



Intersection 2025

SOCIAL NORMS • GENDER EQUITY • CLIMATE ACTION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary	... 2
Social norms, gender equity and climate action	... 3
Intersection and Intersectionality	... 5
Gender equality and climate action	... 7
Knowledge Products	... 9
Session I	... 10
Session II	... 11
Session III	... 12
Session IV	... 13
Key recommendations and Conclusion	... 14

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Intersection 2025: Social Norms, Gender Equity, and Climate Action

Intersection 2025 was a conference centered on gender equity, social norms, and climate action, hosted by PCI India under its flagship knowledge platform—the Social Norms and Agency Learning Collaborative. This second edition of Intersection built upon the success of the inaugural conference in December 2023, continuing its mission to drive discourse on the critical role of social norms in achieving gender equality and equity. Since its establishment in January 2021, the Learning Collaborative has been at the forefront of advancing research, dialogue, and action on social norms in South Asia.

The conference highlighted how climate change and gender inequality are deeply intertwined, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities, especially women. While India leads the G20 in emissions reductions and renewable energy expansion, women remain largely excluded from climate decision-making, financial access, and leadership roles. Existing social norms often reinforce these exclusions, making climate adaptation and mitigation efforts incomplete without a gender-inclusive lens.

Key Findings

- Women face disproportionate climate risks due to restricted access to land, finance, and climate-resilient resources.
- Climate-induced migration, extreme weather, and resource scarcity contribute to food insecurity, unpaid labor burdens, and higher risks of gender-based violence.
- Current climate policies fail to fully integrate gender, largely restricting it to "social" sectors while excluding it from infrastructure, technology, and economic strategies.
- Women-led enterprises in climate resilience sectors receive minimal financial support, with only 11% representation in India's renewable energy sector.

Call to Action

To build a sustainable and equitable future, climate adaptation and mitigation efforts must:

- Adopt a "Lives and Livelihoods" Approach – Center climate action around marginalized communities' realities, particularly women's economic and social needs.
- Strengthen Gender-Responsive Climate Policies – Incorporate gender-disaggregated data, climate-gender markers, and participatory knowledge systems into national and state climate strategies.
- Invest in Women's Climate Leadership – Expand financing for women-led climate initiatives, clean energy entrepreneurship, and skills training.
- Integrate Climate and Health Responses – Address sexual and reproductive health (SRHR), mental health, and gender-based violence risks in climate adaptation planning.
- Scale Clean Energy for Gender Equality – Leverage solar home systems, microfinance, and community-led renewable energy projects to reduce unpaid labor and expand economic opportunities for women.

SOCIAL NORMS, GENDER EQUITY & CLIMATE ACTION

The evolution of life on Earth, including humans, has been significantly influenced by climate changes over millions of years. Climate change is a natural process driven by complex events occurring over billions of years. However, over the last 250 years, human activities have introduced alarming trends. Anthropogenic changes have led to the unprecedented warming of the planet, resulting in the climate change impacts we now face. Over the past 70 years, we have studied these changes deeply, and today, we find ourselves at a critical crossroads. As we look at new ways of living, we must focus on saving our planet and the life we know. While measures are being explored to mitigate and assist us in adapting to a changing world, complex challenges must be addressed to restore balance and ensure the sustainable progress of societies.

India has adopted robust strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change and has made significant progress in its overall response. Among the G20 economies, India is most likely to achieve its targets for reducing emissions and contributing to slowing the 2-degree Celsius temperature rise. The UN Emissions Gap Report 2024 highlights India's potential to meet its three crucial climate pledges. India is racing ahead and is on track to reach over 50% green power capacity, having successfully sequestered 7 billion tons of carbon through major carbon sinks in the last 10 years.

However, despite ongoing mitigation efforts, challenges remain, such as the disruption of carbon sink capacity due to rising temperatures. The 2070 target may not be sufficient to slow the 2-degree Celsius temperature change. This creates opportunities to engage vulnerable communities who are bearing the brunt of climate change, experiencing extreme weather events that threaten their livelihoods.

Focus on Women: Addressing the Gendered Impact of Climate Change

The impacts of climate change, coupled with structural inequalities between men and women - related to access to information, resources, education, and mobility - poses threats to women's livelihoods, health and safety. In India, women, especially those in poor and vulnerable communities, are mostly dependent on climate-sensitive work such as agriculture and manual labor to make their living and when disaster happens, they bear the greatest burden of climate change impacts. They manage households, secure energy for cooking, fight floods, care for the sick, and secure household finances. They are also more likely to face distress from extreme weather events and emerging health challenges in a hotter world. Despite this, existing social norms hold women accountable in many areas yet exclude them from leadership roles and limit their ability to allocate resources for climate solutions.

While government schemes and market efforts are expanding choices for women and promoting inclusion, many initiatives fail to centre the climate agenda, limiting women's ability to understand, participate in, and seek solutions to climate challenges. It remains to be seen whether enough space has been created to allow women in vulnerable communities to understand, access, and afford the solutions available to them.

The Role of Policy, Investment, and Partnerships

The Government of India has recognized the need for inclusion and reducing the gender divide. Several core sectors now have strong policies, schemes, and missions designed to place women at the center of development, particularly in financial inclusion, livelihoods, and access to clean energy. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), in pursuit of Environment, Social, and Governance (ESG) goals, invests in projects that focus on women's empowerment. The private sector is driving solutions for cleaner technologies and facilitating easier access to green technologies, services, and products. Women from middle-income to poor communities represent a large market for solutions.

However, there is a pressing need for affordable solutions such as heat-resilient housing materials for poor households or access to green energy-efficient machines to support women nano and micro-entrepreneurs in rural or urban settings.

How deep are current engagements with women, including investments in studies to understand the solutions they seek or investments in mechanisms to support women-led platforms? How accessible are women-led enterprises (WLEs) to technology through easy funding or credit solutions?

PCI India's Commitment to Addressing Climate Change and Vulnerable Communities

PCI India has been addressing complex social challenges related to poverty, livelihood, health, nutrition, gender equality, and more over the past few decades. Working across diverse geographies and with various communities, it has observed that climate change, particularly extreme weather events, is severely affecting the poor and vulnerable in both rural and urban settings. As mitigation efforts aim to slow climate impacts, there is an urgent need to accelerate adaptation, particularly for the most vulnerable communities.

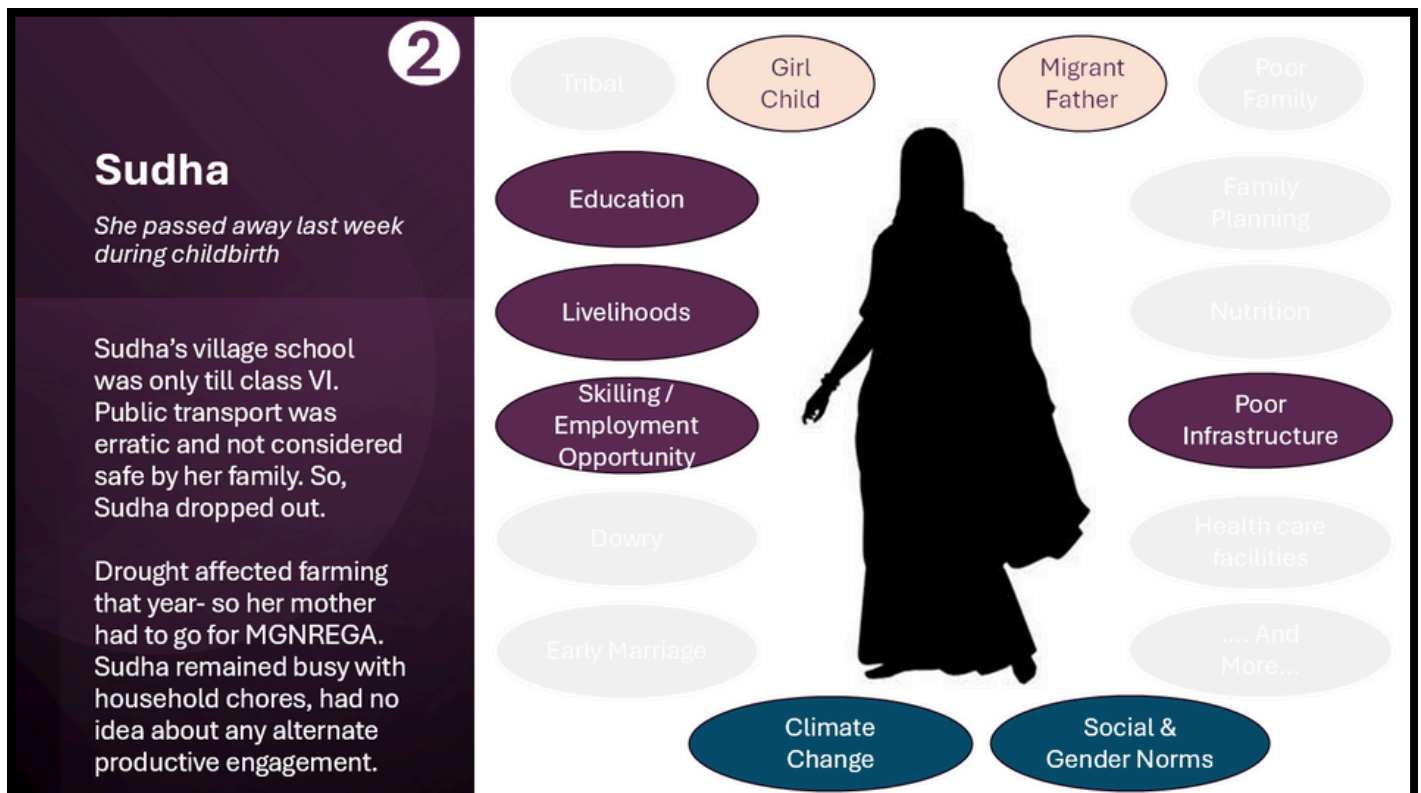
Opportunities to address climate change impacts exist in every geography and community setting, such as coastal regions facing rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion in agricultural lands, unpredictable heatwaves and rainfall leading to crop losses, and rising temperatures making street vending or factory work unbearable, resulting in productivity and wage losses. The urgency of these issues calls for collective action to develop solutions that foster resilient communities, ensuring secure livelihoods, habitats, health, finances, and well-being.

INTERSECTION AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Keynote address: Indrajit Chaudhuri, CEO & Country Director, PCI India



An individual's sex, gender identity, socioeconomic status, educational background, their family, social norms play a crucial role in shaping their physical and psychosocial wellbeing, as well as the opportunities and resources they can access. It also affects how one experiences and adapts to climate change. The intersection of these factors can mean the difference between why a woman dies of post-partum haemorrhage and why another might survive because she receives proper and timely care and treatment.



Intersectionality needs to be integrated as a design principle into development of programs and policies, one that is reflected through the integrated 'lives and livelihoods' approach.

On the funding side, this would translate into holistic funding for health, productivity, infrastructure, and transformation of social norms. For research and academia, it could mean improved interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary investigation, potentially bridging the artificial divide between “natural” and “social” sciences. It would mean convergence of departments in the government as well as non-governmental organizations. Predominantly, it means bursting the silos all of us operate in.

By virtue of the scale of impact, gender and climate are two variables that need immediate and sustained attention in South Asia, impacting a wide variety of areas including but not restricted to access to social security, health and livelihoods.

Climate policies must therefore be designed with an understanding of how multiple disadvantages accumulate over time, reinforcing each other.



INTERSECTION 2025

As we explore the intersectionality of climate change and resilience, several questions remain central to shaping the future of climate action. The conference provided an opportunity to address these questions and find solutions.

Some areas of intersectionality explored include:

- How can climate adaptation strategies be gender responsive, inclusive and promote normative shifts, with particular emphasis to social security, safety, and entitlements?
- How can health initiatives intersect with climate adaptation solutions to prevent disproportionate impact of climate change (on women's health)?
- What priority areas within women's economic empowerment should be integrated into climate action agendas to build resilient rural and urban communities?
- How can the clean energy initiatives be leveraged to address the gender equitable needs?

GENDER EQUALITY AND CLIMATE ACTION

Keynote address: Amita Sharma, IAS Retd.

While there is growing recognition that intersectionality extends beyond gender, shaping identities through multiple influences across public and personal spheres. Patriarchal norms are systemic and women may also play a role in perpetuating them. Addressing these complexities requires policies that acknowledge differences rather than imposing homogenized solutions. While solutions may be challenging, ignoring these nuances only reinforces systemic inequities. A truly inclusive approach demands recognizing layered identities and ensuring that all voices shape decision-making processes.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Women face disproportionate climate risks due to structural inequalities in land ownership, access to finance, and decision-making power.
- Climate-induced migration, extreme weather, and resource depletion increase vulnerabilities, leading to higher rates of early marriage, food insecurity, and unpaid labor burdens for women.
- Current climate vulnerability assessments (CVA) and adaptation policies fail to fully integrate gender, largely confining it to the "social" category, excluding it from infrastructure, technology, and economic strategies.

Taking steps in the direction of inclusive representation in problem framing and solving begets an understanding of intersectionality from questions of how the self is actually constructed by multiple influences in public and private spheres. It does not entail unquestioning fulfillment of demands. It means reaching the decision of *what's best* - collaboratively. The resources and power available to an individual, their agency, are shaped greatly by aspects of the self. Human psychology and society are at the center of it all.

How we develop and implement policies will therefore greatly impact their effectiveness regardless of their substance.

Despite a growing recognition of these nuances, climate policies and assessments often fail to integrate gender as a structural consideration. Tools used to evaluate climate vulnerability frequently rely on broad, undifferentiated indicators. While some include women's literacy rates or workforce participation, they rarely account for the deeper, structural constraints that define gendered experiences—such as land ownership, mobility restrictions, or unpaid labor burdens. The existing frameworks for assessing risk and adaptation, including India's climate vulnerability assessments, often do not disaggregate data by gender and other intersecting identities, leading to policies that overlook the most affected populations.

Efforts to integrate gender into climate policy necessitate a shift in how adaptation and mitigation are framed—not as gender-neutral technical challenges but as issues embedded within existing social and economic inequalities. Without a deliberate effort to center gender and intersectionality in climate action, policies will continue to reinforce, rather than dismantle, the disparities that leave so many on the frontlines of climate change with the least power to respond.

“If you actually deconstruct that (climate initiatives) and look at who's benefitting and who's not; and who's deciding and who's not. a lot of fault lines appear.”

- Women's economic roles in climate resilience (e.g., sustainable agriculture, renewable energy) receive little direct financial support. Participation in renewable energy and climate entrepreneurship is underdeveloped, with only 11% representation in India's renewable energy sector.
- Climate vulnerability rankings and gender inequality rankings often do not correlate, suggesting the need for better-integrated gender-climate assessments.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS

Gender-responsive Climate Change Policies related to Agriculture: Opportunities and Challenges

Author: Amita Sharma

Introduction

India's rural economy is heavily dependent on agriculture, where women play a crucial role. They make up a significant portion of the rural labor force, yet face challenges that make them more vulnerable to climate change. Climate-related impacts—such as droughts and floods—are worsening conditions for rural communities, that are affecting livelihoods and food security. For women, these challenges are magnified due to gender-based barriers, thus reducing their opportunities for economic resilience (Sorenson et al., 2018). Addressing the issue requires a gender-responsive approach to both rural development and climate adaptation. National programs targeting rural livelihoods (such as National Rural Livelihoods Mission, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act etc.) must integrate gender considerations to empower women as agents of climate resilience while promoting sustainable economic growth.

Key Facts

- Women in Agriculture:** In India, Agriculture employs about 80% of rural women (NITI Aayog, 2022). According to the Agriculture Census (2015-16), 13.9% of agricultural land holders in India were women. However, only 12% of the total operational land holdings were owned by women, leaving them vulnerable to poverty and food insecurity. Despite their major contributions, women's access to land and agricultural resources remains significantly restricted due to socio-cultural norms that favor male ownership. This limits their ability to access credit, inputs, and extension services crucial for climate-resilient agriculture (Jiggins et al., n.d.).
- Climate Change Effects:** Increasing weather variability, crop failures, and resource depletion place additional burden on women, who are often responsible for household food security (Magwewe et al., 2024).
- Impact of Climate Change on Rural Women:** Women bear the brunt of climate change impacts, as they face increased workloads, reduced agricultural yields, and greater vulnerability to food and water insecurity (ibid).

Methodology

This review employed a systematic approach to examine the intersection of gender-responsive climate change policies and rural livelihoods in India. A thorough literature search was performed across academic databases (e.g., Google Scholar, JSTOR) and key reports from government ministries and international organizations, such as FAO, IPCC, and NITI Aayog. Sources were selected primarily from the past decade (2010 to 2023), emphasizing India-specific challenges and strategies that enhance rural women's resilience to climate impacts and promote economic empowerment. Selection criteria required that sources address climate change adaptation, resilience, or sustainable rural livelihoods from a gender perspective, while exclusions applied to studies outside India, unless they offered valuable comparative insights. Data extraction focused on key national policies and programs (e.g., NRLM, MGNREGA) and gender-specific challenges and opportunities, particularly regarding rural women's access to resources, finance, and agricultural extension services.

Gender-responsive Strategies for Addressing Climate Change and Health Challenges

Authors: Dr. Amrita Misra and Dr. Chandni Tyagi

Overview

Marginalized groups, including indigenous women and gender-diverse populations, face compounded vulnerabilities due to overlapping systems of discrimination. Addressing these inequalities is critical for inclusive climate resilience (UNEP, 2023). Climate change influences health outcomes through direct and indirect pathways, such as extreme weather events, altered disease patterns, and food and water insecurity (IPCC, 2022). Gender roles and inequalities intensify these effects, as women and gender-diverse individuals often face systemic barriers to resources, healthcare, and decision-making (UN Women, 2020). Climate change acts as a threat multiplier by exacerbating existing inequalities. Women and children are 14 times more likely than men to die in a disaster (UNDP, 2020). Under a worst-case climate scenario, climate change could push up to 158.3 million more women and girls into poverty by 2050 (16 million more than the total number of men and boys) (UN Women, 2023).

Gender-Specific Health Impacts of Climate Change

Climate change is not gender-neutral; it exacerbates existing inequalities and disproportionately impacts women's health and well-being, particularly in low-income and marginalized communities. This section explores the intersection of climate change and women's health through seven critical dimensions: heat stress, vector-borne diseases, reproductive health, mental health, social norms, economic inequalities, and intersectionality. These factors highlight how structural inequalities, gender roles, and limited access to resources compound the health risks women face in a changing climate.

i. Enhanced Vulnerability of women to heat-related illnesses

Women are more at risk of heat-related mortality, as their ability to thermo-regulate is compromised. There are increasing evidences of still births among pregnant women who are exposed to heatwaves. Adverse social norms and gender discrimination further add to their problem (JPH, 2023). A study conducted by IMA (2023) in the slums and marketplaces in Delhi (India) also showed that women are extremely vulnerable to the impact of heat stress due to their socioeconomic disadvantage which acts as a driving force.

ii. Disproportionate effect on women due to climate change exacerbated vector-borne diseases

Climate change expands the geographical range of diseases like malaria and dengue fever. Gender norms often position women as primary caregivers, increasing their exposure to these diseases. Limited autonomy in accessing healthcare further amplifies the impact (UNEP, 2021; Jiang et al., 2020). Farmand et al. (2019) highlighted how climate change exacerbates the spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue. In a recent study of three districts in India, it was found that 22% or more of maternal deaths between 2004 and 2006 were attributable to malaria, making it the most common cause of maternal death during pregnancy (Kouris et al., 2014).

iii. Disrupted access to reproductive healthcare due to climate change

Changes in temperature, water scarcity, and natural disasters disrupt access to reproductive healthcare.

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GLOSSARY

Demystifying Climate Change with a Gender Lens



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CLIMATE GENDER MARKER

A Tool to Assess Climate Interventions from Gender Lens



Access here:



SESSION - I

GENDER

KEY QUESTION:

How can climate adaptation strategies be gender responsive, inclusive and promote normative shifts, with particular emphasis on social security, safety, and entitlements?

Panelists:

Mamta Borgoyary (Executive Director, SHE Changes Climate)

Jaydeep Biswas (Chief of Policy, Advocacy, and Partnerships at UNFPA India)

Nupur Tyagi (Program Manager, Sphere India)

Moderator: Sushmita Mukherjee (Director - Gender & Adolescent Girls, PCI India)



The intersection of gender, social norms, and climate action is a critical area of focus in addressing the global climate crisis. Gender norms often exacerbate the vulnerabilities faced by women and marginalized groups, limiting their access to resources, decision-making spaces, and climate-resilient livelihoods. These inequities hinder inclusive climate solutions and sustainable development.

There is a strong need for gender-balanced leadership in climate decision-making processes, and representation of diverse voices in shaping equitable climate policies. Women and children are disproportionately affected by climate-induced crises, which underscores the necessity of including them in all decision-making spaces.

Moreover, climate mitigation efforts are fragmented and lack convergence and urgency. This disjointedness significantly contributes to the absence of women in climate discourses, which is further exacerbated by a global attitude of indifference and ignorance toward the gender lens.

The panel emphasized the need for strict protocols for gender-responsive mechanisms and community-driven approaches, including mandatory gender audits and integration of gender-sensitive language into all climate initiatives. They also highlighted the collective power of women's groups, such as self-help groups (SHGs), to drive normative shifts and enhance women's participation in climate action—from awareness-raising and resilience-building to decision-making and solution design.



SESSION - II

HEALTH

KEY QUESTION:

How can health initiatives intersect with climate adaptation solutions to prevent disproportionate impact of climate change on women's health?

Panelists:

Dr Deepa Prasad (Chief - Programs & Technical Support, UNFPA India)

Dr Richa Sharma (Fellow at TERI-Earth Science and Climate Change)

Dr Raj Shankar Ghosh (Lead - Health Program, Nangia & Co LLP)

Medha Gandhi (Founder & Principal Consultant, Counterpoint Impact Advisory)

Moderator: Dr Amrita Misra (Director - Health & Nutrition, PCI India)



In the interest of effective action, it is necessary to deconstruct the health impacts of climate change, caused by both extreme events and gradual shifts. India has moved ahead with a Climate and Health Action Plan and several states have developed State Climate and Health Plans. However, evidence generation and action on the ground is still to be taken.

There is an urgent need for representative and inclusive evidence generation and streamlining to support policy making for strengthening the health system against climate change. The call to action must also extend to indirect and systemic impacts, as well as intersectional vulnerabilities.

The impact of disasters and climate change on sexual and reproductive health, especially of minoritised populations is an oft neglected issue. The risk of gender-based violence, mental health deterioration, child early and forced marriage (CEFM), menopausal symptoms, food security, inadequate nourishment, miscarriage, infertility, and disruption of health services significantly increase post disasters, and with hazardous environmental conditions. In addition to building climate resilient health infrastructure, there is a need to ensure inclusion of gender and SRHR in climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR) plans.

Moreover, climate related events that adversely affect health, causing diseases, injuries and mental trauma, such as heat, extreme weather events (floods, drought, flash floods, cyclones), infectious diseases, air pollution and food related diseases have a disproportionate effect on women, as women as usually are at the front-line as health workers and care-givers at home or in disaster settings.



SESSION - III

LIVELIHOODS

KEY QUESTION:

What priority areas within women's economic empowerment should be integrated into climate action agendas to build resilient rural and urban communities?

Panelists:

Neha Chauhan (Lead - CSR and Social Performance, Shell India)

Poulami Bhattacharya (Lead - Women Entrepreneurship Program)

D. V. Raidu (IAS Retd.)

Anjana Guha Roy Chowdhury (Assistant Director General, BCC&I)

Moderator: Shantamay Chatterjee (Director-Livelihoods, PCI India)



Climate change deepens inequalities, making it essential to integrate gender perspectives into policy and practice.

A key theme was the role of industries in embedding climate action into decision-making while ensuring women's participation. From corporate-led green skilling to grassroots sustainable agriculture, women's economic empowerment is central to climate resilience. Models like Project Sundari and Andhra Pradesh's natural farming initiative show how women-led collectives drive both sustainability and financial agency.

The discussion highlighted the need for multi-stakeholder collaborations to close gender gaps in climate sectors. Industry leaders emphasized integrating women into supply chains, leadership, and technology, while development practitioners stressed the role of community organizations in designing relevant solutions. A recurring concern was the slow pace of climate action relative to escalating crises, reinforcing the urgency for cross-sectoral interventions that include women as change agents.

Key takeaways included strengthening women's collectives, investing in gender-responsive financing, and ensuring livelihood programs leverage local knowledge and digital innovations. Sustainable climate action requires systemic shifts where businesses, policymakers, and communities embed gender at the core of resilience strategies.

Addressing these issues holistically can drive systemic change, embedding equity and resilience into employment, sustainability, and governance structures.



SESSION - IV

CLEAN ENERGY

KEY QUESTION:

How can clean energy initiatives be leveraged to address the gender equitable needs?

Panelists

Dr Manisha Mukherjee (Executive Director, Sustainability & Development Sector, Nangia Andersen LLP)

Ripu Bhanjan Singh (Senior Director, Energy, Environment & Infrastructure, SAWIE)

Satya Prakash Choubey (Director-Demand, Jobs and Livelihoods, GEAPP)

Ramanshu Ganguly (Associate Director, Shakti Foundation)

Moderator: Sruthi Niveditha Kande (Senior Program Manager, PCI India)



Clean energy initiatives can address gender inequality by providing women with increased access to electricity, which can significantly improve their quality of life by reducing time spent on household chores like collecting firewood, improving safety with better lighting, enabling participation in education and economic activities, and empowering them to take on leadership roles in the energy sector through targeted training and employment opportunities within clean energy projects.

Access to clean energy can transform gender dynamics, easing household burdens and opening doors to new opportunities. With clean cooking fuels and electricity, women spend less time on labor-intensive tasks like collecting firewood, freeing them for education, income generation, and community engagement. Improved lighting and energy access enhance safety, reducing the risks of accidents and gender-based violence at home and in public spaces.

Economic empowerment follows, as electricity enables women to run businesses—whether in food processing, tailoring, or other trades. Training programs in clean energy installation, maintenance, and sales create employment pathways and leadership roles. When women are actively involved in designing energy projects, their needs are prioritized, ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making.

Policy interventions can further this shift, with governments promoting gender equality through quotas for women in leadership and financial incentives for women-led enterprises. Clean energy isn't just about sustainability—it's about equity and empowerment.



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Concentrate efforts to center the ‘lives and livelihoods’ approach to program development and implementation for addressing complex lived realities and intertwined developmental challenges.
- Integrate gender in climate initiatives at all stages including design, implementation and evaluation through tools such as the climate-gender marker, data disaggregation and participatory knowledge construction with gender minorities.
- Generate robust evidence about the unique vulnerabilities of gender minorities and local approaches for mitigation, adaptation and resilience, and make gender responsive budgets the norm.
- Study and synthesize findings about the impact of climate change, including gradual deterioration as well as sudden disasters, on health to influence policy formulation and large scale interventions.
- Collaborate with technical agencies, financial institutions, industry, government and women-led institutional platforms to expand climate action in livelihood domain for sustainable transition and impacts.
- Leverage clean energy initiatives for gender transformation through solar home systems, community-based projects, microfinance schemes, and higher education and skill development.

CONCLUSION: THE PATH FORWARD

A just and sustainable climate future cannot be achieved without prioritizing gender equity, intersectionality, and community-driven solutions. Intersection 2025 reinforced the urgency of placing social norms at the centre of climate and gender equity discussions—a core mission of PCI’s Social Norms and Agency Learning Collaborative.

As climate challenges intensify, there is an opportunity for governments, civil society, and the private sector to collaborate on gender-inclusive climate action. By bridging the gap between climate action and gender justice, Intersection 2025 laid the foundation for transformative, intersectional change in South Asia and beyond.

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