

GENDER JUSTICE IN GLOBAL CLIMATE GOVERNANCE:

COP Processes and Feminist Demands

→ Briefs From Global South; Nepal & Thailand ←

When climate change is discussed, gender is often treated as just another issue to be discussed, even though it represents nearly half of the global population that experiences disproportionate climate impacts. These impacts are driven by social and structural gender inequalities, patriarchy systems, colonial history, systematic and structural disparity. In many contexts, socially assigned roles such as caregiving, securing food and water, and managing household responsibilities increase women's exposure to climate risks while limiting access to resources, mobility, land, finance, and decision-making.

In global climate governance, the most important negotiation and decision making platform is the Conference of the Parties (COP) which has been organized annually by UNFCCC since 1995.

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History of Gender agenda in UNFCCC



If we look at the history of COP and Gender, for many years the gender issue seems to be invisible in climate governance. It was only in 2009 that the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) was founded, and in 2011 that it was officially recognized under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), alongside the youth constituency (YOUNGO), while other constituencies were already introduced throughout the time.

This already shows that the women's representation and gender sensitive planning was not considered and was very minimal. This gap was one of the key reasons for establishing a constituency that advocates for the recognition of gender equality and women's rights within UNFCCC processes.

After the establishment too, it took years to finally come up with the institutionalization of it, and finally in 2014 (COP 20 at Lima, Peru), the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG), was adopted from the decision Decision 18/CP.20 at Lima, Peru aiming to promote gender equality and integrate gender in all the processes of UNFCCC. The LWPG was a two years plan, which later in 2017 (COP 23 in Bonn, Germany), for the first time parties came up with three years of Gender Action Plan (GAP) by Decision 3/CP.23. This was a landmark decision in recognizing and points of action in integrating gender equality and empowerment under climate policies, plan and implementation. Again in 2019 (COP 25, Chile at Madrid), under decision Decision 3/CP.25, parties agreed on a five-year Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender (ELWPG) and an updated Gender Action Plan (GAP) with 5 priority area;

- i) Capacity-building, knowledge management and communication,
- ii) Gender balance, participation and women's leadership,
- iii) Coherence,
- iv) Gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation,
- v) Monitoring and reporting.

Following the same document, their intermediate and final review, the Enhanced Lima Work Programme is extended to 10 years by Decision 7/CP.29 (2026-2034) with development of the new Belem Gender Action Plan this year in COP 30.

The progress so far..

According to the 2024 Synthesis report by the secretariat on Implementation of gender-responsive climate policies, plans, strategies and action as reported by Parties in regular reports and communications under the UNFCCC, reveals that from all the documents analysed, 81.5 per cent of Parties mentioned gender in their latest available NDCs; while gender was referenced in 95.0 per cent of NAPs, 96.2 per cent of NAPAs, 93.8 per cent of NCs and 54.9 per cent of LT-LEDS most recently submitted by each Party. Significant mention of gender was identified in 90.0 per cent of those NAPs, 94.2 per cent of the NAPAs, 65.1 per cent of the NCs and 25.3 per cent of the LT-LEDS. Since the adoption of the first UNFCCC Lima Work Programme on gender (LWPG) in 2014, and of the enhanced LWPG in 2019, gender integration in all reports and communications, including NDCs, has been increasing in quantity and quality.

According to the Gender composition report by UNFCCC, women representation has been increasing within different constituted bodies by year. According to the same report it says "At COP 29, representation of women increased by 1.8 percentage point (Party Delegates) compared to COP 28,. A similar increase of 4.8% can be observed in representation of women among heads and deputy heads of delegation." But in the participation percentage too, the regional disparity lies. The report from Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO) during COP 28 says that only Africa and Asia tend to have lower women's participation with 31% and 28% respectively for COP28, which shows that on ground striking differences of regional inequalities, resource constraints, underlying oppressive systems.

While progress in participation and representation is important, increased presence in decision-making spaces does not automatically translate into gender-responsive climate action. Many Parties still face significant gaps in access to gender-responsive climate finance, institutional capacity, and implementation mechanisms required to translate commitments into practice.

Only mentioning gender in the paper and representation and participation does not affirm that there is Gender balance in the UNFCCC process. For instance, according to the document Gender synthesis report by UNFCCC in 2024, only 4.9% of the parties submitting NDC included examples of gender-responsive budgeting, where gender-sensitive or responsive initiatives were included as line items in tables for estimating the costs of implementing adaptation, mitigation or cross-cutting activities. This highlights a persistent gap between policy commitments on gender equality and the allocation of financial resources required to implement gender-responsive climate action.

This shows that the scenario is changing but it's not enough, there is clearly much still need to do.

Gender and Climate Governance in National Contexts

While the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan provides an important framework for advancing gender-responsive climate action, translating these commitments into national policies and implementation remains uneven. From a climate justice perspective, this gap is particularly significant, as women and marginalized groups often experience disproportionate climate impacts while having limited influence over decision-making and access to resources. The experiences of Nepal and Thailand illustrate both progress and persistent challenges in integrating gender considerations into climate governance, planning, and implementation.

NEPAL

Nepal, with negligible contribution to the climate crisis yet facing the highest and gendered impacts of climate induced disaster, must treat gender climate nexus urgently.

Evidence from disaster contexts in Nepal consistently shows that women and girls often face disproportionate risks and impacts during disasters. Limited mobility, unequal access to information and resources, caregiving responsibilities, and exclusion from decision-making processes increase their vulnerability.

Structural realities like; large numbers of men migrate abroad for employment, leaving women to manage agriculture, resources management, and household responsibilities usually in rural areas has increased women's roles and vulnerabilities however their decision-making power over land ownership, finance are limited and restricted. Furthermore, lack of gender-responsive budgeting, insufficient sex-disaggregated data across sectors, and limited and weak institutional mechanisms for gender mainstreaming continue to create gaps in ensuring equitable climate action.

Nepal seems progressive in terms of policy and documentation. The documents like Gender Equality and Social Inclusion(GESI) Strategy 2021, Third Nationally Determined Contribution (3.0), the National Adaptation plan(2021-2050), National Climate Change Policy 2019 have explicitly included GESI as priority themes and mainstreaming actions. Also, in the global stage like COP, as a party, Nepal is leading a mountain agenda and part of the decisions like Enhanced Lima Work Programme and the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan (GAP).

However, a persistent gap remains between policy commitments and implementation on the ground. While gender mainstreaming is acknowledged in policy documents, clear operational targets, monitoring frameworks, and responsive financing mechanisms to ensure implementation at the grassroots level are very limited. In many cases, gender integration is treated as a policy requirement rather than a transformative approach to climate governance.



THAILAND

Thailand faces increasing climate risks including floods, droughts, extreme heat, and coastal erosion that affect agriculture, water resources, coastal communities, and urban populations. While contributing a relatively small share of global emissions, the country remains vulnerable to climate change impacts. Thailand's latest Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0) commits to reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by 47 percent from 2019 levels by 2035, with a pathway toward net-zero emissions by 2050.

Despite these commitments, significant gaps remain in integrating gender considerations into climate policy and implementation. Gender equality receives only limited attention in national climate planning instruments, including the NDC, and women and other marginalized groups often have limited opportunities for meaningful participation in climate decision-making processes.

In many cases, these groups are primarily framed as vulnerable populations or beneficiaries of climate interventions rather than as leaders and agents of change. Participation mechanisms tend to remain consultative or procedural rather than ensuring sustained engagement, leadership, and access to resources for community-led climate initiatives.

Thailand has adopted legal frameworks such as the Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558 (2015) to address gender-based discrimination and promote equality. However, the integration of gender considerations into climate governance, climate finance, and climate planning remains limited. Structural barriers - including limited gender-responsive budgeting, insufficient sex-disaggregated data, and weak institutional coordination between gender equality mechanisms and climate governance institutions - continue to hinder gender-responsive climate action.

Strengthening gender-responsive climate action in Thailand will therefore require moving beyond policy recognition toward meaningful participation and leadership of women and marginalized groups, alongside improved access to climate finance and stronger institutional mechanisms for inclusive climate governance.

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Feminist Demands


Civil Societies organization and activist has been long served as feminist watchdog and moral voice that has been pushing government and authorities to center gender justice, human rights, social justice, equity in all the levels of decision making. Likewise, they are demanding the same in the COP platform that global climate action must center gender justice as well. Women and Gender Constituency (WGC), one of the nine constituencies that has been taking the voices from grassroots to negotiation table, has been advocating for the gender just climate action through strategic and technical in the decision making process. There are certain demands that all the progressive activists, CSOs have been advocating in the climate action, which the constituency, the CSOs themselves and countries gender focal point and all other stakeholders have been placing on the table and making decisions accordingly.

- The new Gender action plan (GAP) to be ambitious, target - based, designated non debt finance, ensuring equitable participation and representation at all levels of decision making be it international, national or local.
- Deliver the climate finance, which is non debt creating, new and additional dedicated, timely in accordance with the obligation of Paris Agreement that supports the goal of adaptation, mitigation, reparation for loss and damage with the commitment to human rights, community support, and gender equality.
- While transitioning away from fossil fuel, ensure the transition is just, feminist, equitable, human right centered, and social justice.
- Integrate gender responsive aspects in all the actions of adaptation, mitigation including climate finance, technology development and transfer, along with in the climate commitments documents like Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), National Adaptation Plan (NAP), Long term Strategy (LTS) etc, not only as a "primary beneficiaries" but an "agent of change".
- Reject all the false solutions that are being practiced in the community, with unproven technology, that does not address the root cause of the crisis rather promotes economic interests, favors the corporate capture and negatively impacts local community, IPs, marginalized and vulnerable population.
- Recognize the intersection of climate change impacts to health and wellbeing including Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR), so consider Health as an integral component in climate action.

Overall, CSOs demands and works for COPs and decisions go beyond the emission reduction to structural and systematic change, we demand climate policies and actions rooted in human rights, gender justice, social justice and community inclusion that dismantle inequalities exacerbated by the greed of the profit, extractive and patriarchal system.


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