



# Scaling Up Women-Centered Adaptation through the Community Resilience Partnership Program's Gender Window

TECHNICAL NOTE  
MAY 2022





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6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City, 1550 Metro Manila, Philippines  
Tel +63 2 8632 4444; Fax +63 2 8636 2444  
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Publication Stock No. ARM220155-2

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Photo on the front cover: A female farmer in Tbong Khmum province, Cambodia. Smallholder farmers generate more income through increased agriculture product from improved agriculture techniques, access to technology, market, and rural finance.

All photos are from ADB unless otherwise stated.

#### Acknowledgement:

This document has been prepared by Alex Fowler, Climate Resilience Specialist (Consultant) with technical inputs from Arghya Sinha Roy, Principal Climate Change Specialist, Sustainable Development and Climate Change Department (SDCC), Asian Development Bank (ADB). The document has benefited from technical review and inputs from Zonibel Woods, Senior Social Development Specialist, SDCC; Andrew Clayton, Senior Social Development Adviser, Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, United Kingdom; Aage Jorgensen, Program Manager, Nordic Development Fund; and Emilien Amblat, Task Team Leader, Agence Française de Développement. Production and finalization were supported by Sugar Gonzales, Climate Change Officer (climate change adaptation), SDCC.

# About This Technical Note

Climate shocks and stresses are already having devastating impacts on the livelihoods, food security, water security, and health of millions of people in Asia and the Pacific, and climate change is projected to exacerbate these impacts. Women are vital drivers of resilient development, and have a critical role to play in advancing investment in climate resilience at the community level. However, social and political inequalities, as well as patriarchal power structures, remain deeply entrenched, often limiting women's leadership and participation in decision-making. This contributes to disproportionate levels of vulnerability and low adaptive capacity compared to men, particularly in poor communities in low-income countries. Investing in women-focused climate adaptation measures, that build women's resilience to climate change and create space for women's leadership and participation in decision-making, is therefore an imperative for improving resilience outcomes and advancing sustainable development.

To unlock the potential of women as agents of change for adaptation, there is a need for investments to include transformative approaches

that address the underlying causes of women's disproportionate vulnerability and ensure that women's voices and expertise are included in climate change policy and programming. It is in this context that the Community Resilience Partnership Program (CRPP) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has included a dedicated Gender Window as part of the program's architecture, to support women-focused investments in climate resilience. The principal objective of the CRPP is to scale up climate adaptation measures, especially measures at the community level, that explicitly address the nexus between climate, gender, and poverty. In doing so, the CRPP will facilitate transformational changes to the lives, livelihoods, and well-being of poor and vulnerable people in the Asia and Pacific region. The dedicated Gender Window has been developed to provide technical assistance and grants for identifying, developing, and implementing women-focused investments. By women focused, the program refers to investments that explicitly strengthen the resilience of women, particularly poor women, and/or adaptation investments led by women that have a specific focus on supporting women to build their resilience.

This technical note is one of a series of notes developed as part of the rollout of the CRPP. The note first presents the rationale for the CRPP to have a dedicated gender window, and then identifies key interventions that the CRPP Gender Window can support to empower women and build their resilience to climate change.

# The Rationale for the Gender Window

The adverse impacts from climate shocks and stresses are disproportionately felt by certain groups. This means that the consequences of climate change are not being experienced equally. Women and men are being impacted differently, largely as a result of women's higher levels of vulnerability and reduced capacity to adapt that stem from social, economic, cultural, and political inequalities, discriminatory sociocultural norms and the power imbalances between women and men (UNDP 2014). The impacts of climate change can also create conditions that intensify preexisting sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) risk factors (UN Women 2012).

Multidimensional poverty significantly limits women's ability to confront climate change. In Asia, women account for 80% of all people living on less than \$2 per day (UN Women 2018), and their economic activities are often highly concentrated in sectors that are dependent on natural resources such as agriculture. For example, agriculture accounts for between 60% and 75% of women's employment in a number of countries in Asia and the Pacific, including Nepal (74%), Pakistan (65%), the Lao People's Democratic Republic (64%) and Papua New Guinea (60%) (ILO 2019). Women also tend to be overly burdened with household work and caring for children, the sick, and the elderly; women do not always have the same rights as men to land; women often have less access to financial services, technology, information, and early warning systems;<sup>1</sup> and women, particularly rural women, are often held back from fully participating in their community and in formal decision-making processes.

The gendered effects of climate-induced migration means that experiences will also not be the same



for men and women (Lama, Hamza, and Wester 2021). All of these factors contribute to increased vulnerability and lower adaptive capacity, and are closely related to socially created gender functions, systemic discriminations, and the power imbalances between women and men.

While it is crucial to recognize and address women's vulnerabilities to climate change and understand the structural causes for them, it is fundamental to refrain from categorizing women as innately weak, passive receivers of protection and support. In the past, this approach has prevented women from being recognized as active agents in resilience-building programs. The adoption of programs designed on the assumption that women are powerless further exposes them to climate change shocks and disasters, as well as hinders the realization of women's rights to full and equal participation and decision-making (Action Aid 2017). Women's unique knowledge, skills, and perspectives, mean that they can contribute positively to the identification of appropriate adaptation measures and ensure that they are implemented effectively and efficiently. Women can also play a leadership role in accessing public and private resources for adaptation, which in turn can give them recognition within the community and promote their position

<sup>1</sup> For further details on the specific vulnerability context of women, see Habtezion (2016); Miles and Wiedmaier-Pfister (2018); and Neumayer and Plümper (2007).



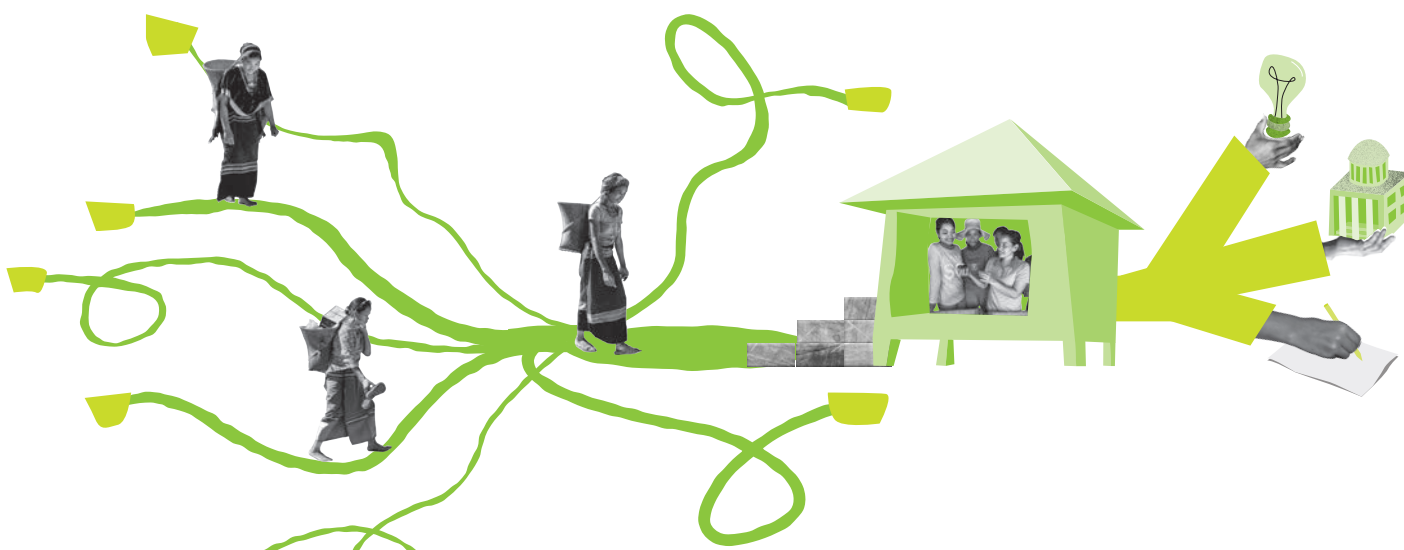
in the family and wider society, creating a positive feedback loop for women's empowerment.

There are increasing examples of grassroots women organizations closely collaborating with local governments to make use of their knowledge and capacity to assess, prioritize, negotiate, and influence resource allocation for resilience investments targeted at vulnerable communities. These investments are not focused exclusively on women but aim to improve the lives of their families and communities. More importantly, the strategies adopted by the women highlight their leadership role in claiming resources and public recognition, thereby shifting the view of women's status from victims and passive beneficiaries to stakeholders and drivers of resilient development (ADB and Huairou Commission 2017; Huairou Commission 2019). For example, UN Women determined that women's leadership in water management links to more cost-effective water delivery, more households with access to water, and less corruption in water financing (Ray 2016).

The rising acknowledgment of the criticality of gender equality in resilience has been recognized in many global agreements and intergovernmental processes (e.g., Sustainable Development Goal target 13.b and the 2016 Paris Agreement). Despite the increasing evidence on the crucial role women play in strengthening resilience, investments that focus on women remain limited. Existing national climate adaptation policies, as well as sectoral plans and policies, often do not consider women's role

in resilience building an explicit priority. This likely translates to few investments in women's climate resilience, although statistics on funding directly targeting women or community-based adaptation initiatives where women play key roles are inconsistent (Williams 2011). Thus, there is a strong need for effective programs aimed at increasing women's resilience to climate change, addressing the roots of their unique vulnerabilities and boosting their adaptive capacity.

In this context, the CRPP has included a dedicated gender window as part of the program architecture. Through the Gender Window, the CRPP will invest in building on the existing capacities of poor women and in implementing specific women-centered adaptation initiatives that are designed through inclusive processes where women are engaged at all levels of decision-making. The approach toward implementing investment activities through the Gender Window will emphasize women's role in resilience as "active stakeholders" and "game changers" rather than "vulnerable" and "victims." There is also a strong recognition of the opportunity of climate resilience investments to contribute to a positive change toward gender equality and challenge historical patriarchal norms and practices. As such, the CRPP Gender Window goes beyond mainstreaming gender considerations into programming, providing specific dedicated resources for strengthening women's adaptive capacity, and promoting transformative interventions that challenge the structural sociocultural norms that drive their vulnerability.



# Strengthening Women's Resilience to the Impacts of Climate Change through the Dedicated Gender Window

The CRPP Gender Window will support the identification, development, and implementation of investments that have the explicit objective of strengthening the resilience of women to climate change. As such, support will be provided through (i) knowledge support and technical assistance for identifying investment opportunities and creating an enabling environment for financing women-focused adaptation measures; (ii) transactional technical assistance for preparing investment projects; and (iii) grant financing, on a selective basis, for implementing investments identified and prepared under the technical assistance. This section identifies some of the specific activities that the CRPP can support under these modalities.<sup>2</sup>



## Technical Assistance: Strengthening the Enabling Environment for Investing in Women-Focused Adaptation

Substantial gaps remain in many countries to generate the necessary political will, capacity, and commitment from governments and communities to invest in women-focused adaptation measures that help tackle climate change. In order to contribute to filling these gaps, the CRPP, through the Gender Window, will provide support for undertaking (i) analytical work to identify potential women-focused adaptation investments and present evidence-based arguments on why these investments are crucial for wider resilience building; (ii) multistakeholder policy dialogues to create a culture for investing in women-focused adaptation measures; and (iii) institutional strengthening to develop the necessary communication and coordination frameworks and an enabling policy environment for increasing women-focused resilience investments.

Specific activities might include the following:

- **Carry out action research to generate knowledge and evidence to make the case for women-focused adaptation investments.** Future investments will need to take into consideration the specific situation of women, their diverse conditions, and how they are impacted by climate change in both the short and long run. Understanding the nature of gender-based vulnerabilities in specific contexts is crucial to recognizing the different impacts that climate change has on women and men. There is thus a need to generate a deeper understanding of women's vulnerability context in CRPP countries, and generate an evidence base for climate adaptation interventions that are effective in reducing these vulnerabilities and building

<sup>2</sup> An intersectional approach will be a core element of the activities supported by the CRPP's Gender Window that are discussed in the subsequent sections.



the resilience of women. Furthermore, there is a need to demonstrate how women's contributions can strengthen the effectiveness of climate change measures in general and, where women are implementing adaptation initiatives that are having positive impacts, how they can be scaled up.

The CRPP will support governments and communities in undertaking action research studies that address gaps in understanding around women and resilience in CRPP countries. In doing so, the CRPP will contribute to a deeper and more contextualized understanding of existing systems and ways of doing things, including identifying issues related to structural inequality between men and women in specific geographical areas. This activity area will also help strengthen the evidence base for appropriate and effective women-centered adaptation, by collecting data and information to build evidence, and compiling lessons learned from related initiatives to demonstrate the potential for bankability of women-focused adaptation investments. This in turn should inspire political will and community support for investing in women-led, local-level adaptation at scale.

- **Support small-scale innovations and pilot projects.** As part of the evidence generating and lesson learning process, the CRPP will

support innovative adaptation initiatives and pilot activities at the community level to identify and test women-focused adaptation measures that could be scaled up through larger investments in the future. These initiatives, which will focus on building skills, capacity, and knowledge rather than civil works, will be designed and led by women, providing a dedicated space for women to trial and test adaptation measures with them at the center. Types of activities supported might include testing new climate-smart production and land management practices in rural areas; setting up community-run food banks in drought-prone areas; and introducing home gardening in urban areas for food security and reduced heat stress. Supporting these types of initiatives will provide an opportunity for women to demonstrate their ability to build resilience to climate change and present their achievements to local governments so that, in future, women can increasingly be recognized as partners for resilience building by local governments.

- **Host multistakeholder policy dialogues and knowledge-sharing forums to build a culture conducive to increased investment in women's climate resilience.** Increasing investment in local-level, women-focused adaptation goes against the dominant trends in many CRPP countries, and thus will require getting key stakeholders to transform current business as usual practice. Work is needed to build the capacity of ministries and sector agencies, as well as other key actors, such as the private sector, to understand the importance of promoting women-focused investments in climate resilience, and how this can be achieved. It is also imperative that women, especially at the grassroots level, have a voice in shaping adaptation programming, and that their practical needs, interests, vulnerabilities, and capacities are represented in policy, plans, and standards that inform women-centered adaptation investments.

The CRPP will support policy dialogues and forums for exchange at the regional, national, and local levels that bring together grassroots women's organizations, government ministries from various sectors, the private sector, academic institutions, and other civil society organizations, providing a platform for exchange and collaboration between actors that may not traditionally work closely together. By bringing together these key stakeholder groups for multiple iterations of dialogue, CRPP support through the Gender Window can contribute to a change in culture within governments and civil society that is more supportive of women-focused investments in adaptation and recognizes their value in shaping resilient development. These dialogues will help to frame key issues in a way that pursues clear actions, and will facilitate horizontal and vertical lesson sharing and multistakeholder participation. The long-term objectives being to help create a movement for locally appropriate women-focused adaptation investments in CRPP countries and to promote women's leadership in adaptation.

- **Strengthen institutional and policy frameworks.** Increasing women-focused investments will require improved coordination and communication at all levels of government and also at the project level. This will require greater vertical integration among municipal, provincial, and national governments on policies and practices that aim to build women's resilience to climate change (ADB 2020). In addition, ensuring the meaningful participation of women in adaptation decision-making beyond the program life-cycle will require strengthening the institutions and processes that provide the necessary space to support and deliver such an approach. The CRPP will thus support governments to create new and/or improve existing policy frameworks and communication and coordination mechanisms to stimulate coherence and convergence across gender, climate, and key sectors such as agriculture, land-use planning, and urban planning.



## Project Preparation for Women-Focused Investments in Climate Resilience

The CRPP will seek to increase the climate resilience of women through leveraging sizable investment in adaptation projects and replicating effective interventions. As such, the CRPP Gender Window will support the preparation of large-scale investments that explicitly strengthen the climate resilience of women, particularly poor women, and/or adaptation investments that are led by women. Focusing on women also means prioritizing investment projects where the primary stakeholders are women throughout the project cycle—planning, design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

Women will be at the center of the design process and engaged at all levels of decision-making, using inclusive design processes. As a first step, it will be important to carefully map the involvement and the role of women in the design and implementation of potential adaptation measures. The following are key design features and approaches that will form part of project preparation under this activity area:

- **Use sex-disaggregated climate risk information and data.** A robust understanding of current and future risk should be the starting point when designing





investments in climate resilience. As well as understanding the spatial and temporal characteristics of climate hazards, investment projects supported by the CRPP Gender Window should be informed by the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data to understand the specific vulnerability characteristics of women so that they can be addressed through the project activities.

Evidence also shows that women have a deeper understanding of vulnerability than men, largely due to the role they play in households and the wider community. Because vulnerability links closely to livelihoods and well-being, tapping that knowledge is critical to identifying the most suitable intervention to address risk.

- **Include outputs that address structural inequalities between men and women.**

It is critical that women-focused investments to strengthen resilience consciously include activities that aim to reduce inequalities between men and women, challenge social and gender norms, and contribute to transformative change. The CRPP will ensure that investment projects supported by the Gender Window integrate suitable outputs that help to narrow the equality gap and seek to include outcome indicators to address structural gender inequality. In many cases, such activities will be related to policy reforms

(e.g., revising the land tenure system); revision of regulations (e.g., needing to provide collateral for accessing housing microfinance); and information management (e.g., ensuring that women have access to climate information). Specific measures to increase women's empowerment should also be included. For example, the provision of equal wages, ensuring participation of women in meetings where public works are designed and selected, as well as information management and capacity-building activities (Steinbach et al. 2016).

- **Ensure sustainable outcomes.**

Women-focused investments supported by the CRPP should be designed in a way that ensures positive changes are likely to be sustained beyond the investment itself and despite fluctuations in wider socioeconomic and political contexts. This will require integrating approaches that aim to create a structural, cultural, and financial base that can facilitate the desired change over time. For example, improving organizational and individual capacity across the public and private sectors and civil society; developing leadership for women-focused adaptation at all levels; producing champions and supporting change makers in positions of influence that can drive change forward and advance the progress made under the interventions.

- **Monitor, evaluate, and learn.** The lack of a rigorous monitoring and evaluation system with sex-disaggregated indicators will hinder the assessment of program impacts on women and girls. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks for all CRPP-supported projects should have specific sex-disaggregated indicators. Furthermore, monitoring and evaluation systems for women-focused interventions will be consciously designed to increase women's capacity to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of adaptation measures and institutionalize learning and information generation practices. Through this approach, the implementation of the investment projects can become an integral part of empowering women.
- **Examples of women-focused investments for climate resilience.** Meaningful actions to strengthen women's climate resilience are manifold and encompass various sectors, such as social protection; financial inclusion;

climate-smart agriculture, and upgrading of urban informal settlements.

Examples of some of the types of investment projects that the CRPP Gender Window could support in their preparation are the following: adaptive social protection programs with direct cash transfers for poor women or households headed by women, which include capacity-building components on climate-smart agriculture; disaster microinsurance programs, such as weather-indexed insurance, that are specifically targeted at women and designed to consider women's needs and preferences; informal settlement upgrading projects that improve the resilience of women's economic activities to climate change (e.g., protection against extreme heat in the place of business); and early warning and climate information systems that are designed to meet the needs and preferences of women farmers.



## Grants for Implementing Women-Focused Investments in Resilience

Supporting climate change adaptation initiatives at the community level that focus on meeting the practical needs of poor and vulnerable women should be a catalyst for local governments to support bringing investments to scale. Recognizing this, the CRPP will provide grant resources for the implementation of climate adaptation initiatives that explicitly focus on building the resilience of women as part of new or ongoing ADB programs.

Such initiatives will be community based and **led by women**. They will be aimed at strengthening livelihoods and women's adaptive capacity, taking into account social, economic, and environmental features as well as local development priorities. Such interventions will include activities to strengthen women's self-reliance, leadership, and confidence

that aim to contribute to a transformative impact over the long term. Although there may be limited examples of adaptation investments that specifically target women, those opportunities that do exist must be pursued.

Grant support might include the following: provision of cash transfers for inputs and to offset any short-term income forgone by trialing improved climate-smart production practices; cash-for-work for the installation of nature-based solutions (e.g., planting mangrove seedlings for regenerating mangrove forests for protection against storm surge and sea-level rise); home gardening initiatives and small-scale agroforestry; and climate proofing critical supply chain links of women-dominated livelihood activities.

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# Scaling Up Women-Centered Adaptation through the Community Resilience Partnership Program's Gender Window

## *Technical Note*

The Community Resilience Partnership Program (CRPP) aims to support countries and communities in scaling up climate adaptation measures, especially measures at the community level, that explicitly address the nexus between climate, gender, and poverty. The program includes a dedicated gender window to promote women-focused investments in resilience. This note explains the importance of the dedicated gender window and identifies key interventions it can support to empower women and build their resilience to climate change.

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