



Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development

Empowering women to use law as an instrument of change and promoting women's human rights in the Asia Pacific region
NGO in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations

United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences Wednesday, 30 March, 2022

I. About this submission

The Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD)¹ appreciates the opportunity to contribute to the Special Rapporteur's thematic report on **Violence Against Women and Girls in the context of the Climate Crisis, including Environmental Degradation and Related Disaster Risk Mitigation and Response** to be presented to the UN General Assembly in September 2022.

This submission is a result of a collaborative analysis of feminists and grassroots women's organisations participated in the Climate Justice Feminist Participatory Action Research (CJ FPAR) for the last 7 years (2014 - 2021)². CJ FPAR supports grassroots women to build their own evidence to ensure that women in communities most affected by climate crises are able to influence policies at the local, national and international levels and achieve structural and system change to advance women's human rights amid the reality of climate catastrophe.³ This submission particularly highlights the stories and ground realities of women in **Bangladesh, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Pakistan and Philippines**.

II. Women's Human Rights in the Face of the Worsening Climate Catastrophe

Climate crisis is not gender neutral⁴. It has been globally recognised that rural, indigenous, urban poor women and girls, especially from the Global South are disproportionately affected by climate crises as they are highly dependent on natural resources especially in their role to secure water and food for their families.⁵ Many countries in Asia and the Pacific are in the state of extreme vulnerability to climate catastrophe where rural, indigenous, urban poor women and girls are greatly affected and suffer the most from climate related disasters. They suffer the increasing sexual and gender-based violence, highest mortality and carry the burden of the long-term impacts of loss of land, livelihoods and security.⁶

¹ APWLD is a feminist, membership-driven network representing 265 diverse women's rights organisations and advocates from 30 countries in Asia and the Pacific. For more information about APWLD, please visit: www.apwld.org

² Since 2014, APWLD has been working together with 24 grassroots feminist and women's organisations across 13 countries in Asia and the Pacific through FPAR to women's reality, experiences and analysis on the impact of climate crises.

³ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Feminist Participatory Action Research: <https://unfccc.int/climate-action/momentum-for-change/activity-database/feminist-participatory-action-research>

⁴ Climate Change is not Gender Neutral. International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). 2021: <https://www.iucn.org/news/gender/202106/climate-change-not-gender-neutral>

⁵ Enabling Just and Equitable Transitions through Rural Women's Power. Asia Pacific on Women, Law and Development (APWLD) for the 62nd Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. 2017: <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/62/EGM/EP8%20%20Kate%20Lappin.pdf>

⁶ Ibid.

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In 2020, Sindh province of **Pakistan** witnessed the highest ever rainfall in the last 60 years.⁷ Currently, the area is also witnessing an extreme daily temperature reaching up to 52 degrees Celsius⁸ along with the duration of heat waves increasing by five times in the last 30 years. Women cotton pickers in Matiari district are suffering further, starting from higher exposure to harsh working conditions to loss of daily income by at least 50 per cent and threatening their livelihoods, while surviving more frequent health impacts including heat strokes. They also continue to experience precarious working conditions, receiving lower wages than men, provided with no social protection while being constantly exposed to pesticides and various health hazards. Women and girls are forced to do agriculture work instead of going to school or forced to enter into early marriage to ease family burden without considering the potential violence they will experience in their marriage. Due to lack of access to education, nearly 95 per cent of women cotton pickers are not able to read and write which is among many factors that have a direct impact on their access to information and opportunity to engage in climate related planning and policy making processes.⁹

Similar to many stories of women and girls across Asia and the Pacific region, the story of cotton pickers in Matiari District, Sindh province shows an example of systemic injustices undermining women's human rights and further hindering meaningful participation and leadership of women and girls in shaping climate action.

In the particular context of women environmental and human rights defenders (WEHRDs), some countries in Asia and the Pacific region such as India and the Philippines are among the most dangerous countries as WEHRDs continue to experience violence and killings. Indigenous environmental and land rights defenders are facing greater risks as shown by the global trend and analysis where they made 59 per cent among 358 defenders killed for protecting the environment in 2021 alone.¹⁰

III. Gender Based Violence and Climate Injustices in Asia and the Pacific

There is a growing evidence of the increasing violence against women and girls during and after disasters. Countries in the Pacific have reported that climate induced disasters and displacements heighten the existing vulnerabilities of women and girls to gender based violence especially in the context of women climate refugees due to increased stress and family hardships as well as lack of space, privacy and security in emergency shelters.¹¹

⁷ State of Pakistan's Climate. Meteorological Department, Government of Pakistan. 2020: http://www.pmd.gov.pk/cdpc/Pakistan_Climate_2020.pdf

⁸ Pakistan City Jacobabad Records World's Highest Temperatures. What it means. India.com. 2021: <https://www.india.com/news/world/pakistan-city-jacobabad-records-worlds-highest-temperatures-what-it-means-4777619/>

⁹ Summary of CJ FPAR journey of the women agricultural workers in Matiari district who dissected the impacts of climate crises on women cotton pickers (2019 - 2021).

¹⁰ Global Analysis. Front Line Defenders. 2021: https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/sites/default/files/2021_global_analysis_-_final.pdf

¹¹ Climate Change, Disasters and Gender-Based Violence in the Pacific. UN Women: <https://www.unclearn.org/wp-content/uploads/library/unwomen701.pdf>

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Women of Carteret Islands in **Papua New Guinea** are among the world's first climate refugees due to the increasing sea levels. Carteret Women reported that the climate impacts have reinforced many social issues in the communities such as the increasing domestic violence against women in the emergency shelters as well as abandonment by husbands who migrate to look for work. When husbands and male family members leave, women's responsibilities are doubled, however their access to resources including financial, political and social capital remains extremely limited.¹²

In **Nepal**, trafficking cases increased from 3,000 - 5,000 annually in 1990 and reached up to 20,000 per year after the earthquake in 2015.¹³ Through Climate Justice FPAR, Mughal indigenous women highlighted how climate crises exacerbate their existing burden of working 18 hours everyday to take care of children, doing household chores, collecting food, water and wood as well as planting and harvesting crops. Climate induced disasters not only resulted in crop failure, but also more frequent landslides which have destroyed many of the already limited walking paths available to Mughal women and girls. Distances that used to take 30 minutes can now take up to 4 hours.¹⁴ More importantly, they are facing constant fear for their security as they often face harassment while they try to collect food for their families.

Mundas indigenous women and girls living adjacent to Sundarban, southwest coastal region of **Bangladesh**, are sharing a similar story. The increasing salinity of water sources forces women to walk up to 4 hours to collect safe drinking water. Instead of going to school the girls have to fetch water. They testified that this has a strong connection with the surges in domestic violence against them.¹⁵ Though they are the main caregivers, Mundas women have nearly no access to land, education, disaster relief services to name a view. Also, when the men claim their spots of freshwater access, the women must either use the salty water or walk much farther to find clean water.

Among the types of gender-based violence facing women and girls, Intimate Partner's Violence (IPV) rates in South Asia are high ranging from 33% in Nepal to 50% in Bangladesh.¹⁶ Climate chaos including the sudden-onset climate disasters accelerate sexual exploitation, child marriage and more particularly IPV as it has been labelled as "second wave of brutality" facing women after the initial impact of the climate induced disasters. The reality presented by the women above is further

¹² Impacts on Climate Refugees of the Carterets Islands, Papua New Guinea. Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency (LNWDA). 2015: <https://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/flyer-lnwda.pdf>

¹³ Climate Change, Gender Equality and Human Rights in Asia: Regional Review and Promising Practices. UN Women and Stockholm Environment Institute for UN Women's project for Strengthening Human Rights and Gender Equality through Climate Change Actions and Disaster Risk Reduction (EmPower Project). 2020: https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAsia/Docs/Publications/2021/02/ap-HRCC-report_online-compressed.pdf

¹⁴ Climate Change Destroying Livelihoods and Traditions of Mughal Women in Nepal. Mughal Indigenous Women's Upliftment Institute (MIWUI). 2015: <https://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/flyer-mwui.pdf>

¹⁵ Mundas Indigenous Women of Bangladesh at the Front Lines of Climate Change. Initiative for Right View. 2015: <https://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/flyer-irv.pdf>

¹⁶ Climate Change and Gender Based Violence: What are the links? Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility (GBV AoR) Helpdesk. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) 2021: <https://gbvaor.net/sites/default/files/2021-03/gbv-aor-helpdesk-climate-change-gbv-19032021.pdf>

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reaffirmed by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) which argued that in many communities with poor drinking water infrastructure, women and girls are forced to walk long distances to access water, limiting the time available for other activities including education and income generation. This has caused psychosocial distress for women along with the increasing gender-based violence.¹⁷

In the **Philippines**, women continue to experience the impacts of climate induced disasters. In 2013, Typhoon Haiyan claimed not only a high number of fatalities in Leyte province but also lasting trauma effects on women without any adequate psychological service provided by the government. The women also witnessed an increase in trafficking as they were forced into trafficking by their families to survive after the typhoon.¹⁸

Another serious implication of the climate crisis documented by women on the ground is the implementation of mitigation and adaptation projects where women were forcibly evicted from their lands and forced to migrate as a result of many climate projects. In 2021, of the 7,863 Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects registered globally, 84 per cent are operating in Asia and the Pacific and primarily fund large-scale industry and power sector projects¹⁹. These projects are often not gender transformative and fail to address important issues such as land rights and conflicts over natural resources. Furthermore, just like many other false climate solutions, most of the existing REDD+ projects in the regions are also highly problematic for women where many are enforced without the Free, Prior and Informed Consent of indigenous women as well as their meaningful participation and leadership in decision making processes.

IV. Ending Violence Against Women and Girls, Halting Climate Apocalypse: Our Collective Demands

1. Member States must take concrete measures to ensure that climate mitigation and adaptation strategies are gender transformative and integrate policies and programmes on gender-based violence response and prevention. Meaningful participation and leadership of women and girls must be at the core of the formulation and implementation of these policies and programmes and policies;
2. Member States must take all necessary measures to create and strengthen mechanisms to prevent violence against women environmental human rights defenders and hold the perpetrators accountable in accordance with international human rights instruments and standards when the violence occurred;

¹⁷ Sixth Assessment Report. International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). Chapter 18. Gendered Vulnerability. 2022: https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6wg2/pdf/IPCC_AR6_WGII_FinalDraft_FullReport.pdf

¹⁸ Typhoon Haiyan Claims Lifetime Loss and Damages for Women in the Philippines. Amihan Federation of Peasant Women. 2015: <https://apwld.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/flyer-amihan.pdf>

¹⁹ Annual Report of the Executive Board of the clean development mechanism to the Sixteenth Session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol. 2021: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cmp2021_04E.pdf

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3. Member States must ensure the safety of women and girls during and after disasters especially during their time in the emergency shelters. Adequate, accessible, trauma-informed essential services especially psychological services must be in place to assist women and girls in dealing with their trauma caused by the natural disasters;
4. Member States must strengthen climate ambitions especially at the national level particularly through the National Determined Contributions (NDCs) and ensure the voice and reality of women and girls are reflected in the climate actions from local to national level;
5. Member States must ensure direct financial support to women and girls to strengthen community based and women led climate solutions, community resilience and climate adaptation strategies as well as disaster preparedness;
6. Member States must recognise and promote the roles of women and girls in sustainable natural resource management, preservation of traditional knowledge and ensure the fulfilment of their collective rights to Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in decision making process at all levels including within their own community.

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