



**ADB Gender Forum 2023:
*2 Billion Changemakers – Women Leading on Climate Action in Asia and the Pacific***

Keynote Remarks by Shaila Shahid

Good morning, all!

I extend my greetings to Mr. Masatsugu Asakawa, President of the Asian Development Bank, members of the ADB board and management, and esteemed participants.

It is an honor to join you at ADB's 2023 Gender Forum titled "2 Billion Changemakers – Women Leading on Climate Action in Asia and the Pacific". This gathering resonates deeply with my personal and professional values. The Gender Forum is a critical platform to amplify women's voices leading the fight against climate change, a planetary emergency we cannot ignore.

As a Bangladeshi woman, I have seen the devastating impact of climate change on my country. We only produce .56 percent of global emissions. Yet, Bangladesh ranks seventh among countries most vulnerable to climate change, with over half of our population living in areas with high climate exposure to climate change.

Today's climate crisis is an unprecedented existential threat that requires our collective and immediate action. The world is likely to pass a dangerous temperature threshold within the next ten years, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). We have reached a critical moment in history. Our response must be sustainable, just, and inclusive of women's voices.

Gender inequality and climate change are not separate challenges- climate change is a threat multiplier to women. But the good news is that 2 billion women and girls in this region can act as solution multipliers.

We already have examples of how women are leading solutions to climate change. Let me share three:

- In our beautiful host country, women in the Barangay Industrial Valley Complex Marikina community, led by the local teachers of Batibot Early Learning Center, organized themselves and formed a task force to educate their community about the root causes of flooding and other climate-related disasters as well as ways on how to protect their environment and their community.





- In Indonesia, women are raising awareness of climate change and distributing climate-resistant plants and saplings through the Voices for Just Climate Action Program. The trees will increase soil water retention and reduce erosion, with the ultimate goal of fighting hunger because of failed crops.
- In Bangladesh a major part of Cyclone Preparedness Programme is being managed by women volunteers to raise awareness on early warning mechanism, search and rescue, evacuation, sheltering, and leading the efforts to mitigate the climate impacts through mangrove plantations in 13 coastal districts.
- In Fiji, the Women's Weather Watch (WWW) is organized around gender-inclusive disaster management principles that address women's priorities. The organization monitors natural disasters and enables women to work together to prepare before, during, and after extreme weather events so that everyone in their community is safe.

Their actions illustrate women's leadership at the forefront of climate action. Yet, despite the global emphasis on sustainable and inclusive development, the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment in climate policies has been limited. Historically, women have demonstrated immense wisdom and potential. They have shown remarkable resilience and coping abilities in the face of natural hazards and climate change. Yet, more often than not, women are still seen as victims or passive actors rather than as critical stakeholders. This marginalization from planning, decision-making, and agenda-setting processes must end. Our aspirations for sustainable and resilient societies must be firmly rooted in a commitment to reducing inequalities. There are three things we can do to strengthen women's participation in climate action:

- Support for women's leadership at all levels, including women in decision-making bodies around climate change.
- Gender-responsive financing- gender equality within climate finance is woefully underfunded. Without specific funding for gender equality, we will not meet our Paris Commitments.
- Finally, focus on adaptation and building women's resilience, particularly of poor, indigenous, and women belonging to marginalized groups.

We must redefine resilience to include the priorities of women and uphold the principles of development justice. Recognizing the importance of blending scientific knowledge with traditional, locally-led solutions is essential. For example, 'cyclone houses' (*gamali*) of Pentecost (Vanuatu) have been proven to be better able to withstand hurricane winds than any made from modern materials.





Throughout Asia and the Pacific, women are primarily responsible for seed management, including knowledge of drought-resistant varieties. By not integrating women's traditional knowledge, our efforts to protect the environment and biodiversity may prove inadequate.

There are also significant gender data gaps in the environment and climate change context. These gaps include data on women in disaster-related mortality and morbidity, women's rights to land and natural resources, energy consumption and production, and the interplay between the environment and health.

Our region has six of the top 10 countries most affected by these disasters. A recent study by UNESCAP paints a sobering picture: most countries in the Asia-Pacific region are underprepared for the increasing intensity and frequency of extreme weather events and disasters. The repercussions are severe for women — disrupted food systems, damaged economies and societies in jeopardy, and increases in violence against women. These consequences further exacerbate structural inequalities and pose unique challenges to their livelihoods, health, and safety- yet post-disaster assessments and recovery plans still lack sex-disaggregated data and specific actions to address women's needs.

I am proud to share that we have made substantial progress in transitioning from vulnerability to resilience in Bangladesh. This shift is coordinated with crucial ministries, including the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Water Resources, among others. The National Adaptation Plan of Bangladesh 2022 mainstreams the Climate Change Gender Action Plan, acknowledging the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and vulnerable groups. It advocates for establishing gender-responsive and socially inclusive adaptation processes, ensuring equitable access to resources, and designing, planning, and building capacity for climate-resilient alternative livelihoods.

With support from development partners such as the Asian Development Bank Bangladesh in advancing climate resilience and socioeconomic recovery from external shocks. ADB's commitment to mainstreaming gender equality is critical, as are dedicated actions to strengthen women's resilience to climate change. I commend ADB for creating two specific initiatives, the Community Resilience Partnership Program and a technical assistance program to strengthen women's resilience to heat stress. I value their approach to include innovative ways to enhance women's leadership and resilience at the community level.

Women's involvement is crucial at all levels – from global climate negotiations and corporate boardrooms to local grassroots initiatives. This Gender Forum is taking place right before COP28, where we have a persistent gender imbalance among the delegates.





At COP27, 63% of delegates were men, and only 37% were women. Indigenous women, in particular, have been leading environmental conservation efforts, yet their participation in negotiations is limited despite their invaluable knowledge and expertise.

The Paris Agreement mandates that climate action must respect, promote, and consider gender equality and women's empowerment. This aligns with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Beijing Program for Action, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

Over the last two decades, I have worked from grassroots levels to policymaking and participated in COP as a member of the women and gender constituency of the UNFCCC mechanism. From this role, I would like to highlight some of the critical issues for women at COP28 for us to consider over the next few days, particularly for those of you attending or tracking COP discussions. Women at COP28 will be looking for progress on:

1. Loss and Damage- Addressing losses and damages related to climate change requires correcting gender inequality and stereotypes embedded in climate action interventions. Loss and damage strategies need to empower women in shaping solutions.
2. Gender-responsive climate finance- We urgently need more mechanisms to support direct finance access for grassroots women's organizations, national women and gender institutions, Indigenous Peoples, and local communities. And for overall climate finance, we need climate finance that intentionally includes gender transformative approaches to address and remove social, economic and cultural barriers.
3. Just transition- Advance a just and equitable energy transition, shifting from a fossil-fuel-based economy to a low-carbon, renewable energy system that respects women's human rights and advances social and environmental justice. Opportunities arising from just transition need to ensure that women's equality benefits.

COP28 will be an opportunity to bring these issues to the forefront.

I will end with a reflection. We must bring our most innovative thinking and dedicated action to confront evolving threats and challenges. Asia and the Pacific face an incredible challenge, but it has the resources, talent, and potential to lead climate action. As we stand united today, over 500 participants in the Gender Forum from all over the region, let us pledge to ensure safety, equality, and happiness for women and children in the most vulnerable locations, whether facing crises from conflict, disasters, or climate change.

Thank you.

