at the globalize North, the regional discourse in South Asia blatantly ignores the gender-differentiated effects of climate change. As UN Women (2023) says, South Asian women die 14 times more often in climate-related disasters than men. This is not just because of structural disparities, but because of gap in policies to identify and solve gendered needs in disaster preparedness, reforms in agriculture, land rights and climate finance. Women are not genuinely involved in decision-making processes, even though they are major players in climate resilience contribution-wise, by contributing their knowledge through indigenous knowledge, community organizing, and resource management.

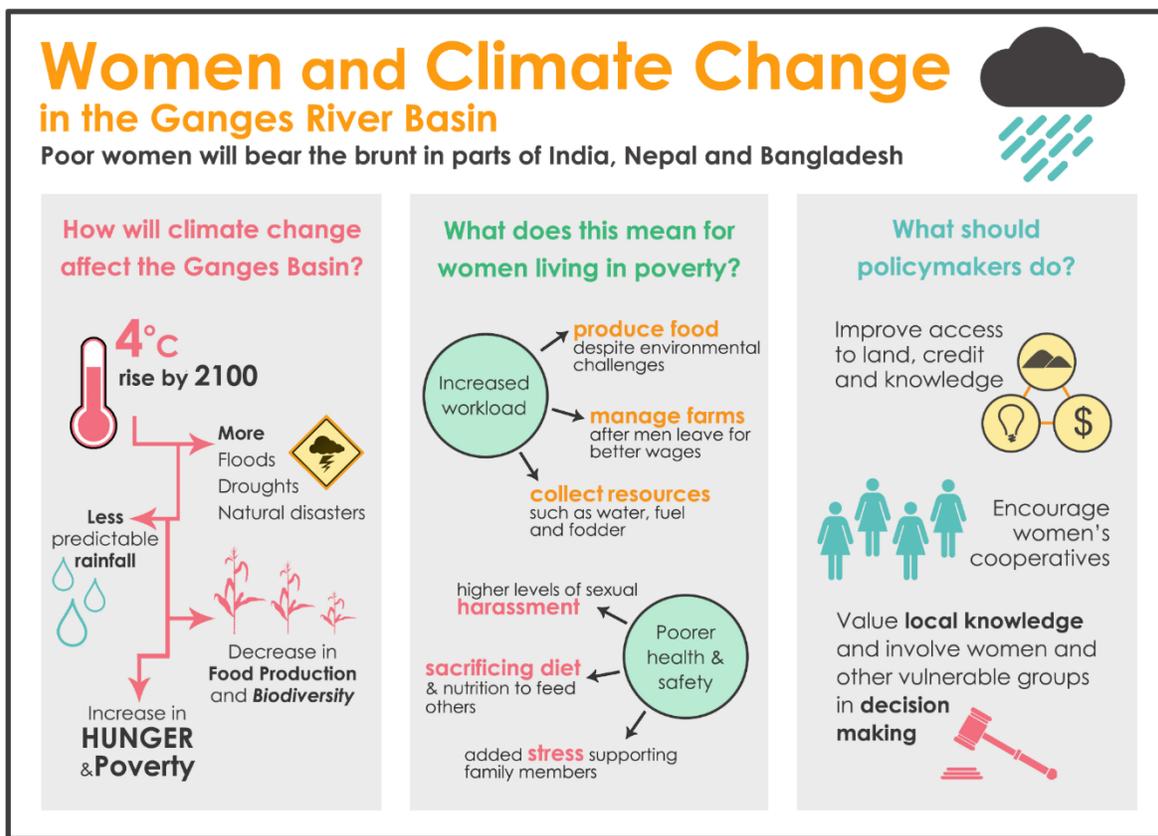
Comprehensive gender-responsive climate policies in South Asia are urgently required to make instant legislation. A law should go beyond a rhetorical inclusion and concentrate on legal assurances in support of participation, protection, and empowerment of women in the climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. Available climate policies within the area are either gender side-lined or positioned gender as a second priority. This paper explains that in absence of legally binding models, whose focus is based on the rights of women to the climate, development plans will continue to lack equity and effectiveness. In this study, researcher seeks to focus on how climate change affects women in South Asia, what effect does the existing law have, and how it should be amended based on environmental justice and gender equity. Through this it has pointed out the need to transition towards institutionalized law enforcement of legal security that would acknowledge the reality faced by women on the frontlines of the climate crisis.



2. Rationale of the Study

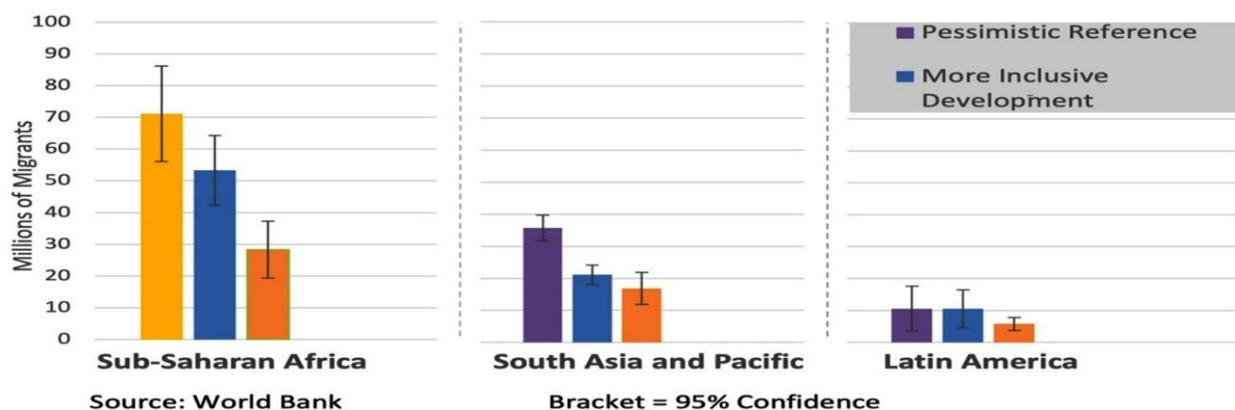
The unequal effects of climate change on women in South Asia bring out one of the most important overlaps between environmental vulnerability and gender inequality - however, the overlap can be considered overlooked in the regional and legal approaches to climate governance. South Asian countries have not promptly integrated implications of gender-responsive climate action, even though the global society has been more and more acknowledging the necessity of such considerations (UNFCCC, 2022). In reports of existing national climate action plans in countries such as India, Bangladesh, and Nepal, there is a passing mention of women but no gender equity that has been entrenched in budgeting, access to lands, disaster relief, or

access to climate finance (WEDO, 2021). Such a legislative gap is especially perilous in a region already experiencing a multitude of climate catastrophes, rampant internal displacement and resulting food and water insecurity: issues that are coped with uniquely by women, not only because of their responsibility to their children, but their immobility and lack of economic access.



The background of this research is the understanding that not only a policy failure but also instances of structural violence, legal inaction is a phenomenon that reproduces the injustice of the climate. Without gender-alongside laws, adaptation strategies threaten to enforce patriarchal norms, which not only leave women and girls out of climate decision-making processes and access to resources but also out of resilience-building processes. Practice indicates, after a disaster in South Asia, women stand at a higher risk to lose their source of livelihood, encounter gender-based violence, early marriage, and health emergency when not addressed through a gender focus of emergency response planning (CARE, 2020). Moreover, there is a high probability of ending up in a social breakdown, especially due to climate related migration where women and girls that are displaced are exposed to trafficking and exploitation. The solutions to these effects should not only be humanitarian interventions but also structural legal interventions to make women become instruments of climate resilience.

This study is a motivation that the binding regional and national laws are needed that unite women rights and climate justice. This study will contend that gendered language in environmental policies; accountability systems; and gender quotas that are established legally need to be incorporated as the most pertinent weaknesses and systemic obstacles to South Asian women are identified by the given study. It also highlights the importance of local women leadership and native knowledge which is generally left unaccounted in formal policy language. Finally, the study aims at bringing climate science, gender advocacy, and law closer together-to lobby legislation which is sensitive enough, fair enough, and capable of taking it to the reality of the people who are worst hit.



3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Gendered Vulnerabilities in a Changing Climate

Structural inequalities have been enhanced with climate change in South Asia, and women have an incredibly elevated exposure, particularly in the rural, Indigenous, and low-income population. It is widely accepted in the literature that women are in the hot seat of the climate crisis because of their traditional roles as caregivers, subsistence farmers, and water collectors (UN Women, 2023). Due to the increase in temperature and a decline in agricultural productivity, the adaptive pressure grows through women unpaid labour, which results in nutritional loss and time impoverishment (Preston et al., 2024). Also Ravipati (2025) says that gender-based violence and economic insecurity increase when climate shocks hit populations displaced especially by conflict. These are gender-conditioned vulnerabilities, which demand legal and policy solutions that should acknowledge the inequality exposure and reaction capacities of women in different ecological regions.

3.2 Disaster Response, Health, and Displacement

They also disproportionately affect women during and after their exposure to climate-induced disasters despite the fact that they have specific needs that are hardly taken into consideration during emergency planning or during the recovery process. According to CARE (2020), the floods and cyclones that occurred in Bangladesh and India had a devastating effect where women did not have access to adequately shelter and hygiene resources, as well as access to medical care- especially maternal and reproductive. According to Sabina Faiz Rashid (2025), interventions to health fail to consider sociocultural limitations that women in climate-affected areas have to endure, like freedom-of-movement issues or unfair household principles. Lack of legal obligations that entail the provision of gender-sensitive disaster relief further entrenches post-disaster trauma and limits or rather prevents long-term recovery among the female survivors.(Wider, W., Tan, F. P., Tan, Y. P., Lin, J., Fauzi, M. A., Wong, L. S., ... & Hossain, S. F. A., 2024)

3.3 Legal Gaps in Gender-Responsive Climate Governance

Even as climate change increasingly comes to be viewed as a women issue, the majority of South Asian legal systems fail to accommodate any binding frameworks wherein the climate policy has women at its core. Gender sometimes appears as a cross-cutting theme in National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and climate finance systems, not nevertheless in a technically defined or institutionally connected manner. Ravipati (2025) criticizes the Indian policies of agroecology by positing that though they mention empowerment of women, they fail to provide any real challenge against patriarchal land ownerships, accessibility to credit and resources. Likewise, the regional structures do not have in place any accountability processes to respect women rights in the mitigation, adaptation, or building of resilience pertaining to climate acknowledgment (WEDO, 2021).

3.4 Feminist and Localized Approaches to Climate Justice

An emerging strand of literature advocates for **intersectional and feminist climate frameworks** that prioritize the agency, knowledge, and leadership of women in climate action. Preston et al. (2024) stress that women's collective organizing—such as self-help groups, grassroots cooperatives, and water user associations—have been crucial in enhancing community resilience but remain excluded from formal governance structures. These scholars argue for legal reforms that embed **bottom-up climate governance**, protect Indigenous ecological

knowledge, and mandate gender parity in climate decision-making bodies. Without such reforms, climate legislation risks reproducing the same gender hierarchies it aims to address.

4. METHODOLOGY

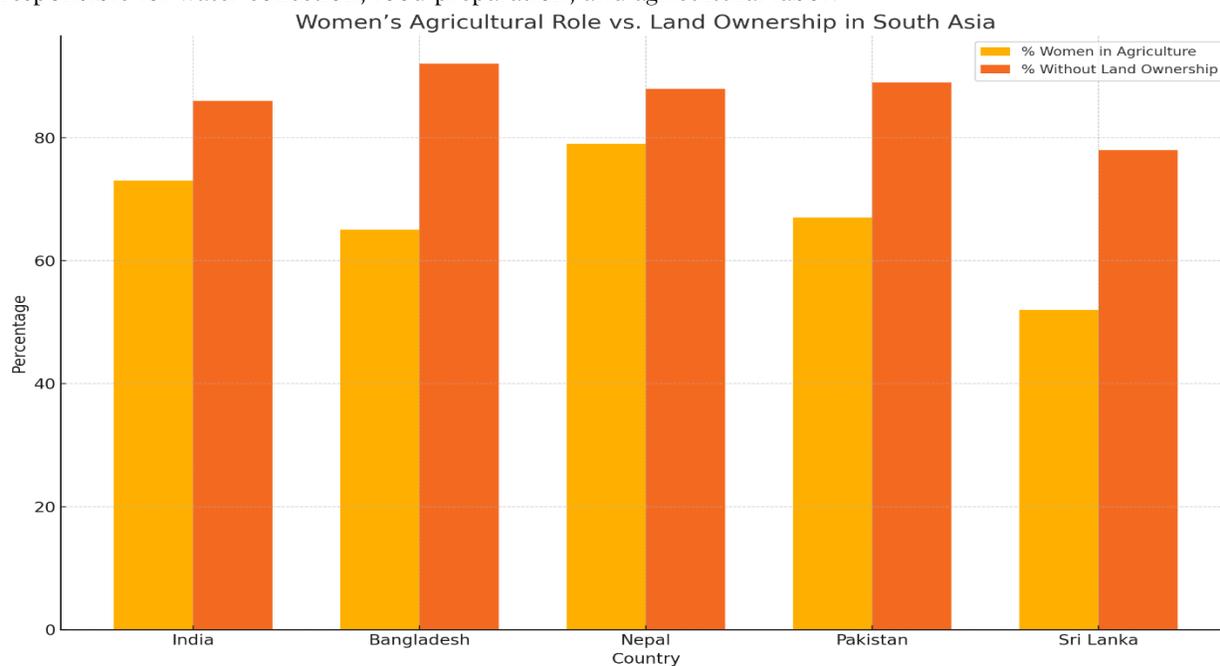
This study employed a **qualitative research design** combining **secondary data analysis**, **comparative country profiling**, and **policy gap assessment** to explore the gender-specific impacts of climate change in South Asia and the need for gender-responsive legislation. The focus countries included India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka—chosen for their high climate vulnerability and significant gender development disparities. The research analyzed existing national adaptation plans, climate policies, disaster response strategies, and gender equity laws to identify how these frameworks address (or fail to address) women’s needs and rights in the context of climate change.

Data was drawn from a range of credible sources, including peer-reviewed academic journals, UN reports, NGO assessments (e.g., CARE, WEDO, UN Women), and government policy documents published between 2018 and 2025. Statistical indicators—such as the percentage of women in agriculture, land ownership disparity, climate-related displacement, and gender-specific mortality rates—were compiled into comparative tables and charts to visualize regional disparities. Thematic coding was used to classify recurring issues across countries, such as health vulnerabilities, displacement risks, and lack of policy enforcement. Policy documents were assessed based on their inclusion of gender-specific goals, legal mandates, funding provisions, and institutional accountability mechanisms.

A **comparative matrix** was developed to evaluate each country on five dimensions: climate exposure, gendered impact, legal protection, civil society response, and climate budget allocation. Visual tools such as bar charts and heatmaps were used to enhance interpretability of cross-country differences. The analysis culminated in a conceptual framework identifying the critical intersections between climate vulnerability, legal gaps, and women's rights. No primary fieldwork or interviews were conducted; all data used were from publicly available and ethically sourced materials.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that **climate change disproportionately impacts women in South Asia across health, livelihood, and security dimensions**, with rural and Indigenous women facing the greatest vulnerability. Extreme weather events such as floods, droughts, and cyclones regularly disrupt the lives of women responsible for water collection, food preparation, and agricultural labor.

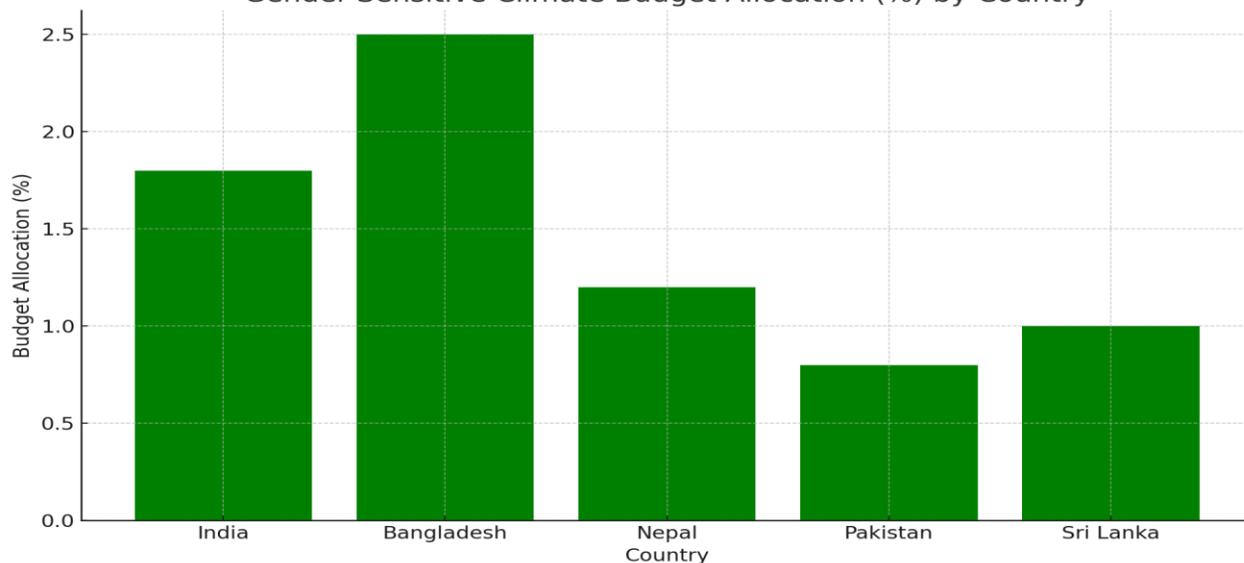


As an example, at the most climate-at-risk places in Bangladesh and Odisha, females spend almost twice the time compared to males coping with water and food scarcity during times of drought (UN Women, 2023). This growth of unpaid labor may cause the loss of access to education, political activity and paid work, and perpetuates long-term patterns of gendered poverty. Notably, despite women playing such important roles in the resilience of households and the communities, their role is yet to be captured in any formal climate policy.

| Country | Primary Climate Risks | Gendered Impact Areas | Existing Gender-Specific Policy | Civil Society / Grassroots Role |
|------------|---|--|--|---|
| India | Heatwaves, floods, droughts | Agriculture, water burden, displacement | Gender mentioned in NAPCC, not legally binding | Active women's SHGs, water cooperatives |
| Bangladesh | Cyclones, sea-level rise, floods | Shelter access, GBV, health services | Gender-sensitive adaptation plans (draft stage) | Women's shelter networks, disaster response teams |
| Nepal | Glacier melt, landslides, drought | Migration, health care, livelihood loss | Limited inclusion in national climate strategy | Forest user groups with female leadership |
| Pakistan | Floods, heatwaves, droughts | Food insecurity, forced marriage, labor exploitation | No formal gender component in climate legislation | NGO-led gender advocacy in climate zones |
| Sri Lanka | Cyclones, water scarcity, deforestation | Health care, unemployment, early marriage | Mentioned in policy rhetoric but lacks legal mandate | Rural women's climate resilience networks |

The analysis also goes further to point at the fact that disaster relief and recovery structures that existed in South Asia do not properly address the needs of women. Women and girls are more vulnerable to gender-based abuse, trafficking, and child marriage in the process of displacement due to climate. CARE (2020) testifies that the deprivation of menstrual health and reproductive health care interrupted the lives of women in shelters in post-flood Bangladesh, which is simply a violation of principles. Additionally, Rashid (2025) claims that humanitarian responses are unable to address sociocultural obstacles that affect women, including physical barriers to movement and social stigma, and therefore offer relief services that are out of reach. Although such problems are observed repeatedly, emergency policies hardly incorporate gender-sensitive guidelines and mechanisms of accountability safeguarding vulnerable groups.

Gender-Sensitive Climate Budget Allocation (%) by Country



| Country | % of Women in Agriculture (Rural) | % of Women Lacking Land Ownership | % of Women Displaced in Climate Disasters | Female Mortality in Climate Disasters (est. ratio) | Gender-Sensitive Climate Budget Allocation (%) |
|------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| India | 73% | 86% | 60% | 13.4 | 1.8% |
| Bangladesh | 65% | 92% | 68% | 14.0 | 2.5% |
| Nepal | 79% | 88% | 64% | 12.8 | 1.2% |
| Pakistan | 67% | 89% | 66% | 13.9 | 0.8% |
| Sri Lanka | 52% | 78% | 55% | 11.5 | 1.0% |

Policywise, the findings indicate that gender has continued to be insufficiently incorporated in the national climate plans of actions and laws in South Asia. India, Nepal and Sri Lanka address gender in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) but they are mainly aspirational and are not, in fact, binding. Ravipati (2025) discovers that even progressive agroecological changes in India overlook the structural limitation of disparity in land title as well as gendered access to credit. Likewise, South Asia does not have any regional climate legal framework, which promotes gender equity or requires the inclusion of women in climate decision-making departments. Due to it, climate policies have a chance of replicating gender inequality instead of undermining them.

Lastly, the evidence indicates that at a local level, the women movement and feminist climate change initiatives are moving faster than formal institutions. Empowerment of women through grass-root leadership has demonstrated success in community-led projects to govern water, be prepared towards disasters and conserve forests in some parts of India, Pakistan, and Nepal. The report by Preston et al. (2024) claims that in India, in the dryland rope area, self-help groups enhanced food security and income diversity of individual households in times of extended droughts. Nevertheless, such achievements are subdivided and not backed up at state or national levels. The absence of legal validation in the environmental leadership through women makes such efforts susceptible to funding withholdings, political relegation and co-option by the larger patriarchal bodies.

6. CONCLUSION

Through this paper, we find out that the effects of climate change on women in South Asia are critical and systematic and can be based not only on general environmental vulnerability but also on the present inequality of the genders and disregard in the legal field. With more unpaid work, food insecurity, more displacement, and gender-based violence, climate stresses have wider implications and are disproportionately falling on women, particularly women in rural and disadvantaged groups. Women are still left out on making formal policy on climate, mitigation efforts and availability of finance to cater to risks caused by climate change, even though they are the center of such development and practices of climate resilience and local sustainability. The existing national frameworks that pertain to the South Asian countries recognise these inequalities on the rhetoric front but do not convert them to enforceable measures, subsidised initiatives and inclusive decision making processes.

The results call to the establishment of a greater sense of urgency in terms of climate action legislation that is gender-responsive, tending to hit the institutional accountability rather than to continue with symbolic representation. The policies should internalize the rights to land of females, require female representation in climate policymaking, deny access to gender competent healthcare in case of a disaster, and assign specific climate funds to female-led resilience actions. Climate adaptation will not be unified and fair, until there is legal reform, which can do nothing toward combating the injustice, but only contribute to it. The sustainable development of South Asia has to be based on the concepts of environmental justice, where the promotion of gender equity should not be seen as a bonus addition to it, but rather a major right. This paper is part of that discussion in which I highlight the main gaps in the legislation and argue that measures have to be taken at a legislative level to protect the dignity, agency, and survival of women on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

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