



Ministry of Environment



SLYCAN Trust

ISSUE BRIEF

GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SRI LANKA

Table of Contents

Table of contents

1. Introduction	2
1.1. Gender	2
1.2. Gender and climate change	2
1.3. Climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights	4
1.4. Climate change budget integration, gender and social inclusion	5
2. Gender and climate change in Sri Lanka's policy environment	6
2.1. Overview of the existing climate policy environment	7
2.2. Key policy areas related to gender	10
3. Entry points and opportunities for enhancement	11
3.1. Disaggregated data collection and knowledge management	11
3.2. Awareness creation and capacity-building	11
3.3. Recognition of climate change impacts on SRHR and GBV	12
3.4. Participation and representation in decision-making processes	12
3.5. Gender-responsive means of implementation	13
3.6. Strengthen linkages between national and international processes	13
4. References	14

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01: INTRODUCTION

Climate change affects and impacts human lives and livelihoods in myriad ways. Extreme weather events, long-term processes, and compound or covariate risks already pose severe threats and are projected to increase further over the coming years. However, while climate change is one of the interlinked issues of the "triple planetary crisis" impacting everyone, intersectional vulnerabilities put certain groups and communities at a heightened risk.

1.1 Gender

Gender refers to the "social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between and among women and men and girls and boys. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through gendered socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed, and valued in a woman or a man in a given context.

In most societies, there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important intersectional criteria for socio-cultural analysis include class, race, poverty level, ethnic group, and age."¹

1.2 Gender and climate change

Gender and climate change have multifaceted and significant interconnections. On the one hand, climate risks and impacts often disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, including women (especially pregnant women, mothers, and those from poor or marginalized communities), girls, and LGBTIQ+ individuals.

Underlying inequalities and intersectional vulnerabilities (such as gender and disability) can lead to serious threats to livelihoods, health, safety, and security in situations of climate-induced disasters and other sudden- or slow-onset climate impacts. In many contexts, there are also gender-specific or gender-related challenges and constraints that can reduce coping and adaptive capacities, such as those related to ownership of or access to land, resources, equipment, assets, markets, information, and decision-making processes.²

Women's labour force participation is significantly lower than that of men, both at the global level and in Sri Lanka. Out of the total working population over 18 years of age, which equals 8.51 million people, only 2.96 million (34.8%) are women. Female participation in the labour force is only 34.1% as opposed to 75.7% of male participation, with a strong gender-based segregation of the labour market along sectoral and occupational lines. The relative demand for women workers³ is high in sub-sectors such as agriculture, food and beverages, garment industry, education, healthcare, and social services, but predominantly for low-skilled jobs.⁴

[1] (UN Women/OSAGI)

[2] (Aita, Chihiro; Ahmed, Arsalan, 2022), (Mombauer, 2021)

[3] (Department of Census and Statistics, 2023)

[4] (UN Women, 2022), (UNDP, 2023), (UN Women, 2022)

Their often more precarious economic situation makes women more vulnerable to shocks, including those related to climate change and its various impacts.

On the other hand, women are also essential stakeholders and contributors as change agents to climate action. They play a key role in many economic sectors, including the informal sector and food systems, and perform highly diverse work for family sustenance. In addition, women from local or Indigenous communities are often knowledge holders and custodians of ecosystems, nutrition, healthcare, traditional pest and disease control, and sustainable resource management, which are essential to nature-positive and climate-friendly adaptation actions.

Gender inequality in the context of the climate crisis presents a serious threat to livelihoods, health, safety, and security of women and girls. There is now an increasing recognition of the unique vulnerabilities and contributions of women and other marginalized groups in the face of this global challenge, which highlights the need for inclusive, participatory, and evidence-based processes. It is pivotal to address existing gender-related vulnerabilities and risks as well as empower women and girls to become a more integral part of policy- and decision-making processes related to climate action.⁶

Despite their vulnerability and key role in finding solutions, women face significant barriers with regard to their participation in climate-related decision-making processes. These barriers are connected to socio-economic, cultural, and political factors that limit their access to resources, education, skill development, finance, information, and opportunities, as well as a lack of representation at higher decision-making levels.

Addressing these challenges is not only a matter of equity but also important for effective and inclusive policy-making and the designing of climate solutions that address systemic obstacles, incorporate women's perspectives, and harness their unique knowledge and skills to ensure holistic adaptation and resilience-building.

[5] (Mombauer, 2021)

[6] (SLYCAN Trust, 2019)

1.3 Climate change and sexual and reproductive health and rights

Climate change intersects with sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) in multifaceted ways, disproportionately affecting women, girls, and marginalized groups. For example, research indicates that a temperature increase of one degree Celsius in the week before delivery corresponds with a six per cent greater likelihood of stillbirth.⁷

Increased poverty and food insecurity driven by climate-related loss of livelihoods can also impact maternal health as decreased yields reduce the nutrient intake of the poor through a decrease in the availability and supply of highly nutritious crops.⁸ Air pollution and climate-related diseases can also impact maternal and neonatal health, with marginalized populations facing heightened risks. Furthermore, climate-related events hinder access to clean water and essential supplies needed for safe childbirth and personal hygiene.

Climate policies must protect human rights and reflect the principles of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, which safeguards the rights of women, children, refugees, displaced people and disabled persons throughout the climate policy process.⁹

Reviewing national climate policies and addressing gaps related to SRHR and GBV are crucial to ensuring inclusivity and equity. Investing in SRHR acknowledges the intersectionality of discrimination and inequality, which is essential for building a more just and resilient world amidst the climate crisis. This holistic approach recognizes SRHR as fundamental to achieving gender equality and environmental sustainability.

Extreme weather events and disasters linked to climate change can intensify gender-based violence (GBV) and child marriage, undermining human rights and hindering resilience-building efforts. Climate-related disruptions compromise access to SRHR services, particularly for women and other vulnerable groups. Failure to address SRHR has negative implications for the participation of women and girls in climate action and sustainable development.

[7] (UNFPA ESARO, 2022)

[8] (UNFPA, Queen Mary University of London, 2023)

[9] (UNFPA, Queen Mary University of London, 2023)

1.4 Climate change budget integration, gender and social inclusion

The integration of climate change and gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) issues into public budgets is an important enabler for effective and gender-responsive climate action. The Climate Change Budget Integration Index (CCBII++) conducted by UNDP revealed that Sri Lanka has undertaken significant reforms in its public finance management (PFM) systems towards advancing the SDGs, setting the stage for further reforms to make the PFM system more responsive to climate change and GESI considerations.

Sri Lanka has made strides in recognizing climate change and GESI issues, particularly through its updated NDCs. However, the strategic planning and budget documents currently do not explicitly reflect climate change policy objectives, and there is no clear prioritization of climate change allocations during the budget formulation process.

The institutional arrangement for climate change finance is fragmented, lacking a centralized unit for strategic planning and budgeting specifically for climate change and GESI issues. These gaps indicate a need for a more integrated and legally mandated approach to ensure that climate change and GESI considerations are embedded in Sri Lanka's policy, planning, and budgeting processes. Multiple shortcomings are undermining the effective governance of climate change finance. Several recommendations to enhance the policy, system and accountability dimensions to improve the integration of climate change and GESI considerations were also provided.



02. GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN SRI LANKA'S POLICY ENVIRONMENT

In the face of increasingly intense and frequent climate change impacts and the gender-related considerations outlined above, it is important to understand the enabling environment for climate action.

Key policy documents and plans have the potential to mainstream a gender lens and a gender-responsive framework for climate action across all relevant sectors.¹⁰



Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement



Long term Strategies (LTS) such as the 2050 Carbon Net-zero Roadmap and Strategic Plan



The National Policy on Climate Change, and other related national policies



Sri Lanka's NDC Implementation Plan (2021-2030)



National Adaptation Plans (NAPs)



[10] (SLYCAN Trust, 2019), (UNDP, 2023)

2.1 Overview of the existing climate policy environment

As of 2023, Sri Lanka has updated NDCs,¹¹ is in the process of updating and localizing its NAP,¹² and has revised the National Policy on Climate Change as well as the National Environmental Policy.

The table below examines how gender is incorporated into these key policy documents.

Policy document	Year	Description
National Policy on Climate Change (NPCC)	2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes as guiding principle the shared responsibility of all citizens in addressing climate-induced issues while incorporating youth, children, vulnerable groups including women for the decision-making process in climate action at all levels. • Includes as a policy objective to create awareness on the multifaceted issues of climate change and empower communities, especially women, youth and children, on their roles and responsibilities as agents of change in implementing climate action. • Strategy 4.5 focuses on enhancing knowledge and understanding of comprehensive risk management approaches among communities, particularly among children, youth, and women, with necessary skills development mechanisms to address climate-induced risks. • Strategy 8.5 focuses on promoting nature-/ecosystem-based solutions to empower livelihoods, especially focusing on the poor, women, youth, and persons with disabilities. • Strategy 14.6 focuses on promoting mechanisms to recognize and transfer appropriate and gender-responsive climate technologies to vulnerable communities. • Strategy 14.7 focuses on mobilizing social capital to invest in and facilitate participation of women, children, and youth as agents of change to lead technological innovation and transformation required for climate action.
Carbon Net Zero 2050 Roadmap and Strategic Plan	2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Towards a just transition to net zero pathways, social and gender inclusion aspects related to the proposed strategies and actions were analysed, and recommendations are provided.

[11] (Ministry of Environment, 2021)

[12] (Government of Sri Lanka, Ministry of Mahaweli Development and Environment, 2015)

<p>NDC Implementation Plan (2021-2030)</p>	<p>2023</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapter 6.5 is about gender integration and social inclusion. Sector analysis shows that women are a significant resource that contributes to each sector. There is a gendered division of labour and gender norms in each sector, visible and evident in gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities. Accordingly, there are corresponding needs, priorities, and access to a) information and knowledge, b) technologies, c) training, d) support services, e) machinery and equipment, etc., which are different for men and women and NDC IPs need to consider these aspects. • In implementing the NDCs, gender-responsive and socially inclusive recommendations were provided for 4 sectors as indicated in chapters 3.2 (electricity (Power) sector), chapter 4.3 (fisheries sector), chapter 4.4 (livestock sector), and chapter 4.5 (water sector). • The inclusion of SRHR is limited to maternal and newborn health. Reference to maternal and newborn health is made when describing development challenges and/or successes for the country.¹³ It highlights how pregnant women with low body mass index on or before 12 weeks of pregnancy, low birthweight of newborns, underweight infants and young children aged up to one year are major concerns in the health sector, and that they will be challenging to deal with as “food security becomes vulnerable to climate change”. In response, it includes an adaptation measure to strengthen social welfare systems to cover groups, including nursing mothers and young children, who are vulnerable to food insecurity.
<p>Third National Communication (TNC)</p>	<p>2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes a section on gender-responsive climate action, which focuses on the need to develop a Gender Action Plan for Climate Change in Sri Lanka, establish an M&E system for gender-based participation, ensure gender balance, conduct capacity-building on gender responsiveness, and conduct research on gender and climate change. • Highlights that indicators for women and other vulnerable groups were considered in developing the indicator list for risk/hazard/vulnerability maps and proposed adaptation opportunities. • Notes that educating girls and women is one of the best ways of strengthening community adaptation measures to climate change. • Commits to developing activities for specific stakeholders that have lower representation in climate change-related activities, including women.
<p>Green Finance Taxonomy</p>	<p>2022</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reference to gender or women.

[13] (UNFPA, Queen Mary University of London, 2023)

National Environmentally Sensitive Areas Policy	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The policy has specific references to promote gender inclusion in scaling up ESA management practices. (Policy statement 6.1, 7 & 8).
National Environmental Policy (NEP)	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.1.3.2. focuses on land ownership and tenural reforms with special attention to co-management and gender-inclusive community-based management solutions. • 4.5.1.3. focuses on decreasing the vulnerability of individual and community stakeholders in vulnerable sectors, regions, and communities, including women. • 4.7.1.2. focuses on establishing institutional and e-communication linkages to enhance the cooperation and coordination between government institutions and key stakeholders, including women organisations. • 4.7.7.2. focuses on enhancing the participation of different stakeholder groups, including women, in the implementation of policy measures and environmental management plans. • 4.7.7.4. focuses on enhancing female and youth participation and empowering gender and youth in environmental management.
Sri Lanka Climate Prosperity Plan (SLCPP)	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No reference to gender or women.
Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)	2021 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated chapter on integrating gender into NDCs as a cross-cutting issue. • Proposes a multi-step approach to integrate gender into NDC implementation plans by sector through sector-specific gender analysis, development of gender-responsive actions, improved capacities to engage women in planning and monitoring of NDCs, and allocation of budgets/resources for gender-responsive actions. • Highlights the importance of mainstreaming gender and social safeguards into adaptation priorities and integrating specific needs, vulnerabilities, skills, knowledge, and capacities of women, young children, disabled, and elderly populations.

National Environmental Action Plan 2022-2030	2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy 6.2. focuses on increasing women's participation to combat climate change and including gender aspects into new policies and plans related to climate change. • Strategy 7.8 focuses on ensuring gender mainstreaming when providing extension and support services for agroforestry and woodlot establishment. • Under the action plan for information and knowledge management, includes poster and video-based knowledge products annually for social media with women social media influencers to speak on sustainable lifestyles.
National Adaptation Plan for Climate Change Impacts in Sri Lanka 2016-2025 (NAP)	2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentions in the foreword that the NAP presents a gender-sensitive approach to deal with climate change impacts on Sri Lanka. • The current work on updating and localizing the NAP aims to make the updated NAP and the Provincial Adaptation Plans (PAPs) gender sensitive and supplement them with a dedicated Gender and Social Inclusion Action Plan.

2.2 Key policy areas related to gender

As shown in the previous section, gender is included in these major policy documents to some degree in relation to planning processes, implementation, mainstreaming, and monitoring and evaluation in connection to mitigation, adaptation, and comprehensive risk management. Key objectives related to gender include awareness, education, participation, livelihoods and skill development, coordination, and gender mainstreaming into various areas, such as risk management, extension services, or land management.

Integration of SRHR and GBV in policies and plans is limited, with references to SRHR mainly focusing on maternal and newborn health, but not on family planning, unsafe abortion, and post-abortion care, which could negate Sri Lanka's efforts to reduce the unmet need for family planning and preventable maternal deaths. Greater investment in, engagement with, and prioritization of SRHR, GBV, and harmful practices are needed to ensure that inequalities are not further exacerbated.

Gender-related considerations could be more explicitly integrated into the climate finance and investment framework outlined by the above-mentioned documents as well as the country's National Prosperity Plan and the Central Bank's Green Finance Taxonomy. Incorporating gender-responsive or -specific aspects into financial instruments (such as risk transfer mechanisms, loan schemes, or bonds) could supplement the existing policy commitments and—in conjunction with a drive towards enhanced financial literacy and inclusion—allow women and other vulnerable groups to better access finance and financial risk management tools.¹⁴

03. ENTRY POINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCEMENT

This issue brief aims to outline key areas of integration for gender and climate action and policy processes. Building on Sri Lanka's existing policy environment, the below elements are vital to ensuring that gender considerations are addressed and included in meaningful ways for any climate-related intervention in the country.

3.1 Disaggregated data collection and knowledge management

Evidence-based policymaking relies on the availability of reliable, accessible, and context-specific data. Gender-aggregated data collection and gender-specific indicators are vital to identifying relevant gaps and issues and addressing them through effective policies and actions.

This also includes the management of existing data and knowledge collected across different sectors and by a multitude of institutions, and making existing information available to women, other marginalized groups, and actors from civil society and communities through transparent and accountable systems.

As the analysis of gender and sustainable development co-benefits is already required under Sri Lanka's national project planning format, mainstreaming gender-related metrics and indicators into all relevant data collection systems (demographic, socioeconomic, disaster impacts etc.) could greatly support the incorporation of a gender lens into this process.

3.2 Awareness creation and capacity-building

Building awareness and capacities on gender-related considerations would help to create greater awareness of the differential impacts faced by men and women and help individuals and institutions to incorporate them into their actions and planning processes.

Building relevant literacies among girls and women could also address some of the underlying inequalities and vulnerabilities, for example, related to finance or climate risk management. In relation to a just transition and ensuring female workforce participation, skill development is also a key area of enhancement when it comes to climate action and a shift towards more climate-smart and resilient employment opportunities.

[14] (UNFPA, Queen Mary University of London, 2023)

3.3 Recognition of climate change impacts on SRHR and GBV

Enhancing the integration of gender and climate action involves recognizing the impact of climate change on SRHR and GBV. There is a need to collect and mobilize more data and evidence to better understand climate impacts on women, girls, and vulnerable groups, especially concerning their SRHR.

Existing interventions, particularly those related to gender and health, provide opportunities for the integration of programming on SRHR and GBV. This involves improving data systems and conducting gender-sensitive climate vulnerability and risk assessments integrating SRHR and GBV considerations; developing indicators that capture a wide range of gender, health, and SRHR impacts; and strengthening health systems through the inclusion of SRHR in vulnerability and risk assessments, disaster preparedness plans, and health information management systems.¹⁵

In disaster risk reduction, SRHR and GBV can be integrated by addressing the immediate needs of access to contraception and saving lives in obstetric complications as well as reducing the vulnerability of existing SRHR health systems to absorb the impact, respond to, and recover from climate shocks. SRHR and GBV aspects could also be sufficiently integrated within anticipatory action and early warning systems.¹⁶

3.4 Participation and representation in decision-making processes

Ensuring meaningful participation and representation of women and other marginalized groups in decision-making processes at all levels and across sectors and stakeholder groups is key to amplifying their voices and having their specific needs and priorities be addressed. This could be achieved through quota systems, supplementary gender-specific consultation processes, open calls for public participation, and other mechanisms that ensure gender-based participation and representation.

Key strategies for scaling up female participation and representation in the decision-making process could include strengthening women's economic empowerment (for example, by supporting women-led entrepreneurship and specific funding and mentorship opportunities); offering tailored education and training programmes to enhance policy literacy and knowledge on institutional processes and entry points; strengthening the role of gender focal points; working towards changes in gender norms and promoting the value of women's participation (for example, through awareness creation campaigns); ensuring baseline levels of representation in relevant political and decision-making processes; and providing dedicated platforms and forums for female participation and knowledge-sharing.

[15] (UNFPA, Queen Mary University of London, 2023)

[16] (UNFPA, Queen Mary University of London, 2023)

3.5 Gender-responsive means of implementation

Participation from women, women organizations, and other relevant stakeholders (including the private sector) requires adequate means of implementation, including finance, technology, and capacity-building. Making these accessible through gender budgeting as well as specific calls, funding windows, grants, and financial instruments can play an important part in strengthening gender-related work overall. Furthermore, gender-specific risk transfer or insurance instruments, loans, and other financial tools can contribute to comprehensive risk management and address gender-related gaps and needs in targeted ways.



3.6 Strengthen linkages between national and international processes

National policies on climate action are connected to international processes, especially those under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Paris Agreement. NDCs, NAPs, national communications, and other submission and reporting processes can ensure coherence between the national and global level and strengthen the other elements outlined above through access to means of implementation, data, knowledge, exchange, and expertise. Operationalizing some of these linkages could help to connect work on the national level with the UNFCCC process and workstreams such as Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE).

Climate policies must protect human rights and reflect the principles of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, which safeguards the rights of women, children, refugees, displaced people and disabled persons.

It is important to underpin climate policy with a voluntary, human rights-based approach to reproductive choices and ensure that references are consistent with the ICPD Programme of Action principles.¹⁷

[17] (UNFPA, Queen Mary University of London, 2023)

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