

Invisible women:

A gender analysis of
climate-induced migration
in South Asia



Funded by the European Union



**IMPROVING MIGRATION
MANAGEMENT** IN THE SILK ROUTES

Implemented by



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Cover photo: Sabita Rani leads womens' groups in emergency response in Kalpara, Bangladesh.

Photo credit: ActionAid Bangladesh

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Villagers living on high ground to escape floodwaters from heavy rainfall in Gaibandha, Bangladesh
Photo credit: ActionAid Bangladesh

Executive Summary:

A vast amount of evidence, including data, exists to demonstrate the devastating scale of impacts that climate change is having on people's lives, livelihoods and food security across South Asia. Migration and internal displacement have been taking place in South Asia since long before climate change was recognised as a major issue. However, there is still a great need to capture information about how the impacts of climate change are driving migration, so that we can understand, address and minimise the root causes of migration. Even more urgent is the ever-growing need to understand the impact of climate-induced migration on women and girls, who are made invisible in research, policy and media narratives related to this issue.

According to the climate change projections, in five South Asian countries, namely Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, about 37.4 million people will be displaced by 2030 and an estimated 62.9 million by 2050, due to slow onset events such as sea-level rise and drought.¹ This is even if the global community acts on its greenhouse gas mitigation pledges and targets. Current global pledges and targets see us on track for a temperature rise of between 2.1°C and 3.3°C.² The projections further show that in Afghanistan about 2.2 million and 5 million people will be displaced by 2030 and 2050 respectively, by slow onset events, considering the current levels of climate ambition.

Undertaking more ambitious action for meeting the Paris Agreement goals of limiting global warming to between 1.5°C and 2°C, however, will restrict the number of people displaced or driven to move in these six countries to 23.6 million by 2030 and 36.5 million by 2050. The alternative is more than threefold increase in movement by 2050.

1. This work was conducted by Bryan Jones - Assistant Professor, Marxe School of Public and International Affairs, Baruch College, New York, for ActionAid and Climate Action Network South Asia (CANSA).
2. Ibid.

This report draws from participatory research undertaken with communities through focus group discussions and key expert interviews in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. The findings are backed by secondary literature reviews and policy analysis. This was part of a joint project led by ActionAid and CANSA (in collaboration with its members). This project was funded by the European Union through the International Centre for Migration Policy Development. This report is also informed by research from a similar project undertaken in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, also led by CANSA and ActionAid, and funded by Bread for the World.

The country-level research from these six South Asian countries reveals that changing temperatures and levels of precipitation; intensifying cyclones and rising sea levels; increasing river erosion and water salinity; greater flooding and longer droughts are severely affecting people's abilities to cope with and adapt to environmental shocks and stresses. Many are being forced to migrate in search of an income, so that they and their families can survive. In most cases, it is men who migrate. The research shows different, disproportionate impacts on the women and girls left behind, compared to men and boys. This needs political recognition.

Our research in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan highlights four areas of gendered and strongly interlinked impacts of climate-induced migration that should be better understood and addressed by policymakers, so that communities can adapt and become more resilient. These are impacts on: health and wellbeing; mobility and quality of life; women's economic rights; and violence against women and girls. These areas have inevitable overlaps since the causes and impacts are grounded in systemic patriarchy and gendered social norms.

As climate impacts become increasingly pervasive and severe, households' and families' coping mechanism to adapt and respond is to make women and girls societal shock absorbers. This plays out in various ways: they get food last in the family, their unpaid care burdens increase, their right to study is curtailed, their risks of violence are heightened, and mortality and morbidity increase among them. Even with all the negative externalities for women, they are making massive contributions to disaster risk reduction, post-disaster management and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies. We must move on from the passive categorisation of women and girls as 'vulnerable victims' of climate change, and reorient ourselves towards understanding their specific barriers and needs, to support them in being active agents of transformative change.

Policies and programmes in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan address migration and climate change, but these are not necessarily always linked. The link between the two must be firmly established. Besides, there is a need to climate-proof gender-responsive policies and practices as well as to embed a gender-responsive approach into climate and livelihoods policies and practices. There is also a critical implementation gap, which can be addressed through the collaborative working of government, civil society, researchers and, most importantly, participatory approaches involving communities, in particular, women and girls, who can illuminate where the barriers and opportunities lie to overcome the lack of gender responsiveness.

Facilitating dignified, planned movement in South Asia requires policymakers to better understand the state of climate-induced migration and displacement, and share the learnings and information across borders. Investing in, and collecting, high-quality, gender-disaggregated data is critical to enabling better understanding of how climate-induced migration, gender and women's rights are related. This will be critical to informing interventions that improve outcomes for women and men, boys and girls.

To get there, women and girls have to be brought to the fore and made visible.

In this regard, the following recommendations were developed, based on the learnings of the secondary literature review and our conversations with women living on the frontlines of the climate crisis in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan:

Local governments must:

1. Prioritise and ensure the safety and security of women and enable gender-sensitive, easy and equal access to basic facilities and services, food and nutrition and medical care, including psycho-social support, before, during and after disasters.
2. Conduct awareness-building and information-sharing activities that increase people's understanding of migration push factors, their impacts on a household, especially the gender differences, and of their legal rights and available support.
3. Women should be included in participatory decision-making in their communities and households to lead resilience-building efforts and address displacement and distress migration.

National governments must:

4. Invest in collecting gender-disaggregated disaster- and displacement-related data to support developing political and legal recognition of climate-induced migration and its disproportionate impacts on women and girls.
5. Develop an institutional and legal architecture that provides protection from climate-induced displacement and distress migration, particularly to women and girls, while also applying a gender lens to existing policies and programmes, and climate-proofing these.
6. Protect women and girls through targeted policy interventions at both source and destination sites, and through the provision of gender-responsive basic services and social protection to communities affected by migration.
7. Provide livelihood security for women by creating economic opportunities, imparting vocational training and ensuring equal land rights for women.

Regional bodies must:

8. Include climate-induced migration as a part of regional forums like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and the Budapest Process to spotlight the nexus of climate, migration and gender and build knowledge as well as dialogue on solutions.
9. Facilitate cross-border exchange and learning, through regular intergovernmental dialogues and information sharing on climate-induced migration.
10. Legally protect the rights of people who are forced to migrate across national borders.

Other stakeholders should:

11. Undertake further research and academic analysis to establish links between climate change and migration, understand their impact on the most vulnerable, and to understand ways to develop and climate-proof gender-responsive policies and programmes.
12. Consider the role of multilateral institutions, UN agencies, international organisations, labour unions, civil society organisations and the media in developing gender-based approaches, raising awareness and building capacity of government authorities, institutions, the media and other stakeholders.



Shaiday IDP camp in Herat, Afghanistan.
Photo credit: TCRO

1. Introduction

Climate change is disrupting traditional livelihoods, forcing millions of people worldwide to consider alternative options. These disruptions do not affect women and men, boys and girls equally. The options available to people are also not equal. While circular migration — within countries and regions — has long been a practice of livelihood security, climate change impacts are forcing new kinds of human mobility, for which people and states are not prepared. Although these mobilities may be complex and multi-dimensional, it is important to understand different “push factors” and “pull factors” through the lens of climate change impacts, because such impacts are well evidenced to have significant bearings on livelihood security across developing countries.³ (See box entitled: Why say ‘climate-induced’ migration.)

Migration and mobilities brought on by climate change impacts and poor adaptive capacity have gendered dimensions which are critical to study because they compound gender inequalities. Even with a nascent scientific evidence base, which demonstrates the gendered impacts of climate-induced migration, current conversations to address migration remain focused on male migrants and fail to pay attention to the experiences of women and girls. There are multi-faceted reasons some (usually, men and boys) move, while others (usually, women and girls) stay in place. Typically, women and girls who migrate, or who are left behind, are absent from the conversation.

In South Asia, migration as an adaptation strategy is often a privilege afforded to people with some disposable income, whilst the poorest and most marginalised people may be trapped in place.⁴ Since at least 70 per cent of the world’s poor are women and girls, this suggests an overall trend towards feminised ‘trapped’ communities, which are important communities to speak to and support. Due to the still male-dominated nature of climate policy-making and research, investment into understanding the gendered push and pull factors as well as the impacts on poor women and girls has been insufficient. Despite the disproportionate impacts of climate change and the huge potential for women and girls to be agents of positive change in the global transformation to sustainability, poor women and girls are made invisible in the research, policy and media narratives on climate-induced migration.

3. Olsson, L., Opondo, M., Tschakert P. et al. (2014), Livelihoods and poverty, In: *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, pp. 793-832.
4. Gioli, G., Khan, T., Scheffran, J. (2013), Gender and Environmentally-induced Migration in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, In: *Sustainable Development in South Asia: Shaping the Future*, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Islamabad and Sang-e-Meel Publishers, pp. 355-378.; and Bhatta, G.D., Aggarwal, P.K., Poudel, S. et al. (2015), Climate-induced migration in South Asia: Migration decisions and the gender dimensions of adverse climatic events. *The Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 10(4), 1-23.

This report aims to reverse that trend by bringing poor women and girls to the centre and highlighting their voices and experiences so that solutions can be more sustainable and equitable. This research focused on women across three South Asian countries – Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan – to make their lives and voices visible, and thus demonstrate the need for gender-responsive policy solutions. The countries are characterised by low socio-economic and human development indicators as well as high levels of poverty and inequality. These factors affect people’s options and agency to respond and adapt to crises. Further, South Asia is one of the biggest hotspots of climate-induced displacement and migration. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, South Asia accounted for 38.3 per cent of the global total number of displacements in 2019.⁵

The same year registered over 9.5 million newly displaced people due to disasters, the highest figure since 2012. Most of this displacement was due to monsoon rains, floods and tropical storms.

In 2020, ActionAid and Climate Action Network South Asia commissioned Assistant Professor Bryan Jones, of Baruch College’s Marxe School of Public and International Affairs in New York, to model climate change projections related to estimated internal movement within South Asia. The approach used was a modified version of the gravity-based spatial allocation model applied in the World Bank’s 2018 report, ‘Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration’. Jones focused on migration linked to slow-onset impacts, namely sea-level rise, water stress, crop-yield reductions, ecosystem loss and drought.⁶

The modelling in five countries, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, finds that even if the global community acts on its greenhouse gas mitigation pledges and targets, about 37.4 million people will still be displaced by 2030 and an estimated 62.9 million by 2050. Current global pledges and targets see us on track for a global warming of between 2.1°C and 3.3°C.

The modelling further finds that in Afghanistan about 2.2 million and 5 million people will be displaced by 2030 and 2050 respectively, even if the global community meets its current mitigation pledges and targets.⁷

Undertaking more ambitious action for meeting the Paris Agreement goals of limiting global warming to between 1.5°C and 2°C, however, will restrict the number of people displaced or driven to move in these six countries to about 23.6 million by 2030 and 36.5 million by 2050. The alternative is more than threefold increase in movement by 2050.

1.1 Gendered Impacts

Our research in the three countries identified four areas of gendered impacts of climate-induced migration that should be better understood and addressed by policymakers so that women, men and communities can adapt and become more resilient. These are impacts on: health and wellbeing; mobility and quality of life; women’s economic rights; and violence against women and girls.

The disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls in the South Asian countries studied are particularly pervasive because of the deeply rooted gender norms and expectations which influence women’s and men’s choices. While men are expected to earn an income to support their families and dominate public spaces, women and girls are expected to confine their social and economic lives to the home – or as close to it as possible. In large part this is to do with their bodily autonomy – because their

5. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2020), *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2020/>

6. Singh, H., Faleiro, J., Anderson, T. et al. (2020), *Costs of Climate Inaction: displacement and distress migration*, ActionAid and Climate Action Network South Asia.

7. Ibid.

bodies have become a symbol of purity and honour on which families depend. The female body is under constant surveillance and pressure to conform, to uphold family and community honour. This constrains women's access to physical and emotional spaces, including social and material networks through which they can develop resilience.⁸

Women and girls are also constrained in developing independent incomes. In large parts of Pakistan and Afghanistan it is socially inappropriate for a woman to do more than domestic work and provide care for their family. This means that many women are totally dependent on the finances their male family members can, and choose to, share with them. Where women can work, their livelihoods tend to be highly informal, hence precarious and easily shattered by shocks and stressors.⁹ Land ownership of women is extremely low, so in resource-based livelihoods, they produce on land that is owned by men or they work as landless tenant farmers and landless labourers as part of households dominated by men. In Bangladesh, while there remain vast inequalities in women's access to decent work, female labour force participation has increased rapidly in recent years. However, more than 90 per cent of the working women are in the informal sector, facing the same systemic risks and precariousness that their counterparts in Afghanistan and Pakistan do.¹⁰

Finally, planning and infrastructure solutions are largely gender-blind. Designed by men, for men, whether it's transport systems, water infrastructures, other basic service provisions or emergency shelters — women's needs are not factored in. This makes accessing critical services very challenging for women, whether staying in place or migrating. This compounds their vulnerabilities and exclusions.

As a result of these systemic inequalities, women and girls have less social, material and environmental options and poor coping mechanisms to respond to climate impacts. But this does not mean there are no avenues to build women's resilience.

1.2 Women as Agents of Change

In fact, much like all areas of climate action, as recognised by the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC's) Enhanced Gender Action Plan (2019), there are critical opportunities to engage with women and support their agency in responding to the climate crisis and building resilience. Paying greater attention to women's voices and agency is critical to understanding what those opportunities are and harnessing them through gender-transformative policy and programming approaches.

This means that we must move on from the passive categorisation of women and girls as 'vulnerable victims' of climate change towards understanding their specific barriers and needs, to support them in being active agents of transformative change. Women are already making massive contributions to disaster risk reduction, post-disaster management and climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

They are often the 'first responders' in crises and absorb massive burdens of unpaid care to support their household and community. The UNFCCC found that up to 43 per cent of women contribute to the agricultural labour force in developing countries when they receive support from policymakers. It is also well established that when women are included, equally, in decision-making over climate policy and programming, it results in better environmental policies, more resilient and sustainable environmental outputs,

8. Mathur, K. (2008), *Body as space, body as site: Bodily integrity and women's empowerment in India*, Economic and Political Weekly, 43 (17), 54-63; Anwar, et al. (2016), *Gender and Violence in Urban Pakistan*, International Development Research Centre; Alam, F., Rashid, S.F., Camfield, L. et al. (2019), *Adolescent bodily integrity and freedom from violence in Dhaka, Bangladesh*, Policy Note, Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence, London; Schuler, S.H., Islam, F., Rottach, E. (2010), *Women's empowerment revisited: a case study from Bangladesh*, Development in Practice, 20:7, 840-854. DOI: 10.1080/09614524.2010.508108
9. Malik, A.A. (2019), *On the Margins - Women Workers and the Future of Work: Narratives from Pakistan*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).
10. Nawaz, F. (2019), *Feminist Perspective on the Future of Work in Bangladesh*, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES).

and better enforcement of collective rules around resource management.¹¹ Well-designed climate action and resilience building, that ensures women's full and effective participation, can have multiple developmental benefits, including gender equality and women's empowerment, sustainable development, disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation. It should be underlined that gender equality is a pre-condition for the realisation of all sustainable development goals.¹²

Policymakers and donors should, therefore, invest in greater understanding of the gendered impacts and opportunities associated with climate change and migration. Social protection schemes that are gender responsive are a critical tool governments can use to support people most affected by climate change. Understanding how climate-induced migration, gender and women's rights are related will help facilitate dignified, planned movement.

The second section of this report elaborates why focusing on women's lives matters, followed by section 3 which focuses on climate migration and women's rights, where four key gendered impacts are highlighted. The fourth section covers the policy landscape in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, and promising practices. Finally, section 5 contains the report's conclusions and recommendations.

Box: Why say 'climate-induced' migration

There is an important debate about the terminology that should be used when speaking about people on the frontlines of the climate crisis; those who move, are displaced and/or migrate. In particular, academic researchers are concerned that simplistic assumptions about why people move can lead to myths that drive unhelpful policy responses. One example is the trend of 'securitising' the issue — presenting those who move as a threat to the communities in which they end up.¹³ We share these concerns and agree that more research should be funded to understand "*the multiple forms, directions and multiplicities of human movement in the context of climate change, as well as the transformative character of mobility and its impact on places of origin, transit and destination*". This is a key reason for this research. A fundamental reason for people's movement may be the failure of State and society to build resilience to climate impacts.¹⁴ Policymakers are also failing to support people in mobilities when they have no other option. **For that reason, we use the term 'climate-induced' to highlight the urgency of the issue.** Communities are telling us that they are compelled to move because of the combination of more extreme and unpredictable weather, sea-level rise and coastal erosion. This is an important dimension to add to the scientific debate.¹⁵ Climate-induced mobilities are happening right now, resulting in loss of lives and livelihoods, dislocation from communities and violations of fundamental human rights.¹⁶ We must address this with the urgency it requires.

11. Norgaard, K., York, R. (2005), Gender Equality and State Environmentalism, *Gender & Society*; Nugent, C., Shandra, J.M. (2009), State Environmental Protection Efforts, Women's Status, and World Polity: A Cross-National Analysis, *Organization & Environment*, 22(2):208-229; Mavisakalyan, A., Tarverdi, Y. (2018), Gender and climate change: Do female parliamentarians make difference?, *European Journal of Political Economy*; McKinney, L., Fulkerson, G. (2015), Gender Equality and Climate Justice: A Cross-National Analysis, *Social Justice Research*, 28; Ergas, C., York, R. (2012), Women's status and carbon dioxide emissions: A quantitative cross-national analysis, *Social Science Research*, 41(4); Agarwal, B. (2009), Gender and Forest Conservation: The Impact of Women's Participation in Community Forest Governance, *Ecological Economics*, 68(11); Leisher, C., Tamsah, G., Booker, F. et al. (2015), Does the gender composition of forest and fishery management groups affect resource governance and conservation outcomes: a systematic map protocol, *Environmental Evidence*, 4:13.
12. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2018), CEDAW/C/GC/37: *General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change*.
13. Boas, I., Farbotko, C., Adams, H. et al. (2019), *Climate migration myths*, *Nature Climate Change*, 9, 901–903. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-019-0633-3>
14. Mustafa, D. Wrathall, D. (2011), *Indus basin floods of 2010: souring of a Faustian bargain?*, *Water Alternatives*, 4(1): 72-85.
15. Boas, I., Dahm, R. Wrathall, D. (2020), *Grounding Big Data on Climate-Induced Human Mobility*, *Geographical Review*, 110:1-2, 195-209.
16. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/dec/16/how-floods-are-emptying-bangladesh-villages>;
<https://careclimatechange.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/CARE-Climate-Migration-Report-v0.4.pdf>;
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/28/how-climate-change-is-death-sentence-afghanistan-highlands-global-warming>;
<https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/made-worse-tree-loss-flooding-forces-migration-afghanistan>



Women walking long distances to fetch well water in rural Pakistan.
Photo credit: SDPI

2. Why Focus on Women's Lives

Climate change is exacerbating South Asia's development challenges. The region is characterised by poor economic and human development indicators and its countries suffer systemic crises such as poverty, inequality and insecurity. Increasingly unpredictable and extreme weather is directly impacting the poor, making their livelihoods unfeasible and damaging their land and homes. Unabated climate change is driving populations to take the last-resort decision of uprooting themselves and leaving their homes and communities in search of a more secure life, defined by having safe shelter, a steady income and access to basic services and facilities, among other things.

South Asia is characterised by patriarchal institutions and stark gender inequalities. Across Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan people's lives are — in large part — governed by social norms which dictate roles, responsibilities and expectations of women and men, boys and girls. These norms are reinforced at every level of society, from the national government to interpersonal relationships.¹⁷

Gender inequalities significantly impact the social, economic and political power that women and girls have, compared to men and boys. Women are not given space and freedom to decide about their lives; they also face significant barriers to attaining an independent income as well as ownership of land and resources.¹⁸ Their economic options are highly limited and precarious, compared to men's. In addition, women, especially those in poverty, spend disproportionately more time on unpaid care work, compared to men. Women and girls spend long hours fetching

¹⁷ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2018), CEDAW/C/GC/37: *General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change*.

¹⁸ Bhatta, G.D., Aggarwal, P.K., Poudel, S. et al. (2015), *Climate-induced migration in South Asia: Migration decisions and the gender dimensions of adverse climatic events*, *The Journal of Rural and Community Development*, 10(4), 1-23.

water, collecting firewood, doing laundry, preparing food, caring for children and the elderly, and doing other household chores, as well as carrying out agricultural duties.¹⁹

As climate impacts become increasingly pervasive and severe, households and families must use coping mechanisms to adapt and respond. One of the first coping mechanisms practised in these countries is to make women and girls 'societal shock absorbers'. This plays out in various ways which hamper their rights. For example:

- When crop yields—and hence household food security—are impacted by droughts and floods, established food hierarchies mean that women and girls receive lowest priority. This leads to greater risks of hunger and malnutrition.²⁰
- Women and girls absorb higher unpaid care burdens, which reduces their time for rights such as education, political participation and access to basic services. One common coping mechanism is to withdraw girls from school to secure food and water for the household. When economic capital is low, boys are prioritised for education because it is perceived that they can do more with education for the family in the long run.²¹
- A meta-analysis of 130 peer-reviewed studies showed that 68 per cent of the studies found that women faced more adverse health impacts associated with climate change than men, including poor mental health and malnutrition following extreme weather events.²²
- In times of climate-related shocks and stressors, women and girls are exposed to heightened risks of violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, trafficking and forced early and child marriage.²³ Studies show that women in Pakistan experienced domestic violence because they were expected to continue to manage the household without problems even when water was not available.^{24, 25}
- Women and girls also tend to face higher levels of physical harm, mortality and morbidity in disasters.^{26, 27} In Bangladesh, studies find that women are disproportionately impacted by cyclones because they are less likely to have learnt to swim and avoid leaving their homes to use shelters for fear of violating purdah norms and facing sexual violence.²⁸ Data from climate-induced floods in Nepal show that girls had a mortality rate of 13.3 per 1,000, compared to 9.4 for boys, 6.1 for women and 4.1 for men. This is in keeping with the global trend: women are more likely to be killed by extreme weather events in countries where their socioeconomic status is below that of men, including in Pakistan and Afghanistan.²⁹

Women's restricted mobilities, lack of information and poor preparedness lead to greater loss of life, exploitation and gender-based violence, in addition to affecting their economic livelihoods.³⁰

This does not mean that men are not impacted by climate change. They certainly are, but some have more power than others to respond and cope. Men who belong to socially, economically and politically disadvantaged communities are facing the impacts of climate change and limited coping mechanisms. Societal expectations that men be

19. <http://powerproject.actionaid.org/unpaid-care-work/>

20. Ayeb-Karlsson, S. (2020), *When the disaster strikes: Gendered (im)mobility in Bangladesh*, *Climate Risk Management*, 29 (2020) 100237.

21. Jordan, J.C. (2019), *Deconstructing resilience: why gender and power matter in responding to climate stress in Bangladesh*, *Climate and Development*, 11:2, 167-179. DOI: 10.1080/17565529.2018.1442790

22. <https://www.eco-business.com/news/mapped-how-climate-change-disproportionately-affects-womens-health/>

23. UK Aid (2020), *Climate Change Brief, Adolescent Girls Resource Pack*, UK Aid.

24. UNEP (2020), *Gender, Climate and Security: Sustaining inclusive peace on the frontlines of climate change*, UNEP.

25. Memon, F.S. (2020), *Climate Change and Violence Against Women: Study of A Flood-Affected Population in The Rural Area of Sindh, Pakistan*, *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies Alam-e-Niswan*.

26. Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2018), *CEDAW/C/GC/37: General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change*.

27. Dimitrov, B.E.G. (2019), *Effects of Climate Change on Women*, *Area Studies*, 4 (5): 210-5

28. Jordan, J.C. (2019), *Deconstructing resilience: why gender and power matter in responding to climate stress in Bangladesh*, *Climate and Development*, 11:2, 167-179. DOI: 10.1080/17565529.2018.1442790

29. <https://www.eco-business.com/news/mapped-how-climate-change-disproportionately-affects-womens-health/>; Neumayer, E., Plümper, T. (2007) *The gendered nature of natural disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy*, 1981-2002, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97 (3). pp. 551-566. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-8306.2007.00563

30. https://www.preventionweb.net/files/73854_empowergenderandclimateinthecovid.pdf

the breadwinners and maintain family stability when climate change is destroying farming and fishing livelihoods put them under considerable pressure.³¹ Studies link increases in suicides among male farmers in India to the immense stress they experience during periods of food insecurity, when they are expected to provide food for the family.³² Studies also suggest that men are more at risk of certain health issues associated with working outdoors, such as heatstroke and contracting specific infectious diseases.³³ However, on the whole, our experience tells us that — due to multiple layers of discrimination that exclude and marginalise women in social, economic, material, political and environmental life — women and girls tend to not only be disproportionately affected, but also understudied and underrepresented in policy discussions.

Our research in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan revealed that every displaced person has a story. The stories are often tragic, involving loss, deprivation, helplessness and a struggle to survive.



Migrant women from rural cyclone-impacted areas cooking in a slum in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Photo credit: ActionAid Bangladesh

31. <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002603>

32. Jordan, J.C. (2019), *Deconstructing resilience: why gender and power matter in responding to climate stress in Bangladesh*, *Climate and Development*, 11:2, 167-179. DOI: 10.1080/17565529.2018.1442790

33. <https://www.eco-business.com/news/mapped-how-climate-change-disproportionately-affects-womens-health/>;
<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/11/heat-killing-more-people-ever-scientists-are-looking-ways-lower-risk>;
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/gallery/2015/jun/23/pakistan-heatwave-in-pictures>; International Labour Organisation (2019) Working on a warmer planet The impact of heat stress on labour productivity and decent work, ILO, Geneva.



Hard won social mobility of women enhances their resilience to flooding as they fetch freshwater in Faridpur, Bangladesh.
Photo credit: ActionAid Bangladesh

3. Climate Migration and Women’s Rights – Key Trends

Global literature as well as our studies show that climate-induced migration has a range of impacts on women and girls. These can be grouped under the following four thematic areas. However, it is important to note that there are inevitable overlaps — since the causes and impacts are grounded in systemic patriarchy and gendered social norms.

1. Health impacts
2. Mobility and quality of life
3. Women’s economic rights
4. Violence against women and girls

The following sections will highlight the thematic areas with examples from the global literature as well as our research in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

3.1 Health

The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced the link between climate change and public health, especially for women and girls, for which the global pandemic has been described as having devastating effects.³⁴

Women’s and girls’ physical and mental health are particularly under threat due to climate change impacts. They suffer from food and nutritional insecurity when extreme events such as floods and/or droughts lead to a shortfall in production. This is because decisions are made in households to prioritise feeding the men and boys due to their breadwinning responsibilities. Some research has shown that young and elderly women are most at risk of hunger as a result.³⁵ At the same time they become more food insecure, their unpaid

34. https://www.preventionweb.net/files/73854_empowerongenderandclimateinthecovid.pdf; and [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31679-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31679-2/fulltext)

35. Sorensen, C. et al. (2018), *Climate Change and Women’s Health: Impacts and Opportunities in India*, *GeoHealth*, 2(10); Nombo, C.I. et al. (2015), *Adaptation to Climate Change: Changing Gender Relations in the Meatu and Iramba Districts in Tanzania*, In: Lal, R., Singh, B., Mwaseba, D. et al. (eds), *Sustainable Intensification to Advance Food Security and Enhance Climate Resilience in Africa*, Springer; Alston, M.

care burdens increase, making their calorie expenditure even more severe.³⁶ This leads to prolonged malnutrition, which is especially risky to the health of pregnant and lactating mothers. Infants and young children also suffer adversely as a consequence.

Studies by the World Health Organization also reveal that pregnant women face poorer health due to the risks brought about by climate change³⁷ – they are at an increased risk of miscarriage and premature birth due to unsanitary conditions and lack of access to healthcare professionals.³⁸ Absence of clean water makes it difficult to practice menstrual hygiene and can lead to health complications among women and girls.³⁹ Studies have found that following disasters, women suffer increase in skin rashes and infections of the reproductive system because they are not able to wash their menstrual cloth, or they lack access to other menstrual hygiene products. Studies have also shown an increased risk of urinary tract infections due to women avoiding sanitation areas/facilities for fear of sexual violence. Further, women's and girls' lower socioeconomic status make it more difficult for them to access and pay for treatment.⁴⁰ In relation to mental health, any direct attribution of climate change risks to mental health remains a challenge.⁴¹ It is, however, clear that mental health is closely linked with physical health⁴² and poor physical health and ailments can lead to poor quality of life and psychological distress.⁴³ Environmental psychologists emphasise the disproportionate impacts of displacement on women's mental health in South Asia. A study (due to be published in 2021) of 16 neighbourhoods affected by displacement and the threat of displacement, by Karachi Urban Lab, found that *"land displacement is not a gender-neutral process. Women expressed higher levels of distress due to loss of social safety, community disruption, loss of homes, and loss of livelihoods. In the case of ongoing displacements, these negative impacts on wellbeing caused immense anxiety and fear of loss."*⁴⁴

While these displacements were not all specifically climate-induced, they give an insight into the gendered trauma associated with being forced to move, and dislocate life, community and social networks – especially for women and girls who have invested their lives into negotiating gendered social norms. The need to do this in a whole new place can be intensely traumatic. Since mental illness remains a highly stigmatised issue across the three countries, it is often brushed under the carpet, especially for women.

In our research, women shared stories of climate impacts and related migrations affecting both their physical and mental health – and these were often interconnected. For example, several women across Pakistan told us distressing stories about their experiences. Thirty-four-year-old Rajju, from Sanghar in Tharparkar district in Sindh province said, "We had to migrate due to a drought in Sanghar village. I was seven months due. I joined work as a daily wage labourer where I had to carry weight. I miscarried. My family took a loan of PKR 10,000 (about USD 70) to meet my medical expenses. I went into depression after I lost my baby."⁴⁵

Similarly, 40-year-old Maya from Islamkot, another town in the same district, narrated: "I was expecting when we were forced to migrate. I did not have access to healthy or nutritious food. I delivered a girl, but we lost her in three days. She was too weak. I lost my

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- Akhter, B. (2016), *Gender and food security in Bangladesh: the impact of climate change*, Gender, Place and Culture, 23 (10); UN-FAO (2016), *Gender, food security and nutrition in protracted crises: Women and girls as agents of resilience*, Guidance Note.
36. Padmaja, R., Soumitra, P., Pingali, P.L. et al. (2019), *Understanding nutritional outcomes through gendered analysis of time-use patterns in semi-arid India*, Global Food Security, 23:49-63.; Vemireddy, V., Pingali, P.L. (2021), *Seasonal time trade-offs and nutrition outcomes for women in agriculture: Evidence from rural India*, Food Policy.
37. https://www.preventionweb.net/files/73854_empowerongenderandclimateintheCovid.pdf
38. UK Aid (2020), *Climate Change Brief, Adolescent Girls Resource Pack*, UK Aid.
39. https://www.preventionweb.net/files/73854_empowerongenderandclimateintheCovid.pdf
40. Bhatta, G.D., Aggarwal, P.K., Poudel, S. et al. (2015), *Climate-induced migration in South Asia: Migration decisions and the gender dimensions of adverse climatic events*, The Journal of Rural and Community Development, 10(4), 1-23.
41. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5984805/>
42. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4446935/>
43. Ibid.
44. Anjum, G., Anwar, N.H. et al. (2021), *Land, Governance & the Gendered Politics of Displacement in Urban Pakistan*, Karachi Urban Lab/ International Development Research Centre.
45. *Climate-induced migration among women of Pakistan: findings from District Muzaffargarh and District Tharparkar*, unpublished draft report, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan.

mother-in-law as well. Her health did not withstand our travails. We have not received any relief from the government. Instead, we are saddled with a loan of PKR 30,000 (USD 210).⁴⁶

In another province, Punjab, Kausar shared her story of experiencing Pakistan's mega floods in 2010, which affected over 20 million people. In her home town of Muzaffargarh, heavy flooding damaged her house and destroyed their livelihoods. The family also lost important documents to support their access to social protection. They were displaced to a temporary accommodation and had no income, leading them to experience severe hunger. Kausar would mix sugar in mud water to feed her children because milk was not available. This resulted in diarrhoea, skin rashes, fever and hepatitis. For food, she had to make do with scraps left at the temporary place she was staying at.⁴⁷ As a result of this displacement, her husband migrated to Dubai for work. His work, though, is not steady, so the remittances are not regular. She remains in a constant state of anxiety about household income. Due to the strict nature of social norms in the region, it is very difficult for Kausar to develop her own income sources.

3.2 Mobility and Quality of Life

Gender inequalities are spatialised across South Asia — with public spaces framed as 'for men' and domestic spaces the realm in which women should stay, in order to live up to their prescribed gender roles and maintain family honour.⁴⁸ These patriarchal, gendered, social norms are reinforced throughout society and limit women's choices in all realms of life. This is evident when it comes to migration. Men have historically practised circular migration across the three countries, during different seasons, to secure income. However, in large part migrations were for shorter periods of time and to closer locations. More recently, there appears to be an increasing trend of larger scale displacements, which are more permanent and often further away, due to the combination of slow- and rapid-onset climate impacts permanently affecting livelihood viability in certain areas. These displacements may involve women, but in the poorest communities, who have the least social and economic assets to support movement, women are often left behind to face the consequences.

In an increasingly prevalent scenario of men absent in villages, women have to take on roles which are traditionally seen as male/masculine to survive. This varies by context — especially between rural and urban settings where women's mobility options are very different. However, whether it is providing food or seeking or managing water and fuel, this can often be an intensely anxiety-provoking and harmful situation for women, who are expected to play a small role in public space across the contexts.⁴⁹ These harms may come in the form of physical backlash (violence and harassment), reputational backlash (challenging their bodily integrity) and anxiety associated with these choices and negotiations around mobility that men almost never have to face.

Women are also denied the same means and assets as men to ensure their own safety in case of flooding, landslides and storms. This heightens their vulnerabilities when men have out-migrated.⁵⁰ Loss of traditional food sources exposes women, especially in female-headed households, to loss of harvest, often their sole source of food and income.⁵¹

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Moghadam, V.M. (2002), *Patriarchy, the Taleban, and politics of public space in Afghanistan*, Women's Studies International Forum, 25 (1): 19-31.; Mumtaz, Z., Salway, S., Nykiforuk, C. et al. (2013), *The role of social geography on Lady Health Workers' mobility and effectiveness in Pakistan*, Social Science & Medicine, 91: 48-57; Lata, L.N., Walters, P., Roitman, S. (2021), *The politics of gendered space: social norms and purdah affecting female informal work in Dhaka*, Gender, Work & Organisation, 28 (1).

49. Anwar, N.H., Sawas, A., Mustafa, D. (2020), *Without water there is no life: negotiating every day risks and gendered insecurities in Karachi's informal settlements*, Urban Studies.

50. <https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/gender.pdf>

51. Ibid.

When the remittances from men who have migrated for work don't come, the women are forced to find jobs to support the family. Young girls, without choice, are forced to forego their education to assist with household burdens instead⁵², and/or are married off by parents, who worry they will not be able to feed them.⁵³

Our research showed that the stories of women's plight are similar across the three South Asia contexts.

In Dhaka in Bangladesh, a female respondent revealed that she had been seasonally migrating to Dhaka for years. There she earns USD 0.5 a day. Farming, she said, was no longer viable in her village and had ceased to be a source of sustenance for smallholders.

At another study site in Bangladesh, Jamalpur village in Sunamganj, young men in the village are absent for about eight months a year, since they must migrate to source income. A number of problems arise as a consequence. Floods feature annually in the village, which the women have to handle on their own. When low-lying houses are submerged for weeks, women are unwilling to leave their houses for the fear of their household goods being stolen. Availability of drinking water is disrupted, and women have to go afar to fetch water. Managing food and providing for the family are difficult in such circumstances.

Some women cannot reach hospitals in time for delivering their babies, while most do not know how to swim and are, therefore, trapped if they do not receive warnings of floods. Even if warning reaches them, stepping out of the house for shelter evokes fear of sexual or physical abuse.⁵⁴

Maleka, a 16-year-old from Miarchar, Bangladesh, wanted to be a teacher, but ended up as a domestic worker in Dhaka. Maleka's parents and five other siblings still live in her home village. Maleka followed her elder sister to Dhaka to help their family tide over one crisis after the other. Floods and unusually heavy rainfall have damaged Maleka's house in the village four times in the past eight years. On one occasion, while trying to fix the house, her father suffered an injury, rendering him immobile. Her mother is afflicted with health issues, which do not permit her to work. Food shortages, lack of basic needs and sanitation, and diseases stare the family in the face, as do mounting debts. Maleka had to drop out of school and move out to find menial work. She said, "My dream does not matter anymore. God had a different plan perhaps."⁵⁵

In Pakistan, women are expected to manage a household without problems even during a drought and when facing water shortage. If they fail, they face patriarchal and structural oppression. Studies have shown that depleting aquifers that supply water to Karachi have a particular bearing on women. While women and men talk of the psychological violence stemming from water insecurity, it is women who tend to embody the violence, due to their restricted social safety nets and mobilities. Women speak of dealing with sick children with no resources, of disappointing their husbands and even being assaulted by them for failing to manage existing water.⁵⁶

52. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1473237>

53. <https://bridesofthesun.com/>; Alston, M., Whittenbury, K., Haynes, A. et al. (2014), *Are climate challenges reinforcing child and forced marriage and dowry as adaptation strategies in the context of Bangladesh?*, Women's Studies International Forum, 47 (A); <http://www.unfpa.org/news/new-study-finds-child-marriage-rising-among-most-vulnerable-syrian-refugees> <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/2/19/marriage-of-survival-will-climate-change-mean-more-child-brides>; Chamberlain, G. (2017), *Why climate change is creating a new generation of child brides*, The Guardian, 26 November; Plan International (2018), *Adolescent Girls in Crisis: Voices from the Lake Chad Basin*; Camey, I.; Owren, C., Sabater, L. and Boyer, A. (2020) *Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality*. Wen, J. (ed.). Gland, Switzerland: IUCN; CARE International (2016), *Hope Dries Up? Women and Girls coping with Drought and Climate Change in Mozambique*; UNFPA (2017), *Evidence Brief: Women and Drought in Southern Mozambique: More Responsibilities, Less Power, and Increased Vulnerabilities*.

54. Ayeb-Karlsson, S. (2020), *When the disaster strikes: Gendered (im)mobility in Bangladesh*, Climate Risk Management, 29 (2020) 100237.

55. *Addressing climate change-induced displacement and migration in Bangladesh: taking a human rights based approach*, unpublished draft report, ActionAid Bangladesh.

56. Sawas, A., Anwar, N., Anjum, G. (2020) *Climate Change and Security in Urban Pakistan: A Gender Perspective*. In UNEP et al, *Climate, Gender and Security: Securing Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*. UNEP, UNDP, UNDPFA and UN-Women.



Noor Bibi from Shaiday IDP camp in Herat, Afghanistan.
Photo credit: TCRO

In post-disaster situations in Pakistan's Sindh district, studies have found immense pressure on women when their partners migrate to find work. Women who otherwise practise purdah find themselves displaced and forced to fend for themselves and their families. The women usually refer to themselves as 'shameless' for stepping out of their houses, for exposing themselves to the 'male gaze' by living in communal spaces following disasters.⁵⁷ The situation puts them under extreme stress.⁵⁸

In Afghanistan, floods have wiped away assets and reduced agricultural productivity, forcing men to migrate to urban areas for employment — some have gone to Iran. The women are usually left behind to look after the family and have to wait for money to be sent back to them, or find employment within the village. Rural Afghanistan is conservative and women there usually do not leave the house without a male member of the family accompanying them. In the absence of male family members, women have no choice but to leave the house to buy food and look for work.

During our participatory research in Afghanistan, women described how scared and uncomfortable they usually are when they leave their houses, even if it is to buy food. They face abuse and harassment in the marketplace. Since remittances are not regular, the women are made to work longer hours at lower pay in comparison to the daily wage rate paid to men. Sometimes they do not hear from their husbands for months.

Then, there are many who have lost husbands and children to disasters. Some like Noor Bibi and Shahr Bano end up in displacement camps (see related box). Some get married to men who have lost their spouses in the hope of getting male support. In some cases, daughters are married off for a paltry bride price. Sometimes children, mostly young boys, get busy trying to earn by washing cars in city or by collecting and selling metal or plastic waste — or, they beg. School is a luxury they cannot afford — it is survival over education.

57. Memon, F.S. (2020), *Climate Change and Violence Against Women: Study of A Flood-Affected Population in The Rural Area of Sindh, Pakistan*, Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies Alam-e-Niswan.

58. Ibid.

Noor Bibi, a resident of Khoshab village in Kishk district of Herat in Afghanistan, lived happily with her husband and three children in a mud house. She had 10 goats and land, and never had to worry about food. In 2018, on a fateful night, heavy downpour followed by floods consumed her happiness. She lost her husband, two sons, goats and land to the floods. She and her two-year-old daughter arrived with nothing at Shaiday displacement camp. Noor Bibi now barely survives on USD 4 a week by weaving wool. She shares her tent with a cousin who has also lost her home and family to the same floods. She continues to await meaningful financial assistance.

Noor Bibi's neighbour Shahr Bano lost her husband and a son to the floods. She is in the camp with her two remaining children. There is no one else to take care of the children, so she cannot go looking for work outside of the camp. She also fears being harassed if she goes out unaccompanied. Like Noor Bibi, Shahr Bano also weaves wool and struggles to make ends meet. Her children cry, mostly because they are hungry, said Shahr Bano, so they go around the city looking for scraps in garbage. If they get sick, she has no resources for a visit to the doctor.

Noor Bibi and Shahr Bano do not know how long they will stay in Shaiday. They would like to return home, but they do not know how to begin a new life. "I want the government to rebuild my village. I hope my daughter can go to school and then to a university. I want my daughter to become a doctor," said Noor Bibi.⁵⁹

3.3 Women's Economic Rights

More and more women are moving into agriculture as men migrate for paid labour. Yet women farmers have less access to inputs and resources that could improve their farming and meet climate change challenges.⁶⁰ Inequality between the sexes and deeply rooted imbalanced power relations often push women into a more vulnerable position.⁶¹ As women increasingly take to farm work, the term feminisation of agriculture has gained popularity. Typically, feminisation involves women managing finances, crop production and engagement with market and land. But this does not translate into decision-making powers due to unchanging patriarchal societal structures and gender inequalities.

Moreover, the farm work is in addition to women's regular home responsibilities. On top of this increased workload, they have to deal with moneylenders or find employment because they are heavily dependent on remittances which are often not regular. The situation reinforces the already skewed customary gendered divisions of labour.

Sometimes there are advantages. A study in Bangladesh suggests that migration of male members opened up spaces for women.⁶² Following Aila cyclone in 2009, women, with the help of local NGOs, undertook transformative adaptation. While women were largely confined to their houses due to religious and cultural boundaries pre-Aila, following the cyclone, the women of Gabura transformed their livelihoods, in particular food production and small-scale industry. They disseminated knowledge and technologies related to their local context to improve their practices and to make themselves more resilient to, and prepared for, future climate and other stressors.⁶³

In our research we found that women's livelihoods were being squeezed and shifted in response to the climate-induced migration of men, compounding their vulnerabilities and economic exclusions.

59. Spink, P. (2020), *Climate change drives migration in conflict-ridden Afghanistan*, ActionAid International.

60. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/GenderClimateBriefs.pdf>

61. <https://knowledge.unccd.int/publications/3-ways-which-gender-equality-interlinks-climate-migration-adaptation-strategy>

62. Khalil, M.B., Jacobs, B.C., McKenna, K. et al. (2019), *Female contribution to grassroots innovation for climate change adaptation in Bangladesh*, Climate and Development. DOI: 10.1080/17565529.2019.1676188

63. Ibid.

In Pakistan, our study covered two of the poorest, and most climate-affected, districts: Muzaffargarh in Punjab and Tharparkar in Sindh.⁶⁴ Muzaffargarh also has a deeply embedded history of land feudalism, causing great social inequality between the landless and the landowners.⁶⁵ This is made more severe for women because, although, legally, women can inherit land and property, most are still denied any physical and financial control or benefit.⁶⁶ Like in other districts of Southern Punjab, due to the out-migration of men, women have become a key part of the agriculture workforce in Muzaffargarh.⁶⁷ Landless women workers are some of the most vulnerable to livelihood and food insecurity in the country. This is compounded by the fact that their livelihoods are often climate-dependent, e.g. rain-fed agriculture, cotton-picking or raising livestock.⁶⁸

Women in Tharparkar district are also a key workforce in farmland. They are largely in the poor Hindu community (of Scheduled Castes), where men have migrated. Women mostly work without any financial benefit and have the added responsibilities of domestic chores and managing increasingly scarce water resources. Hindu women have also taken up some other means of earning such as tailoring because remittances are not always assured. Farm labour is hard and has direct impacts on women's health. Often women suffer miscarriages and then they have to rely on loans from Muslim landowners for treatment. This builds a cycle of debt and bonded labour that is almost impossible to break.



Community seed bank managed by women in Gaibandha, Bangladesh.
Photo credit: ActionAid Bangladesh

64. *Climate-induced migration among women of Pakistan: findings from District Muzaffargarh and District Tharparkar*, unpublished draft report, Sustainable Development Policy Institute, Pakistan.

65. *Ibid.*

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

Deeme, from Malook Mehar in Tharparkar district of Sindh province in Pakistan, said, “When we migrated due to drought, my husband got sick and I had to take a loan of PKR 15,000 (USD 142.8) for his treatment. In order to repay the loan, I had to work at a brick kiln for four years. I was getting PKR 400 (USD 3.8) per 1000 bricks. By the time we returned to our village, our houses were damaged.”⁶⁹

3.4 Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

Research shows a vicious cycle between VAWG and climate change. Firstly, VAWG reduces women’s resilience, and becomes a significant barrier to their building resilience and engaging in the climate transition.⁷⁰ Then, climate impacts contribute to spikes in various forms of VAWG, thus violating women’s and girls’ rights and feeding back into their poor resilience.⁷¹ The evidence is emerging around trends in various forms of physical and sexual violence against women linked to climate-induced displacement and migration. This is driven by systemic patriarchy and control over women’s bodily autonomy across South Asia, meaning women are exposed to violence regardless of location. However, migration and displacement create heightened risks and vulnerabilities related to VAWG.

As mentioned earlier, in the subsection on health, women face disproportionate physical and mental health impacts related to climate change shocks and stressors, due to gendered social norms. Since women are generally responsible for care work such as providing food and water in any climate-stressed situation, they are the ones who physically and mentally exhaust themselves to fulfil the needs of others. Many women, interviewed about their lived experiences of these shocks and stressors, use the phrase ‘psychological violence’ or ‘mental torture’.⁷² They also speak of the feeling of being ‘trapped’, as part of this psychological violence.

Our research in Bangladesh showed that following a disaster, women either experience sexual harassment and catcalling when they go to fetch water in unfamiliar environments or they bear the physical and/or verbal wrath of the men in their homes, who, according to them, are stressed because they are unable to provide food and shelter. Abusive behaviour is accepted as inevitable and is, therefore, often not branded as abuse or harassment.⁷³

Women are also at a heightened risk of sexual harassment, sexual assault and trafficking. If displaced women and girls make it to shelter facilities, it is incredibly difficult for them to use public toilets because of the stigma associated with being seen by men without a veil or in wet clothes.⁷⁴ Camps or temporary housing facilities lack appropriate personal hygiene amenities for women and girls; there is often no privacy or separate toilets and bath for women. This further increases their risk of sexual harassment and violence.

A study conducted in Bangladesh showed that around half of the women in shelters felt that the facilities were not gender-appropriate and the shelters were not safe for women and young girls. Pregnant women and lactating mothers face additional problems due to the unavailability of private spaces.⁷⁵ Studies have also established that sexual assault, kidnapping and trafficking of women and girls increases during floods.⁷⁶ This

69. Ibid.

70. Le Masson, V., Benoudji, C., Sotelo Reyes, S. et al. (2019), *Violence Against Women and Girls and Resilience: links, impacts and perspectives from the Chadian context*, Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Building Resilience And Adaptation To Climate Extremes And Disasters (BRACED); Carney, I., Sabater, L., Owren, C. et al. (2020), *Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality*. Wen, J. (ed.), IUCN, Gland, Switzerland.

71. Ibid; UNEP (2020), *Climate, Gender and Security: Sustaining inclusive peace on the frontlines of climate change*, UNEP.

72. Memon, F.S. (2020), *Climate Change and Violence Against Women: Study of A Flood-Affected Population in The Rural Area of Sindh, Pakistan*, Pakistan Journal of Women’s Studies Alam-e-Niswan; Anwar et al. (2016), *Gender and Violence in Urban Pakistan*, International Development Research Centre; Mustafa et al. (2019), *Gender, global terror, and everyday violence in urban Pakistan*, Political Geography.

73. Sharmin, R., Sharmin, S., Iqbal S.M.S. et al. (2020), *Climate-induced migration and displacement in Bangladesh: a case study of riverbank erosion from Naria Upazila, Shariatpur*, Climate Action Network South Asia.

74. Memon, F.S. (2020), *Climate Change and Violence Against Women: Study of A Flood-Affected Population in The Rural Area of Sindh, Pakistan*, Pakistan Journal of Women’s Studies Alam-e-Niswan.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

is because young girls and women are exceptionally vulnerable during migration and displacement, not only due to their dislocation from familial and social networks, but also because of their heightened need to seek food and cash from new sources.⁷⁷

Women giving birth to stillborn babies or being turned away by in-laws is common in Bangladesh. Getting daughters married is also difficult sometimes because men do not show interest in a girl whose family has lost everything in a disaster.

When men migrate alone, female members left behind fear sexual harassment when they step out to do chores men would do earlier.

For the women climate migrants who arrive in Dhaka, life is seldom easy.⁷⁸ They usually work as domestic help or in garment factories and raise families—often fending off sexual and other forms of violence daily.

Ajekjan Begum lives in a slum in Kalyanpur and is worried about being robbed for a second time. The atmosphere in the slums — from thefts to rapes to drugs — is not good, she laments.⁷⁹

In Pakistan too, women bear the brunt of male anxiety and frustration stemming from their inability to be the 'providers' in disaster situations.⁸⁰ Women are subject to emotional, physical and sexual violence. Studies also show that during heat waves in particular, women faced higher levels of aggression, despair and violence and lower levels of wellbeing.⁸¹

The lack of availability of water for basic tasks like washing, cooking and drinking results in domestic violence from partners or other family members.⁸² The situation gets worse if a male member dies or becomes incapacitated in a disaster, since women assume the burden of running the house.

These forms of everyday violence, and women's limited options in seeking recourse, or justice, show how harmful gendered social norms continue to pervade everyday life in the three countries.⁸³

77. Ibid.

78. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/2019/01/climate-change-drives-migration-crisis-in-bangladesh-from-dhaka-sundabans/>
79. Sharmin, R., Sharmin, S., Iqbal S.M.S. et al. (2020), *Climate-induced migration and displacement in Bangladesh: a case study of riverbank erosion from Naria Upazila, Shariatpur*, Climate Action Network South Asia.

80. Sawas, A., Anwar, N., Anjum, G. (2020) Climate Change and Security in Urban Pakistan: A Gender Perspective. In UNEP et al, *Climate, Gender and Security: Securing Inclusive Peace on the Frontlines of Climate Change*. UNEP, UNDP, UNDP/PA and UN-Women.

81. Ibid.

82. Memon, F.S. (2020), *Climate Change and Violence Against Women: Study of A Flood-Affected Population in The Rural Area of Sindh, Pakistan*, Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies Alam-e-Niswan.

83. Ibid.



A child in Shaiday IDP camp in Herat, Afghanistan.
Photo credit: ActionAid

4. Making the Policy Landscape Gender-responsive

While climate-induced mobilities — whether migration or displacement, temporary or long term — affect all genders, poor women and girls face unique sets of struggles, impacts and exclusions. These must be addressed in order to protect women’s and girls’ rights and for them to thrive under new circumstances. Any policy related to climate migration in the three countries studied in South Asia must be gender-responsive and grounded in the intersectional barriers that women and girls face.

Environment- and climate-related policies in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Bangladesh only make perfunctory references to the issue. However, this also presents an opportunity to make the policy landscape gender-responsive and elevate women’s and girls’ voices. And to do this, our policy research in the three countries showed there is no need to entirely reinvent the wheel. Countries have taken steps to respond to climate change, whether it is through National Climate Policies or projects in adaptation and mitigation. What is needed is better linkages across policies and programmes; climate proofing gender-responsive policies and practices; or embedding a gender-responsive approach into climate and livelihoods policies and practices. The critical implementation gap can be addressed through the collaborative working of government, civil society, researchers and — most importantly — women and girls, who can illuminate where the barriers and opportunities lie in each context.

4.1 Country Policies: Gaps and Opportunities

4.1.1 Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, although there is no overall regulatory framework specifically addressing climate change, a number of policies and strategies can be tailored to address climate-induced migration and its impacts on women and girls.

Two government institutions address displacement in the country – i) the Office of the State Minister for Disaster Management and Humanitarian Affairs; and ii) the Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation in association with other line ministries. Afghanistan also has an Inter-Ministerial Coordination Committee on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to ensure that displacement-specific needs are included in sectoral laws, policies, plans and programmes of relevant ministries at the national, provincial and municipal levels.

The country has launched the following policies related to displacement:

- 2009 National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) and the country's development plans are now guided by the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) (2017-2021), likely to be superseded by ANPDF II (2021-2025).⁸⁴
- 2011 Strategic National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction (SNAP)
- 2013 IDP Policy
- 2014 Disaster Management Strategy (NDMS, 2014–17), with the purpose of coordination with programmes run by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).
- 2017 Policy Framework for Returnees and IDPs (PFRI)
- 2019 Comprehensive Migration Policy (CMP), developed with the support of the European Union and the assistance of the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD). The policy builds on PFRI, with a focus on return and reintegration from a sustainable development perspective, moving beyond the humanitarian and immediate assistance aspects covered by PFRI.

Several of these policies and strategies need to be climate-proofed. For example, the 2013 IDP Policy and the 2014 NDMS do not mention climate change at all; and in the 2017 IDP Policy (PRFI) only those displaced due to conflict are included. There is no mention of people displaced due to disasters, whether rapid or slow-onset. This is the same for the NAPA, which does not refer to displacement as a result of climate-induced shocks and stressors and their impacts on communities with low resilience. It is good to see some recognition of migration related to livelihood insecurity in the ANPDF, but with no reference to environmental impacts on those livelihood insecurities.

Where climate change is starting to be acknowledged, there is a need to make policies gender responsive. The ANPDF II, for example does acknowledge climate change as a serious and current threat that needs to be addressed. However, it does not yet focus on the specifics of climate-induced migration, nor on the ways women and girls are disproportionately impacted. The 2019 Comprehensive Migration Policy provides for appropriate responses. The policy states that “a gender equality and women's empowerment perspective is essential to optimize the development impact of women migrants. An overarching issue relevant to migrant women is the need for protection against gender discrimination in all phases of the migration cycle”. The policy also states that national and provincial action plans will take into account the gender dimension of policy implementation, in line with relevant international standards. It remains to be seen whether these plans will receive the necessary attention and funding for implementation.⁸⁵

84. Spink, P. (2020), *Climate Change drives migration in conflict-ridden Afghanistan*, ActionAid International.

85. Ibid.

4.1.2 Pakistan

Recent successive governments in Pakistan have indicated that addressing climate change is a policy priority. Currently, the Ministry of Climate Change is responsible for the country's climate change strategies, policies and action plans. The National Disaster Management Authority of Pakistan deals with disaster risk reduction. Due to acknowledged gaps in implementation the government also established a National Climate Council, under the Climate Change Act of 2017, with the express purpose of supporting Pakistan's embodiment of its policies and plans amid other strategic challenges, such as underdevelopment and security. However, the Council is yet to be operationalised, with climate experts regularly calling on the government to address this.⁸⁶

Other relevant policies include:

- 2012 National Climate Change Policy (NCCP)
- 2012 National Development Strategy
- 2014 Framework for Implementation of Climate Change Policy
- 2019 National Disaster Risk Response Plan
- Pakistan Vision 2025 — a national vision, published by the Planning Commission, for a more prosperous and equitable society.
- A range of provincial and municipal-level plans, such as the 2017 Punjab Climate Change Policy; 2020 Karachi Strategic Development Plan.

All of these policies acknowledge and recognise the impacts of climate change. It is only within the more localised policies and plans that both gender and migration issues are referred to. This is a promising development. However, there is a chronic implementation gap that must be overcome for these policies and plans to have resonance with the realities on the ground.

The National Climate Change Policy acknowledges the mounting risks to rural livelihoods and the increasing migration of rural population towards urban areas of the country. The Framework for Implementation of National Climate Change Policy (2014), which provides actionable policy targets for implementing NCCP, recommends that rural to urban migration be curbed through rural development. Similarly, Pakistan's National Disaster Risk Reduction Policy, published in 2013, emphasised multi-hazard early warning, disaster preparedness and response strategies, and a range of policy measures to reduce vulnerabilities. Although the policy mentions climate change hazards and their link to migration and displacement (in the preamble), it lacks further provisions in terms of ensuring safe relocation of vulnerable rural populations during early periods of disasters.

While in some of the policies, displacement and migration find a mention, women's and girls' issues remain on the fringe. Pakistan's second national communication document to the UNFCCC reads, *"Pakistan fully recognizes that women are powerful agents of change. It is, therefore, vital to ensure participation of women and female gender experts in all policies, initiatives and decisions relating to climate change. To address the gender aspects of vulnerability from climate change, the government in collaboration with other relevant entities needs to make strategic measures."*⁸⁷ However, no timeline is provided for when and how these strategic measures will be undertaken. Further, in recent years, climate experts have increasingly expressed concern about the exclusion of women from these processes.⁸⁸

86. Hussain, S. (2019), *Climate Council Yet to Hold First Meeting*, Express Tribune, 31 January.

87. Ministry of Climate Change, Government of Pakistan (2018) Pakistan's Second National Communication on Climate Change to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), pp: 117

88. Examples: https://twitter.com/rafay_alam/status/1019169806078107648?s=20;
<https://twitter.com/simisadafkamal/status/1273664315355209730?s=20>;
<https://twitter.com/afiasalam/status/1118396554325430272?s=20>

The country's National Disaster Management Authority has developed guidelines, 'Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), Gender and Environment', with an objective to provide disaster managers with the initial tools for taking care of the infrastructure and social vulnerability during a disaster.⁸⁹ At the provincial level too, the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) has established 'Gender and Child Cells' and developed codes of conduct to support gender integration during humanitarian response.⁹⁰ However, these remain mostly on paper as humanitarian response either excludes or does not consider the needs of women.⁹¹ A survey of the literature in Pakistan on the topic stresses the need for gender-disaggregated data.⁹² Studies also show that despite various public narratives about the painful lessons of exclusion of women and girls in early warning systems and responses to recurrent disasters, there remains a chronic exclusion of women and girls from post-disaster consultations. This is not helpful. One-off examples do exist though, as in the following case.

In January 2021, Sindh province's Legislative Assembly passed a landmark amendment which recognised the role of women farmers in water management for the first time ever.⁹³ The Sindh Water Management (Amendment) Bill, 2018, is now said to guarantee women's representation in around 45,000 water course associations, over 350 farmer organisations and 14 area water boards in the province. It has been a long battle to create this historic change.⁹⁴ The extent to which women — from all segments of society — will be supported to take on these roles in practice remains to be seen. Meaningful implementation will be absolutely critical to the Bill's success. Nevertheless, it is an example of gender-responsive legislation that needs replication across South Asia.



Focus group discussion with migrant women in Pakistan.
Photo credit: SDPI

89. Resurrección, B.P., Goodrich, C.G., Song, Y. et al. (2019), In the shadows of the Himalayan Mountains: Persistent Gender and Social Exclusion in Development, In: *The Hindu Kush Himalaya Assessment: Mountains, climate change, sustainability and people*, International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) and Hindu Kush Himalayan Monitoring and Assessment Programme (HIMAP).

90. Ibid.

91. Ibid.

92. Ibid.

93. <https://www.eco-business.com/news/women-in-pakistans-sindh-win-historic-recognition-to-manage-water/>

94. Ibid.

4.1.3 Bangladesh

Bangladesh has released a host of policies to address climate change and related migration issues. These include:

- 2005 National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA)
- 2009 Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan
- 2013 Overseas Employment and Migrants Act, but which does not mention anything on climate-induced migration.
- 2016-20 and 2021-25 National Plans for Disaster Management
- Eighth Five-Year Plan (2021-2025)
- Vision 2021 and the Perspective Plan of Bangladesh

Overall, of the three countries, Bangladesh is the most advanced in addressing the interlinkages between climate change impacts, livelihoods and human mobilities. Its Third National Communication report to the UNFCCC mentions migration in the context of urbanisation; as a coping mechanism during floods and drought; and resulting out of river bank erosion and salinity intrusion. The National Plan for Disaster Management (2021-25) acknowledges that floods and riverbank erosion are rendering people homeless. But it does not address migration any further as a strategy for poor people to cope with disasters or adapt, and resettlement is mentioned briefly.⁹⁵ The plan emphasises the importance of supporting migrants to cities to ensure quality of life, safe housing and resilient cities. It also states that it will empower local authorities to work with civil society and people to support resilience. It speaks of the inclusion of women as a key priority, after learning from the failures to do so in the prior plan. However, it does not link climate-induced migration with gender-responsiveness, which remains a key gap.

In its policies and communications Bangladesh widely acknowledges the extreme challenges women face due to climate impacts. These include challenges in the agriculture sector; additional workload; and discrimination in terms of extended work hours, employment opportunities and human rights.

How people can, and do, move in response to climate impacts, and how the movement impacts women needs to translate into policies and programmes that explicitly safeguard affected women, and support their agency to build resilience at home, or in the receiving communities.

It is important to address not just the movement of people arising out of fewer employment opportunities, but also the cause of fewer employment opportunities.

The Eighth Five-Year Plan has a section dedicated to women empowerment, social inclusion and social protection. The plan mentions that the 2020 Global Gender Gap Report ranks Bangladesh 50th among 153 countries and first among South Asian Countries. The report ranks countries based on their progress towards closing the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival; and political empowerment. The plan, however, recognises limitations such as weak implementation of laws related to women and their economic participation and opportunity.

The Five-Year Plan also refers to the National Strategy for Water and Sanitation in hard-to-reach areas. It states, “The areas susceptible to climate change require context specific interventions to ensure sustainable WASH services. Adequate attention should also be given to climate-induced WASH realities of women and other vulnerable groups who are disproportionately affected.”

95. Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate change, Bangladesh (2018), Third National Communication of Bangladesh to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The plan makes several references to migration as well, but mostly from the economic lens.

Bangladesh can take advantage of key moments though, since it is preparing and revising major policies, strategies and plans to implement climate actions and climate-proof development. These are the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, National Adaptation Plan and the Bangladesh Climate Investment Plan. This is an opportunity to build interlinked approaches and address climate-induced migration with gender-responsive approaches to support overall climate resilience and gender equality.

It is clear that South Asian countries urgently need gendered policies on climate-induced migration. To properly implement these policies, the countries will also have to remove constraints such as lack of financial resources; lack of climate attribution to disasters; limited scientific information to attribute climate change as a factor for migration; lack of institutional/inter-departmental coordination and capacities; insufficiently trained human resources; and limited investment in climate change education.

4.2 Promising Practices

Although we do not yet see adequately gender-responsive approaches, it is important to acknowledge the promising work the three countries are doing to support both migrating and receiving communities to prosper in the face of climate change. We support their efforts to pilot schemes on social protection and resilience building, and offer guidance on making such schemes gender responsive.

4.2.1 Social Protection through Cash Transfers: The WATAN Card in Pakistan

In 2010 and 2011, Pakistan experienced mega floods across the country, leaving one-fifth of its landmass under water and affecting over 20 million people, displacing at least 6 million of them. When the floods hit Pakistan 2 million hectares of crops were ready for harvest. This led to massive risks of food insecurity and destroyed livelihoods. For the first time in the country's history, it responded through a large-scale social protection scheme — the Citizen's Damage Compensation Program (CDCP) — which provided 'universal' disaster relief to all households in the affected regions. This was made possible in large part due to an up-to-date social registry maintained by the National Database Registration Authority (NADRA) in Pakistan. At that point, NADRA had claimed to cover 96 per cent of Pakistan's 180 million citizens. The programme instituted used citizenship numbers to identify people and then provided them ATM cards, called 'WATAN cards'. The government of Pakistan provided almost USD 400 million in cash grants to more than 1.62 million families.⁹⁶

Researchers who studied relief transfer among the most affected and marginalised communities across the Sindh province, found that the scheme was popular among communities, regardless of their social class, ethnicity or geographical location. For many this became the first directly positive experience with the state. The experience created a 'transformative political space' where a more positive state-social contract — and, importantly, the feeling of citizenship — could be built.⁹⁷ The cash supported the people to move back home after the flood waters had receded, despite the destruction of their homes and the death of their livestock. Many people in the most affected regions of Sindh and Punjab prefer temporary and circular migration because of the importance of continuing to live on ancestral lands. This social protection scheme allowed people to respond to — and recover from — the shocks of the floods. The transition was also supported by local and international NGOs that implemented water sanitation, hygiene and resilience-building programmes in the aftermath of the floods.

96. World Bank (2013), Pakistan's Citizens Damage Compensation Program (CDCP).

97. Siddiqi, A. (2018), 'Disaster citizenship: an emerging framework for understanding the depth of digital citizenship in Pakistan', *Contemporary South Asia*, 26:2, 157-174.

This is an excellent example of promising practice, and it can be built upon in future to be more gender responsive. Although NADRA had done an important job by registering 96 percent of citizens, the large majority of those who fell through the cracks were poor women and girls. At least 10 million remained unregistered by the time of the floods, and therefore could not receive their own WATAN cards, and had to rely on family members. Additionally, even for the women who did get WATAN cards, social norms around their mobilities made it much more challenging to go and wait in the line of, mostly, men at the ATM. Another issue was that very little information about the scheme filtered through to the most marginalised women and girls within communities.

To make social protection schemes like this more gender responsive, we recommend working with women's rights organisations to develop strategies. These can include:

- Developing a rapid documentation scheme for unregistered women and girls, to ensure that no one falls through the cracks.
- Stop relying on community 'gatekeepers' to communicate to everyone. Develop communications strategies that recognise and mitigate gendered and intersectional exclusions.
- Organising women-only transport to and from cash sources to ensure that they can access and benefit from the cash; or, work with banks and/or local civil society to develop closer distribution sources where women are protected from threats.



Women speaking about the impacts of migration on their lives, Pakistan.
Photo credit: SDPI

4.2.2 Creating Safe and Resilient Spaces for Relocation: Climate-resilient, Migrant-friendly Towns in Bangladesh

Due to the imminence of climate threats in Bangladesh, its civil society and government have long been at the forefront of proposing innovative solutions to the climate crisis. The International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) has a project focused on supporting the inevitable migration, by 2050, of at least 13 million people within Bangladesh.⁹⁸ It is focusing on supporting migration to smaller towns and cities, rather than solely to vulnerable megacities, such as Dhaka. The team at ICCCAD has identified 12 inland towns, which are far away from low-lying coastal areas and have populations of about 500,000 that can be increased to about 1,500,000 and transformed into climate-resilient towns.⁹⁹

This project supports Bangladesh's Seventh Five-Year Plan by focusing on 'transformative adaptation', which addresses the needs and adaptations at societal, community and national levels. These cities are being prepared to offer multi-scale and multi-sector opportunities by promoting livelihood security, climate resilience and cohesion of households and communities, whilst also supporting sustainable economic development and national plans. This includes social work, such as working with the receiving communities to understand the benefits of in-migration, and to help migrants integrate and feel welcome there.

One example is of 'Mongla Port' city, which is preparing itself to be 'climate migrant friendly'. It is being designed as a refuge, which can support migrants in accessing basic services, jobs and green, resilient infrastructure. These initiatives are not just beneficial to the migrants and the receiving city, but megacities where migrants would be forced to go otherwise. This takes the pressure off megacities and supports with the spatial distribution of migration.¹⁰⁰

The project offers huge promise, but currently, from what is available of the plans it appears they are not yet gender responsive. Some ways to build gender-responsiveness into these cities are:

- Working with local women's rights organisations in the sending and receiving communities to map and understand the normative challenges and opportunities for women and girls in the transition process so that they can thrive in their new communities.
- Developing gender-responsive, decent work strategies that account for the fact that the majority of women's work in Bangladesh is informal and precarious, and support women migrants get into safer and more sustainable jobs.
- Developing education strategies centred on girls and women. This will support migrating women to access education and skills development tailored to the needs and opportunities in their new home town.

98. Rigaud, K.K., de Sherbinin, A., Bryan, J. et al. (2018), *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration*, World Bank, Washington, DC.

99. <http://www.icccad.net/publications/policy-briefs/building-climate-resilient-migrant-friendly-cities-and-towns/>

100. <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/climate-migrant-cities>



Children in Shaiday IDP camp in Herat, Afghanistan.
Photo credit: TCRO

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Climate-induced migration needs recognition in government policies, with the acknowledgement that there is a chain of causality between structural inequalities and poor governance, leading to low resilience which makes climate change impacts shocking and severe. This leads to the loss of economic opportunities, reduced quality of life and becomes a driver of temporary and permanent human mobilities. The report documents evidence of this causality, across scientific literature and primary research with people on the frontlines of climate change in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan. It is also clear from the evidence that often the most vulnerable people cannot afford to migrate since migration is tied to social and financial capacities. But when climate-induced disasters strike, they can end up displaced and are left with little choice but to migrate. These trends must be reflected and addressed in policy and programming.

Despite the urgent need for the world to restrict warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, countries' current climate action plans submitted to the UNFCCC point to an average 3°C+ rise in global temperature.

Unless urgent efforts are put in place to tackle the climate emergency, climate-induced migration is going to increase, dislocating millions of people from their homes, livelihoods, cultures and social networks, and impacting women and girls especially adversely.

Given the projected impacts of climate change on internal displacement, there is no time to lose. In the event of both slow-onset and extreme weather events, peoples' rights to stay and to move must be protected. For this to happen, different actors — from multilateral to national and local governments, as well as development and humanitarian organisations, the private sector and academia — have a role to play in ensuring that vulnerable climate migrants, including women and girls, are protected through gender-responsive public services and targeted social protection schemes.

Gender-responsive public services are proven to be key instruments for delivering on human rights and the SDGs, and for tackling the barriers and exclusions that marginalise women and girls.¹⁰¹ Quality provision of universal, publicly delivered and publicly funded early childcare, public education, health and water, are crucial — alongside

101. <https://actionaid.org/sites/default/files/publications/Who%20cares%20for%20the%20future%20key%20messages.pdf>

investments in energy, agriculture and social protection that put women's and girls' needs and agency at the centre.¹⁰² Social protection is a critical tool to address gendered vulnerabilities and exclusions, and increase women's autonomy and agency. This can include cash transfers and access to maternal healthcare.¹⁰³ States need to deliver social protection both for those at home and those displaced or driven to migrate.¹⁰⁴ To do this effectively, women's participation in planning processes remains non-negotiable.

Disaster response must also be designed to ensure gender-sensitive relocation.¹⁰⁵ This includes steps such as targeted nutrition schemes for pregnant and lactating women; schemes to ensure protection from violence and harassment; safe mobilities; access to decent work opportunities; and community integration and psycho-social support.¹⁰⁶ Gender-responsive health and social care must be available with temporary shelters, and built into the structures of 'climate migrant friendly' towns and cities.

Governments must also support communities in vulnerable rural and peri-urban areas to become more resilient. One proven approach is through agroecological farming, which strengthens resilience by using indigenous and organic materials instead of foreign species and chemicals. This is proven, through many studies, to improve soil health and water-carrying capacity, help diversify seeds and crops, and combat pests and disease.¹⁰⁷ All of this contributes to community and household resilience to disasters, as well as income and nutrition. By working with nature, increasing biodiversity and avoiding harmful agrochemicals that can impact the environment and human health, agroecology can provide multiple additional benefits to farmers. These benefits include reduced unpaid care work, support for girls to go back to school, and in some communities even a reduction in domestic violence.¹⁰⁸ Ultimately, agroecology is increasingly proving to be a tool of both resilience – supporting people's right to stay in place and live in a healthy environment – as well as women's and girls' empowerment.

Facilitating dignified, planned movement in South Asia requires policymakers to better understand the state of climate-induced migration and displacement, and share the learnings and information across borders. Investing in, and collecting, high-quality, gender-disaggregated data is critical to enabling better understanding of how climate-induced migration, gender and women's rights are related. This will be critical to informing interventions that improve outcomes for women and men, boys and girls.¹⁰⁹

To get there, women and girls have to be brought to the fore and made visible. The best way to ensure their visibility and develop gender-responsive solutions is to resource and support women-led movements and collectives. These have proven, through various studies in South Asia, to be critical assets in understanding and breaking down the barriers that exclude and marginalise women and girls across public and private life.¹¹⁰

To help achieve this, the following recommendations were developed, based on the learnings of the secondary literature review and our conversations with women living on the frontlines of the climate crisis in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan:

102. Ibid.

103. Singh, H., Faleiro, J., Anderson, T. et al. (2020), *Costs of Climate Inaction: displacement and distress migration*, ActionAid and Climate Action Network South Asia.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid.

108. Ibid.

109. <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002603>

110. Nazneen, S., Hossain, N., Chopra, C. (2019), *Introduction: contentious women's empowerment in South Asia*, *Contemporary South Asia*, 27:4, 457-470; Kirmani, N. (2009), *Claiming Their Space: Muslim Women-led Networks and the Women's Movement in India*, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 11(1), 72-85; Khan, A. Kirmani, N. (2018), *Moving Beyond the Binary: Gender-based Activism in Pakistan*, *Feminist Dissent*, (3), 151-191.; <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/sep/29/bangladesh-women-taking-charge-from-grassroots-to-government>

Local governments must:

1. Ensure Safety and Security
 - Prioritise and ensure women's safety in shelters post disasters.
 - Make access to water, sanitation, transport and cash easier for women post disasters.
 - Include swimming lessons for women and girls in flood-preparedness activities.
 - Maximise the diversification of sustainable livelihoods.
2. Ensure Nourishment/Care:
 - Enable equal access for women and girls to food and nutrition.
 - Ensure access to women's specific and gender-sensitive medical care.
 - Provide access to emergency obstetric and gynaecological care very early in the course of disasters.
 - Prioritise protection and psychosocial support for children, especially those who are separated, unaccompanied and with special needs.
3. Ensure Planning/Awareness
 - Increase gender awareness of migration push and pull factors, and of the social and economic impacts on the household.
 - Ensure women are involved in planning and represented in all decision making.
 - Provide information about services, supports and legal rights and obligations.

National governments must:

4. Provide Political and Legal Recognition
 - Recognise and respond to the trends and projections of climate-induced migration and how women and girls are disproportionately impacted.
 - Develop an institutional and legal architecture that provides protection from climate-induced displacement, particularly for women and girls. In this regard, governments must look at their existing institutional framework and policies from the gender lens and climate-proof these.
 - Have policies in place to ensure sustainable infrastructure to accommodate migration influx from rural to urban areas.
 - Invest in collection of quality gender-disaggregated disaster- and displacement-related data
5. Provide Basic Services/Social Protection
 - Invest in gender-responsive, resilience-building efforts, as well as in protection for women and girls through targeted policy interventions at both source and destination sites.
 - Invest in publicly funded, publicly delivered, universal, quality, gender-responsive public services. This is the most sustainable and just method to redistribute unpaid care and domestic work and protect or create jobs for young women across the public sector.
 - Make targeted efforts towards the provision of social protection to communities affected by migration (those who have moved and those who have become trapped at source). Importantly, these should be gender responsive: accounting for the unique health and livelihood needs of women and girls.
 - Proactively manage natural resources in climate hotspots and adopt agroecological practices, which are proven to build biodiversity, resilience, household income and women's economic empowerment, in rural and peri-urban areas.

6. Provide Disaster Preparedness and Management Support:
 - Plan for disasters keeping in view vulnerable communities, particularly women and children. Early warning weather systems must be designed to ensure information reaches women.
 - Ensure rescue and recovery committees receive training in gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management and develop checklists to put in place during flood seasons and disasters. Countries must ensure that gender-sensitive emergency shelters are available and proactively safeguard women and children.
7. Provide Livelihood Security
 - Create economic opportunities and provide vocational training for the female workforce.
 - Support women in obtaining their equal rights to formal land tenure – in both sending and receiving communities.
 - Ensure that women and girls play meaningful leadership roles and shape more ambitious policies and localised programmes.

Regional bodies must:

8. Include climate-induced migration as a part of forums like South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) and other Asia-Pacific forums. Another key forum is the Budapest Process, which is an interregional dialogue on migration that includes over 50 governments and numerous international organisations. It is a useful forum to spotlight the nexus of climate, migration and gender, and to build knowledge as well as dialogue on solutions.
9. Facilitate cross-border exchange and learning, for example, countries should focus on developing regular intergovernmental dialogues and information sharing on climate-induced migration, with a long-term view to developing common ambition, policies and responses. These interfaces may be helpful engagements in peace building, especially between India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
10. Legally protect the rights of people who are forced to migrate across national borders.

Other stakeholders should:

11. Consider Research Needs:
 - Undertake further research and academic analysis to establish links between climate change and migration, and their impact on the most vulnerable. Gaps in definitions and conceptual understanding of climate-induced migration require further understanding.
 - Undertake research on how gender-responsive policies and practices can be climate-proofed and how gender-responsive approach can be embedded into climate and livelihoods policies and practices.
12. Consider the Role of Multilateral Institutions, UN Agencies, International Organisations, Labour Unions, Civil Society Organisations and Media:
 - Identify gaps and advocate all aspects of climate-induced migration, including rights- and gender-based approaches.
 - Invest in raising awareness and building capacity of government authorities, institutions and other stakeholders.
 - Encourage media to report more widely and consistently on climate migrants.

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