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Changing the world
with **women and girls**
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Women's Champion Pak
Pov plants a mangrove
sapling at Kampong Samaky
Community Fisheries in
Kampot province, Cambodia.

**“All work on climate change must
include the voice of women”**

Feminist perspectives from
the frontlines of the climate crisis

Gender equality and climate action are mutually reinforcing, with progress on women's rights supporting effective and inclusive climate action and vice versa.¹ Yet, despite being disproportionately impacted by the climate crisis and at the helm of grassroots climate action, women in the Majority World remain excluded from decision-making and underrepresented in environmental leadership at all levels. This briefing shares the experiences of three women who are leading action on the frontlines of the climate crisis and presents their recommendations for more effective and inclusive climate policy and programming.

The climate crisis affects everyone, but not equally. Its impacts systematically differ across the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, economic class and other factors.² Climate change has differential impacts on women and men due to existing gender hierarchies, gendered divisions of labour and dominant gender norms.³ In particular, women⁴ living in rural communities at risk of economic marginalisation in the Majority World – who bear the least responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions – are experiencing the worst impacts of the climate crisis.⁵ As a result of being on the frontlines, these women have developed valuable knowledge to deal effectively with climate impacts, making them uniquely placed to respond to the needs of those most vulnerable to risk in their communities.⁶ Yet, space for women's voices to be heard in climate policy and programme development remains limited.

More than a decade on from the landmark decision at COP18 to promote gender balance and improve the participation of women in UNFCCC negotiations, opportunities for women to lead climate responses remain narrow at all levels of decision making.⁷ There are persistent gender gaps in climate decision making in all countries, most prominently in the Majority World.⁸ While women amount to 39 percent of environment ministers in OECD countries, their numbers are considerably lower in countries where climate shocks and stresses are felt the most, and where women are most vulnerable to climate risk.⁹ The lack of women's representation in climate leadership is a reflection of larger structural gender equality issues at the local, national and international levels.¹⁰ These include social attitudes and cultural beliefs around gender, caregiving responsibilities and expectations, and restrictions on participation in committees and other decision making spaces.¹¹

Feminist leadership in climate action is key both to responding to the climate crisis effectively, as well as to advancing the rights of women and girls. Without women's meaningful contribution in decision making, the worsening impacts of the climate crisis cannot be effectively

addressed.¹² Research shows that women's leadership is an unrecognised mechanism for addressing the climate crisis, with more stringent climate policies adopted in countries with more women in leadership positions.¹³ The current system which privileges a very narrow type of climate leadership is not fit to respond to the complex and multifaceted impacts of the climate crisis, tied up in systems of current and historic oppression, extraction and injustice. A more diverse kind of leadership is required to tackle the scale of the climate crisis we face today, one which represents a broader and more inclusive range of views and experiences.¹⁴

Gender-transformative climate action requires a shift beyond simple representation to a system in which women are treated as equal actors and their views and experiences are listened to and acted upon. Active steps need to be taken as part of a systemic and transformational approach that shifts power relations, safeguards women's rights and enables women to lead.¹⁵ These include increasing women's access to education, training, resources, social protection and decision making.¹⁶ This must be accompanied by mechanisms through which women and girls impacted by the climate crisis can hold decision makers to account, as well as systems for measuring and tracking women's meaningful participation.¹⁷ Further evidence on the impact of gender-transformative approaches on effective and inclusive climate response is vital to advancing the case for women's leadership in climate action.¹⁸

ActionAid interviewed three women on the frontlines of the climate crisis – Chan Kimcheng in Cambodia, Anastacia Pliian in Kenya, and Priscilla Mbarumun Achakpa in Nigeria. The following pages share their experiences – the ways in which they are leading climate action; the challenges they are facing; and how they feel their voices can be better integrated into effective and inclusive climate response.¹⁹ The paper closes with key recommendations to enable the effective and meaningful participation of women and their organisations in climate action moving forward.

Chan Kimcheng, Cambodia



Chan Kimcheng is a farmer from Chroy Svay village, Koh Kong province, Cambodia. She is a leader of the Women Champion Network of Koh Kong province and a beneficiary of the Women-Led Alternatives to Climate Change (WLACC) project in Cambodia. She works with women and young people in the coastal community in which she lives to raise awareness of the threats posed by the climate crisis and has been instrumental in the development of climate action plans and women's charters of demands on climate change and disaster risk reduction in her community.

How can women's participation, voices and leadership be better integrated into climate action?

"To address climate change better, all work on climate change must include the voice of women and enable women to lead and manage because only they know their problems and needs. I have been involved in increasing participation and decision-making to let women understand and talk about their real needs related to climate change and its impacts. It is vital that women understand the challenges they face because they are the people aware of the conditions in front of them. Women see different signs based on their roles and responsibilities within the family, and they help communities manage to improve their natural resources. Women are at the forefront of climate action, and women not only speak for themselves, but also for those at greatest risk."

What do you feel are the key barriers to women's participation in climate action?

"There is a lack of awareness of the impacts of climate change in my community. There is less support from village and commune authorities to the efforts of women

champions. Local authorities from the sub-national level to the national level have plans but do not have sufficient funds to support this work. My family is not happy for me to do this work because of having no salary to feed them, and my friends do not value my work either. My capacity and that of other women champions on climate change and disasters is therefore still limited."

What policy recommendations would you make to increase the participation and leadership of women in climate action?

"I have some recommendations to increase women's participation and leadership in responses to climate change. Local authorities should provide opportunities, funding and support for women on disaster risk reduction and climate change response, including capacity building activities. Women champion networks should be integrated into government policy and established in all communes and districts to work on climate change. They should be equipped with the necessary tools, including office space, computers, desks and chairs, and the government should provide salaries and social protection for the women champions.

"Women should be supported to participate and engage in forums and workshops to exchange experiences. The government should provide opportunities for women champions to participate in forums, workshops and training on climate change, gender and disaster management. Stakeholders at the international level should invite women champions to join exposure visits outside the country to share experiences on climate change.

"To address climate change related issues of gender inequality and the promotion of women's rights, it is important to empower women via investing more resources in promoting women's local business activities, supporting women-led activities, and funding local organisations or women's networks. Additionally, it is important to promote women's participation in exercising their rights at all stages of climate change-related work so that they can raise their voices about their concerns and demands in the event of disasters and climate change."

Anastacia Plilan, Kenya



Anastacia Plilan is a climate champion living in Tangelbei, Baringo County, Kenya. As an agent for both the Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) and Women Led Community Based Protection (WLCBP), she trains women in her community on energy saving techniques and alternative livelihoods including agroecology and poultry keeping, as well as supporting them to advocate for their rights.

How can women's participation, voices and leadership be better integrated into climate action?

"We need to accept and include women among those who make decisions in the community. For example, when there are issues to do with drought, there is always a committee of men who go and talk with members of other communities so that they can be allowed to graze livestock on their land. Such committees purely comprise of men with no women representing them. There is a perception that women don't own livestock and therefore cannot be involved in security related matters, but you will find that those who are directly affected by insecurity issues are women. So, I think going forward, in every committee there should be representation of women, the elderly, young people and people living with disabilities."

What do you feel are the key barriers to women's participation in climate action?

"We have a lot of barriers in this place. We still have patriarchy where men are seen as everything so you find that even the voices of women are very hard to be heard. Women have no authority to take ownership of anything in the community, not even to be granted permission to attend trainings and climate conferences.

"Because the government has failed to provide essential services, we do not have access to water. We fetch water

at far distances and therefore, even if you call a meeting for women, you find that they trek looking for water and eventually attend the meeting late or even fail to attend just because they are tired. The unpaid care work for women in this place consumes a lot of time as they don't even have time to rest.

"Women often do not even accept that they are important due to their cultural backgrounds. Last year, a woman from my community was given a rare opportunity to attend the COP27 climate summit. It really encouraged many people and we were very happy that an illiterate woman can board a plane to Egypt and is later accorded an opportunity to express her views on a national television and is treated with respect. It really motivated and encouraged many women and we felt happy. Such opportunities should be increased for women from across disadvantaged pastoral communities which are mostly illiterate to interact with other women nationally and worldwide."

What policy recommendations would you make to increase the participation and leadership of women in climate action?

"Women's rights organisations should be given enough funds to support women who have embraced alternative livelihoods such as agroecology because they may have acquired the knowledge but have no money to buy seeds, seedlings and containers for storing water for their kitchen gardens. Women should be provided with grants to grow more food and expand their businesses.

"Having said that patriarchy is very dominant, to break this vice the community should be sensitised and given awareness that in every decision made, in every meeting or committee, women should be involved. Women from marginalised communities should be given the opportunity to interact with women from other regions or places so that they can feel valued and believe in themselves and accept that they can do things just the way women in more developed areas can do. Policy enforcers should pass and implement policies of inclusivity to encourage all people in leadership positions.

"When climate meetings are held, policy makers should not strictly base participation on education or literacy levels. This is because most people from marginalised communities where the climate crisis is rampant are illiterate but when they are sensitised, trained and given awareness, they are best placed to contribute to important decisions as they are the people who are directly impacted by the winds of climate change and thus can give better solutions and guidance towards combating the impacts."

Priscilla Mbarumun Achakpa, Nigeria



Priscilla Mbarumun Achakpa is the lead and founder of the Women Environmental Program which works with a range of civil society organisations and networks to advance climate and gender issues at both the grassroots community level and in national, regional and global policy forums. Activities range from working with women farmers to support climate smart agriculture and organic fertiliser production at the community level, to undertaking research on the gendered impacts of loss and damage as host of the African Working Group on Gender and Climate Change. The Women Environmental Program also facilitates the Global Environment Civil Society Network for West Africa which aims to promote civil society voices in international advocacy.

How can women's participation, voices and leadership be better integrated into climate action?

"It will be good to see how we can strengthen the capacity of grassroots women organisations to address the impact of climate change. It is also very important to see how we can fund them, because it's not enough just to build their capacity. If you build their capacity and you don't equip them, what next? We need to look at the issues of sustainability. How do you sustain this group that we have had? We need to build the capacity of grassroots organisations and of course equip them, give them skills that cannot be taken away. Skills that are not just monetary value, but skills that they themselves can use, are going to help them a lot to deal with climate impacts."

What do you feel are the key barriers to women's participation in climate action?

"A big challenge we have is that of funding. Our grassroots women organisations are doing incredible work developing innovative ways of addressing the impacts of climate change, but do not have funding available to them. The templates that donors present for grassroots women organisations to apply for grants are ambiguous; some of them don't even understand it, so how can they apply for these grants? These women, they have what it takes; they have innovative ways and indigenous knowledge but they aren't provided with the capacity to be able to respond.

"Above all, we need sensitisation and awareness. Even when you talk to members of parliament about climate change, not all of them to understand what you are talking about. And especially when you relate it to the issues of gender, they get lost. They say what has gender got to do with climate change? Funding for gender issues, especially relating to climate change, is very minimal. We need our members of parliament to understand how we can budget for the issues of gender and climate change."

What policy recommendations would you make to increase the participation and leadership of women in climate action?

"We need to increase advocacy about women's leadership. But this women's leadership is not just given on a platter of gold. We have to be able to help and build the capacity of these women to be able to respond positively. We need to conduct analysis for us to be able to say these are the number of women that are in leadership positions, and with that, for instance in the Ministry of Environment, how many women are commissioners, how many women are directors, how many women are this, how many women are that.

"One of the things the Women Environmental Programme is looking at is how we can increase women's leadership and participation in climate change negotiations and delegations at the UNFCCC. I must commend Nigerian government for making conscious effort to include women and youth in their delegation as negotiators and for the youth to shadow the negotiators. But we need to increase women delegations and women's leadership in climate change."

Policy Recommendations

The experiences shared by Chan Kimcheng, Anastacia Pilan, and Priscilla Mbarumun Achakpa demonstrate how women are taking the lead in climate action, but also that they face systemic barriers in doing so. These barriers, rooted in structural inequalities, are holding back effective climate responses by limiting women's meaningful participation. For climate policies to be effective, they must not only respond to the needs of different genders (gender-responsive) but also transform unequal gender dynamics that hold women back from participating in and leading climate solutions (gender-transformative).

Gender-transformative climate policies and finance require policymakers and donors to explicitly challenge structural inequalities in climate action and ensure that women are able to lead their own change. The following recommendations for international climate governance policymakers, climate finance donors and national government policymakers are based on the experiences shared by Chan Kimcheng, Anastacia Pilan, and Priscilla Mbarumun Achakpa. These recommendations pave the way for an intersectional and gender-transformative approach to climate action, which shifts power relations, safeguards women's rights and enables women to lead.

International climate governance

Increase the accessibility of women-led and women's rights organisations, particularly those in the Global South, to international forums and conversations on the climate crisis.

The removal of unnecessary language and literacy requirements and simplification of registration processes is needed to enable more grassroots women-led and women's rights organisations to engage in climate discussions at the international level. In addition, specific funding is required to allow women and their organisations to be present in these spaces.

Expand opportunities for local and national women-led and women's rights organisations to network, collaborate and collectively advocate in international policy spaces.

More accessible and participatory spaces should be created for grassroots women-led and women's rights organisations to network, collaborate and collectively advocate in regional and international spaces. This could build on the work of the Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) that has supported women's organisations to coordinate and advocate within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Such networks need to be supported and provided with clear links to decision making processes.

Climate finance donors

Provide long-term, accessible and flexible funding to women-led and women's rights organisations to allow them to lead in the planning and delivery of climate change preparedness, response and recovery activities.

Women and their organisations possess the knowledge and capacity to lead climate action, however lack the funding to be able to carry out these activities on a long-term and multiyear basis. Funding should not only be more reliable and flexible, but application processes simplified to improve financial access for women and their organisations.

Undertake comprehensive gendered analysis of leadership in climate action in order to address the gaps in decision-making opportunities available to women.

Improved data collection and analysis of women's access to climate leadership is needed at all levels to measure progress and identify gaps in representation. This will better enable women and their organisations to hold traditionally male-dominated systems and structures to account and help to make climate discussions at all levels more women-led and intersectional.

National governments

Recognise women's disproportionate responsibility of unpaid care and domestic work and invest in quality public services.

Simply creating leadership positions for women will not be effective if their disproportionate burden of work at the household level is not addressed. Women's disproportionate responsibility of unpaid care and domestic work should be recognised and quality public services and social protection support provided so that they have more time and capacity to lead climate action.

Invest in training and opportunities for women to lead long-term climate action at all levels.

The work of women-led and women's rights organisations in climate action should be recognised and supported through the provision of training and other opportunities to enable them to become more resilient and exercise greater autonomy in climate spaces.

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