



# Building and Applying a Gender Transformative Climate Framework

Towards Just and Equitable Climate Action

Learning Brief





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Climate change is not a gender-neutral crisis. Across India, it deepens the injustices already faced by women, girls, and gender-diverse people especially those from historically marginalised communities including Adivasi, Dalit, and urban poor groups. Yet, mainstream climate action remains trapped in technocratic silos and mitigation-heavy agendas, failing to confront the entrenched systems of caste, gender, class, and colonialism that shape climate vulnerability and resilience.

In resistance to this narrow framing, feminist practitioners and researchers Neha Saigal and Saumya Shrivastava have co-developed the **Gender-Transformative Climate Framework (GTCF) (Saigal & Shrivastava, 2025)**—a bold intervention that reimagines how we understand and respond to the climate crisis. Rooted in lived realities, feminist theory, and grounded policy tools, the GTCF offers a new pathway for transformative action.

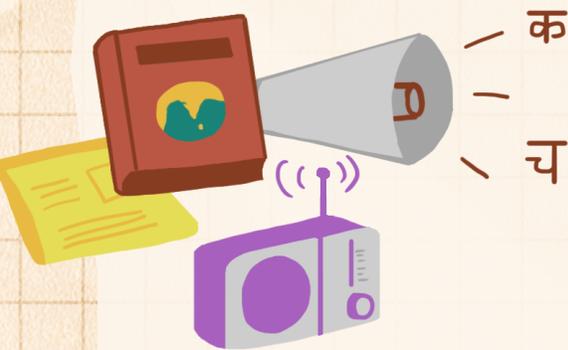
This brief shares the story of its creation and outlines its core components, with the hope that it sparks further experimentation, adaptation, and collective building of feminist climate frameworks that disrupt dominant narratives and centre justice at the heart of climate policy, practice and decision making.



# 1. Inception of the Framework

## Why do we need a new framework?

- Dominant climate approaches position the issue primarily as a technical one leaving out the complex socio-economic dimensions of risk and resilience.
- Existing policies tend to instrumentalise women (e.g., as agents of change) but ignore power asymmetries, intersectionality, or structural drivers of exclusion.
- Neoliberal climate governance overlooks the lived experiences, knowledge, roles, and responsibilities of those most affected by the climate crisis particularly women. It fails to account for the specific contexts and power relations shaped by gender, caste, class, race, and other intersecting factors that determine a community's social position.
- The framework's co-developers, recognised that gender and climate justice were not being meaningfully linked in policy or programming.



**“We didn’t set out to build a feminist framework but the values and methodology we adopted were deeply feminist.”**

**— Neha Saigal**

# Feminist Approach to Knowledge and Process



- Rooted in the rich traditions of feminist political ecology, ecofeminism, and climate justice, the researchers placed power, care, voice, and accountability at the heart of their inquiry, asking not just *what* the climate crisis is, but *who* it impacts, *why*, and *how*.
- Their process defied linearity. It was intentionally iterative moving fluidly between critical feminist literature, lived experiences from the field, and deep dialogues with diverse stakeholders. Each stage informed and reshaped the next.
- The framework was built with community engagement at its core, incorporating perspectives from women in Delhi, Odisha, and Maharashtra, Jharkhand among others.



**“Women in the community understood the framework more intuitively than NGOs working on climate change.”**

**— Saumya Shrivastava**

# 2. The Gender-Transformative Climate Framework (GTCF)

The GTCF is structured as a systems-thinking model that links basic causes (like power, patriarchy, caste, and resource access) to gendered vulnerabilities, and outlines intersectional interventions and their intended impacts.

## A. Core Principles

- **Intersectionality:** Recognition that caste, gender, class, geography, and identity shape climate vulnerability and it is not uniform. It insists that justice-oriented climate action must begin with those most affected.
- **Power Analysis:** The framework starts from power relations and not just climate risks- who holds it, who is excluded, and how structural inequities such as patriarchy, casteism, and capitalism perpetuate climate injustice. It shifts the lens from symptoms to root causes.
- **Community-Led Governance:** Emphasis on decision-making power for women and people of all gender at all levels of governance like the Panchayats, ward level etc.
- **Care & Dignity:** Moving beyond survival to envision climate action as a pathway to thriving and transformation and not just coping.





## B. Structural Design

Inspired by The Lancet's conceptual framework for nutrition interventions, the **GTCF** organises climate action into **four layers**:



### → Root Causes

The framework identifies the structural forces driving climate injustice like patriarchy, casteism, economic inequality, extractivism, and the depoliticisation of climate governance. These forces shape *who* bears the brunt of climate impacts and *who* gets to influence solutions.

### → Structural Vulnerabilities

Climate risks are intensified by deeply entrenched social and economic vulnerabilities: forced displacement, precarious and informal livelihoods, unpaid and invisible care work, gender-based violence, and the chronic absence of essential public services.

### → Transformative Interventions

The framework proposes eight interconnected interventions that are systemic in nature and scalable across contexts. These are not isolated solutions, but pathways to disrupt and reimagine the structures that reproduce vulnerability.

### → Impact Pathways

The desired outcomes go beyond mitigation and adaptation metrics. They include shifts in power relations, enhanced well-being, increased agency for marginalised communities, and forms of resilience rooted in dignity, justice, and collective self-determination.



# 3. Thematic Axes of the Framework

The framework orients interventions around **three core axes**:

## → A. Leadership

The framework acknowledges the near-total absence of women, queer, and trans people in climate leadership, from international negotiations like CoP to national and sub-national decision making bodies. The barriers to representation in climate leadership, particularly in male-dominated sectors like energy and transportation stem from limited access to knowledge, skills, and mentorship, as well as a lack of political will to dismantle gendered power structures that favour men's participation and advancement.

## → B. Vulnerability

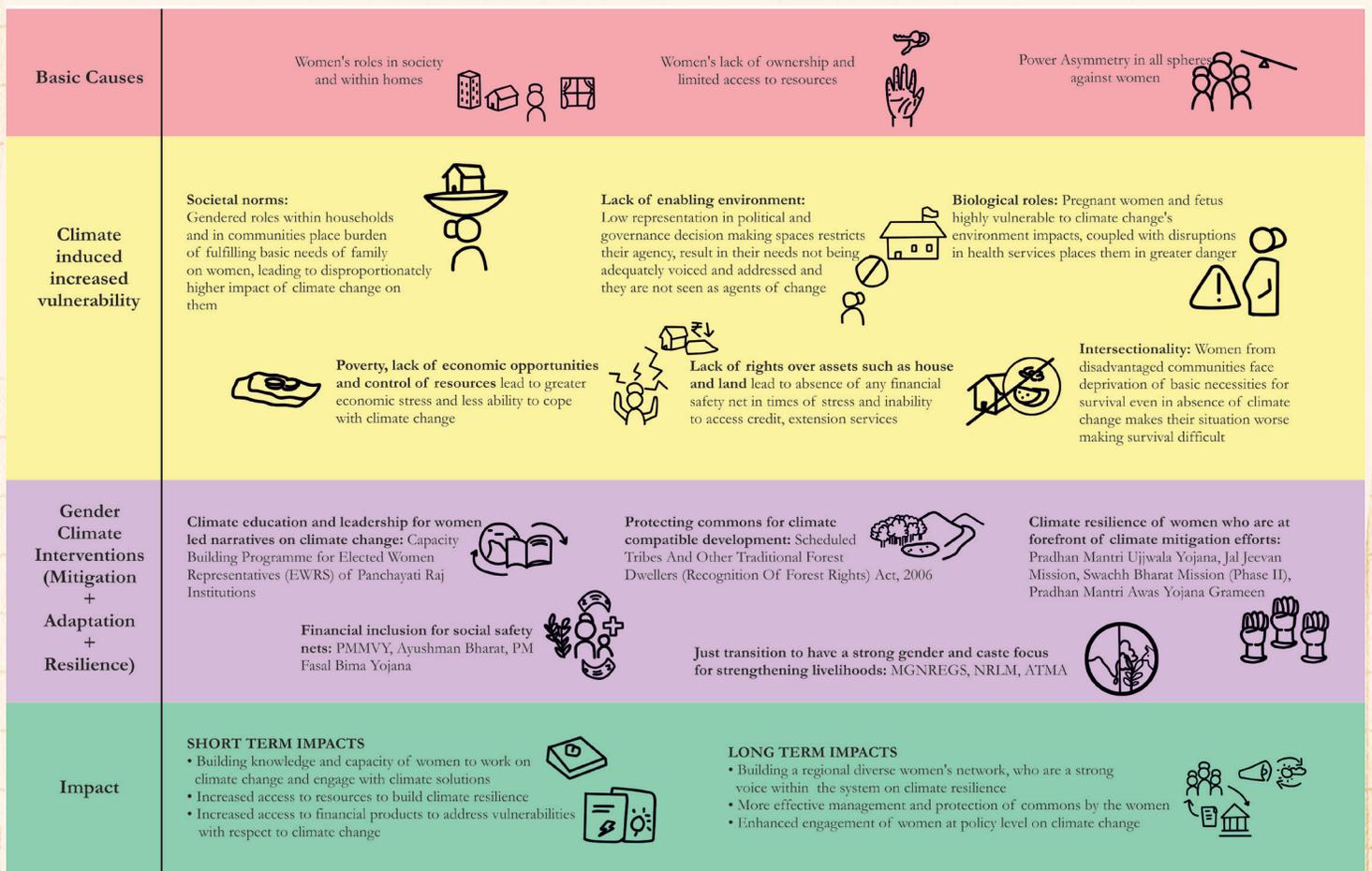
Gendered inequalities heighten vulnerability to climate change. Women and gender-diverse people face barriers such as limited decision-making power, restricted land and resource access, and exclusionary policies. Strengthening social protection, financial inclusion, and gender-responsive measures is essential to build their climate resilience.

## → C. Benefit

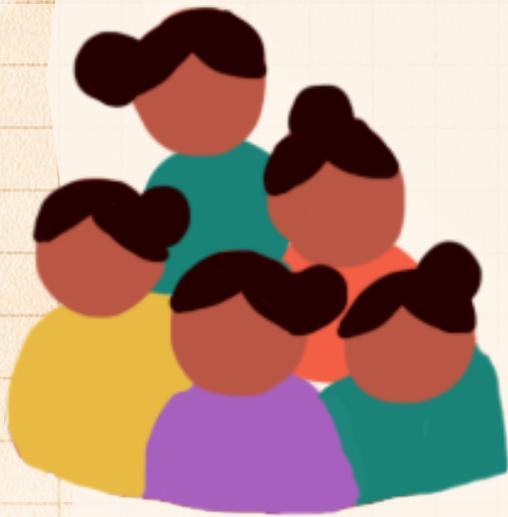
Addressing gendered vulnerability in the climate crisis can enhance the effectiveness of climate solutions by recognising women as key agents of change. Women-led cooperatives, shown to be vital during the COVID-19 pandemic for securing livelihoods and basic services, offer powerful models for building community resilience and adaptive capacity in the face of climate change.



# 4. Gender Transformative Climate Framework



# 5. Political Positioning and Challenges



The framework strategically aligns with existing government schemes like MNREGA and the Public Distribution System (PDS), allowing for integration without the need for new infrastructure or parallel systems. This makes it both cost-effective and politically feasible. By framing gender-transformative climate action within the familiar language of welfare, development, and service delivery, it engages state and political actors on common ground, opening pathways for adoption, scale, and institutional support.

## Risks of Misuse

There is a risk that the framework could be co-opted to serve tokenistic agendas, where gender is reduced to box-ticking, and women's inclusion is framed within patriarchal notions of welfare rather than as a matter of rights, power, and justice. To mitigate this instrumentalisation, a network of practitioners committed to transformative change is actively being cultivated. This includes supporting grounded, context-specific implementation, fostering collective learning, and engaging strategically with institutions to push for deeper structural shifts rather than surface-level adoption.

# 6. Reflections & Next Steps



## Reimagining the process

Future iterations of the framework must deepen engagement with queer, trans, and sex worker communities, whose climate vulnerabilities are often compounded by criminalisation, stigma, and systemic exclusion. Their lived experiences ranging from climate-induced displacement to lack of access to healthcare, housing, and public services are rarely acknowledged in mainstream climate policy. A proposed “Framework 2.0” envisions thematic adaptations that respond to the specific needs of these communities. For example, a tailored version for sex workers could address the intersections of climate displacement, housing insecurity, and occupational stigma—ensuring their inclusion as rights-holders, not afterthoughts, in climate resilience planning.



**“We didn’t speak to trans communities in the way we did with Adivasi women, because we felt unprepared. That needs to change.”**

— *Neha Saigal*

# Conclusion:

## An Emergent Framework



The Gender-Transformative Climate Framework is not just a toolkit, it is a provocation to rethink climate change and its proposed solutions. Grounded in power analysis, shaped by community realities, and resisting depoliticisation, it offers a bold roadmap for inclusive, systemic climate action.

It challenges the way climate work is usually done: top-down, technical, and stripped off context. It's not fixed or final. Like the communities it draws from, the framework is set to evolve through reflection, dialogue, and practice. It makes space for discomfort, disagreement, and difference. And it pushes us to keep asking: who holds the power, who bears the burden, and who gets to decide what climate justice looks like?

As climate impacts intensify, this framework offers a feminist, intersectional, and collective path forward. It rejects the limits of survival and adaptation within collapsing systems, demanding instead a radical transformation of power, of relationships, and of the very terms on which climate action is defined. It is a call to act with care, to resist with clarity, and to imagine with radical hope.

### Acknowledgments:

*This Learning brief is authored by Shraddha Mahilkar for Asar Social Impact Advisors.*

### References

Saigal, N., & Shrivastava, S. (2025, May 08). *Urgent Imperatives: Advancing Gender Equality in Climate Action*. Springer.com. [link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41134-025-00391-x](https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s41134-025-00391-x)