



Inclusive climate governance in Sindh, Pakistan

Summary

In the Sindh province of Pakistan, inequality is embedded in social structures, and climate resilience is shaped by gender, age, disability, class, access to land and information, and voice in governance. Women, girls, persons with disabilities, elderly people, and landless labourers face the greatest risks from floods, droughts, and heatwaves. Despite progressive policies, climate governance remains centralized and gender-blind, and it fails to recognize community-led local adaptation actions such as early warnings, maintaining flood embankments, and home-based sustainable livelihoods. This policy brief highlights the barriers and practical solutions to institutionalize gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) within Sindh's climate governance through the principles of locally led adaptation (LLA).



Recommendations

- **Institutionalize inclusive, locally led climate governance:** establish GESI-integrated climate governance units within district and union council systems to embed gender equality, inclusion, and accountability in all planning, budgeting, and monitoring processes.
- **Create and finance community adaptation committees:** establish permanent committees at the community level, with at least 40 per cent representation from marginalized and under-represented communities, such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities. Devolve small-scale adaptation funds directly to these committees for locally identified priorities.
- **Integrate gender-responsive budgeting and sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD) across departments:** make gender-responsive budgeting and SADDD mandatory for all climate-related planning and expenditure tracking, with annual public reports, to ensure transparency and the distribution of equitable benefits.
- **Establish local resilience desks with micro-grant mechanisms:** set up district-level resilience desks within district disaster management authorities (DDMAs) to coordinate inclusive adaptation, administer transparent and interest-free micro-grants, and support women- and youth-led resilience initiatives in food security, health, and livelihoods.

Author:

Nazima Shaheen
nazima.shaheen@concern.net

Introduction

In Sindh, inequality is deeply embedded in social and institutional structures, shaping how different groups experience and respond to climate shocks. Women, girls, persons with disabilities, elderly people, and landless labourers face heightened vulnerability due to unequal access to land, resources, and decision-making. These inequalities amplify the impacts of floods, droughts, and heatwaves that strip livelihoods, undermine health, and erode dignity.

Despite progressive commitments, climate governance remains centralized and gender-blind. District governance systems are reactive, under-resourced, and disconnected from community realities. Yet, at the grassroot level, resilience is already being built, with communities sharing labour to repair embankments, issuing early warnings through mosques and mobile networks, and sustaining livelihoods through women's home-based food production. These locally led practices show that women, youth, and marginalized groups are active agents of resilience.

The principles of LLA (IIED, n.d.) offer a pathway to institutionalize community-driven solutions by transferring authority, finance, and accountability to local actors. Embedding GESI into planning, budgeting, and finance is essential to make LLA effective in Sindh. This brief draws on field research by Concern Worldwide under the Zurich Climate Resilience Alliance (ZCRA) in Matiari and Shaheed Benazirabad districts. Findings are drawn from eight focus group discussions with communities,¹ five key informant interviews at the district level, and four interviews with relevant government departments at the provincial level. These discussions and interviews identify practical barriers and solutions for inclusive, accountable, and community-led climate governance.

The problem: barriers to inclusive and gender-responsive climate governance

Policy–practice gap in climate governance

Sindh's climate and disaster management policies are progressive on paper but weak in implementation. (Ministry of Climate Change, 2023) Local governance systems are siloed and underfunded, with minimal coordination across departments. Financing for local adaptation is scarce, leaving marginalized people invisible in planning and decision-making.

According to the Provincial Disaster Management Authorities' (PDMA, 2016) *Camp Management Guidelines*, separate shelters and sanitation facilities for men and women are required to ensure privacy and safety. However, the district authorities explained that, in practice, shelters are combined because 'people prefer to live together and no gendered barriers exist'.

This institutional perception contrasts sharply with community experiences:

'We cannot sleep in the same space as men. There are no separate toilets, no space for women. Better to stay at home, even if the roof may fall'. (Woman from Bhaikhan Subecho village, Matiari district)

'We stayed in the flooded house because at least in our own home we had some dignity. In the camps, everyone is watching, and we cannot even go to the toilet in peace'. (Woman from Nathyani, Shaheed Benazirabad district)

'Our women cannot stay in a place where men are also sleeping. It is not our way. We build our own shed with charpai [local beds] and cloth'. (Man from Yateem Lashari, Shaheed Benazirabad district)

These testimonies show how gender-blind implementation of relief policy forces women to self-exclude from formal camps, leaving them exposed to unsafe conditions at home. This gap illustrates why localized, inclusive planning that is rooted in community perspectives must underpin Sindh's resilience strategy.

Policies emphasize inclusive, community-based early warning systems. Institutional representatives note that the PDMA have prepared an integrated system with formal evacuation channels and alert mechanisms. In practice, however, communities often remain unaware of these official systems and receive warnings too late:

'We only find out when the flood water is already in our homes'. (Woman from Nathyani, Shaheed Benazirabad district)

'By the time the news came, the water had already reached our doors'. (Woman from Yateem Lashari, Shaheed Benazirabad district)

'If the mullah [Muslim clergy] announces in the mosque, everyone will hear. That is how we know danger is near'. (Man from Kacho Salaro, Matiari district)

In response, communities have developed their own locally led early warning systems using mosque loudspeakers, mobile messages, and night patrols by youth. While these adaptations demonstrate strong local resilience, they operate outside formal disaster management structures, highlighting a gap between existing systems and community awareness and engagement.



In the aftermath of the October 2025 flooding, girls in the Sindh province face protection concerns in temporary shelters, disruption to education and increased risks of early and forced marriages. Photo: Maira Soomro, Concern Worldwide

Community-led adaptation and early warning systems

While communities already practise adaptation through early warnings, self-evacuation, livestock protection, handicraft production, kitchen gardening, and mutual aid, district institutions rarely recognize or resource these mechanisms. Communities instead rely on unpaid labour, small informal loans, or the sale of personal assets. Marginalized groups often rely on informal income sources such as home-based embroidery, dairy processing, or vegetable gardening as critical buffers to shocks and stresses but receive no policy support. Youth-run mobile alert networks and local rescue teams operate entirely outside formal disaster management systems. However, the most vulnerable groups, particularly persons with disabilities and those with chronic illness, face the gravest risks when institutional systems fail to account for their needs during crises.

Flood responses continue to overlook persons with disabilities and chronic illness:

'One of my sisters was sick, the other disabled. We tied them with rope and tried to pull them through the water, but they slipped and drowned.' (Woman from Nathyani, Shaheed Benazirabad district)

This tragedy underscores the urgent need for inclusive evacuation planning, accessible shelters, and trained local volunteers to assist vulnerable individuals.

Although women's unpaid and home-based work or off-farm work provides a safety net during crises, it is invisible in formal adaptation planning:

'When the fields are flooded, we stitch, make Sindhi caps, or sell livestock. That is how we earn to buy food.' (Woman from Yateem Lashari, Shaheed Benazirabad district)

Women's small-scale economic activities are the backbone of household resilience. Targeted interest-free micro-grants or district resilience funds could scale these women-led adaptation practices.

Institutional barriers to inclusive adaptation

Sindh's climate governance system faces several structural and interlinked barriers that constrain inclusive LLA and prevent equitable participation in decision-making at all levels:

- Absence of SADD across DDMA, PDMA, and local government databases.
- No gender-responsive budget or inclusive climate finance practice embedded in climate and development planning.
- Lack of community adaptation committees and district resilience units² in district governance structures.
- No formal mandate or quota to guarantee representation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities in local adaptation governance



Without these foundational shifts, LLA will remain a patchwork of unpaid community efforts rather than an institutionalized process.

Call to action

To the Government of Sindh

- Issue a directive establishing DDMA GESI resilience desks in all high-risk climate districts.
- Formalize community adaptation committees with quotas for women, youth, and persons with disabilities.
- Allocate provincial seed capital to a micro-grant pool for climate resilience to directly finance priorities identified by communities, such as early warning systems, kitchen gardens, livestock protection, and water management initiatives.

To national institutions

The Ministry of Climate Change and Environmental Coordination, the National Disaster Management Authority, and the National Adaptation Plan (NAP)/Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) Secretariats should:

- Provide technical and policy support to Sindh for piloting inclusive, gender-responsive adaptation mechanisms such as community adaptation committees and GESI resilience desks.
- Facilitate cross-provincial learning and coordination to harmonize approaches to LLA.
- Ensure that forthcoming national frameworks (e.g. NAP and NDC implementation) integrate principles of inclusion, equity, and LLA.
- Strengthen national and provincial monitoring systems to capture disaggregated data and lessons for scaling inclusive resilience.

Conclusion

To strengthen climate resilience where it matters most – at the community level – Sindh should transform its adaptation system from fragmented, top-down responses to a participatory, inclusive, and accountable model grounded in the principles of locally led and inclusive governance. The goal is to institutionalize inclusive adaptation and LLA by decentralizing authority, ensuring predictable financing, and empowering local actors, particularly marginalized groups, to lead adaptation planning. This transformation requires mandatory collection of SADDD, mainstreaming inclusive budgeting and gender-responsive budgeting across departments, and establishing representative community

and district structures with clear mandates for participation, transparency, and accountability. Once piloted and validated, Sindh’s inclusive adaptation mechanisms, such as community adaptation committees and GESI resilience desks, could serve as models for operationalizing Pakistan’s NAP (2023) and informing national frameworks on inclusive, gender-responsive LLA. Inclusive, accountable, and locally led climate governance in Sindh, supported by inclusive and gender-responsive financing and disaggregated data, is critical to protecting vulnerable populations and institutionalizing community-driven resilience.

Acknowledgements

The author led the research, field work, and write-up for this policy brief, with financial and peer review support from Mercy Corps. The field data was collected with support from colleagues at the Hyderabad field office, Concern Pakistan, and Sami Foundation (a partner organization for the ZCRA programme). The author acknowledges the support from the ZCRA Concern Worldwide global team, Concern Pakistan country management team and ZCRA in-country project team for their support throughout the assignment. Field research for the policy brief was conducted in Matiari and Shaheed Benazirabad districts, Sindh, Pakistan.

References

- International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) (n.d.) ‘Principles for locally led adaptation’.
<https://www.iied.org/principles-for-locally-led-adaptation>
- Ministry of Climate Change (2023) ‘Pakistan national climate resilience and adaptation plan 2023–2030’.
<https://docc.sindh.gov.pk/files/DoCC/Documents/NAP%20Final%20Draft-edited.pdf>
- NAP (2023). ‘National adaptation plan: Pakistan 2023’. Available from:
https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/National_Adaptation_Plan_Pakistan.pdf
- PDMA (2016). ‘Camp management guidelines’. Provincial Disaster Management Authorities.
<https://www.pdma.gov.pk/project-details/42>

Notes

- 1 Four with men, four with women, and two per district.
- 2 Establishing such structures would be a key pre-step that should be followed by delegated, predictable small-scale finance for such structures.



The Zurich Climate Resilience Alliance is a multi-sectoral partnership, powered by the Z Zurich Foundation, focused on enhancing resilience to climate hazards in both rural and urban communities. By implementing solutions, promoting good practice, influencing policy and facilitating systemic change, we aim to ensure that all communities facing climate hazards are able to thrive. [Find out more at ZCRAAlliance.org](https://www.zcra.org)

In partnership with:



Powered by: ZURICH Foundation

© 2026 Zurich Climate Resilience Alliance | Concern Worldwide
 ZCRAAlliance.org | concern.net