



Reshaping India–EU Collaboration for Climate Resilience and Women’s Leadership

Discussion Paper

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RESHAPING INDIA–EU COLLABORATION FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP

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Background

In the evolving landscape of global partnerships, the strategic collaboration between India and the European Union (EU) offers a timely opportunity to advance women-led development. Both regions are committed to gender equality, sustainable development, and inclusive growth. As India champions *Women-Led Development* through G20 initiatives and national policies, and the EU strengthens its *Gender Action Plan III*, this paper aims to explore how joint efforts can empower women for achieving resilience to tackle the climate crisis and cope with associated risks and shocks.

Objectives

- To examine the scope of India-EU collaboration in achieving gender justice and climate resilience
- To identify actionable strategies for strengthening women's climate leadership
- To foster cross-sector partnerships that enhances women's ability to address climate change issues in both regions
- To contribute towards the achievement of SDGs 5 (Gender Equality) and 13 (Climate Action)

1. Climate Change and Non-Traditional Security

As the biggest threat to the survival of humanity, climate change has transformed the realm of security and shifted the global attention towards non-military, non-traditional security threats which have serious implications for the survival of the people and sustainability of the planet. As per one estimate, the world suffered at least 24.39 million in loss and damage from climate change between 2000 and 2019.¹

A long-term, strategic roadmap is required to address non-traditional security threats, as their impacts are often quite deep, long-lasting, and sometimes irreversible. Given its catastrophic nature, climate change is being approached as a non-traditional security threat, which may change the planet beyond recovery if remains under addressed. However, it affects people differently, depending on the capability, resilience and adaptation level.

As one of the most affected countries in the Global South, India faces multi-front challenges from development to green transition and from wealth generation to gender justice. Promotion of gender equity in climate governance helps in the achievement of gender justice, allows the acknowledgment of differentiated impacts, and creates scope for transformative solutions that enhance climate resilience and decision-making.

Further, globally including India and Europe, there exists a structural disconnect in the gendered analysis of climate policies which limits long-term effectiveness by excluding marginalised women from access to infrastructure, finance, and governance mechanisms. The effects of climate change are profoundly gendered,

¹ <https://www.unep.org/topics/climate-action/loss-and-damage/about-loss-and-damage>

posing greater risks for women due to entrenched socio-economic inequalities, systemic exclusion from decision-making spaces, limited access to finance, and barriers to technological participation. Women in general, are vulnerable to environmental disasters and climate-induced displacement because of restricted mobility, lack of access to early warning systems, and inadequate emergency resources. The climate-induced extreme weather events disrupt essential services, including reproductive and maternal healthcare, further disadvantaging women.

2. Climate Resilience and Gender Justice

Climate resilience refers to the capacity of communities to anticipate, prepare for and adapt to climate impacts such that they can continue to maintain essential services and recover quickly from disruptions. Ensuring climate resilience means making climate action inclusive through gender mainstreaming² and gender justice—which emphasises the importance of women and men, especially those from marginalised groups, having equal rights, access, opportunities to shape and benefit from climate actions.

As women often hold key societal roles in resource management, agriculture, water security, energy security, and community health, their leadership remains critical for climate resilience. As per the estimate of International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), the share of women employees has reached 32% in all the renewable energy sectors and 40% in the solar PV industry.³ This shows women are entering in various energy management sectors as part of climate leadership paving path towards gender justice and equity. Commenting on the IERNA report “Solar PV: A Gender Perspective”, Francesco La Camera, Director-General of IRENA says, “The findings of our new report are promising and confirm renewable energy’s great potential as an equal employer, but they also signal the need to step up our efforts to pave the way for more women to lead the energy transition and shape our shared future.”⁴

Long-term effectiveness of climate policies can be enhanced through women’s representation in climate governance through different perspectives. The differences aren’t biological or automatic. They come from social roles, lived experiences, and structural realities. Women’s representation in climate governance strengthens long-term climate policy effectiveness in several interconnected ways. Women prioritize community well-being and sustainability, they are primary managers of natural resources in many regions, higher women’s political representation correlates with stronger climate laws, women foster inclusive decision-making, women’s leadership

² Gender Mainstreaming: The 1997 agreed conclusions of ECOSOC defined gender mainstreaming as: “The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.”, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/how-we-work/un-system-coordination/gender-mainstreaming>:

³ <https://www.irena.org/News/pressreleases/2022/Sep/Solar-PV-Employs-More-Women-Than-Any-Renewables>

⁴ <https://www.irena.org/News/pressreleases/2022/Sep/Solar-PV-Employs-More-Women-Than-Any-Renewables>

strengthens climate finance accountability and women demonstrate Intergenerational and preventative thinking. The effect is not just symbolic; it shows up in measurable outcomes such as stronger environmental laws, better resource management, and more resilient community adaptation systems. The G20 presidency of India in 2023 gave a new momentum to the idea of women-led development, which changed the gender discourse not only in India, but also had ripple effects beyond its boundary. The idea was to do away with the traditional understanding of development where women are passive receivers of the development outcomes. And it was to ensure that women not only receive the benefits of the development but they actively shape them as well. Development of the women, by women, for the women!

This emphasis is going to have a far-reaching impact, especially in climate action. Because of their position in the society, women can uniquely drive the localisation process and create resilience with maximum adaptation with minimum resources.

3. Women in Climate Leadership

Women, as such, remain highly vulnerable to the vagaries of climate change given their proximity to and reliance on natural resources for livelihood and survival. On the one hand, it shows vulnerability. On the other, women by the very virtues of their lived experience and stewardship can provide unmatched leadership to fast-track and deepen the localisation of climate policies. Be it agriculture, water resources or green transition⁵, women are the major stakeholders in all of them and should be actively involved in the policymaking pertaining to climate action. European Investment Bank Group leaders in a conversation on ‘Why is women’s leadership important for climate action?’ reemphasized that women can add additional and holistic perspectives into the discussion on climate change.⁶

For leadership to grow, a set of right policies and institutional support is a must. This can be achieved through repurposing the existing ones and creating new ones if required. India’s strong pitch for women-led development has created a positive discourse in that direction. Recently, Prime Minister Modi termed women-led development as cornerstone of India’s progress.⁷ Let us look at the situation of India and Europe when it comes to providing institutional and policy support for the women’s leadership to grow, especially for enhanced climate action.

o India: Situation analysis

- National Commission for Women (NCW), a statutory body established in 1992 under the Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD), addresses and advises the government on key gender justice issues. Though the Commission is mandated to “participate and advice on the planning process

⁵ Examples of Women as stakeholders in Green Transition are: SEWA’s Women Solar Entrepreneurs with EU & ILO Support; Barefoot College & European Donors: Women “Solar Mamas”, EU-India Clean Energy and Climate Partnership (CECP): Women in Policy Dialogues; European Investment Bank (EIB) Gender-Lens Green Financing in India; Women Leaders in Climate Research & Diplomacy.

⁶ <https://www.eib.org/en/videos/co-chairs-of-the-women-climate-leaders-network>

⁷ <https://www.newsonair.gov.in/pm-modi-highlights-women-led-development-as-key-pillar-of-ndas-11-year-journey/>

of socio-economic development of women”⁸, it lacks legislative authority to meet the emerging challenges of climate-induced gender vulnerabilities. It can expand its role through the promotion of gender-disaggregated climate data, resilient livelihood policies and women's representation in local environmental governance.⁹

- The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) launched the Indian Women Network (IWN) in 2013 to address professional barriers and promote gender diversity. It offers leadership workshops, mentorship, and startup support to the women in urban areas. But the platform needs to integrate a climate lens and focus on green entrepreneurship, clean energy ventures and circular economy initiatives. IWN could expand its impact by partnering with EU climate-tech incubators, offering green skills training, and funding women-led innovations for climate resilience.
- Climate policies in India, especially the State Action Plans on Climate Change (SAPCCs) have started recognising gendered dimensions of climate vulnerability. While these policies frameworks incorporate gender concerns, they lack targeted, actionable gender-responsive approaches, failing to translate normative goals into measurable targets, resource allocations and inclusive planning processes. The National Adaptation Fund for Climate Change (NAFCC), launched in 2015, supports community-based adaptation and enhances women's involvement in climate resilience efforts. However, it faces limitations due to the absence of gender budgeting, clear performance indicators, and meaningful involvement of women's organisations in planning and execution.
- India has been trying to mainstream women-led development and gender concerns on multilateral fora through its foreign policies. India's G20 Presidency is an example of Indian diplomacy in action for promoting women's leadership. A Working Group on the Empowerment of Women was unanimously endorsed under the New Delhi Leaders' Declaration in September 2023. It marked a collaborative effort among G20 nations to tackle gender inequalities in economic, political and environmental domains on a global scale. Institutional and normative changes can be observed in the recent trends of Indian Foreign Service achieving near gender parity. This trend marks a cultural shift in diplomatic hiring and has led to stronger female representation within the Indian diplomatic corps.
- Green Diplomacy: Climate action inherently involves foreign policy, diplomatic negotiation and intersection with multilateral climate arrangement. While India has advanced Women-Led Development (WLD) domestically, it has yet to systematically embed this vision into foreign policy, diplomacy, and climate action. Patriarchal norms within diplomatic and climate institutions continue to

⁸ <https://www.ncw.gov.in/about-us/about-the-commission/mandate/>

⁹ In India, approximately 270–300 million rural women are estimated to be directly affected by climate change through their dependence on agriculture, forestry, and water systems (UN Women, 2022; FAO, 2021; NITI Aayog, 2023). These include smallholder farmers, forest gatherers, and women-headed households, who face growing risks from droughts, crop loss, and resource depletion. Yet, they also represent a potential force for transformation. Studies by UNDP India (2022) and Chaudhuri et al. (2022) show that women-led self-help groups have successfully implemented localized climate solutions, enhancing adaptive capacity and livelihood resilience. Targeted support to enable even 10–20% of this population to act as climate change-makers could significantly accelerate India's women-led development and resilience goals.

limit gender inclusion, particularly in security, trade, and climate diplomacy. A lack of gender-climate literacy among diplomats and foreign policy professionals hampers their ability to assess how international agreements disproportionately affect women and marginalised groups. Sometimes this situation reinforces existing inequalities in renewable energy, climate finance, and related sectors. Civil society organisations working at the gender-climate intersection are underfunded and structurally disconnected from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)¹⁰. Weak data systems hinder the generation of actionable evidence to inform gender-climate diplomacy.

- **Europe: Situation analysis**

Women's Climate Leadership in Europe

Across Europe, women are emerging as powerful leaders in the fight against climate change – shaping policy, leading innovation, and driving grassroots action. Their leadership is increasingly recognized as a key factor in achieving equitable, inclusive, and effective climate action. Women bring unique perspectives rooted in community engagement, social equity, and sustainability – ensuring that climate policies and practices address both environmental and human dimensions. As Europe advances toward its ambitious Green Deal and climate neutrality by 2050, women's climate leadership has become central to this transformation.

A. Policy Landscape Supporting Women's Climate Leadership

The EU has long acknowledged the gender – climate nexus through frameworks like the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020 – 2025, European Green Deal, renamed as “European Green Deal Industrial Plan” in 2023 by the European Commission and EU Climate Law. These policies emphasize gender-responsive approaches to climate action, ensuring that women participate equally in decision-making, innovation, and implementation.

Key initiatives include:

- Gender mainstreaming in climate finance through EU programs like Horizon Europe, LIFE, and NextGenerationEU.
- The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) provides research and recommendations for integrating gender equality into environmental policy.

¹⁰ India's climate finance landscape reflects a significant gender gap. While total climate finance flows are estimated at USD 45–50 billion annually, largely directed toward mitigation and adaptation initiatives, only a small fraction—about 2–3% (USD 1–1.5 billion)—is gender-responsive. Most funding comes from public sources, with limited private participation and weak gender integration across schemes. Although India's gender budget exceeds USD 40 billion, only a minor portion links directly to climate action. Reports by UN Women (2023) and IIED (2023) indicate that fewer than 10% of adaptation funds explicitly target women or gender outcomes, and only 7–8% of Green Climate Fund projects in India have gender equality as a principal goal. This imbalance underscores the need to mainstream gender considerations in climate budgeting, strengthen women-led climate entrepreneurship, and ensure equitable access to finance for rural and vulnerable women.

- The European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM) advocates for women's participation in green sectors, leadership roles, and STEM education.

At the national level, countries such as Sweden, Finland, France, and Germany have embedded gender equality within their national climate strategies. For instance, Sweden's Climate Policy Council and France's High Council on Gender Equality ensure that climate policies reflect gendered perspectives.

B. Women Leaders Driving Policy and Innovation

Europe has seen a surge of women leaders in climate governance and science:

- Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, is spearheading the European Green Deal, integrating sustainability and equity at the heart of EU policy.
- Frans Timmermans' succeeded by Teresa Ribera, who serves as the Executive vice President for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition (2024-2029) Green Deal team includes numerous female policymakers who have designed frameworks for Just Transition, renewable energy expansion, and carbon neutrality.
- Ségolène Royal, former French Minister for Ecology, spearheaded France's Energy Transition Law, emphasizing citizen participation and gender equity.

In academia and research, women like Sandrine Dixon-Declève (Club of Rome), and Laurence Tubiana (Paris Agreement architect) have influenced global climate governance, emphasizing just transitions and gender-responsive strategies.

C. Grassroots Movements and Civil Society Leadership

Women-led grassroots and civil society movements across Europe are building community-driven climate action:

- Women Engage for a Common Future (WECF) operates in over 40 European countries, promoting women's participation in climate and energy policy, sustainable agriculture, and circular economies.
- Local women's cooperatives in Scandinavia and Central Europe are leading renewable energy cooperatives, waste reduction initiatives, and environmental policies.

These movements demonstrate how women are transforming community resilience through local leadership, inclusive planning, and intersectional climate action.

D. Women in Green Innovation and Entrepreneurship

The transition to a green economy offers vast opportunities for women entrepreneurs. In Europe, women-led start-ups and enterprises are leading innovation in:

- Clean energy (e.g., female founders of solar cooperatives in Germany and Austria),
- Circular economy models (e.g., sustainable fashion ventures in Italy and the UK),
- Climate-smart agriculture (e.g., agroecology networks in France and Spain).

EU-backed initiatives like Women in Green Economy (WGE) and EIT Climate-KIC support capacity building, mentorship, and financing for women innovators in the climate-tech sector.

Despite progress, barriers such as gender gaps in financing, representation, and STEM participation persist. The EU's Women Tech EU initiative seeks to close these gaps, promoting equitable access to innovation ecosystems.

E. Challenges to Women's Climate Leadership

While progress is notable, several challenges remain:

- Gender bias in policy design and funding allocation limits women's participation in decision-making.
- Underrepresentation in STEM, research, and green jobs hinders leadership pipelines.
- Socio-economic barriers – including wage gaps and caregiving responsibilities – affect women's access to leadership opportunities.
- Limited integration of gender-disaggregated data in climate monitoring frameworks constrains policy responsiveness.

Recognizing these challenges, European institutions emphasize capacity building, gender-responsive budgeting, and inclusive governance mechanisms.

F. Case Studies of Transformative Leadership

Case Study 1: France – Women in Renewable Energy

France's ADEME program supports women entrepreneurs in renewable energy, with women-led cooperatives implementing solar and wind projects in rural areas, enhancing energy access and local employment.

Case Study 2: Central and Eastern Europe – WECF Networks

Through training, advocacy, and microfinance, WECF supports rural women to adopt sustainable agriculture, waste management, and energy efficiency practices—bridging local livelihoods and environmental protection.

G. Future Directions: Strengthening Women's Leadership

To accelerate women's climate leadership in Europe, the following strategies are critical:

1. **Gender-Responsive Climate Governance:** Institutionalize gender equality in climate planning, budgeting, and monitoring frameworks at EU and national levels.
2. **Capacity Building and Education:** Expand access to climate education, STEM training, and leadership programs for women and girls.
3. **Financial Inclusion:** Promote targeted financing mechanisms, venture capital, and grants for women-led green enterprises.
4. **Representation in Decision-Making:** Ensure parity in climate negotiation teams, advisory boards, and public-private partnerships.
5. **Intersectional Approaches:** Address vulnerabilities across gender, race, migration, and socio-economic status for holistic climate justice.

Conclusion

Gender justice strengthens climate resilience by ensuring climate actions reflect diverse needs and knowledge. When women have equal voice in decision-making and access to land, finance, and education, adaptation strategies become more accurate, trusted, and widely adopted. Europe's path to climate neutrality similarly depends on inclusive leadership. Women's participation shapes climate solutions that are equitable, sustainable, and community-centered. Promoting gender-responsive policies, entrepreneurship, and shared governance reduces vulnerability, diversifies livelihoods, and protects social stability during climate shocks. Women's climate leadership is therefore not only a matter of fairness but a foundation for building resilient, green, and just futures.

4. EU Support for Women's Climate Leadership in India

India cooperation with EU countries is flourishing like never before. Notable among them is India-Germany relations. Both the countries have strong strategic partnership not only in defence sector but also for environmental protection and green transition. The Indo-German Green and Sustainable Development Partnership 2022 is a case in point. It is a comprehensive framework, aimed at addressing most pressing non-traditional security challenges from circular economy, green mobility to climate change and SDGs localisation. Through such partnerships, effort is on to make these sectors gender-responsive. For example, Indo-German Green Urban Mobility Partnership, launched in 2019, aims at "to enable equal participation by women...in economic and social life...to deal as effectively as possible with the impacts of climate change."¹¹ It assists Indian states and cities "in developing energy-efficient, low-emissions, sustainable mobility concepts that take account of the needs of women and girls..."¹²

¹¹ <https://www.bmz.de/en/countries/india/core-area-sustainable-urban-development-49174>

¹² <https://www.bmz.de/en/countries/india/core-area-sustainable-urban-development-49174>

Through its different measures, EU supports women's climate leadership in India. The EU-India strategic partnership goes back to 2004. Since then, it never looked back. In 2018, the European Commission adopted the Joint Communication 'Elements for an EU strategy on India' which proposed to build on common values that promote gender equality and women's empowerment.¹³ Trade bears immense potentials for shaping a sustainable and gender-just future. As per WTO, "Trade and climate change policies can contribute towards climate action while at the same time ensuring opportunities for economic growth and diversification".¹⁴ "Although trade policies are not *de jure* discriminatory, they impact women and men differently due to dissimilar initial conditions.", assesses the OECD.¹⁵ Amid the talks of EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA), concerns of women have resurfaced. European Parliament has been very particular about gender mainstreaming in EU trade agreements and called for "gender issues to be taken into account throughout the texts and during negotiations".¹⁶ Such parliamentary oversights would help ensure that the EU-India FTA is gender responsive and promote gender equality, for sustainability and women's empowerment and climate leadership.¹⁷

5. Key Takeaways

- Women's leadership can bring additional and holistic perspective into the discourse on climate change particularly in the areas of climate resilience and non-traditional security.
- There exists huge scope for gender mainstreaming in the EU-India partnerships and ongoing trade negotiations.
- The existing policies, frameworks and strategies between EU and India do not adequately address the gender concerns.
- A comprehensive assessment of the EU-India partnership instruments needs to be done from gender lens to address the gender gap and gender inequality in the realm of climate action.

6. Way forward

- There should be a dedicated EU-India Committee at European Institute of Gender Equality to regularly conduct gender audit of the EU-India relations.
- EU-India FTA should address the gender and climate concerns before it gets finalised for a just and fair green transition.
- The upcoming EU-India Summit should lead a discussion on gender mainstreaming and build on the women-led development momentum created under India's G20 Presidency in 2023 for sustainability and enhanced climate action.

¹³ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-europe-as-a-stronger-global-actor/file-new-eu-strategy-on-india>

¹⁴ https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/envir_e/climate_intro_e.htm

¹⁵ https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/trade-and-gender_6db59d80-en.html

¹⁶ [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/760388/EPRS_BRI\(2024\)760388_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2024/760388/EPRS_BRI(2024)760388_EN.pdf)

¹⁷ The current draft India–EU FTA risks reinforcing gender inequalities if gender considerations remain non-binding or absent. Without a dedicated gender chapter, enforceable labor safeguards, or gender-responsive monitoring, the agreement could deepen existing disparities in sectors where women are concentrated, such as textiles, agriculture, and informal work. Stronger intellectual property rules may raise medicine costs, disproportionately affecting women as primary caregivers. Sustainability and green transition provisions could also exclude women if training, finance, and market access are not designed with gender inclusion in mind. Limited gender-disaggregated data further makes it difficult to track who benefits from trade gains and who is left behind.

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Centre for Social Research (CSR), established in 1983 in New Delhi, is a non-profit organization committed to promoting a gender-equal and violence-free society. For over three decades, CSR has served as a respected research institution and a key advocate, advisor, and lobbyist for government bodies. The organization works at local, national, and regional levels to uphold the rights of women and girls, using a gender perspective to deepen the understanding of social issues. Through research, capacity building, and advocacy, CSR aims to strengthen individuals, communities, and institutions to create a more inclusive, equitable, and gender-just society.

The Hanns Seidel Foundation (HSF), founded in 1967, is a German political foundation working in the service of "Democracy, Peace and Development" as well as international cooperation. At present, the foundation is engaged in the implementation of over 80 projects across 50 countries worldwide. In India, the foundation works in collaboration with local partners, providing support for capacity-building measures and national and international policy dialogues with the aim of effectively localising and achieving sustainable development goals. HSF India's partnerships and projects are primarily focused on youth engagement, good governance, climate action, and security, including women-led development.