

We know what we need

**South Asian women speak out
on climate change adaptation**



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Executive summary

“ I am 60 years old and I have never experienced so much flooding, droughts, hot winds and hailstones as in recent years... I am surprised how often we have these problems. Whatever the cause, more crops are failing and production is lower. ”

Chandrika Tiwari, 60, Matehiya, Banke, Nepal.

Climate change is affecting everybody, regardless of caste, ethnicity, sex, race or level of income. But it is women like Chandrika who are suffering the most, simply because they are women, and women are poorer. Women make up for 70% of the world's poor. They have less access to financial resources, land, education, health and other basic rights than men, and are seldom involved in decision making processes. Women are therefore less able to cope with the impact of climate change and are less able to adapt.

As this report shows, poor women in Bangladesh, India and Nepal are struggling to protect their lives, homes, assets and livelihoods from weather-related hazards. Field research conducted in the Ganga river basin in the aftermath of massive flooding illustrates how these women's livelihoods are being affected by erratic monsoon patterns. Nevertheless, women are not passive victims of climate change.

“ If the government could build flood-protected shelters for the community, it could save lives and assets during floods. ”

Ameme, Gulzar Mondol village,
Faridpur district, Bangladesh

Despite limited resources, information and support, evidence from this research proves women in poor areas have started to adapt to a changing climate and can clearly articulate what they need to secure and sustain their livelihoods more effectively. Their priorities include a safe place to live and store their harvest and livestock during the monsoon season; better access to services such as agricultural extension; training and information about adaptation strategies and livelihood alternatives; and access to resources to implement effective strategies and overcome constraints.



Emdadul Islam Bitu / ActionAid

Adaptation funds must play a key role in promoting women's rights. There is now increasing recognition that mitigation efforts will not be enough to secure social and economic progress in the face of climate change. Rich countries responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming are under mounting pressure to fund adaptation. Consequently, additional sources of financial and technical assistance are emerging to support adaptation processes in the Least Developed Countries (LDC) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Yet there is little evidence of specific efforts to target women in adaptation activities funded as part of bilateral and multilateral programmes. Moreover, despite their disproportionate burden, the voices of poor women are seldom heard in UN negotiations on climate change and adaptation processes. For adaptation funding to be effective and efficient, as well as equitable, it is crucial that poor women are fully involved, and that their experiences and needs are reflected and prioritised in both policies and interventions for adaptation to climate change.

In order to that ensure adaptation financing mechanisms effectively support poor women's adaptation needs, **this report makes a number of recommendations directed to country delegates negotiating adaptation financing and to the bodies responsible for the management of these funds.** These apply in particular to the establishment of the Adaptation Fund under the Kyoto Protocol. However, they are also relevant to the UNFCCC* Least Developed Countries Fund and the Special Climate Change Fund already operational, as well as to other emerging funding mechanisms for adaptation beyond the UNFCCC.

In brief, they are to:

- **Ensure procedural justice in design and implementation of adaptation financing;**
Through procedures for access by agencies involving and representing poor women to international negotiations, national adaptation programmes, information on funding mechanisms, and to the funds themselves.
- **Prioritise the adaptation needs of poor women in adaptation funds;**
By recognising poor women as the most vulnerable group and creating guidance and operational criteria to specifically target them in adaptation funding.
- **Monitor how women are targeted by, and benefit from, adaptation funds;**
By including disaggregated gender sensitive indicators on how funds are securing aspects of women's livelihoods such as food security or equal access to social services.
- **Create mechanisms for women's participation in adaptation fund management;**
By fostering input from civil society through mechanisms including a women's rights body to monitor adaptation funds, equal representation of women on committees for project planning, monitoring and evaluation, and social auditing of funds.
- **Ensure adaptation finance mechanisms are able to support livelihood adaptation priorities of poor women;**
By ensuring that women have access to education, information and resources to sustain their livelihoods and that funds are set up to be able to deliver adaptation options tailored to their needs.
- **Ensure states provide an enabling environment for women's participation;**
Through legislation and institutional practices that guarantee women's rights are fulfilled.



Emdadul Islam Bitu / ActionAid

Only with proactive and inclusive efforts to prioritise the needs of poor women will existing adaptation funds, as well as negotiations for future adaptation financing, be able to support those women most at risk of climate change.

*UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

1 Introduction



Binod Timilsena / ActionAid

Changing mausam (seasons) made our life difficult

“My name is Nim Kumari Bohara. I live in Matehiya, a village in a district called Banke in Nepal. I am 32 and I am married. I have a thatched house near the riverbank, so every year we are badly affected by baadh (floods). In the recent years, our problems have increased. This is the reason why I have to spend most of my earnings to make my house safe. I need to repair it after every baadh.

As we never know when the rain will come, we had to change. I started to change the way I prepare the seedbed so that we don't lose all our crops. I am also using different crops depending on the situation. I prefer to use local variety of paddy to cultivate in my three kattha of land (three kattha is equivalent to approximately 1.000 square metres). We also grow mustard and masuro (lentil) as winter crops.

But to keep my crops safe I would need to be able to raise my homestead. Having a better irrigation system for the land is also a big priority for all of us. If you ask me, we also need to use early or short duration paddy and crops that are resistant to baadh and sukha (drought) if they exist.”

Nim lives in the Ganga (Ganges) river basin that connects Nepal, India and Bangladesh. The communities living in this basin are suffering from increasing and more severe flooding. In 2007 Nim was one of 28 million people affected by the early onset of strong monsoon rains. In 2007, two million hectares of crops were either damaged or completely lost to the waters. Months after the rains stopped many had still not recovered their livelihoods.¹

Climate change is affecting everybody, regardless of caste, ethnicity, sex, race or level of income. But it is women like Nim who are suffering the most – simply because they are women, and women are poorer. Their unequal position in society means women have less access to money, land, food, protection from violence, education or healthcare. They are also more dependent on natural resources for their subsistence. Therefore they are more exposed to climate shocks and have fewer resources to protect their own lives, assets and livelihoods while looking after their families. There are many ways in which women are affected differently, and more severely, by climate change.

Women as food producers and providers

One of the primary reasons that women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change is that they are disproportionately dependent on threatened natural resources. A recent report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 'Impacts, adaptation and vulnerability', predicts that yields from rain-fed agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa could be reduced by as much as 50% by 2020. Such a strain on food production will certainly translate into increased hardship for women, who often carry out the majority of farming activities. In fact, women are responsible for approximately 75% of household food production in sub-Saharan Africa, 65% in Asia, and 45% in Latin America.² As crop yields decline and resources become scarcer, women's workloads will expand, jeopardising their chances to work outside the home or attend school. In times of drought, they will also have to spend more time performing another typical female responsibility — carrying, purifying and supplying the family's water.³

Women as guardians of health

As water- and heat-related diseases increase because of climate change, women will bear the extra burden of increased care giving and increased threats to their own health.⁴ The World Health Organisation states that,

“Changes in climate are likely to lengthen the transmission seasons of important vector-borne diseases, and to alter their geographic range, potentially bringing them to regions that lack population immunity and/or a strong public health infrastructure.”⁵ Malaria is one example a vector-borne disease that will likely increase due to climate change, particularly as a result of increased temperatures and rainfall.

Pregnant women are particularly vulnerable because they attract malaria-carrying mosquitoes at twice the rate of non-pregnant women. Moreover, pregnancy reduces a woman's immunity to malaria, making her more susceptible to infection and increasing her risk of illness, severe anaemia and death. Maternal malaria increases the risk of spontaneous abortion, premature delivery, stillbirth and low birth weight — a leading cause of child mortality.⁶

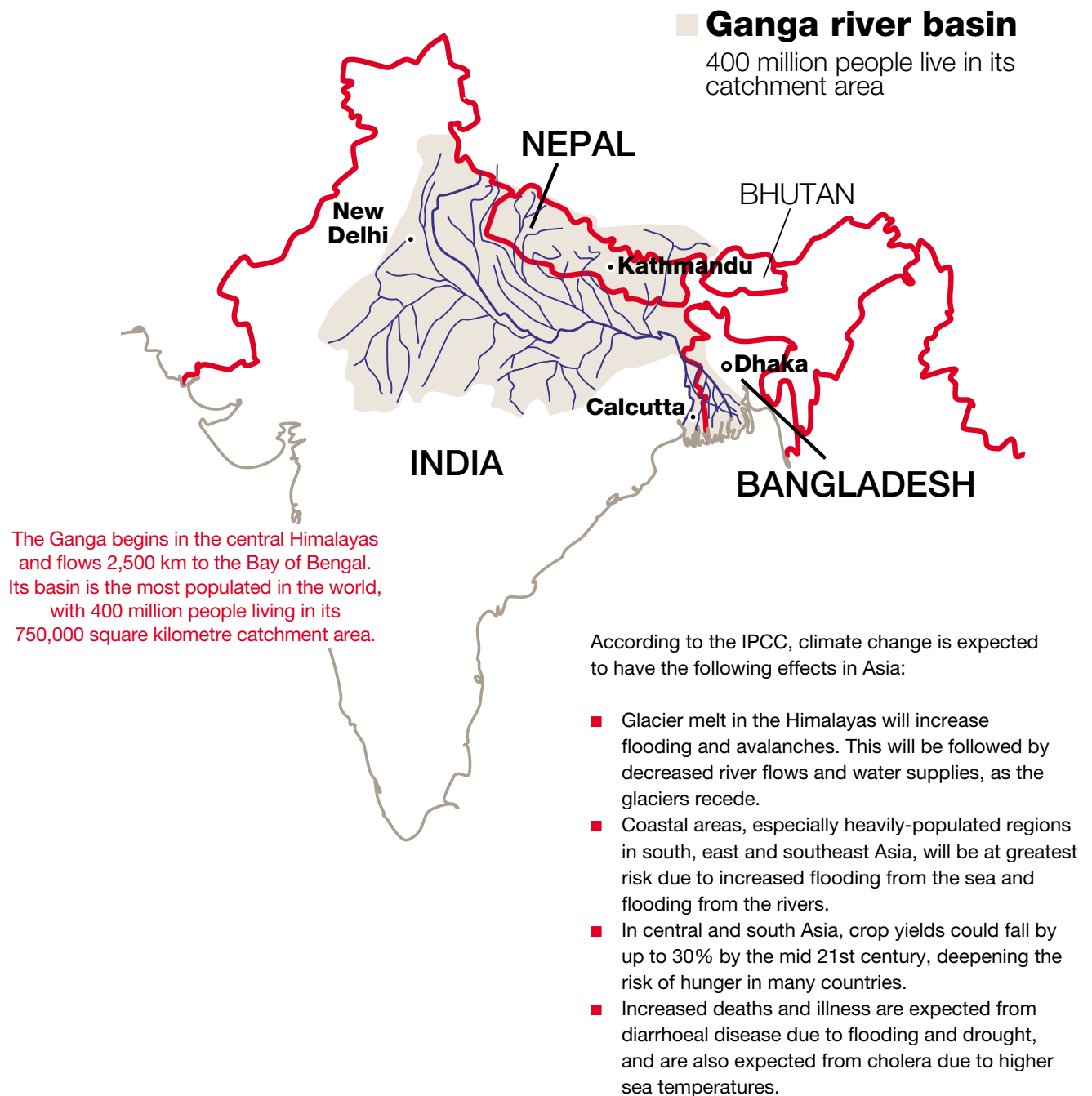
Since it is poor women who are disproportionately affected by climate change, there is a strong case for the need to ensure that adaptation funds available through UN mechanisms or other means effectively support women's adaptation to climate change. Climate change interventions that fail to address women's needs will fail to support those most affected by climate change and reinforce the disparity between men and women in their capacity to adapt to it.⁷



Sanjit Das / ActionAid

The context

This report is based on field research that was conducted with women living in rural communities in the Ganga (also known as Padma or Ganges) river basin in Bangladesh, India and Nepal. These countries are currently amongst the worst affected by extreme weather-related hazards. The region is particularly vulnerable to cyclones and flooding and the frequency and severity of the shocks are taking a massive total on local communities.⁸





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The studies were carried out with poor women in rural areas from both male and female-headed households who were either responsible for the household's main source of income, or significantly contributed to it. Participatory research tools were used to explore: the impact of changing monsoon and flooding patterns on their livelihoods; existing coping strategies; constraints to adaptation; and adaptation priorities based on scenarios of future flooding.⁹

In **Bangladesh**, the research took place in villages in Faridpur and Pabna districts, both largely dependent on agriculture. In Faridpur, the main crops are rice (paddy), lentils, jute, onions, garlic, nuts and chilli, and almost every household is involved in livestock and poultry rearing. In Pabna, people are largely dependent on agriculture and livestock. The main crops include rice, wheat, lentils, mustard, sesame and nuts. Share-rearing and share-cropping are common practices.

In **India**, the research took place in villages located in Muzaffarpur district in Bihar state. The main economic activities of women are share cereal cropping,¹⁰ agricultural wage labour and animal husbandry. Litchi and mango crops for export provide an important source of cash for the local population.

In **Nepal**, research was carried out in two districts: Banke, part of the Rapti river basin, and Bardiya, part of the Karnali river basin (both part of the Ganga river system). Matehiya village is in Banke and is one of the most remote locations within the district. A decade-long conflict has disrupted services, and it has no transport or electricity. Main livelihoods are agriculture, livestock and seasonal work. The village of Suryapatuwa in Bardiya has also been affected by conflict, which further compounds women's vulnerability. The majority of the population depends on agriculture, followed by livestock and seasonal work.

Why livelihoods?

Climate change is having a huge impact on people's livelihoods. When poor people lose their livelihoods to a hazard such as a flood or a cyclone, they are less able to rebuild their lives, homes and assets and can hardly recover before the next shock hits them. Without a livelihood, women are more likely to go hungry. Women have a main role as food producers and providers and a key role in their household's economy. Female-headed households are an important part of the rural south Asian economy, comprising 15% of households in Bangladesh, 10% in Nepal and as much as 35% in rural India.¹¹ When poor women lose their livelihoods, they slip deeper into poverty and the inequality and marginalisation they suffer from because of their gender increases.

2

The rationale: women and climate change adaptation in the Ganga river basin

We must find other livelihood options

“All was devastated in the third flood. The previous floods were big but this time all the crops like calai [type of pulse] were destroyed. The water level is now increasing more than in previous floods. Now the floodwater comes uncertainly. In the past the river eroded only in the month of Ashar [3rd month of Bangladeshi calendar]; now river erosion takes place more or less throughout the year. If it continues then it will be necessary to find out an alternative livelihood option. For example rearing cattle or having a small business so that we can survive.”



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Akter Banu is 30 years old and lives with her two daughters on a sandy river island formed by river sediments in the Padma – the product of the river erosion of the embankment. She is the head of her household and sustains her family by rearing poultry and raising goats. Thanks to her 8th grade education she supplements her income by working as a tutor in a village nearby. Sometimes she works in other people’s fields as a wage labourer. She was hit by three floods this year.

Flooding in the Ganga river basin is a regular event. Annual floods are vital in replenishing soil fertility, transportation and providing water for irrigation. In recent decades however, there have been significant changes in frequency, timing, intensity and duration of flood hazards. Climate models indicate wetter monsoon conditions in the future,¹² which are expected to cause more intense and extreme rainfall, higher peak flows in rivers and increases in flood magnitude/frequency. But for women like Akter, this is already a reality with which they have to cope.

As experienced by Sumitra (see page 11), large-scale floods lead to significant losses of crops, livestock and property. Women like her have little choice but to work as wage labourers again or to borrow money from money lenders at a very high interest rate. As stored goods such as food, seeds and grain also get damaged, food and seed prices increase and are often unaffordable for day labourers, who can remain without work for weeks or even months.

In this context, it is unsurprising that besides the material losses, women have to cope with the psychosocial impacts of the floods. In the research


areas in Nepal, Gautam¹³ observed people were suffering from anxiety and lack of sleep and generally feeling desperate and helpless. Families often have to relocate, sometimes permanently, to safer grounds during the flood season. This has a severe impact on social support networks and family ties which help women to cope better. The evidence from this research suggests this is common across all flood-affected areas.

“The people in our village have lost the feeling of helpfulness towards each other, and there is no community feeling anymore. People do not help each other, but wait for an NGO or government to come and help. We need to think about how we can get back the feeling of helping each other in times of floods.”

Chulhi Devi, Gangti Bishanpur,
Bihar State, India.

The psychosocial effects of disasters are of course not limited to women, but in their role of care-givers, they have the extra burden of looking after their other family members even when they themselves are in great distress, especially when support groups are not available.

Sumitra Devi lives in Chaupal Bharat village, near the Bagmati river in the state of Bihar in India. She and her husband are landless and used to be wage labourers until they started to grow paddy, corn, wheat and vegetables on a piece of land owned by a local landlord in exchange for a part of their crops.



“ Our paddy crop has been completely destroyed. If the water had receded earlier, we could have grown some vegetables, but now the time for that is also gone and our farmland is still under water. Crop insurance will be taken by the landlord. It will not come to us. All our work has been swept away and the investment and expenses we made to grow the paddy will now not be returned. ”

Sumitra Devi

Sanjit Das / ActionAid

An alternative livelihood helped us cope with the flood impact

“My name is Sawari Tharu. I am 32 and live in Suryapatuwa in Nepal. We are freed Kamaiyas (landless bonded labourers) and we were given a small piece of land by the government. We are 10 people in my family and when we first came, we used to work for other people. But with the support from neighbours and relatives we started cultivating vegetables like potato, cauliflower, tomato and onion. The floods destroyed all the vegetables this year.

We would have suffered a lot with these floods if we had not thought of setting fisheries recently. We started with 1,000 fingerlings of Mangur fish in our pond. The flood took away some of them but I managed to rescue the majority. But during floods the muddy road that takes me to Taratal and Sanoshree market is blocked so I cannot sell the fish in the market. If I had been able to go to the district headquarter for training I think I could have done a great job with both vegetables and the fishery.

My husband goes to India for seasonal labour work so I have more responsibilities looking after my children and taking care of the vegetable farm and fisheries. It would be good to have small cottage industries in our village, so that it could provide many jobs for many men like my husband. To scale up the vegetable farm and fisheries, we would need more skills and markets. If we could be sure that we had a market to sell our products, we could extend this business.”

Current adaptation strategies and constraints

Sawari and her children, as with many people who used to be bonded labourers, are likely to be severely affected by flooding because they are compelled to live on low land and along dangerous riverbanks where their production is easily compromised by the floods.

However, as Sawari’s case shows (see box left), in spite of the harsh conditions, women are not passive victims in the face of these challenges; they have coping strategies and mechanisms in place to protect their lives, assets and livelihoods from flooding.

When the water level in Bangladesh rises, some women move to the nearest high location and make temporary shelters to ensure their safety and that of their families. Others find refuge in the houses of relatives or friends on higher ground. Those who have the necessary resources increase the plinth level of their houses or their homestead, allowing them to protect some of their belongings.

To protect their assets and livelihoods, women try to store seeds in high places within the house before the floods come. Livestock is sometimes taken to higher ground, but safe places to keep cattle are often hard to get to. To cope with the resulting lack of food and assets, women borrow money or sell their livestock or other goods.

To reduce losses resulting from crops rotting in inundated fields, some people have switched to cultivating crops that can be harvested before the flood season, or varieties of rice that will grow high enough to remain above water when the floods come.

“I’m one of the women farmers who are growing off-season vegetables and bananas. These crops suffer less than paddy when there is a flood or a drought. I started to grow vegetables in a kitchen garden to sell. There is no alternative other than changing our cropping patterns to reduce the risk of crop failure.”

Lautani Tharu, Suryapatuwa village, Bardiya district, Nepal.

Similarly, changing the way seedbeds are prepared and selecting crop varieties (mixing local and hybrid types) according to the local context were said to be helpful techniques in the three countries studied. While these approaches can reduce loss of livelihoods, they come at a price. Hybrid seeds are often more expensive and some crops can be labour intensive, thus increasing the burden on women. Additionally, they require knowledge and skills that are often lacking in poor, remote and marginalised communities. Since women are less likely to have an education and they have limited access to information and opportunities to acquire new skills, their engagement in activities like this, which might contribute to improving their safety, capacity and wellbeing, is curtailed.

Practices such as raising homesteads and promoting alternative energy-related technologies (solar, biogas, improved cooking stoves) are increasingly being shared by women. Women also mentioned other adaptations such as adopting less labour-intensive technologies; initiating multiple cropping and intercropping practices; changing cultivation to more easily marketable crop varieties or flood and drought resistant crops; and investing in alternative irrigation facilities – but many are unable to afford them.



Binod Timilsena / ActionAid

“Although I know about different equipment like our neighbours are using, I couldn’t afford it. I know the advantages of each of them but the cost of these technologies is higher. Finance has remained the barrier for me to use these technologies.”

Mintu Tiwari, Matehiya village, Banke district, Nepal.

Because they have fewer assets, in times of hardship when they need credit they are forced to resort to private money lenders who charge exorbitant interest fees in the absence of social protection mechanisms. However, the research found evidence of emerging community-based self-help groups and networks in Nepal, which are strengthening the capacity of the community to take collective action to create safety nets and support the livelihoods of poor women to reduce their financial risks. For instance, to make the best use of water and rain during cultivation, communities in Nepal practice the *parma* (exchange of group labour) system, which is already popular in migrant hill communities. The emergence of group savings is also evidence of the social solidarity in the neighbourhood.

“If we do not change our attitudes and practices, it is difficult to survive in the changing conditions. We are adopting systems like the ones used by migrant hill societies. We are strengthening our social institutions to cope with flood and drought by providing support to each other, like food and shelter for our flood-affected neighbours.”

Muna Mukeri, 55, Matehiya, Nepal..



Binod Timilsena / ActionAid

3

The evidence: women's livelihood adaptation priorities

“ We depend on cows, and it is important to increase our homestead. If our land gets inundated, I have to buy a hundreds of bricks to increase the level further. But I need money for that. Also, none of us is educated. If we had an educated person or a veterinary amongst us, that person could treat our livestock when the roads are blocked and the veterinary cannot come. If we had a trawler (fishing boat) five of us could jointly rent it, go to a nearby char (sandy island) and collect some grass to feed our cows. ”

Momena Begum, Gulzar Mondol village, Faridpur district, Bangladesh.

Women who took part in the research had a clear sense of what they need to adapt better to the floods. They have been experiencing changes to the weather that have affected their lives, and are adapting their practices in order to secure their livelihoods. They might not be aware of all the possible adaptation strategies, of all the ways to overcome constraints to the ones they are using, but they certainly know their present situation best and have an urgent list of priorities to secure a livelihood in the face of the new challenges.

Crop diversification and adapted agricultural practices were deemed essential by many women in the three countries. However, women felt they lacked the capacity to adopt new agricultural practices. Therefore, they want support from peers, authorities, professionals and other stakeholders such as NGOs to learn about various aspects of agriculture and livestock such as: flood and drought-resistant crops; the suitability of different crop varieties (local and hybrid) for particular climatic conditions; the proper use of items such as manure, pesticides and irrigation; post-harvesting technologies and improved animal husbandry.

Women from Nepal in particular insisted on the importance of exposure visits and skills training to allow them to increase their income through alternative livelihoods. They regard goat rearing and poultry farming as possible ways to supplement the loss of their monsoon crops to flooding.



Emdadul Islam Bitu / ActionAid

“ We are far behind in terms of acquiring new skills. I think we also need information, training and seeing other alternatives. We want to know how women in other villages are managing their livelihoods. ”

Muna Mukeri, Matehiya village,
Banke, Nepal.



Sanjit Das / ActionAid

The importance of developing women's capacity is supported by other studies. Skutsch notes that, "if women are to be able to tap climate change-related finances at all, it is clear that capacity-building, focused on their needs, will be necessary, including the need to lobby for their own interests within the climate negotiations."¹⁴

Safety is a major concern for all, but especially for women in their role as carers. In Bangladesh, women living in one of the villages that had recently formed a char (where erosion along the river caused the village to become cut off as an island in the river) felt that they were not safe as long as they lived there. For them, the first adaptation priority was to relocate the community to an area within the embankment where they could live safely and cultivate land. Other groups prioritised adaptation *in situ*, through the construction of solid houses with higher plinth levels.

Several women also mentioned the need to build flood shelters – a place within the community where poor people could go, but also a place that would be safe for their animals and that they could use to store seeds, animal fodder and food.

“**If the government could build flood-protected shelters for the community, it could save lives and assets during floods.**”

Amema, Gulzar Mondol village,
Faridpur, Bangladesh.

Access to doctors, pharmacists, vets and agricultural extension services appear as an important aspect of women's wellbeing and livelihoods. During times of flood, roads are often inundated and communities are deprived of these services. In a scenario of increased flooding, women felt that it was vital to improve their access to the services and markets on which their livelihoods depend during the flood season.¹⁵

Table:

Flood impact, current coping and adaptation strategies, and priorities for livelihood adaptation support of women in the Ganga river basin

Country	Livelihood impact	Current coping and adaptation strategy	Key adaptation priority	Current constraint
Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ loss of homes and homesteads ■ death and diseases of livestock/poultry ■ lack of fodder ■ difficulties in reaching markets ■ loss of crops ■ loss of seeds and harvest because of lack of safe storage ■ shortage and high price of agricultural inputs ■ decrease in productivity because of sand deposits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ borrow money ■ increase plinth level ■ keep poultry and livestock in high places ■ use traditional medicine ■ sell within neighbourhood ■ buy fodder ■ cultivate crops that can be harvested before floods ■ cultivate in flood protected areas ■ store inputs in high places within the house ■ mix fertile soil with sandy soil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ find alternative livelihood options ■ increase the plinth level of houses and homesteads ■ relocate communities to safe areas ■ build community shelters ■ provide permanent medical and veterinary services ■ short term crops ■ improve transport facilities during flood season ■ improve access to credit and markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ lack of relevant skills and knowledge ■ limited access to material financial and material resources ■ lack of safe land and shelter during floods ■ lack of access to affordable seeds after flood disaster ■ cultural barriers limit women's access to services
India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ destruction of homes ■ loss of livestock ■ waterborne diseases ■ lack of fodder ■ loss of crops ■ lack of employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ take loans from money lenders ■ move to a high road ■ improvised shelters ■ distress sale of livestock 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ develop alternative livelihood strategies ■ build solid houses ■ preserve and revive wetlands that can absorb floodwater 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ lack of relevant skills and knowledge ■ lack of financial resources ■ lack of access to affordable credit
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ loss of life and property ■ decrease in crop productivity ■ loss of fertile land ■ damage of stored seeds and grains ■ increase in diseases ■ lack of food ■ reduced access to inputs ■ sedimentation of crop land ■ forced migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ borrow money from private money lenders ■ raise homestead ■ migrate outside the village ■ practice group farming ■ differ seedbed preparation ■ use alternative energy sources ■ use local knowledge to diversify crops ■ initiate multiple cropping and intercropping practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ develop skills for alternative livelihoods ■ sharpen knowledge on various aspects of agriculture and livestock ■ raise houses and homesteads ■ practice multiple cropping and intercropping to reduce risks of crop failure ■ grow cash crops to replace monsoon cereal crops ■ increase irrigation performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ lack of relevant skills and knowledge ■ limited access to financial and material resources ■ lack of access to affordable credit ■ lack of safe land ■ limited access to agricultural and livestock extension ■ high price of agricultural input

4

The policy gap: women's rights in financing adaptation

Poor women shoulder much of the burden in terms of the severity of the impact of climate change, and in coping with and adapting to climate hazards. The women who participated in the research show how climate change hampers the livelihood strategies that could allow them,

their families and communities to overcome poverty. They also highlight their urgent adaptation needs and the support they need from adaptation financing to effectively adapt their livelihoods so that climate shocks do not threaten their very subsistence.



Sanjit Das / ActionAid

Over the last decades the climate change debate has focused on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to stop global warming. But there is now a shift in the debate and increasing recognition that, unless the most vulnerable countries are helped to adapt to climate change, progress in social and economic development, including reaching the Millennium Development Goals is likely to be blocked. This shift was partly triggered by a recent IPCC finding which states that, *“even the most stringent mitigation efforts cannot avoid further impacts of climate change in the next few decades, which makes adaptation essential”*.¹⁶

The additional annual cost of climate change adaptation in developing countries has been estimated at between US\$10-50 billion.¹⁷ While precise calculation is difficult, these estimates indicate that the scale of the efforts needed to keep poverty reduction progress on track is huge.

As a result, the pressure on rich countries to fund adaptation to the climate changes that they are largely responsible for is mounting, and additional sources of financial and technical assistance are emerging to support adaptive processes in the Least Developed Countries (LDC) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), both groups formed of the poorest and most vulnerable countries.

However, current resources are limited, making it even more vital that they are spent effectively and address the disproportionate burden borne by poor women as a result of climate change. Women make up 70% of the world’s poor and supporting them to cope with and adapt to climate change should be therefore a priority for adaptation financing.

It is in this context that this report highlights a significant policy gap in relation to women’s rights and climate change. The perspectives of poor and excluded women in south Asia outlined in this report demonstrate that they have experience of coping with climatic impacts, and have firm ideas about the necessary steps to improve coping and adaptation strategies. This demonstrates why they should be fully integrated in adaptation financing design processes, governance and management and that these should specifically target women with their programmes and activities.



Emdadul Islam Bitu / ActionAid

Adaptation funds

In order to integrate women's needs within adaptation finance, gender considerations need to be considered within a set of common principles for adaptation funding channels¹⁸, including:

- democratic governance
- civil society participation
- sustainable and compensatory financing
- no economic policy conditionality
- access for the most vulnerable.

The following key international funds for adaptation operate under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

- The **Least Developed Country Fund** is financing the development and implementation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) in developing countries. While gender equality formed one of the guiding elements for NAPA development, it has not resulted in explicit targeting of women in adaptation projects resulting from the NAPAs.
- The **Special Climate Change Fund** prioritises finance of adaptation projects in developing countries. However, to date, guidance for management or implementation of the fund does not include perspectives on gender and rights.

A third fund, called the **Adaptation Fund**, is financed by emissions trading under the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol. Although not yet operational, there is a clear need for including gender and poverty as central components of guidance. While this responsibility rests with all negotiators, recipient developing countries will be responsible for ensuring gender sensitive approaches through a country-driven approach in order that women benefit from activities financed under the Adaptation Fund.

There is little evidence from other adaptation activities funded as part of bilateral and multilateral programmes of specific efforts to target vulnerable women struggling to cope with short and long-term climate change impacts. In this regard, both donors and developing country governments must make gender sensitivity a priority in adaptation assistance if they wish to improve the livelihoods of the most vulnerable groups most affected by climate change.

The role of states and institutions

Adaptation funding alone cannot respond to the needs of poor communities and women. It also requires strong enabling policies and institutional mechanisms that embed a commitment to tackle gender equality across society. For adaptation financing to be effective and equitable, states and institutions therefore have an important role to play. Legislative and societal commitment to gender equality is essential for allowing poor women, their families and their communities the capacity to adapt to the adverse impact of climate change. An enabling environment that ensures equal rights is crucial in ensuring that agents involved in adaptation financing can be held accountable for their actions by the communities they support.

Specifically, states must ensure that legislation guarantees equal rights for women. In particular, they need to promote and protect the rights of poor women to:

- access relevant knowledge and skills
- land ownership
- equal participation in decision making
- access services such as agricultural extension and veterinaries.

Additionally, policies should be put in place to:

- support women's engagement in adaptation financing discussions
- ensure that women's needs are considered before any decision regarding livelihood adaptation is taken
- ensure that disaster risk is considered as part of land use planning
- ensure that regressive cultural practices do not hinder women's capacity to adapt.

Finally, institutional mechanisms have to be put in place to systematically review the planning, design and implementation of infrastructure work in hazard-affected areas. This is to ensure that they conform to appropriate building codes and contribute to effective adaptation, rather than increasing the problems.

5

The lessons: recommendations for adaptation finance

In order to that ensure adaptation financing mechanisms effectively support poor women's adaptation needs, **this report makes a set of recommendations directed to country delegates negotiating adaptation financing and to the bodies responsible for the management of these funds.**

These apply in particular to the establishment of the Adaptation Fund under the Kyoto Protocol. However, they also apply to the already operational UNFCCC Least Developed Countries Fund and Special Climate Change Fund, as well as to other emerging funding mechanisms for adaptation beyond the UNFCCC.



Sanjit Das / ActionAid

Recommendations

1. Ensure procedural justice in design and implementation of adaptation financing

As a first step, the negotiations around adaptation financing must:

- Ensure that women have equal access to negotiating, developing and implementing adaptation financing.
- Incorporate principles and procedures to ensure women's access to national adaptation programmes and project development.
- Ensure that fund managers and project leaders have the knowledge and tools to incorporate poor women's needs in adaptation funds and projects.
- Ensure intermediary agencies, including civil society organisations, government departments, research institutions, and practitioners are sensitive to the specific needs and priorities of women, children, the chronically poor and other vulnerable groups.
- Guarantee that civil society has access to information to monitor funding mechanisms, make recommendations on their focus, equitable distribution and effectiveness and hold management bodies to account.

2. Prioritise the adaptation needs of poor women in adaptation funds

Negotiators and the management bodies of adaptation funding mechanisms must:

- Recognise that poor women are affected worst by climate change and ensure their needs are prioritised.
- Clarify in funding guidance and operational criteria how they will identify and target vulnerable population, including reserving a significant percentage of the funds available for projects directly improving their livelihoods and securing their adaptation capacity.
- Propose and discuss these strategies with civil society.

3. Include disaggregated indicators in adaptation funds for targeting and monitoring benefits to poor women

To monitor adaptation benefits to poor women, negotiators and fund management bodies should incorporate gender-sensitive indicators into funding mechanisms. These could include disaggregated indicators on how funds are securing women's livelihoods, food security, personal security and equal access to social services like education and health in the face of climate change.

4. Create mechanisms for women's participation in adaptation fund management

The management bodies of adaptation funding mechanisms must ensure inputs from civil society – including local organisations, communities and women from poor, disadvantaged areas in particular – on their design, operation and monitoring by:

- Establishing a women's rights body to monitor adaptation funds
- Equal representation of women on committees for project planning, monitoring and evaluation at all levels
- Including social auditing processes as part of funds management processes.

5. Ensure adaptation finance mechanisms are able to support livelihood adaptation priorities of poor women

Adaptation finance, delivered through any mechanism, should support the livelihood adaptation priorities of poor women by:

- Ensuring that women have access to education, information and training to help them implement adaptation strategies such as diversifying livelihoods, using alternative crops and irrigation systems, changing agricultural calendars and using technological improvements as appropriate to their local context.
- Ensuring women count with the resources and services that they need to sustain their livelihood. In all study countries access and control over common property resources, extension services, markets, price and wages are key to women's adaptation. National government must safeguard and strengthen these essential resources and services for women so that they secure their livelihood despite worsening climate change impacts.
- Promoting access to easily available finance and capital tailored to the needs of poor women, including interest free products and those with low interest rates over long repayment periods.

6. Ensure states provide an enabling environment for women's participation

Adaptation funding alone will not be able to reduce the vulnerability of poor women to climate change. A broader enabling environment must exist that enables women equal access to decision making, rights, resources and services.

- State governments are responsible for legislation and institutional practices to guarantee equity of rights for women. In particular, they need to promote and protect the rights of poor women to access relevant knowledge and skills, to gain land ownership, to take decisions for their families and to access services.

Notes

- 1 One million hectares of cereal land were submerged in Bihar State in India alone. In Bangladesh, official estimates in August indicated that some 854 000 hectares of paddy were completely lost and another 582 000 hectares partially damaged. In Nepal, the number was placed at 106865 hectares. FAO/GIEWS Global Watch, *Floods Have Adversely Affected Crop Prospects and Food Security of Millions of Small Farmers in South Asia*. <http://www.fao.org/giews/english/shortnews/sasia070814.html>
- 2 Stoparic, B. (2007) *Climate Change Is a Women's Issue*. Women's eNews, April 8. <http://www.alternet.org/story/38659>
- 3 COP 10 (2004) *Mainstreaming Gender into the Climate Change Regime*, 14 December Buenos Aires
- 4 *A Women's Rights Base Approach to Climate Change* <http://www.madre.org/articles/int/climatechange.html>
- 5 World Health Organization (2007) Fact sheet N°266, Climate and Health. August <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs266/en/index.html>
- 6 Climate Change and Malaria in Nairobi, 31 July 2007 <http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?ReportId=73501>
- 7 Dankelman, I. (2002) Climate change learning from gender analysis and women's experiences of organising for sustainable development. *Gender and Development*, 21-29. Davison, J.; 1988: *Agriculture, Women and the Land: the African Experience*. Westview, 278 pp. ; Denton, F., 2004: Gender and climate change - Giving the "Latecomer" a head start. *IDS Bull.*, 42-49.
- 8 Sven Anemüller, Stephan Monreal and Christoph Bals (2006) Global Climate Change Index 2006: Weather related loss events and their impacts on countries in 2004 and in a long term comparison. <http://www.germanwatch.org/klak/cr06.pdf>
- 9 The studies were conducted over a short period of time in limited number of villages affected by severe flooding in 2007. They do not aim to demonstrate that the floods are a result of climate change, but to show the urgent adaptation needs of poor and disadvantaged women and how these could be best met by adaptation financing. It is hoped that this report will lead to more studies on rights and gender sensitive adaptation mechanisms being undertaken.
- 10 Practice whereby landlords allow landless people to cultivate their land in exchange of a share in the crops.
- 11 CPD (2000) Centre for Policy Dialogue. *Female Headed households in rural Bangladesh: strategies for wellbeing and survival*. CPD-UNFPA paper 10. Dhaka. Bangladesh. 2000; World Bank 1991. *Gender and poverty in India, A world Bank country study*. The World Bank. Washington DC. 1991; CBS 2007. Central Bureau of Statistics. Ministry of Planning. Government of Nepal. http://www.cbs.gov.np/Surveys/NHCS/demographics_characterics.htm
- 12 In the Indian catchment, rainfall is projected to increase from a 134cm per year baseline (1961-1990) to 150cm per year by the 2071-2100 period, with annual river flows rising nearly 12% (IITM/MoEF/Defra 2005 Keysheet 5 *Climate change impacts on water resources in India*).
- 13 Gautam D (2007) *Floods and need assessment, a sociological study from Banke, Bardiya and Kailali of mid and far-western Nepal*. Lutheran World Federation, Nepal.
- 14 Skutsch MM (2002) 'Protocols, treaties, and action: the 'climate change process' viewed through gender spectacles'. *Gender and Development*, 10, 30-39. See also Lambrou Y and Piana G (2006) *Gender: the missing component of the response to climate change*. FAO, Rome.
- 15 Some women in Bangladesh and India mentioned high roads as a good solution to their problems because it secures their mobility and access to markets during the flood season. However, poorly planned and designed infrastructure projects such as highways can disrupt the natural drainage of the water. Standards must be established and enforced to ensure that the design and construction of infrastructure such as roads, railways and dams factor in their impact in the surrounding areas and do not aggravate the local hazards.
- 16 IPCC (2007): *Summary for Policymakers*. Climate change 2007: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, M.L. Parry, O.F Canziani, J.P Palutikof, P.J. van der Linden and C.E. Hanson, Eds, 7-22.
- 17 Stern, N. (2006) *The Economics of Climate Change*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, available at: http://www.hmtreasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/stern_review_economics_climate_change/sternreview_index.cfm (accessed 11th November 2007); *Adapting to climate change*, Oxfam Briefing Paper, May 2007.
- 18 ActionAid USA (2007) *Compensating for Climate Change: Principles and Lessons for Equitable Adaptation Funding*. ActionAid USA.

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