# Between Inclusion and Power: Gender in Global South Climate Finance after COP30

Saleha Ikram
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## Abstract

In South Asia, where only a small percentage of women own agricultural land despite constituting a large agricultural workforce, the institutional machinery of gender-responsive climate finance has produced consistently strong participation gains and weak structural transformation. Drawing on a comparative analysis of COP29 and COP30 negotiating outcomes, quantitative data on global climate finance and gender, project-level evidence from four Green Climate Fund (GCF) interventions across Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India, and a systematic engagement with postcolonial feminist and feminist political economy scholarship, this study examines the structural gap between gender inclusion and gender power in post-COP30 climate finance.

The study is a desk review, and its analysis relies entirely on secondary data sources. A five-dimension gap analysis spanning conceptualization, financing, intersectionality, accountability, and contextualization identifies the structural limits of current approaches.

The study suggests a shift from procedural inclusion to substantive redistribution of power for women in the Global South. It further suggests setting up a dedicated gender-transformative finance window within GCF.



**Keywords:** Green Climate Fund**,** COP30, Belém, Gender Action Plan, Global South, Postcolonial feminism

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In November 2025, 195 Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) adopted the Belém Package at COP30 in Brazil. At its centre was Decision 7/CP.30 Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP) spanning 2026 to 2034 across five priority areas. These areas include: capacity-building and knowledge; gender balance and women's leadership; coherence across workstreams; gender-responsive implementation and means of implementation; and monitoring and reporting (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC] 2025a). The GAP expanded the UNFCCC's gender activity framework from 20 to 27 commitments, introduced provisions on health, violence against women, care work, and the protection of women environmental defenders, and followed the 10-year renewal of the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender agreed at COP29 (Decision 7/CP.29) (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC] 2025b; Nyaruwata 2025). Together these constitute the most ambitious formal commitment to gender-responsive climate action in UNFCCC history.

The numbers surrounding this commitment are striking in their contradictions. Globally, 81.5% of Parties now mention gender in their Nationally Determined Contributions (United Nations Climate Change 2024b). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) publishes the underlying data, and analysis of that data by Focus 2030 finds that annually, US$ 70.8 billion (i.e. 48.2% of screened bilateral Official Development Assistance [ODA]), is directed towards gender equality across Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donor countries (Ferrier 2026). Yet, only 4.1% targets gender equality as a principal objective whereas just 3% of bilateral aid to climate change is gender-principal (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2015). The OECD's own published figures for 2021–22 are of the same order of magnitude: US$ 60.4 billion, or 42% of screened bilateral ODA, of which 4% was gender-principal (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2024). Women's rights organizations, with the deepest expertise in structural gender transformation, receive less than 1% of ODA for gender equality, a figure dropped by 28% from US$ 799 million in 2023 to US$ 578 million in 2024 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2026). Of total global climate finance, only 0.01% is directed towards initiatives that simultaneously address climate change and women's rights (2X Global 2025). Against the backdrop of a climate finance landscape that reached US$ 1.46 trillion in 2022 (Buchner et al. 2023), these figures represent not just underfunding but structural marginalization (2X Global 2025).

The South Asian context renders these global figures tangible and urgent. Reliable sex-disaggregated data on climate displacement in South Asia remain scarce, but the gendered consequences of individual disasters are well-documented. The 2022 Pakistani floods severely impacted millions of people, including children and pregnant women who could not access health care and menstrual hygiene facilities. Similarly, rural women in Bangladesh and India face massive resource disparities and very few own agricultural land. Climate disasters further amplify these vulnerabilities, causing higher female mortality rates in Bangladesh and rising heat-related deaths in India.

## Objectives

The study aims to highlight tension between the formal institutionalization of gender in global climate governance and the persistent structural inequalities that shape women's climate vulnerability and constrain their access to climate finance in South Asia.

Using postcolonial feminist and feminist political economy frameworks, it further aims to examine how post-COP30 climate finance operates in the space between inclusion and power. Specifically, it evaluates how genuine gains in community participation coexist with largely unreformed structural power relations.

# 2. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative, multi-method policy analysis design, combining three sources of evidence, which are discussed below.

First, a documentary analysis of the COP29 and COP30 negotiating texts and adopted decisions — together with UNFCCC, Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) institutional reporting — establishes what was formally agreed and how gender is operationalized within climate finance governance.

Second, quantitative secondary data on gender-related development and climate finance were compiled from OECD Development Assistance Committee reporting and its published analyses, from GCF portfolio documentation, and from national statistical and composite index sources to establish the scale of financing gap.

Third, a purposive comparative case analysis is conducted of four GCF-funded projects across Pakistan, Bangladesh and India (FP018, FP108, FP069 and FP084). These projects were selected because they are the only South Asian initiatives with publicly documented gender-disaggregated results. Evidence from each case is coded against five analytical dimensions: conceptualization, financing, intersectionality, accountability and contextualization derived from postcolonial feminist and feminist political economy scholarship and is presented in the cross-tabulations in Tables 1 and 2.

The analysis relies entirely on publicly available secondary sources; no primary data was collected, and no participants were involved. Consequently, two limitations follow: i): project-level findings depend on the completeness and quality of GCF and IEU reporting, which the IEU itself identifies as uneven; ii): since four cases were purposively selected, they are not statistically representative of the wider GCF portfolio, therefore, the findings cannot be statistically generalized.

# 3. GENDER, POWER, AND CLIMATE FINANCE FRAMEWORK

The integration of gender into climate governance functions as a 'bureaucratic project': gender is institutionalized within governance systems in ways that raise its administrative footprint while depoliticizing its transformative potential (Mukhopadhyay 2004). Arora-Jonsson (2011) demonstrates this in the context of forest and climate governance, showing how gender mainstreaming reduces gender to a measurable input, percentage of women participants, number of gender action plans, rather than engaging with structural power. Lam et al. (2024) identify the central risk as 'bureaucratic co-optation and depoliticization of feminist, women's rights, and queer agendas, resulting in limited potential for transformative change'. The Green Climate Fund's (GCF) own 2025 Independent Evaluation Unit synthesis confirms this pattern: while almost half of GCF portfolio beneficiaries are female, 'the extent and quality of gender mainstreaming vary across project stages, and gaps are in the completion and quality of the gender action plans' (Independent Evaluation Unit [IEU] 2025).

An analysis of 30 GCF projects conducted by Schalatek et al. (2021) found that gender considerations were consistently treated as 'add-ons' separate from, rather than integrated into, climate, economic, and environmental outcomes. Flavell (2023) adds an institutional dimension: feminist advocacy within the UNFCCC has produced significant rhetorical victories while operating within a state-based architecture that systematically marginalizes feminist organizations from the South at the grassroots level. The UNFCCC Trust Fund supported 1,624 participants during a period between 2013-2023, of whom only 30% were women, while women's representation in UNFCCC constituted bodies averages only 39% (Nwamarah and Omolo, 2025).

In feminist political economy, Bedford (2009), Elson (1991) and Agarwal (2003) draw a critical distinction between access to resources and control over resources. Women may gain access to training, project participation, or income-generating activities without gaining authority to manage, dispose of, or make decisions about those resources. This distinction matters empirically: it explains how climate finance can produce measurable income gains as in GCF's FP069 Bangladesh project, where household income rose by over BDT 14,000 without producing measurable increases in women's decision-making power (Independent Evaluation Unit [IEU] 2024).

A study on the gendered impact of climate change confirms the pattern: in Bangladesh, droughts increased women's asset accumulation without corresponding gains in political or household authority (Fruttero et al. 2023).

In Pakistan's agricultural sector, the structural foundations of this distinction are starkly visible. Around 70% of employed women work in agriculture (International Growth Centre [IGC] 2025) and work an average of 15.5 hours per day, of which 5.5 hours are spent on livestock care (United Nations Pakistan 2020). Only 2% own the land they work (International Growth Centre [IGC} 2025). These are not incidental gaps; they are structural features of Pakistan's agricultural political economy that standard GCF gender integration tools are not designed to address.

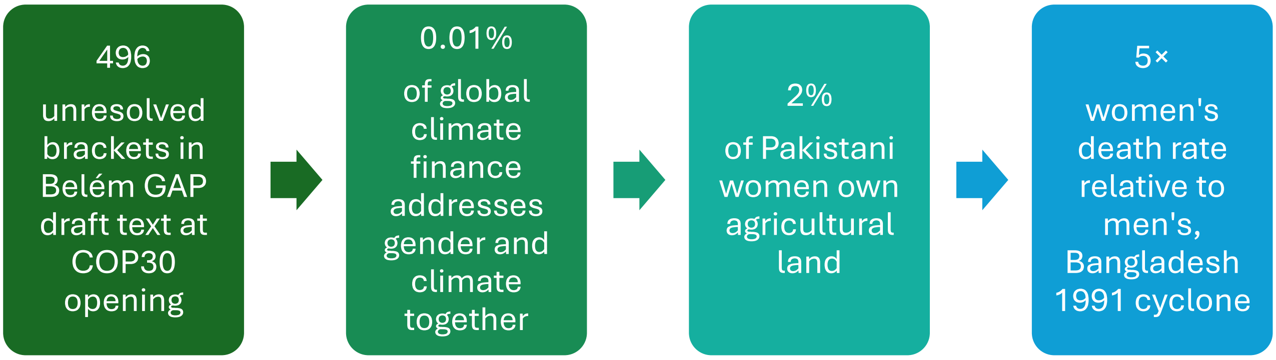
Mohanty (1988) and Bhambra (2014) identify a further structural flaw, i.e. the tendency of global governance frameworks to homogenize 'Third World women' as a uniform category of vulnerability, applying standardized policy tools that ignore historical, political, and economic contexts in gender debates. In South Asia, the structural conditions that shape women's climate vulnerabilities are as follows:

- Colonial land tenure systems that continue to govern property rights;
- Customary laws (*riwaj*) in Pakistan's tribal regions that restricts inheritance and mobility;
- Caste-based exclusion that intersects with gender to compound the marginalization of Dalit and Adivasi women in India; and
- Political economies of agrarian production in Bangladesh's coastal regions.

- Pakistan has a Gender Inequality Index score of 0.534, based on 2021 data (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2023), which reflects structural conditions that universalizing climate governance frameworks are ill-equipped to address.

## 3.1 Post-COP30 Institutional Landscape

The quantitative landscape of gender and climate governance after COP30 reveals a significant gap between institutional ambition and financial reality. The key figures are presented below.




*Sources:* Climate Home News (2025); *2X Global (2025); International Growth Centre (2025);* Shamsuddoha et al. (2024).

At COP29 held in Baku in November 2024, Parties extended the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender for 10 years alongside a mandate to develop a new gender action plan. However, the negotiations were paralyzed by resistance from Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Egypt to language on intersectionality, human rights, and recognition of women 'in all their diversity' (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security 2024; Prentice and Zayed, 2024). References to sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR), intersectionality, and provisions protecting women environmental defenders were all removed from the final text (Sustainable Energy for All 2024; UN Women 2024). The New Collective Quantified Goal, while establishing a US$ 300 billion annual climate finance target, contained no binding gender-finance allocation. The outcome left the distribution of climate finance to women's organizations at grass roots level unaddressed (Lozada 2025).

COP30 adopted the Belém Gender Action Plan with 27 activities across five priority areas after negotiations that produced 496 unresolved brackets, a figure indicating the depth of political contestation (Lozada 2025). The Holy See firmly restated its position that references to gender be understood as grounded in biological sex. Several other Parties pressed comparable objections; Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt continued resistance to intersectional language (ibid). The final GAP was described by feminist observers as a 'small miracle': genuine in its commitments but constrained by the politics of multilateral consensus (ibid).

Three specific achievements stand out. First, the GAP introduces provisions on health, violence against women, and care work, recognizing the dimensions of gendered climate vulnerability previously absent from formal UNFCCC frameworks. Second, it promotes the leadership of indigenous, Afro-descendant, and rural women, a partial recognition of intersectionality that survived the negotiating process. Third, it advances gender-responsive budgeting across mitigation, adaptation, and finance workstreams (United Nations Climate Change [UNCC] 2025a). What it does not include is a dedicated financing mechanism. United Nations Development Programme data shows that by 2030, climate change could push more than 60 million additional people into extreme poverty under a high-impact climate scenario, with women facing disproportionate risks, yet the GAP's normative commitments are structurally divorced from the financial architecture required to deliver them (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] 2024).

GCF is the first climate finance mechanism to mainstream gender perspectives from its operational inception. Its Gender Policy, adopted by decision B.24/12 (Green Climate Fund [GCF] 2019), requires mandatory gender assessments and gender action plans at the project level. As of 2025, GCF's Independent Evaluation Unit was conducting a comprehensive synthesis of the fund's gender approach, the first such system-wide review with a full evaluation planned for 2026 (Independent Evaluation Unit [IEU] 2025). The 2024 Annual Progress Report acknowledges both achievement and failure: 'almost half of the portfolio's beneficiaries are female, and projects comply with mandatory gender assessments and action plans' but simultaneously acknowledges that 'the extent and quality of gender mainstreaming vary across project stages, and gaps are in the completion and quality of the gender action plans' (Green Climate Fund [GCF] 2024a). This is a significant institutional admission: GCF's own reporting identifies a gap between gender policy commitments and project-level gender outcomes.

# 4. CLIMATE FINANCE IN PRACTICE: EVIDENCE FROM S. ASIA

Table 1 presents a cross-tabulated comparison of four GCF-funded projects across Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. Quantitative evidence on project outcomes is drawn from the GCF's Annual Performance Reports (2024-2025) and the IEU's impact evaluations. The crosstab maps each project against five dimensions, such as sector-wise, gender integration method, documented participation gains, evidence of power/asset control change, and overall structural transformation outcome.

Table 1: Cross-Tabulation GCF Projects: Gender Inclusion vs. Power Outcomes (South Asia)

| Project / Country | Sector-wise | Gender Integration Method | Participation Gains (Documented) | Power / Asset Control | Structural Transformation? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FP018 Pakistan | Disaster Risk | Gender action plans; participation targets; community DRR inclusion | ✓ Women participate in early warning & community resilience structures | ✗ No change in land ownership, infrastructure authority, or governance control | No procedural inclusion within unreformed governance hierarchies (Green Climate Fund 2017) |
| FP108 Pakistan | Agriculture / Water | Gender assessments; training; technology access for women farmers | ✓ Women access training & technology; increased participation in project activities | ✗ No change in land ownership (only 2% women own land); no change in credit access or water governance | No standard GCF tools applied to structurally unreformed agrarian sector (Green Climate Fund 2025b) |
| FP069 Bangladesh | Coastal Livelihoods | Women as primary beneficiaries; income-generating activities; water access | ✓ Household income +BDT 14,000; improved water access and food security (Independent Evaluation Unit 2024) | ✗ Zero statistically significant increase in women's decision-making power over household income (Independent Evaluation Unit 2024) | No economic inclusion without power, clearest empirical evidence of the inclusion/power gap |
| FP084 India | Ecosystem / Coastal | Participatory gender | ✓ Livelihood support; women | ~ Limited: some | Partial best practice community design; |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | assessments; women as adaptation agents; community-centred design | included as agents in ecosystem governance | community governance participation; no sustained change in economic authority | insufficient evidence of sustained governance authority (Green Climate Fund 2024b) |

Source: Author's analysis. IEU = GCF Independent Evaluation Unit. All project data from GCF documentation and evaluation reports (2017–2025).

## 4.1 Pakistan: Structural Patriarchy and Limits of Participatory Integration

Pakistan ranked fifth on the long-term Global Climate Risk Index 2023 and 142nd out of 146 on the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum 2023). The 2022 floods, the largest in the country's recorded history, inundated one-third of the national territory, affected 33 million people, destroyed over 2 million homes, and displaced approximately 8 million people (Ashraf et al. 2024). Of these, 8.2 million women and 16 million children were identified as the worst affected. Approximately 650,000 pregnant women lost access to healthcare, and six million women of reproductive age faced acute obstetric risk (Soomar, Arefin & Soomar 2023). The intersection of climate disaster and structural gender inequality was acute: entrenched gender norms restricted women's mobility during evacuation; lack of land ownership eliminated their access to recovery loans; and gender-based violence increased sharply in displacement camps (Basu 2023). GCF projects FP018 and FP108 operate within this context. FP018's disaster risk reduction approach integrates gender through participation targets and community governance structures, producing documented inclusion outcomes. Yet the governance structures through which early warning systems and disaster response are managed remain male-dominated at every level above the community. FP108's agricultural water management project faces a structurally more intractable challenge: around 70% of women work in agriculture, but only 2% own agricultural land (International Growth Centre [IGC] 2025). Standard GCF gender tools (gender assessments, gender action plans, and training activities) cannot address the land tenure system that governs women's access to credit, insurance, and recovery finance in Pakistan's agricultural sector. Mansab, Aslam and Talib (2026) conclude that Pakistan's gender-inclusive climate policies have 'limited impact due to structural patriarchy, governance gaps, insufficient gender-responsive infrastructure, restricted access to green finance for women, and the marginalization of vulnerable subgroups'.

## 4.2 Bangladesh: Quantifying the Income-Power Disconnect

Bangladesh presents the most precisely documented case of the inclusion/power gap. During the 1991 cyclone, women's death rate was five times higher than men's (Shamsuddoha et al. 2024), a disparity rooted in restricted mobility, lack of early warning access, and structural exclusion from disaster governance. Despite significant formal progress in girls' education and substantial reductions in maternal mortality, structural inequalities persist. The International Monetary Fund (2023) finds that 'gender gaps persist with climate change as an added obstacle', and that structural barriers continue to constrain women's economic and political decision-making authority. The GCF's FP069 coastal resilience project provides a precise quantitative illustration. The IEU's (2024) impact evaluation records an average household income increase of over BDT 14,000 per household, approximately US$ 165 at 2024 exchange rates, alongside measurable improvements in water access and food security. These are genuine and significant outcomes. The same evaluation, however, records zero statistically significant increase in women's decision-making power over household income. This finding is analytically decisive: it demonstrates that a well-designed, gender-tagged, GCF-funded climate intervention can produce measurable income gains for women while leaving the household and community governance norms that determine women's authority over those gains entirely unchanged. Economic inclusion and structural empowerment are empirically separable, and climate finance, as currently designed, routinely delivers the former while failing to produce the latter.

## 4.3 India: Community-Centred Design and its Structural Ceiling

India's FP084 coastal ecosystem resilience project represents the strongest design approach in this comparative analysis: women are incorporated as active agents in ecosystem-based adaptation, not merely passive beneficiaries. The project's participatory assessments and community-centred governance design align with feminist recommendations for locally grounded climate finance. Yet the available evidence suggests a structural ceiling: while participation and livelihood support are achieved, sustained changes in women's authority within governance systems or control over economic resources remain limited (Green Climate Fund 2024b). Contextualizing this across South Asia, women face 'limited access to and control over resources, muted voices in decision-making, restricted rights, and limited access to education' conditions that project-level interventions cannot systematically address without engaging the governance architectures that sustain them (Castelo, Antunes & Ashrafuzzaman 2024). India recorded 10,000 heat-related deaths between 2003 and 2022, rising 34% between the two decades, with rural women bearing disproportionate health burdens due to restricted mobility and healthcare access (Beach et al. 2024).

# 5. GAP ANALYSIS OF FIVE STRUCTURAL DIMENSIONS

Table 2 below presents a systematic comparison of COP/GCF discourse, critical feminist scholarship, and South Asian empirical evidence across five structural dimensions. The gaps identified are not primarily implementation gaps; they are structural features of how gender is institutionalized within the current climate finance architecture.

Table 2: Gap Analysis: COP/GCF Discourse, Critical Scholarship, and South Asian Evidence

| Dimension | COP / GCF Discourse | Critical Scholarship | South Asian Evidence |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Conceptualization of gender | Participation, capacity-building, representation (Belém GAP priority areas) | Must engage structural power: land, credit, governance authority (Agarwal 2003; Mukhopadhyay 2004) | All 4 GCF projects: participation gains documented; zero evidence of asset control or governance rights shift. FP069: income +BDT 14,000; zero change in decision-making power (Independent Evaluation Unit 2024) |
| 2. Financing architecture | US$ 70.8bn bilateral ODA targets gender; only 4.1% as principal objective. 0.01% of climate finance addresses gender + climate together (Ferrier 2026; 2X Global 2025) | Chronic underfunding biases delivery towards cheapest forms of inclusion: training, targets, assessments (Lam et al. 2024) | Pakistan: 2% women own land; no green finance access for women farmers. Bangladesh & India projects: participation activities funded; land rights, credit reform unfunded |
| 3. Intersectionality | SRHR, intersectionality removed at COP29 and COP30 under state-bloc pressure; 496 brackets at COP30 opening (Climate Home News 2025) | Erasure renders women interchangeable; ignores caste, ethnicity, colonial dispossession and their climate implications (Mohanty 1988) | Dalit/Adivasi women in India; rural women in KP/Sindh: face compounding intersecting vulnerabilities invisible in GCF frameworks. Pakistan GII = 0.534; ranked 135/191 (United Nations Development Programme 2023) |
| 4. Accountability and measurement | GCF results frameworks measure: % women in | Technocratic metrics document inclusion while leaving structural stasis | FP069: BDT 14,000 income gain measured, celebrated, reported. Decision-making power: incidental finding, not a results indicator. GCF 2024 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | activities, gender action plans completed. Power outcomes: not measured | unreported and unincentivized (Arora-Jonsson 2011; Independent Evaluation Unit 2025) | Report admits quality gaps (Green Climate Fund 2024a) |
| 5. Global South contextualization | Universal frameworks applied across all country contexts. 81.5% of NDCs mention gender (United Nations Climate Change 2024b) | Colonial land tenure, customary law, patriarchal governance requires postcolonial feminist analysis (Bhambra 2014) | Pakistan ccGAP exists in NDC 3.0 (2025); implementation 'limited by structural patriarchy, governance gaps, restricted green finance access' (Mansab, Aslam & Talib 2026). Bangladesh constitutional equality: structural discrimination persists (International Monetary Fund 2023) |

Source: Author's comparative analysis. Full citations in reference list.

## 5.1 Conceptualization Gap

Belém’s Gender Action Plan revolves around five priority areas, namely participation, knowledge, coherence, implementation, and monitoring. This paradigm reflects what Arora-Jonsson (2011) identifies as procedural mainstreaming oriented towards measurable, administratively manageable outcomes rather than structural engagement with the conditions producing gendered inequality. GCF's own IEU synthesis (2025) acknowledges this: projects 'comply with mandatory gender assessments and action plans' while the quality of substantive gender mainstreaming varies significantly. The feminist political economy’s insistence on the distinction between access and control between being present in a project and having authority over its resources is structurally absent from the current conceptual architecture of both the GAP and the GCF's gender policy.

## 5.2 Financing Gap

The numbers are unambiguous. While OECD DAC members commit US$ 70.8 billion annually to gender equality across their bilateral ODA (Ferrier 2026), women's rights organizations, the primary vehicles for structural feminist advocacy, received less than 1% of ODA for gender equality, and this figure dropped 28% in 2024 alone (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2026). Of global climate finance reaching US$ 1.46 trillion in 2022 (Buchner et al., 2023), 0.01% reaches initiatives addressing gender and climate together (2X Global 2025). The Belém GAP has no dedicated financing mechanism. This financing gap structurally biases implementation towards low-cost gender integration (such as training, participation targets, gender assessments) while neglecting the more resource-intensive interventions required for structural transformation, including land rights programmes, women's access to green finance, and feminist civil society engagement with governance reforms.

## 5.3 Intersectionality Gap

The coordinated removal of intersectional language from COP29 and COP30 texts, SRHR, recognition of women 'in all their diversity', protections for women environmental defenders, is not merely a rhetorical setback. For women in South Asia, intersectionality is a lived structural reality. In Pakistan, where the Global Gender Gap Index ranks the country 142nd out of 146 and the Gender Inequality Index stands at 0.534, indigenous women in the north face climate risks shaped by customary governance that excludes women from formal decision-making. Sindh's minority women face compounding land dispossession. In India, Adivasi and Dalit women face simultaneous gender and caste-based exclusion from land ownership and governance. A gender framework that cannot name these intersections cannot address the specific vulnerabilities of those most exposed to climate risk.

## 5.4 Accountability Gap

GCF results frameworks measure participation percentages and gender action plan completion and not shifts in women's asset control or governance authority. The FP069 Bangladesh case demonstrates the consequence precisely: household income gains were measured, disaggregated, and reported as a project success. The finding that decision-making power had not changed was noted in an independent evaluation, not a core results indicator, and triggered no adaptive management response. Without accountability frameworks that measure power outcomes, climate finance institutions face no incentive to design interventions that produce them. The Green Climate Fund (2024a) itself acknowledges this gap, committing to "measures to fill the gender mainstreaming gaps." This acknowledgement underscores that the current system has not yet closed them.

## 5.5. Global South Contextualization Gap

Pakistan's NDC 3.0 incorporates the Climate Change Gender Action Plan. Bangladesh has extensive formal gender equality commitments. India has constitutional provisions on gender equality in land and property rights. In all three countries, the implementation gap between formal commitment and structural outcome is documented and consistent. Mansab, Aslam and Talib (2026) identify the specific mechanism: 'structural patriarchy, governance gaps, insufficient gender-responsive infrastructure, restricted access to green finance for women, and the marginalization of vulnerable subgroups' conditions that universalized GCF frameworks, designed without postcolonial contextual analysis, are structurally ill-equipped to address.

# 6. WAY FORWARD

The five structural gaps identified in this analysis reflect the limits of procedural mainstreaming as a paradigm for gender transformation. The following recommendations are targeted at the specific structural failures identified by the evidence.

## i): Reframe Belém GAP around power, not just participation

The GAP's mid-term review (expected in 2029-30) must embed an explicit power framework alongside its participation architecture. UNFCCC Parties, working with the Women and Gender Constituency and South Asian civil society, should incorporate mandatory indicators for women's control over productive assets, decision-making authority within governance structures, and access to green finance. The review should assess not only how many women participated in climate activities, but also the authority they exercised over the resources those activities generated. The GCF's ongoing gender approach evaluation (Independent Evaluation Unit 2025) provides the analytical basis for operationalizing this shift.

## ii): Establish a dedicated gender-transformative finance window within GCF

The 0.01% of global climate finance reaching gender-climate initiatives (2X Global 2025) and the 28% drop in women's rights ODA in 2024 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2026) together constitute a financing emergency. The GCF's revised Gender Action Plan (2026–2031) should establish a dedicated window for gender-transformative climate action defined as interventions demonstrating evidence of shifting structural power relations, not merely participation metrics. Priority access should be granted to feminist civil society organizations, women's land rights programmes, and women's access to agricultural credit and green finance across Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. Minimum targets: at least 15% of GCF adaptation funding directed to gender-principal interventions by 2030.

## iii): Restore and enshrine intersectionality in UNFCCC gender frameworks

The removal of SRHR language and intersectional provisions at COP29 and COP30 must be treated as a reversible political setback, not a settled outcome. The Belém GAP's implementation guidance should explicitly reference intersectionality as a cross-cutting principle across all five priority areas. South Asian governments, particularly Pakistan, whose NDC 3.0 references the ccGAP, should incorporate intersectional gender analysis into national climate policy, recognizing Dalit, Adivasi, indigenous, and rural women as distinct policy categories requiring targeted interventions. Feminist civil society from the Global South should be formally resourced to defend intersectional provisions in future COP negotiations.

## iv): Reform GCF results frameworks to mandate power outcome measurement

The FP069 Bangladesh case demonstrates the cost of not measuring power: a project that produced a US$ 165 average income gain reported as a success while a zero change in decision-making power went unmeasured and unaddressed. GCF-funded projects with gender tags should mandatorily assess and report on: (a) changes in women's control over project-generated assets; (b) changes in women's decision-making authority within household and community governance; (c) changes in women's access to and control over land, credit, and water; and (d) women's roles in governance bodies with actual decision-making authority. Where evaluations identify persistent inclusion/power gaps, adaptive management requirements should be triggered. The IEU's 2026 full gender evaluation should be tasked with benchmarking these indicators across GCF's full portfolio.

## v): Strengthen Pakistan's national gender-climate architecture

Pakistan's NDC 3.0 refers to the ccGAP, yet expert analysis confirms implementation is 'largely symbolic and constrained by prevailing socio-cultural norms' (Mansab, Aslam & Talib 2026). Three targeted interventions are recommended. First, the Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination should develop gender-disaggregated climate vulnerability data at sub-national level, prioritizing Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh, and Balochistan, the regions of greatest climate exposure and gendered structural inequality. Second, GCF accredited entities in Pakistan should be required to demonstrate how proposed projects address women's land rights, agricultural credit access, and disaster governance participation, not merely gender participation targets. Third, the implementation of the Belém GAP in Pakistan should be monitored by a multi-stakeholder body including feminist civil society organizations with expertise in gender, land rights, and climate justice.

## vi): Centre feminist bodies at grass roots level in GAP implementation & financing

Women's rights organizations receive less than 1% of ODA for gender equality, a figure that dropped 28% in 2024 alone (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2026). The Women and Gender Constituency has consistently advocated for direct access mechanisms within GCF for feminist civil society (Flavell 2023; Maguire et al. 2024). The Belém GAP's means of implementation priority area should establish specific targets for increasing the share of climate finance channeled through women's organizations and feminist networks in South Asia. The GAP's mid-term review should be co-designed with civil society from climate-vulnerable regions, ensuring that evidence from community-level actors (including Pakistan's flood plains, Bangladesh's coastal chars, and India's coastal communities) carries equal analytical weight to institutional reports.

# 7. CONCLUSION

This study has traced a paradox at the heart of post-COP30 climate governance: the UNFCCC's most ambitious formal commitment to gender-responsive climate action coincides with a persistent, quantitatively documented failure to translate institutional inclusion into structural transformation. The 496 brackets that surrounded the Belém GAP's draft text at COP30's opening and the political battles over intersectionality, SRHR, and gender diversity that produced them reveal that gender's institutionalization within climate governance is neither settled nor sufficient. Not settled, because it must be defended against an organized opposition at every COP. Not sufficient, because even when institutional language survives the negotiating process, the structural conditions that determine whether women gain power from climate finance remain largely unchanged.

The South Asian evidence is unambiguous in its pattern and significant in its scale. In Pakistan, where around 70% of women work in agriculture but only 2% own agricultural land, and where the 2022 floods left 8.2 million women and girls among the worst-affected, the GCF's participatory gender integration tools have produced documented inclusion outcomes within governance structures that remain structurally unreformed. In Bangladesh, where women's climate disaster mortality has historically exceeded men's by a factor of five, a well-designed GCF project produced a measurable household income gain of BDT 14,000 yet resulted in no statistically significant increase in women's decision-making power. In India, even the most community-centred approach in the comparative sample has not produced sustained changes in women's governance authority.

The study does not argue that climate finance has failed on gender front; rather it says that success has occurred at wrong level. Participation gains are real and institutional commitments are genuine. What is missing are the political will, financial architecture, and accountability framework to move from procedural inclusion to structural transformation. The Belém GAP, if approached as a platform for transformation rather than a compliance document, creates the institutional basis for this shift. Making that shift requires placing power (control over land, credit, governance, and resources) rather than participation alone at the centre of gender-responsive climate action. The women of South Asia, bearing a disproportionate share of climate costs, deserve no less.

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