

# Mundas Indigenous Women of Bangladesh at the Front Lines of Climate Change

Environmental degradation is already seriously threatening the lives and livelihoods of Mundas women living in the isolated corner of southwest Bangladesh known as the Sundarban. Increases in cyclones, river bank erosion, drought, tidal surges and water salinity due to climate change are increasing the challenges of daily life for the Mundas women.

Women are the main caretakers of the home, responsible for providing food, fuel and water as well as caring for the family's well-being. In recent years, women have fewer crops to feed their families and to be sold for income because of increased salinity and soil erosion. The marine life the Mundas have become dependent on is changing rapidly and fishing and farming are now inconsistent and unpredictable means of subsistence. Facing this unreliable income, husbands often leave to find wage work elsewhere, doubling the burden of domestic work for the women.

Climate change also reinforces existing social problems for the women of the Mundas community. Increasing salinity of local water sources forces the women to walk distances that take up to three and four hours to collect safe drinking water. Desertification of the land forces the women to search farther and harder for fuel for the home. Because the women

have to spend more time collecting resources, other domestic demands, like having dinner prepared for their husbands on time, become a challenge. Mundas women recognize that this is related to surges in domestic violence against them. Also, their limited time means they have no time for themselves. Their already extremely restricted chances to get an education become nonexistent. Some women report that the amount of time spent collecting resources is even responsible for their inability to get married. Many parents cannot let their daughters marry because they are the only ones who can walk far enough to get water.

Though Mundas women are the main caregivers, they have the least amount of access to land, education, health facilities, disaster relief services, infrastructure development and credit assistance. They are extremely vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters. Land insecurity also plays a major role in crop, water and food insecurity for the women. Coastal erosion and increased salinity increase fishing and aquaculture competition. Mundas women often fall victim to land grabbing by local fishermen and prawn farmers. When the men claim their spots of freshwater access, the women must either use the salty water or walk even further to find clean water.



## International Recommendations

- Commit to a radical and urgent transition from extractive, profit based economies to people centered models that are just, equitable, gender-sensitive and locally driven;
- Commit to a comprehensive, ambitious and binding new climate agreement which aims to limit global warming below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels;
- **Mitigation:** the new agreement should target the elimination of all fossil fuels and the use of 100% renewable energy by 2030 for developed countries and 2050 for others;
- **Mitigation** should not include commercializing of the climate through mechanisms that have failed to reduce emissions including REDD, REDD+, and “climate-smart” agriculture, among others;
- **Adaptation:** Developing countries needs (particularly LDCs and SIDS) should be addressed as a priority in the new agreement. Developed countries must recognize their historical responsibilities and fulfill their obligation to support adaption measures for developing countries, including through finance, technology transfer, capacity building and the removal of patent and intellectual property restrictions;
- **Loss and damage** must address long term and slow onset loss and damage as well as immediate disaster related damage;
- **Support small-scale,** locally owned and developed ecological responses ensuring food sovereignty and traditional knowledge and practices of indigenous and rural women are retained and promoted;
- **Decision-making processes at the local, national and international levels:** should be led by those most affected by the impacts of climate change, particularly women;
- **Disaster Risk Reduction:** A gender-responsive approach should be integrated in all disaster risk reduction strategies, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction policies and measures;
- **Accountability mechanism:** A strong and effective compliance mechanism to the agreement should be established to ensure the fulfillment of Parties’ obligations.

## National recommendations

- **Gendered impacts of climate change** should be recognised, especially on the poorest women;
- **National adaption plans** that provide the most affected women with alternative, sustainable and locally owned livelihood options and guarantee equal access of natural resources should be collaboratively developed;
- **Gender specific policies** should be included in pre and post disaster management, including though providing women with capacity building;
- **Gender disaggregated data** should be collected and used in disaster and relief distribution with special attention to extremely vulnerable groups, including indigenous and rural women;
- **Indigenous peoples,** including women, should be included in all decision-making policies and measures on climate change affecting them.

## Bangladesh Country Info

**Population:** 160 million

**Human Development Index Ranking:** Ranked 142 on Human Development Index of 187

**Greenhouse Gas Emissions:** As of 2013, Bangladesh contributed 0.19% of global greenhouse gas emissions and, as of 2014, has a per capita emission rate of 0.38 metric tons (as compared to 17.5 metric tons for the US, and 6.18 metric tons for China).

**Climate Change Vulnerability:** Bangladesh is the most populated country in South Asia, and is widely recognized as the country most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. By 2050, an estimated 50 million people within Bangladesh will be displaced due to climate change.

Women are the most vulnerable to climate change. For instance, of the 140,000 who died from the 1991 cyclone disasters in Bangladesh, 90% were women.

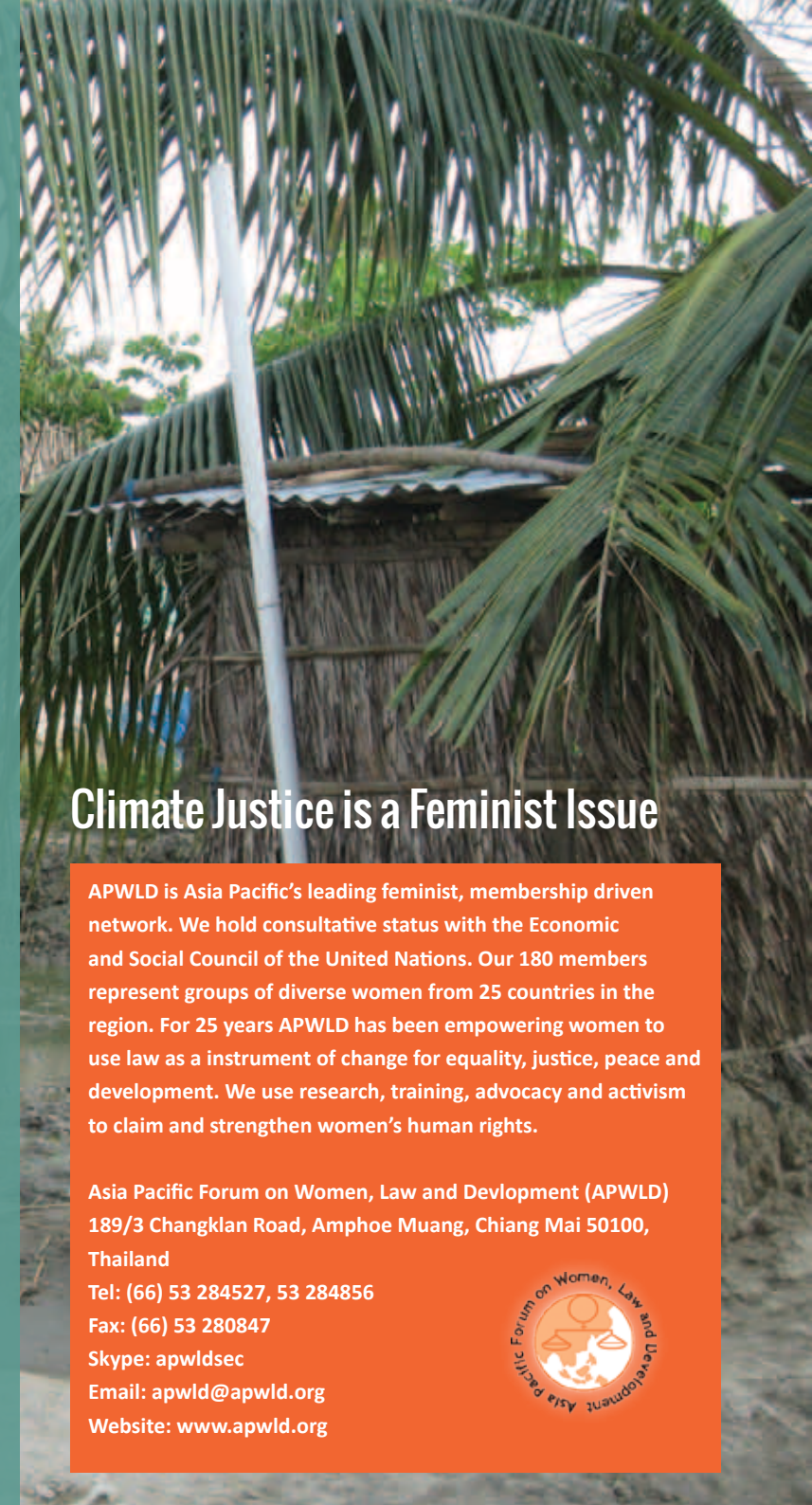
**Cost of Climate Change:** Bangladesh currently spends USD 1 billion- about 7% of its budget- a year on climate change adaptation.

## Community Info

- Mundas are an ethnic community living in the coastal district of the Sundarban mangrove ecological zone of southwest Bangladesh.
- Population: Roughly 900 Mundas people live in 8 villages in the Satkhira district, an estimated 525 males and 375 females.
- Mundas women have a literacy rate of 3% .
- Highly impoverished community reliant on small-scale agriculture and aquaculture.

## Organization Info

**Initiative for Right View (IRV)** is leading research on the effects of climate change on traditional domestic roles and lifestyles of the Munda indigenous women in Southern Bangladesh. IRV aims to enhance the women's capacities for response and understanding of climate change through education and adaptive measures.



## Climate Justice is a Feminist Issue

APWLD is Asia Pacific's leading feminist, membership driven network. We hold consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. Our 180 members represent groups of diverse women from 25 countries in the region. For 25 years APWLD has been empowering women to use law as a instrument of change for equality, justice, peace and development. We use research, training, advocacy and activism to claim and strengthen women's human rights.

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