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Policy Implications of the Gender, Inclusion and Climate Change Nexus:

Experiences from Sri Lanka

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Development discourse has long acknowledged the disproportionate impact of climate change and its implications for women and other marginalized social groups and has called for gender-responsive and inclusive climate action in international, national and local arenas. However, some countries are still pursuing development trajectories that fall short on gender sensitivity and social inclusion, worsening the impacts on women and marginalized groups while hindering resilience-building efforts. Given Sri Lanka's heightened climate vulnerability and the exacerbated climate risks on women and other socially excluded demographics, and responding to the call for action in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this brief examines the level to which Sri Lanka's development and climate policies and strategies integrate a gender and social inclusion approach in comparison to regional peers. Drawing on this work, this brief then provides recommendations to improve the climate policy landscape of Sri Lanka, including the gender-responsiveness of such work, to inform the country's ongoing National Climate Change Policy revisions.

1. Background and Context

Women and men experience the adverse effects of climate change differently, with many women and girls experiencing greater risks, burdens and impacts. Within the population groups of women

and men, there are differences in vulnerability, adaptation and coping capacities determined by social and economic status, age, and physical abilities. Gender dimensions of vulnerability to

climate change are a result of inequalities resulting from differential access of men and women to the social, financial and environmental resources required for adaptation. Women typically have less control over land, lower education levels, more restricted mobility (due also to their home-based roles) and lower levels of participation in decision-making.

In Sri Lanka women are disproportionately affected by climate impacts due to gender-based inequalities coupled with other intersecting factors (i.e., ethnic and/or racial background, religion, gender identity, disability, income level) that further endanger women in times of crisis. The 2012 National Census of Sri Lanka reported that women are 51.5 percent of the population, with a ratio of 106 women to 100 men. The World Gender Gap Report published by the World Economic Forum ranked Sri Lanka amongst the top 20 countries in 2006. However, by 2022, Sri Lanka had drastically slipped in the rankings to 110 among 146 countries when looking across four indicators: Economic Participation and Opportunity (ranked 122), Educational Attainment (ranked 80), Health and Survival (ranked 01) and Political Empowerment (ranked 93).

While Sri Lanka is ranked relatively higher in Educational Attainment and in Health and Survival, the overall rank drops due to the considerable levels of inequalities in Economic Participation and in Opportunity and Political Empowerment. This is due to gender gaps in the labour-force participation ratio, wage equality for similar work, income levels, women in parliament, women in ministerial positions and years with female/male heads of state.² Local data corresponds: a) in 2021, at the national level, the unemployment rate for females (7.9 percent) was more than two times higher than that of males (3.7 percent), and among this, the rural sector reported the highest unemployment rate; b) women's labour-force participation stood at 31.8 percent in 2021 despite

women having access to high levels of education; and c) a small share of seats in the parliament—5.3 percent—are occupied by women. This discrepancy between women's education levels and labour-force participation points out the alarming reality of women's economic dependence and the possible rates of unaccounted labour in the country. Further, women's labour-force participation has varied between 35 percent and 31 percent since 2013, spotlighting the minimal improvements in the economic empowerment of women. Among women who are employed, 75.9 percent are contributing family workers (a household member engaging in a family business or farming, with the other family members who engage in this activity without payment also identified as contributing family workers). Moreover, close to 29 percent of the total number of employed women in the country work in agriculture—a sector that is extremely vulnerable to the climate crisis—with much of that population engaging in subsistence agriculture. In comparison, a majority of the male population that engages in agriculture often deals in high-value, large-volume crop types such as paddy. Moreover, the absence of the quantification of women's contributions to agriculture and value chains and the lack of data surrounding women's participation in agriculture further advances their inequalities while also making it difficult to address their issues, which are often gendered.

Conversely, considerable progress towards gender equality has been achieved over the last several decades, specifically in the areas of education and health, as noted in indicators such as adult literacy, secondary and tertiary education, maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates (Table 1). Average life expectancy is 77 years for women and 70 years for men (with some district-based disparities). At the same time, the most recent Household and Income Expenditure Survey (2012/13) estimates that of 5.2 million households in Sri Lanka, 1.2 million or 23 percent are Women-Headed Households.³

Table 1: Selected indicators on the status of women—Sri Lanka

| Indicator | Female |
|---|---------------|
| Education | |
| Adult literacy rate (15 +) | 90% |
| Some secondary education | 73% |
| Enrolment in higher education (2012) | 62.2% |
| University students | Approx. 58% |
| Employment | |
| Professionals | 62.58% |
| Managers/senior officials | 22.6% |
| Clerks/clerical support | 52.7% |
| Teachers | Over 70% |
| Skilled agriculture/fishery/forest workers | 34.8% |
| Health | |
| Maternal mortality ratio (per 1,000 live births) 2014 | 26 |
| Life expectancy | 77 (F) 70 (M) |
| Adolescent birth rate (Age 15–19) | 16.9 |

Source: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, *Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka 2011* and ADB, *Country Gender Assessment Sri Lanka—An update, 2015*

As in many global contexts, the gender relations and dynamics in Sri Lanka, as illustrated above, limit the control that women and girls have over decisions governing their lives as well as their access to resources such as food, water, agricultural inputs, land, credit, energy, technology, education, adequate housing, social protection and employment. As a result of those inequalities, women and girls are more likely to be exposed to disaster-induced risks and losses relating to their livelihoods, and they are less able to adapt to changes in climatic conditions.⁴ Key determining factors that influence coping and adaptive capacities of men and women include strength and security of livelihoods, ownership of assets, access to productive resources, information, knowledge and insurance for loss and damages.

UNFCCC Commitments to Gender Equality and Inclusion

The Paris Agreement is the legally binding international treaty on climate change, adopted by the parties at COP 21 in Paris on 12 December 2015 and entered into force on 4 November 2016. The Paris Agreement brings all nations into a common cause to undertake ambitious efforts to combat climate change and adapt to its effects, noting that, “acknowledging that climate change is a common concern of humankind, Parties should, when taking action to address climate change, respect, promote and consider their respective obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous

peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity”.⁵ Thus, Paris Agreement for Climate Change is emphatic on gender equality, women’s empowerment and inclusion of all vulnerable groups and urges the member states to adopt inclusive approaches and provisions on adaptation and capacity-building efforts.

On the heels of the Paris Agreement is the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan. The enhanced gender action plan sets out objectives and activities under five priority areas that aim to advance knowledge and understanding of gender-responsive climate action and its coherent mainstreaming in the implementation of the UNFCCC and the work of the parties, the secretariat, United Nations entities and all stakeholders at all levels, as well as women’s full, equal and meaningful participation in the UNFCCC process.⁶

Gender-blind and non-inclusive climate actions continue to worsen the state of affairs of women and other marginalized groups (e.g., indigenous people, youth, children, the elderly, people with disabilities, etc.), hindering their ability to build resilience—this is true to the Sri Lankan context as well. As such, responding to the call for action in the UNFCCC process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this paper seeks to

analyse the scope and provisions for supporting gender-responsive and socially inclusive climate action within existing climate policies and strategies in Sri Lanka.

The Nexus among Gender, Inclusion and Climate Change

The importance of gender equality and women's empowerment for sustainable development has been underlined in the development discourse, expressed in key global commitments such as the year 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2012 Rio+20 Outcome document and the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender inequality in social, economic, political and cultural spheres is identified as a significant barrier to achieving equitable and sustainable development. Therefore, all the global agreements in support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁷ call for gender equality and women's empowerment as necessary conditions to achieve the global development, climate and humanitarian targets.

The Green Climate Fund (GCF) and UN Women guidelines reiterate the position that women are agents of change, making valuable contributions to climate action across the globe. Women have made strides in instituting climate resilience within their communities and enhancing their livelihoods by adopting climate-smart agriculture and sustainable

energy solutions within their domains. Women are on the frontlines of preparing for climate-induced disasters and in exploring innovative climate solutions for their communities and their environment.

The GCF and UN Women Guidelines state that “gender equality considerations should be mainstreamed into the entire project cycle to enhance the efficacy of climate change mitigation and adaptation interventions and ensure that gender co-benefits are obtained. Gender mainstreaming is fundamental to any project intervention and does not necessarily signify additional costs; in fact, mainstreaming gender makes climate interventions more effective and efficient.” Mainstream discourse acknowledges that there is a necessity in designing climate action to be gender-responsive with the intent of transforming inequitable gender relations.

A critically important observation is that gender-blind climate action can inadvertently worsen existing gender inequalities. A review by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on the legislative framework and laws to strengthen women's resilience to climate change and disasters reinforces the fact that lack of empowerment and inclusion of women as equal participants in climate action can further exacerbate existing gender inequalities and inequities.

2. Climate Change Implications: Gender and Inclusion, Sri Lanka

Gender and inclusion aspects related to climate change implications in Sri Lanka closely mirror the findings in various other geographical regions, as highlighted below. Several recent assessments by the Government of Sri Lanka, Adaptation Fund, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and World Food Programme (WFP), GCF, ADB⁸ and the World Bank Group provide evidence in support of this observation.

A policy brief by the Climate Change Adaptation Project outlines that there is a direct relationship between climate change and the impact on women in Sri Lanka. Women are disproportionately at risk of the effects of climate change and are one of the most vulnerable demographics in Sri Lanka. Agriculture and water are two key areas in the country where the impacts of climate change are experienced. Approximately 30 percent of all

women employed in Sri Lanka work in agriculture-related fields. Women are part of the agriculture labour force as both paid labourers and unpaid family workers. It is also estimated that more women work as unpaid family workers, accounting for 16.4 percent of the total employed female population, whereas unpaid family workers who are male account for only 2.5 percent of the employed male population.⁹ Women occupy lower levels in the production value chains and are paid 25 percent to 30 percent lower wages than men who carry out similar work. Women are often assigned supporting roles based on stereotypical assumptions. In the rural agricultural landscape, access to and ownership of resources like credit, land and technology, are at the crux of the gender inequality and inequity issues. Socio-cultural perceptions (including views of women themselves on their multiple roles and social acceptance)

act as further barriers to women's engagement at the higher end of value/market chains and entrepreneurship, where they would gain opportunities in adaptive production practices.

The impacts of such inequalities and women's socio-economic disadvantages continue to undermine the sustainability of climate change responses. Gender disparity, when it comes to decision-making, political participation and ownership of resources, is drastic. When other intersecting facets such as class, race, sexual orientation, gender identity and disability are coupled with the minimal control women have in the economic, political and legal spheres, their exposure to climate shocks is further heightened.¹⁰

Similarly, the Green Climate Fund's Gender Assessment observes that women have a significant role in the household care economy, especially in rural communities in Sri Lanka, which makes them more vulnerable to climate change and disasters due to impacts on household water availability, health of family members and safety of domestic assets such as livestock. Access to and availability of water are specific concerns. Since traditionally women manage household water, kitchen gardens and livestock, they are also expected to manage impacts of reduced water availability. Reduced water supplies have implications for family food security, which can be threatened during extreme climate events. Women are members of farmers' societies for the maintenance of reservoirs and distribution of irrigation water, but they are often not in decision-making roles; hence, water allocation decisions and crop selection are largely male-dominated.¹¹

The assessments carried out as part of the preparation for the Climate Resilience Multi-Phased Programmatic Approach (CRes MPA) Project implemented by the World Bank¹² have identified the following: (i) differences in access to disaster-related information and early warnings between men and women; (ii) lower participation of women in leadership roles in community disaster preparedness activities; (iii) higher risk of gender-based violence faced by women and girls after a natural disaster takes place; and (iii) unequal ownership of assets between men and women, particularly land ownership. Women have less access to land ownership due to the preference given to males in personal laws (Kandyan law, Thesawalamai law, and Muslim law) and common law around state land transfer.

Further, it is women who take responsibility for the care of children, persons living with a disability

and the elderly. The government's 2017 Time-Use Survey found that women's participation in both unpaid domestic activities and caregiving activities was 27.6 percent higher than that of men.¹³

Country Gender Assessment by the ADB notes women's vulnerability to deforestation, which deprives poor rural women of access to natural resources such as fuelwood, food and water; raw materials for industries (home based) and cultivation; and herbal medicines. Women rely heavily on natural resources but have low coping capacities and few resources to face and manage climate shocks. Shortage of water, food insecurity and lack of access to natural resources resulting from climate change, therefore, bring additional burdens on women in carrying out their gender based responsibilities.¹⁴

The UN's registry of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to reduce climate change, updated for 2021, provides a means to benefit from the knowledge and capabilities of Sri Lanka's educated and literate female population when implementing mitigation and adaptation measures. It also states that gender-responsive planning and implementation of NDCs ensure that climate actions do not contribute to creating or widening existing gender disparities and that they contribute to achieving the national gender equality goals and commitments.¹⁵

Ongoing programmatic interventions on the ground in rural Sri Lanka also provide real-time evidence for the value addition of gender-responsive climate action, spotlighting women's role as catalysts of development and adaptation within vulnerable communities. One particularly illuminating example is the ongoing Climate Resilient Integrated Water Management Project financed by the Green Climate Fund. The project's gender-responsive approach has, as of 2022, resulted in women adopting inclusive, equitable and quality livelihood-support activities and benefitting from life-long livelihood improvement opportunities. The project's investments in water and social infrastructure has enhanced availability and access to safe drinking water and sanitation, benefitting women, children, young girls and vulnerable communities in project districts. By 2021, this intervention had saved 4,411 hours per day for women and girls (at an average rate of 1.3 hours per day per woman/girl) in some project locations. This has enabled the investment of their time in social roles or productive undertakings such as livelihood or education related activities and led to the easing of women's household care burden. Gender responsive investments have generated jobs for women in

rainwater and community water supply schemes—creating a community rooted in resilience and empowerment.¹⁶

Similarly, the now concluded ‘Addressing Climate Change Impacts on Marginalized Agricultural Communities Living in the Mahaweli River Basin of Sri Lanka’ (CCAP-II Project), implemented by the Ministry of Environment and Wildlife Resources, WFP and UNDP found that “the project seems to have had an important transformative impact on the lives of women.” CCAP presents an important business case on the benefits and, more importantly, the necessity of gender-responsive climate action in Sri Lanka. The CCAP has not included explicit approaches to gender transformation at the outset of the project design and yet has delivered “important impacts on the lives of women in the targeted communities”. The project is “likely to have a positive impact on gender equality and empowerment of women through income generation and confidence-building by including women as key target groups. In particular, CCAP approached “the involvement of women as a means to building diversified

livelihoods and ultimately resilience rather than as a goal by itself” and still managed to effect community resilience towards climate change.¹⁷

A case study from CCAP reports that a majority of the female participants of the project enjoyed an increase in income level (a majority of the women were unemployed or unpaid family workers prior to the project intervention). They have also stated that the increase in income has positively impacted their spending patterns as a majority invested this additional income in their children’s education, household essentials and medical assistance. Also reported is positive impact on their relationship with their spouses.¹⁸ The results from CCAP’s implicit gender considerations juxtapose the remarkable effects that explicit gender-responsive climate action could have on the resilience of Sri Lanka’s climate vulnerable populations. It indicates the leaps of progress that could be made towards climate adaptation should the key policies and strategies governing climate action in Sri Lanka mandate gender-responsive and socially inclusive climate action across the country.

3. Analysis of Key Policies and Strategy Documents for Their Scope and Provisions for Gender and Social Inclusion: Sri Lanka

In this context, existing key policies and strategies in Sri Lanka have been reviewed to explore their scope and provisions to incorporate and mainstream gender equality and social inclusion into climate action, as underlined and called for in the UNFCCC process and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Given the recent NDC revisions, the envisioned implementation plan comprising the country’s overall plans for transitioning to a green development trajectory posits the best opportunity for the country to set the foundations for a strong policy and institutional landscape that proactively advances gender equality, equity and social inclusion within its development plans, and particularly climate action. Relatedly, Sri Lanka is also currently amidst a severe socio-economic crisis. Such crises also present additional opportunities to demand a different, better, inclusive and more resilient future. The subsequent recovery process that will emerge provides this window of opportunity to prioritize stakeholder consensus on advancing gender equality and equity, create an enabling policy and regulatory environment and build in solutions that will have transformational and sustainable impacts

on Sri Lanka’s development trajectory, catalysing low-carbon, green and inclusive development.

Diagnosing policy and institutional gaps and defining solutions and improvements ahead of the ongoing National Climate Change Policy revision enables stakeholders, such as policymakers, planners, finance/budget-related officials and overall policy legislation–related decision-makers, to set a clear, robust foundation for mainstreaming gender equality and equity within climate action and the development trajectory to come. For this purpose, 21 key national policy and strategy documents related to climate change, the agriculture sector and economic and social development were analysed according to six indicators listed below (see Annex for the list of documents analysed). The analysis aims to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of current policy frameworks and strategies to respond to the calls for action in the UNFCCC process, more specifically the Paris Agreement for Climate Change. The analysis will highlight the gaps in the currently existing policies and strategies and make recommendations to improve the climate policy landscape in the country, with particular

consideration of the currently ongoing revision of the National Climate Change Policy–Sri Lanka. The six indicators for policy and strategy analysis are based on the key recommendations of the Paris Agreement for Climate Change. They also refer to the Lima Work Programme on Gender (LWPG), established in 2014, to advance gender balance and integrate gender considerations into the work of the parties and the secretariat in implementing the convention and the Paris Agreement so as to achieve gender-responsive climate policy and action. The six indicators are:

1. Recognition/mention of differential impacts of climate risks on women and men, differential vulnerabilities and coping capacities
2. Recognition of/commitment to women's access and ownership of production resources, access to services
3. Recognition of/commitment to encourage women's participation and leadership
4. Commitment to/proposals for specific interventions to achieve gender equity/equality
5. Commitment to/proposals for social inclusion (addressing the root causes of structural exclusion and the inclusion of those disadvantaged, often based on gender, age, location, occupation, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), among other factors)
6. Commitment to/proposals for financing for women-specific activities

Review of the documents based on the above indicators point to the following observations:

- The analysis shows that fewer than 43 percent of the policy and strategy documents mention the term 'climate change', 48 percent mention 'gender', with 66 percent of the documents noting social inclusion issues, though mostly indirectly and/or partially. While a few documents contain policy statements with commitments on gender and inclusion, most documents are limited to minimal references.
- Differentiation or recognition of differential impacts of climate change and coping capacities experienced by men and women is found in only 9.5 percent of the documents (e.g., Sri Lanka National Agricultural Policy, March 2021 Draft, National REDD+ Investment Framework and Action Plan, 2015).
- Only 43 percent of the documents reviewed mention women's ownership and/or access to production resources, while only 48 percent make reference to women's participation and leadership (e.g., National Policy for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector, National REDD+ Investment Framework and Action Plan).
- Commitments to supporting women-specific activities aiming to close the existing gender gaps are limited to 19 percent of the documents (e.g., Public Investment Program 2021–24, National REDD+ Investment Framework and Action Plan, National Policy Framework–Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour, Climate Resilience Multi-Phased Programmatic Approach (CRESMPA)).
- Gender equality and gender equity are not strong considerations as they are found in only 38 percent of the documents and included mostly in indirect ways. Most documents contain no explicit references to gender issues.
- The Sri Lanka National Involuntary Resettlement Policy includes a policy statement with a strong commitment: "Gender equality and equity should be ensured and adhered to throughout the policy." Similarly, The National Land Use Policy includes an objective to "Promote gender equity in the ownership, utilization and conservation of lands"; however, the policy statements do not contain commitments to meet this objective.
- Gender and women's issues are predominantly considered from social security and gender-based violence perspectives. Just under 14 percent of the documents have addressed issues related to economic aspects, labour-force participation and skill development of women from an equal partner perspective (e.g., National Agricultural Research Policy and Strategy, Sri Lanka National Agricultural Policy, March 2021 Draft, National REDD+ Investment Framework and Action Plan).
- The Public Investment Program 2021–2024 underscores that "the available data and indicators show that the economic potential of the Sri Lankan women is not fully utilized for the process of economic development. The condition of women in Sri Lanka is determined by social-cultural norms and economic status. Violence against women is on the increase, prevalent in many parts of the country, yet is severely underreported."
- With reference to social inclusion, in all the documents reviewed, strong emphasis is placed on the technical aspects of the respective subject areas the policy and strategy statements cover, while the people/community and inclusion aspects are not sufficiently clarified.

- Frequently used generic terms in the policy and strategy documents include ‘stakeholders’, ‘people’ and ‘communities’. About 9.5 percent identify specifically vulnerable social groups to be included, such as children, disadvantaged women, the elderly and disabled people (e.g., Public Investment Program 2021–24, Constitution of Sri Lanka).
- In the National Climate Change Policy there is no gender differentiation and no mention of gender issues, women, youth or differential impacts. Assessing vulnerability is included in a policy statement in generic terms. General references made in the documents focus on people, communities, stakeholders and family.
- Gender or women’s considerations are not reflected in the National Adaptation Plan Sri Lanka in either the sectoral adaptation plans or the key performance indicators.
- The Sri Lanka Sustainable Development Act does not explicitly mention climate change, women, gender and social inclusion issues. The document, however, indicates the facilitation

of the integration of 17 SDGs into the national planning processes, pointing indirectly to gender equality and social inclusion through the SDGs.

- The National Policy Framework ‘Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour’ does not mention climate change. Gender is referred to only in the context of gender-based violence. One of the policy components offers a commitment that women be empowered economically and socially; the proposed strategy to achieve this is by harnessing the contributions of women to development plans.
- The 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka includes the clause “Right to equality: (4) Nothing in this Article shall prevent special provision being made, by law, subordinate legislation or executive action, for the advancement of women, children or disabled persons”. While the Constitution does not refer to climate change, the above clause on the right to equality applies to all situations, including the impacts of climate change.

4. Conclusion

Local development discourse on climate change, as discussed in this paper, is largely gender-blind and does not account for greater and increasing vulnerability of women to climate-change impacts. Women are at the forefront of climate-related impacts and are unrecognized catalysts of development within rural communities; their productive role as agents of change is not acknowledged, particularly within the institutional framework that governs climate action in Sri Lanka. These gendered inequalities and inequities are staunchly rooted in the patriarchal systems of oppression and neglect that pervade Sri Lankan society. Despite these odds, women continue to bear the brunt of the climate crisis and catalyse sustainable climate action. Evidence from the CCAP illustrated that inclusion of women in climate action—even implicitly or unintentionally—yielded concrete progress towards creating climate-resilient communities. Evidence from CRIWMP demonstrated the paramount role women play as agents of change, creating sustainable change and the potential to harness community security, development and progress, particularly in the context of climate change. As Sri Lanka’s risk profile evolves amidst the country’s worst-ever socio-economic crisis, exacerbating the existent vulnerabilities and inequalities, there is an imperative need to concertedly review and address the critical gaps and build in transformative

interventions that catalyse gender-responsive and socially inclusive climate action.

The analyses point to some of the critical gaps that exist within the current policy frameworks on the required support for climate action from a gender and social inclusion perspective. Overall, gender issues and gender equality are not given adequate consideration in the policies and strategies. Policy statements in some of the key national policy documents express the intent to consider gender issues; however, they often lack the required commitment to accomplish the same.

The National Climate Change Policy does not mention gender or women and does not recognize the differential impacts of climate and differences in coping capacities; also, the National Adaptation Plan Sri Lanka does not contain gender or women’s considerations. Further illustrating this point is the Sri Lanka Sustainable Development Act, which does not mention climate change, women, gender or social inclusion issues. This points to the absence of coherence and lack of policy and institutional coordination to address the recommendations and guidance provided on the importance and interlinkages of gender, social inclusion and climate action in promoting sustainable development.

This analysis draws the overall conclusion that the existing national policies and strategies do not explicitly provide sufficient commitment or guidance to plan or implement climate actions in a gender-responsive and socially inclusive manner. Existing policies and strategies are also significantly inadequate in establishing linkages and/or implementing gender-responsive solutions in response to the climate-related impacts women are already facing, thus thrusting them into further poverty and hardship, worsening inequalities. Further, the reports of a possible global recession in 2023 threaten long-lasting, devastating consequences to developing economies¹⁹ that might mirror the socio-economic crisis that Sri Lanka is currently navigating. The impacts of the COVID-19

pandemic and rising trends of climate change–induced hazards and disasters further solidify the threat of sister countries in the South Asia/Asia region collapsing into a crisis like that in Sri Lanka,²⁰ where climate-induced disasters could worsen prevailing gender-based inequalities and can lead to the worsening of the economic, social and political status of women. How Sri Lanka addresses its institutional frameworks to prevent climate change from further worsening already-aggravated inequalities and gendered impacts can serve as an example to sister countries in the region. This analysis expects to share recommendations that can support Sri Lanka and other countries to aim to become more equal and socially inclusive, green and climate-resilient nations.

5. Recommendations

The recommendations are based on the policy and strategy analysis in Sri Lanka presented above. They primarily aim to inform the ongoing revision of the National Climate Change Policy, a critically important document for planning and implementing climate action guided by the recommendations of the UNFCCC process, to improve its gender responsiveness and social inclusivity. At the same time, these recommendations are applicable to other countries in the region and globally with a similar policy context that lack required consideration for gender and social inclusion, where policies are disconnected and/or lack coherence and when institutional coordination mechanisms are not at their optimum for inclusive climate action. With the objectives of promoting policy and financial commitments to take gender-responsive and inclusive climate action, the recommendations call for acknowledgement of critical climate issues, related social- and gender-differentiated impacts and coping capacities. They are also emphatic on the need for setting targets and indicators and for reviewing progress. Each recommendation aims to build up the strength of the revised National Climate Change Policy to be gender-responsive and socially inclusive in a systematic manner.

- Acknowledge the gender-based inequalities experienced by women in access and ownership of land and access to technology and information, marketing, credit and other services that aim to support climate change adaptation and mitigation, along with the fact that gender-blind and socially insensitive adaptation actions could lead to maladaptation, inadvertently

worsening the existing inequalities for women and other vulnerable groups.

- Incorporate gender-responsive and socially inclusive adaptation and mitigation measures and investments as a pathway for poverty reduction, sustainable development and meeting the national development policy commitments.
- Validate the need and policy commitment to close the mentioned gaps in gender and social inclusion in planning, financing and implementing adaptation and mitigation measures.
- Commit to ensuring the incorporation of gender and social inclusion considerations when conducting national- and local-level vulnerability and coping capacity assessments for programming and financing purposes.
- Develop measures to strengthen the coping capacities of women by enhancing their knowledge and skills, access to climate and production information, credit and other services available under the adaptation and mitigation financing programs.
- Incorporate proactive measures to break barriers (institutional, social, cultural) to actively engage women in adaptation and mitigation programs.
- Invest in and implement gender-responsive and socially inclusive adaptation and mitigation actions throughout project cycles adopted by different sectors and also by identifying specific time-bound targets to be achieved.
- Call for developing targets and indicators of progress for gender and social inclusion in all climate action through the policy statements.
- Include relevant policy clauses to review and monitor gender-responsive and socially

inclusive adaptation and mitigation targets with appropriate indicators of progress, supported by sex- and age-disaggregated data (in collaboration with the national development monitoring process that will be reported to the UNFCCC).

- Ensure that all policy revision processes are underpinned by extensive and comprehensive stakeholder consultation processes that are gender-responsive and socially inclusive, with the inclusion of state and non-state actors,

to ensure that the policy revisions cover the aspects important to the stakeholders who will be affected by the policy as well as to promote ownership and buy-in across the stakeholder spectrum.²¹

- Emphasize the need for the revision/update of other key relevant national/sectoral policies and strategies for enabling the effective implementation of the revised National Climate Change Policy.

Key Insights for the Operationalization of UNDP's Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2025

UNDP Sri Lanka is a Gender Gold Seal–certified country office and thus delivers gender-responsive and sustainable higher-end gender-transformative results. As such, there is a host of initiatives underway at the country office to ensure that gender equality is effectively mainstreamed within all projects and operational areas.

The recommendations of this paper are oriented towards creating a conducive policy and institutional landscape to operationalizing UNDP's upcoming activities, particularly to enable the host of high-level climate action–related activities.

This includes:

Collaborating with the government to enhance gender-responsiveness in climate policies and strategies paves the way for strengthening the mainstreaming of gender considerations across a host of other interlinked strategies and policies. Such an enabling policy and institutional environment will create a more conducive implementation landscape for UNDP to implement its host of projects, a majority of which will further UNDP's new gender equality strategy and, ultimately, catalyse structural transformation towards resilient and equitable development.

As UNDP is the technical lead in the NDC revision and implementation process of governments across the world, including Sri Lanka, UNDP could expound on this opportunity to ensure that gender-responsive and socially inclusive climate mitigation and adaptation actions are mainstreamed across the various NDC sectors to enhance overall national progress on gender equality, particularly within the intersections of social inclusion, climate action and the economy, setting the foundations for gender-equal, green economies.

Leveraging the gender- and socially inclusive policy and institutional landscape, and given UNDP's role as the SDG integrator, UNDP could leverage its host of partnerships—international donors, other development partners and public and private sectors—to align public and private finance with gender equality commitments, particularly to advance a global gender-responsive green transition through its extensive Nature, Climate and Energy portfolio.

Annex

List of Policy and Strategy Documents Reviewed for Gender and Social Inclusion

1. Sri Lanka National Agricultural Policy
2. National Agricultural Research Policy and Strategy
3. Sri Lanka National Agricultural Policy, March 2021 Draft
4. Agricultural Insurance Law No. 27 of 1973
5. National Plantation Industry Policy Framework 2006
6. National Policy for Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector 2001
7. National Land Use Policy
8. Sri Lanka National Involuntary Resettlement Policy (NIRP)
9. National environmental policy and strategies
10. National Policy and Strategy on Cleaner Production for Agriculture Sector (2012)
11. National Climate Change Policy
12. National Adaptation Plan Sri Lanka
13. National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plan 2016–2022
14. National REDD+ Investment Framework and Action Plan (2015)
15. National Environmental (Amendment) Act No. 56 of 1988
16. National Export Strategy 2018–2022
17. Environmental Assessment and Management Framework of Sri Lanka (2016), Climate Resilience Multi-Phased Programmatic Approach (CRESMPA) Project
18. Constitution of Sri Lanka 1978
19. Sri Lanka Sustainable Development Act
20. Public Investment programme 2021–2024
21. Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour—National Policy Framework

Endnotes

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