Gender Action Plan (GAP) & Climate Change in India: Progress, Challenges, and Gaps

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Introduction

Mainstreaming gender into climate policy is essential for equitable and effective climate action. The UNFCCC Gender Action Plan (GAP) under the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender provides a structured framework to advance gender-responsive climate measures, strengthen women's leadership, and improve integration of gender into climate planning, implementation, and finance. The GAP is organized around five priority areas:(A) Capacity-building, knowledge and communication; (B) Gender balance and women's leadership; (C) Policy coherence; (D) Gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation; and (E) Monitoring and reporting of gender actions (UNFCCC). Grounded in human rights and equity principles, the GAP recognizes differentiated climate impacts across gender identities and social groups. While India has begun acknowledging gender in climate responses, significant gaps remain in translating GAP commitments into systematic practice. This brief summarizes India-specific adaptations of GAP priorities, progress to date, key challenges, and policy directions.

1. India-Specific Adaptation of GAP Priorities

India's climate vulnerability is shaped by intersecting inequalities of gender, caste, class, region, livelihood, and ecosystems. Women—particularly smallholder farmers, agricultural labourers, forest-dependent communities, fisherfolk, and urban informal workers—face disproportionate climate risks due to limited access to resources, services, finance, and decision-making. Effective adaptation of the GAP requires alignment with the NAPCC, SAPCCs, national missions, and flagship development programmes.

1.1 Priority Area A: Capacity-Building, Knowledge Management, and Communication

Key actions

- ❖ Build capacities of MoEFCC, line ministries, and State Climate Cells on gender-responsive climate planning.
- ❖ Integrate gender–climate modules into ATMA, KVKs, NRLM cadres, PRIs, SHGs, FPOs, and extension systems.
- ❖ Support ICAR institutes, SAUs, and universities to generate gender-responsive climate research and tools.
- ❖ Develop India-specific toolkits, manuals, and case studies, using local languages and ICT platforms.

Expected outcomes

- ❖ Stronger institutional capacity for gender mainstreaming
- ❖ Improved awareness among frontline workers and communities
- ❖ Greater uptake of gender-responsive climate practices

1.2 Priority Area B: Gender Balance, Participation, and Women's Leadership

Key actions

- ❖ Ensure women's representation in national and state climate committees, SAPCC steering groups, and climate finance bodies.
- ❖ Strengthen leadership through SHGs, FPOs, watershed institutions, water user associations, forest rights bodies, and urban local governments.
- ❖ Promote women's leadership in climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy, and natural resource governance, with special attention to SC, ST, minority, coastal, tribal, and drought-prone regions.

Expected outcomes

- ❖ Enhanced women's leadership in climate decision-making
- ❖ More inclusive and locally relevant climate solutions

1.3 Priority Area C: Policy Coherence and Institutional Coordination

Key actions

- ❖ Explicitly integrate gender into NAPCC missions (Agriculture, Water, Sustainable Habitat, Green India Mission).
- ❖ Align SAPCCs with State Gender Action Plans, Disaster Management Plans, and sectoral policies.
- ❖ Strengthen coordination among MoEFCC, MWCD, NITI Aayog, Ministry of Finance, and state departments.
- ❖ Align gender-responsive climate action with SDGs and flagship programmes such as NRLM, Jal Jeevan

Mission, National Nutrition Mission, and energy transition initiatives.

Expected outcomes
- ❖ Reduced policy silos
- ❖ More coherent and consistent gender-responsive climate governance

1.4 Priority Area D: Gender-Responsive Implementation and Finance

Key actions
- ❖ Embed gender considerations in NDC implementation, the National Adaptation Plan, SAPCCs, and Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategies.
- ❖ Introduce gender-responsive climate budgeting at national and state levels.
- ❖ Channel climate finance toward women-led initiatives in climate-smart and nutrition-sensitive agriculture, water and natural resource management, renewable energy, clean cooking, and climate-resilient livelihoods.
- ❖ Build capacity of gender–climate focal points for project design and implementation.

Expected outcomes
- ❖ Improved access to climate finance for women-centred solutions
- ❖ Scalable, community-based climate action

1.5 Priority Area E: Monitoring, Reporting & Data Systems

Key actions
- ❖ Strengthen sex-disaggregated and intersectional data across climate, agriculture, health, and disaster systems.
- ❖ Integrate gender indicators into climate MRV frameworks, SAPCC monitoring, and SDG reporting.
- ❖ Promote participatory monitoring involving PRIs, SHGs, women's groups, and CSOs.
- ❖ Support research on gender–climate–nutrition–health linkages in vulnerable regions.

Expected outcomes
- ❖ Evidence-based policymaking
- ❖ Improved accountability and learning

Cross-Cutting Priority: Intersectionality and Social Justice
- ❖ Apply an intersectional lens addressing caste, tribe, class, age, disability, region, and livelihood.
- ❖ Recognize linkages between gender, climate change, nutrition, health, care work, land rights, migration, and social protection.
- ❖ Strengthen women's land, water, and resource tenure rights, including under the Forest Rights Act.
- ❖ Protect women environmental defenders and community leaders.

Gender responsive action priorities in India

An integrated framework for gender-responsive climate action in India as presented in figure1 is structured around five interlinked priority areas (A–E) that together operationalize the Gender Action Plan (GAP). At the center, Gender and Climate Action is shown as the unifying goal, surrounded by mutually reinforcing domains: Capacity-building and knowledge management (Priority A) led by MoEFCC, line ministries, and State Climate Cells to strengthen skills, communication, and evidence; Gender balance, participation, and women's leadership (Priority B) anchored by MWCD, MoPR, SHGs, FPOs, and local institutions to ensure inclusive decision-making and leadership; Policy coherence and institutional coordination (Priority C) driven by MoEFCC, NITI Aayog, and the Ministry of Finance to align NAPCC, SAPCCs, NDCs, and SDGs; Gender-responsive implementation and finance (Priority D) involving MoEFCC, NABARD, NAFCC, and sectoral ministries to mainstream gender in adaptation, mitigation, and climate budgeting; and Monitoring, reporting, and data systems (Priority E) supported by MoSPI, ICAR, MoHFW, NDMA, PRIs, and CSOs to generate sex-disaggregated, participatory evidence. The circular, connected design highlights that effective gender-responsive climate action depends on continuous coordination, feedback, and accountability across institutions, scales, and sectors.

Fig. 1 Gender responsive action priorities in India

2. Progress in India

2.1 Recognition of Gender in Climate Policy

❖ India's climate policies increasingly refer to gender concerns, especially in national climate change action plans and international reporting.

❖ Gender references and gender-responsive adaptation commitments have grown in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans globally, showing improved recognition of gender dimensions. ([UNFCCC][3])

2.2 Domestic Programmes with Gender Dimensions

❖ Social protection schemes like Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and livelihood programmes under the National Rural Livelihood Mission facilitate women's agency and resilience in climate-affected sectors. (Outlook India)

2.3 Increasing Awareness and Advocacy

❖ Civil society and research communities are advocating for more gender-transformative climate models that center women's leadership and local experience. (The Times of India)

3. Key Challenges

3.1 Fragmented Policy Integration

❖ Despite gender references in climate policy, integration across climate planning instruments in India remains inconsistent and siloed across ministries.

❖ A consolidated gender-responsive climate finance strategy is lacking, limiting systematic support for women-centered climate action. ([Outlook India][4])

3.2 Limited Gender-Responsive Climate Finance

❖ Mechanisms to track and allocate climate finance specifically with gender criteria are absent, reducing funding directed toward gender-inclusive climate resilience and mitigation programmes.

❖ Capacity building for accessing gender-responsive climate finance and documentation of best practices is needed. ([UNFCCC][6])

3.3 Weak Monitoring and Data Systems

❖ The absence of robust sex-disaggregated data and clear gender indicators for climate outcomes limits effective monitoring of GAP implementation and accountability. ([UNFCCC][1])

3.4 Institutional and Capacity Constraints

❖ Local and state authorities often lack the technical expertise and institutional support needed to mainstream gender effectively within climate planning and implementation.

❖ Women's representation in high-level decision-making in climate governance remains lower than desired.

3.5 Social and Cultural Barriers

❖ Persistent gender norms and structural inequalities continue to restrict meaningful participation of women, especially from marginalized communities, in climate decision-making and leadership roles.

4. Gaps in Implementation

4.1 Policy Coherence and Strategic Framework

❖ There is a need for greater policy coherence between gender equality initiatives and climate planning at national and sub-national levels.

❖ Gender must be embedded systematically rather than treated as an add-on.

4.2 Inclusive and Intersectional Approaches

❖ Current measures often overlook intersectional dimensions—such as caste, indigeneity, disability, and gender diversity—leading to uneven benefits and exclusion of the most vulnerable.

4.3 Institutionalized Gender Budgets

❖ Climate action budgets rarely include gender tagging, which restricts visibility of financial commitments toward gender-responsive interventions. ([CBGA India][7])

4.4 Leadership and Representation

❖ Efforts to improve gender balance must extend beyond token participation to ensure women's decision-making power at all levels of climate governance.

5. Policy Recommendations

5.1 Strengthen Institutional Frameworks

❖ Establish clear mandates and coordination mechanisms across ministries to implement gender-responsive climate action plans.

❖ Build capacity for gender integration in climate planning, budgeting, and evaluation.

5.2 Develop a Gender-Responsive Climate Finance Strategy

❖ Introduce gender-tagged climate funds and ensure tracking of gender outcomes in climate finance flows.

❖ Strengthen access support for gender-responsive climate projects.

5.3 Enhance Monitoring, Reporting, and Data Systems

❖ Institutionalize sex-disaggregated data collection and develop gender-sensitive indicators for climate programmes.

❖ Use monitoring frameworks to evaluate gender outcomes and inform policy adjustments.

5.4 Promote Inclusive Participation

❖ Facilitate women's leadership through quotas in climate-related bodies and ensure meaningful engagement of marginalized groups.

❖ Encourage community-driven climate responses that leverage local knowledge and gender inclusivity.

5. Policy Recommendations

1. Strengthen institutional mandates and coordination for gender-responsive climate action.

2. Develop a national and state-level gender-responsive climate finance strategy, including gender-tagged budgets.

3. Institutionalize sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators within climate MRV systems.

4. Promote meaningful participation and leadership, moving beyond token representation to decision-making authority.

6. Conclusion

India has made incremental progress in recognizing gender dimensions within climate policy and development programmes. However, effective implementation of the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan requires systematic integration of gender across climate planning, financing, data systems, and governance structures. Closing these gaps will strengthen equity, accountability, and the overall effectiveness of India's climate action.

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