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# WOMEN IN CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

QNDCC 2024 White Paper



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White Paper  
QNDCC  
November 17, 2024

## **WOMEN IN CLIMATE LEADERSHIP**

Prepared by Strategy Hub

### **About Earthna**

Earthna Center for a Sustainable Future (Earthna) is a non-profit policy, research, and advocacy organization, established by Qatar Foundation to promote and enable a coordinated approach to environmental, social, and economic sustainability and prosperity.

Earthna is a facilitator of sustainability efforts and action in Qatar and other hot and arid countries, focusing on sustainability frameworks, circular economies, energy transition, climate change, biodiversity and ecosystems, cities and the built environment, and education, ethics, and faith. By bringing together technical experts, academia, government and non-government organizations, businesses and civil society, Earthna fosters collaboration, innovation, and positive change.

Using their home – Education City – as a testbed, Earthna develops and trials sustainable solutions and evidence-based policies for Qatar and hot and arid regions. The organization is committed to combining modern thinking with traditional knowledge, contributing to the well-being of society by creating a legacy of sustainability within a thriving natural environment.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



As the world grapples with the escalating climate crisis, women emerge as essential drivers of climate solutions at every level—as activists, leaders, entrepreneurs, consumers, household managers, and first responders. The Qatar National Dialogue on Climate Change (QNDCC), organized by Qatar’s Ministry of Climate Change and Environment and Earthna Center for a Sustainable Future, serves as a vital national and international platform for shaping climate policies and fostering inclusive discussions on sustainability. Recognizing the importance of women’s contributions, the QNDCC 2024 featured a panel titled “Doha Climate Talk: Women’s Leadership in Climate Change,” which highlighted the unique perspectives and significant impact women bring to climate resilience and action.

This white paper draws on insights from the panel to examine women’s profound role in climate leadership, addressing both the impacts of gender inequality and the transformative potential of women-led initiatives. Findings reveal that women

are disproportionately affected by climate change due to entrenched gender disparities at the grassroots level, facing barriers like limited access to resources that hinder their full participation in climate action. Addressing these disparities is crucial to unlocking women’s potential to lead in climate resilience and to fostering inclusive, sustainable practices that benefit communities on multiple fronts.

This paper further emphasizes that when gender barriers are dismantled, women are uniquely positioned to lead initiatives that prioritize social resilience, sustainable resource management, and economic growth within their communities. Key examples of successful women-led projects underscore how women’s contributions enhance environmental outcomes. They also showcase robust social frameworks that amplify community resilience against future climate shocks. This white paper calls attention to the opportunities and the need for structural changes to support gender equality in climate governance, fostering an inclusive approach that is essential for achieving holistic, impactful climate solutions.

# SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY



The scope of this white paper encompasses an in-depth analysis of the topics discussed during the panel session “Doha Climate Talk: Women’s Leadership in Climate Change,” held on the first day of the QNDCC. The session brought together influential figures in climate policy and leadership, including Ambassador Patricia Espinosa, CEO of ESG consultancy OnePoint5 and former Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC; H.E. Dr. Hend Al-Muftah, Qatar’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations’ European Headquarters in Geneva and former member of the Qatari Shura Council; Dr. Fatima Al-Suwaidi, Group Chief Risk Officer at Qatar National Bank and President Commissioner of QNB Indonesia; and Dr. Sabrina Schulz, a climate and energy policy expert and Associate Fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations. These experts provided diverse perspectives on the barriers and opportunities for women in climate leadership. Additionally, Jennifer Morgan, the State Secretary and Special Envoy for International Climate

Action at the Federal Foreign Office in Germany, contributed a recorded video message that reinforced the importance of amplifying women’s voices in global climate efforts, further supporting the panel’s core themes.

This paper synthesizes the insights from the panel session with supplementary research to thoroughly analyze the challenges, opportunities, and actionable strategies for advancing women’s leadership in climate action. By contextualizing panel discussions with supporting data and broader research, this paper aims to deliver a coherent understanding of the pathways and policies that can empower women in climate leadership, contributing to both gender equality and enhanced climate resilience. The methodology for this white paper includes preliminary academic research, on-site session note-taking, and post-session supplementary research. These approaches enable a comprehensive analysis of both global and Qatar-specific perspectives on women’s leadership in climate action.

# THE GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Gender equality and environmental sustainability are deeply interconnected, each reinforcing and amplifying progress in the other. The United Nations' Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize this synergy, where advancing gender equity bolsters environmental resilience, and sustainable development empowers women, creating a powerful loop that benefits economies, communities, and ecosystems.

The climate crisis does not impact all people equally; women and girls are disproportionately affected, often bearing the brunt of climate change's most severe consequences.<sup>1</sup> Globally, women represent the largest population of people living in poverty, largely due to limited access to essential resources and a high dependence on natural resources for their livelihoods.<sup>2</sup> As climate change intensifies, escalating resource scarcity and extreme weather events, women's livelihoods are threatened, reinforcing pre-existing inequalities and entrenching cycles of poverty.



Pre-existing gender disparities create heightened vulnerability for women in the face of climate crises. These include, but are not limited to:



## ACCESS TO EDUCATION

With **129 million** girls still out of school globally, limited access to education undermines women's long-term economic independence and capacity to participate in climate action.<sup>3</sup>



## GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Nearly **one in three women** worldwide has experienced physical or sexual violence.<sup>4</sup>



## FOOD INSECURITY

Women are disproportionately affected by food scarcity, with **126 million** more women than men worldwide unsure of where their next meal will come from.<sup>5</sup>



## ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER

More than **one in every four women** globally—approximately **1.07 billion**—lack access to safely managed drinking water, exacerbating health risks and daily burdens.<sup>6</sup>



## ECONOMIC INEQUALITY

Women's economic independence is constrained by significant gender pay gaps, limited access to employment opportunities, and minimal property ownership. In 2019, women globally earned only 51 cents for every dollar earned by men, underscoring a persistent economic disparity that weakens women's resilience against climate impacts.<sup>7</sup>



## LAND OWNERSHIP

In 40 of the 46 countries with available data, women are significantly less likely than men to own or have secure rights over agricultural land, despite their crucial role in food production.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> United Nations. "Why Women Are Key to Climate Action." United Nations, 2022. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/women>.  
<sup>2</sup> Nelson, Favour. "Why Majority of the World's Poor People Are Women." Shecluded Blog, August 23, 2023. <https://blog.shecluded.com/why-majority-of-the-worlds-poor-people-are-women/>.  
<sup>3</sup> UN Women. Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023. UN Women, September 2023. <https://www.unwomen.org/>.  
<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> ReliefWeb. "Hunger Has a Female Face." ReliefWeb, March 8, 2024. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/hunger-has-female-face>.  
<sup>6</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>7</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Together, these deep-rooted gender inequalities intensify women’s vulnerability to climate crises, limiting their resilience and adaptation. Restricted access to education, limited land ownership despite significant agricultural labor, food insecurity, gender-based violence, and economic inequality all contribute to women’s heightened risk and exposure to climate impacts. In extreme climate events, for example, women are more likely to experience the following:

Figure 1: The Disproportionate Impact of Climate Change on Women and Girls



These disparities underscore how climate change deepens existing gender inequalities, placing disproportionate burdens on women and limiting their access to education, economic independence, and leadership roles. Ambassador Patricia Espinosa emphasized this during the Doha Climate Talk at QNDCC, noting that “the impacts of climate change have exacerbated deeply rooted inequalities that have become normalized and are often regarded as part of the natural state of affairs.”<sup>14</sup> Addressing these disproportionate impacts means tackling barriers that prevent women from accessing resources, gaining economic independence, and stepping into leadership.

It also means empowering women to take active roles in climate adaptation, resilience, and mitigation efforts. As half of the global population, women’s voices are vital in leadership and decision-making to ensure that their unique needs, priorities, and contributions shape effective climate action. As Jennifer Morgan re-emphasized at the Doha Climate Talk during QNDCC, women’s input is crucial in addressing climate change; excluding them means losing the “expertise and the capacity” to effectively address and understand the needs of half of the population.<sup>15</sup>

Gender diversity in climate leadership is more than a matter of equality; it enhances the effectiveness of climate solutions. Integrating women’s perspectives into climate policies results in more inclusive, sustainable strategies that reflect and address the needs of diverse communities. By fostering gender diversity, climate policies become more comprehensive, resilient, and reflective of the lived experiences of all populations, advancing progress for everyone.



<sup>9</sup> Leahy, Carla Pascoe. “Women Are 14 Times More Likely to Die in a Climate Disaster than Men. It’s Just One Way Climate Change Is Gendered.” The Conversation, May 30, 2024. <https://theconversation.com/>  
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>11</sup> United Nations. “Why Women Are Key to Climate Action.” United Nations, 2022. <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/women>  
<sup>12</sup> UN Women. Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in the Context of Climate Change. UN Women, 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/>

<sup>13</sup> Thompson, Ashley. “5 Ways Climate Change Disproportionately Impacts Women | Expert Analysis.” TechnoServe, May 16, 2023. <https://www.technoserve.org/blog/5-climate-change-impacts-women/>  
<sup>14</sup> Ambassador Patricia Espinosa Cantellano Remarks on the Panel “Doha Climate Talk: Women’s Leadership in Climate Change”. Qatar National Dialogue for Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.

# THE ESSENTIAL ROLE OF WOMEN IN CLIMATE ACTION

Women play an indispensable role in climate action, not only due to their immediate responsibilities but also because of their unique perspectives that prioritize ecological and social dimensions.

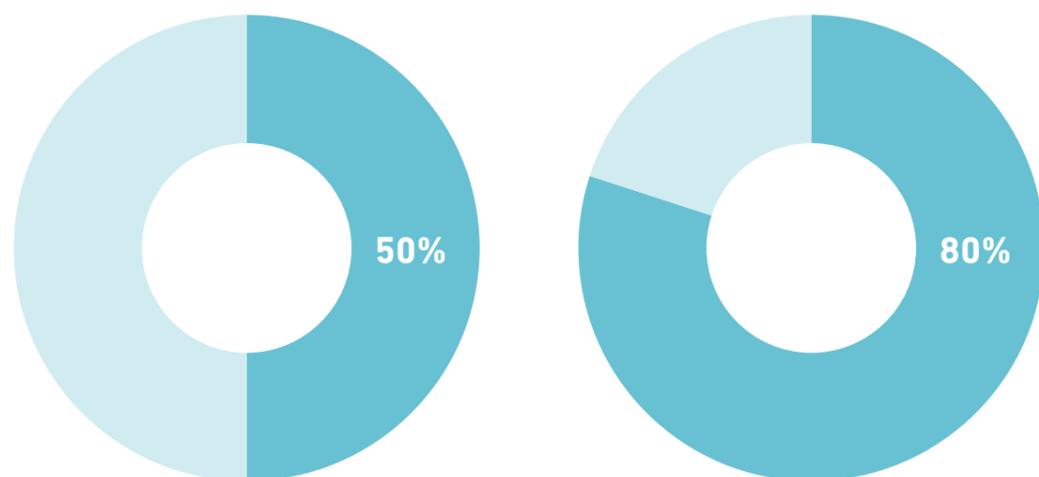
## WOMEN'S UNIQUE PERSPECTIVES AND THEIR ROLES AS FIRST RESPONDERS AND RESILIENCE BUILDERS

Women's focus on community-driven climate action is vital to sustainability efforts, emphasizing practical solutions that enhance local resilience. In their roles as primary caregivers, resource managers, and contributors to local economies, women prioritize approaches that directly address the environmental and social needs of their communities, strengthening both immediate and long-term sustainability. Recognizing this, Dr. Sabrina Schulz highlighted at the Doha Climate Talk during QNDCC that tackling climate challenges requires collaboration beyond policymakers and civil society,

engaging the entire community.<sup>16</sup> She underscored the importance of including those often absent from decision-making spaces, noting that "everyone is working on different aspects of where the challenge is", which fosters policies that address the needs of all.<sup>17</sup> Dr. Fatima Al-Suwaidi reaffirmed that effective climate action requires collaboration and having the right, qualified individuals in decision-making spaces.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, excluding key voices—especially women, who represent half of the global population—will hinder the fight against climate change.

Figure 2: The Vital Role of Women in Global Food Security

### WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO GLOBAL FOOD PRODUCTION



<sup>15</sup> Jennifer Morgan Remarks on the panel "Doha Climate Talk: Women's Leadership in Climate Change." Qatar National Dialogue on Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.  
<sup>16</sup> Dr. Sabrina Schulz Remarks on the Panel "Doha Climate Talk: Women's Leadership in Climate Change". Qatar National Dialogue on Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.  
<sup>17</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>18</sup> Dr. Fatima Al-Suwaidi Remarks on the Panel "Doha Climate Talk: Women's Leadership in Climate Change". Qatar National Dialogue on Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.

<sup>19</sup> FAO. "Women Produce up to 80% of Food in Developing Countries." FAO. <https://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/1634537/>  
<sup>20</sup> H.E. Dr. Hend Al-Muftah Remarks on the Panel "Doha Climate Talk: Women's Leadership in Climate Change". Qatar National Dialogue for Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.  
<sup>21</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>22</sup> World Bank. Leveling the Field: Improving Opportunities for Women Farmers in Africa. World Bank Group, 2014. <https://documents1.worldbank.org>

In rural areas of developing countries, for example, women are responsible for producing 50% of the world's food and up to 80% of the food in less developed countries, making them crucial contributors to global food production.<sup>19</sup> This role drives women to adopt climate solutions that prioritize both ecosystem health

and community well-being. "Imagine the influential role they could play if truly empowered in climate leadership," said H.E. Dr. Hend Al-Muftah.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the panel, she emphasized these statistics, underscoring the transformative potential of women's involvement in climate leadership.<sup>21</sup>



Women-led initiatives often emphasize sustainable practices like crop rotation, water conservation, and soil restoration, which balance immediate needs with long-term ecological health. The World Bank's "Levelling the Field" report found that when women receive equal access to essential agricultural resources—such as land, fertilizers, and training—their productivity on farms can increase substantially, with yield improvements of 20-30% and overall agricultural output gains of 2.5-4%.<sup>22</sup> This boost in productivity strengthens local food security and has far-reaching implications for tackling global hunger. The UN Food and Agriculture

Organization (FAO) estimates that if these gains were realized globally, they could lift between 100 to 150 million people out of hunger, demonstrating the profound impact of addressing gender disparities in agriculture on both local and international scales.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, women, particularly in indigenous and rural settings, bring invaluable traditional knowledge to biodiversity, water, and land management, offering unique insights into climate resilience. In many regions, women are the primary custodians of seeds and biodiversity, ensuring sustainable practices and conservation methods are passed through generations.<sup>24</sup> The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) emphasizes that this traditional knowledge is critical for climate adaptation, especially in areas vulnerable to deforestation and soil degradation.<sup>25</sup> Women's roles in seed preservation, sustainable farming, and conservation strengthen food security and ecosystem health, reinforcing biodiversity and resilience against climate shocks.

Moreover, a study by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) demonstrates that women's leadership in local and regional climate resilience projects. And women's leadership reduces environmental impacts to drive significant progress toward a sustainable future.<sup>26</sup> The study found that

women-led adaptation strategies, such as drought-resistant agriculture and community-managed water conservation, can reduce operational costs while enhancing ecological stability.<sup>27</sup> Women's focus on community needs often leads to more inclusive and resource-efficient approaches. In rural African regions, for instance, women-led cooperatives practicing sustainable agriculture achieved an increase in crop yields while reducing water and soil resource depletion.<sup>28</sup> This efficiency highlights the broader economic and ecological benefits of empowering women as climate resilience leaders and reinforces the necessity of incorporating their perspectives into formal climate action frameworks.<sup>29</sup>

Additionally, a report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reveals that communities with women in central roles in disaster planning and climate resilience initiatives recover faster following extreme weather events.<sup>30</sup> Women's strategic management of resources, prioritization of family welfare, and integration of sustainable practices into recovery efforts contribute to robust community resilience and lower vulnerability to future climate shocks. For example, in flood-prone regions, women-led initiatives to implement systems and manage local water resources have substantially reduced disaster-related fatalities and improved recovery rates.<sup>31</sup> This data underscores that including women in resilience-building efforts strengthens immediate responses but also equips communities to better prepare for and adapt to the growing risks posed by climate change.

Therefore, women are not merely passive participants in the climate crisis; despite their underrepresentation and lack of recognition, they are essential, active contributors to environmental preservation and resilience already offering solutions. They play a key role across many aspects of society—from sustaining food security and conserving biodiversity to leading community resilience efforts and championing sustainable practices.

files/2024-03/2024-gender-equality-for-greener-and-bluer-futures.pdf  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>28</sup> Adlam, Henry. "Supporting Female Farming Cooperatives: A Smart Choice for the African Development Bank." Princeton Journal of Public Affairs, May 26, 2023. <https://jpaia.princeton.edu/news/supporting-female-farming-cooperatives-smart-choice-african-development-bank>  
<sup>29</sup> United Nations Development Programme. "Rural Women Rising: How Climate-Smart Agriculture Is Empowering Women Farmers and Bridging Gender Divides in Southern Zimbabwe." UNDP, February 29, 2024. <https://www.adaptation->

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>24</sup> Elias, Marlène, and Morgan, Miranda. "Women are Key Custodians of Biodiversity, and COP16 Could Strengthen their Conservation Efforts." Alliance of Biodiversity International and CIAT, October 2, 2024. <https://alliancebiodiversityciat.org>  
<sup>25</sup> UN Environment Programme. "Tapping into Indigenous Knowledge to Protect Nature." UNEP, August 8, 2022. <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories>  
<sup>26</sup> IUCN. "Gender Equality for Greener and Bluer Futures." IUCN, March 2024. <https://iucn.org/sites/default/>

# THE ADVANTAGES OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE

## EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE: WHY WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ROLES MATTER

Building upon the unique perspectives that women bring to climate action, it's clear that their involvement is advantageous and essential for comprehensive climate solutions. As H.E. Dr. Hend Al-Muftah emphasized during the Doha Climate Talk panel at QNDCC, placing women in leadership positions isn't merely about numbers or empowerment; it's about fostering "quality engagement," where women actively contribute their insights and expertise to drive impactful, inclusive change.<sup>32</sup>

Women's experiences as community-focused caretakers and resource managers inform strategies that are socially inclusive and ecologically sustainable. However, the necessity of their inclusion in climate leadership extends beyond their unique perspectives—it is rooted in their impact on policy effectiveness, resource allocation, and transparency in governance.

Research shows that women are more likely to champion inclusive policies that support marginalized groups, thereby fostering equitable climate resilience. For example, female parliamentarians tend to prioritize issues such as childcare, equal pay, parental leave, pensions, reproductive rights, physical safety, and the prevention of gender-based violence, along with development goals like poverty reduction and effective service delivery.<sup>33</sup> Countries with higher female representation in parliament are also more likely to ratify international environmental treaties, highlighting the impact of women's leadership on global sustainability efforts.<sup>34</sup>

This influence extends to local levels as well. Evidence indicates that women's participation in leadership positions leads to better outcomes in resource conservation and community well-being. In institutions managing resources—such as forests—greater female involvement has been linked to improved resource conservation and regeneration.<sup>35</sup> Women's presence on executive committees of community forest management groups, for instance, often results in better forest quality due to the development of fairer rules for resource extraction and protection.<sup>36</sup>

Women in leadership roles often prioritize accountability, ethical standards, and transparency, which are crucial for fostering trust in climate governance. In the private sector, research reveals that companies with higher female representation on their boards are more likely to improve energy efficiency, reduce their environmental impact, and invest in renewable energy initiatives.<sup>37</sup> A recent study by the University of Urbino in Italy found that women leaders particularly emphasize proper waste management and reducing the misuse of water, energy, and other resources.<sup>38</sup> This was further emphasized at the Doha Climate Talk, where Jennifer Morgan stated that "women's leadership in climate change matters" due to the many examples across grassroots, national, and international levels where women leaders have been instrumental in driving climate action.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, the World Bank reports that women-led policies tend to have a wider impact, as they often prioritize investments in health, education, and social welfare, which are critical for climate resilience.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, gender-diverse leadership has been shown to foster creativity and innovation, both essential for addressing complex climate challenges. Research by McKinsey & Company reveals that companies with more than 30 percent female representation are substantially more likely to outperform those with 30 percent or fewer women in leadership.<sup>41</sup> Women's inclusion in leadership introduces varied perspectives and approaches, enabling climate action teams to explore new ideas, consider multiple angles, and develop adaptive solutions.<sup>42</sup> Dr. Sabrina Schulz highlighted the impact of women in leadership during the Doha Climate Talk at QNDCC. She emphasized that companies with women in leadership roles often outperform those without, largely due to the diverse perspectives women bring, which enrich decision-making and contribute to stronger environmental outcomes.<sup>43</sup> In her discussion, Dr. Schulz highlighted inspiring examples of women like Jennifer Morgan and Ambassador Espinosa, who are at the

forefront of climate action, driving policy changes and pioneering solutions to address urgent environmental challenges.<sup>44</sup> She emphasized that their efforts underscore the critical role women play in crafting impactful policies, advancing energy efficiency, and advocating for vulnerable communities.<sup>45</sup>

Organizations led by women also tend to demonstrate greater transparency in environmental reporting and monitoring, which strengthens public trust. In corporate and governmental contexts alike, women's participation has been associated with a stronger focus on sustainability and ethical practices. This is particularly evident in companies where women hold executive positions and influence environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices. Studies show that companies with women in executive roles score higher on sustainability metrics, which highlights the importance of gender-inclusive leadership in driving systemic change.<sup>46</sup>

Figure 3: Top-500 Listed Companies' ESG Disclosure Score as Percentage of Women on Boards<sup>47</sup>

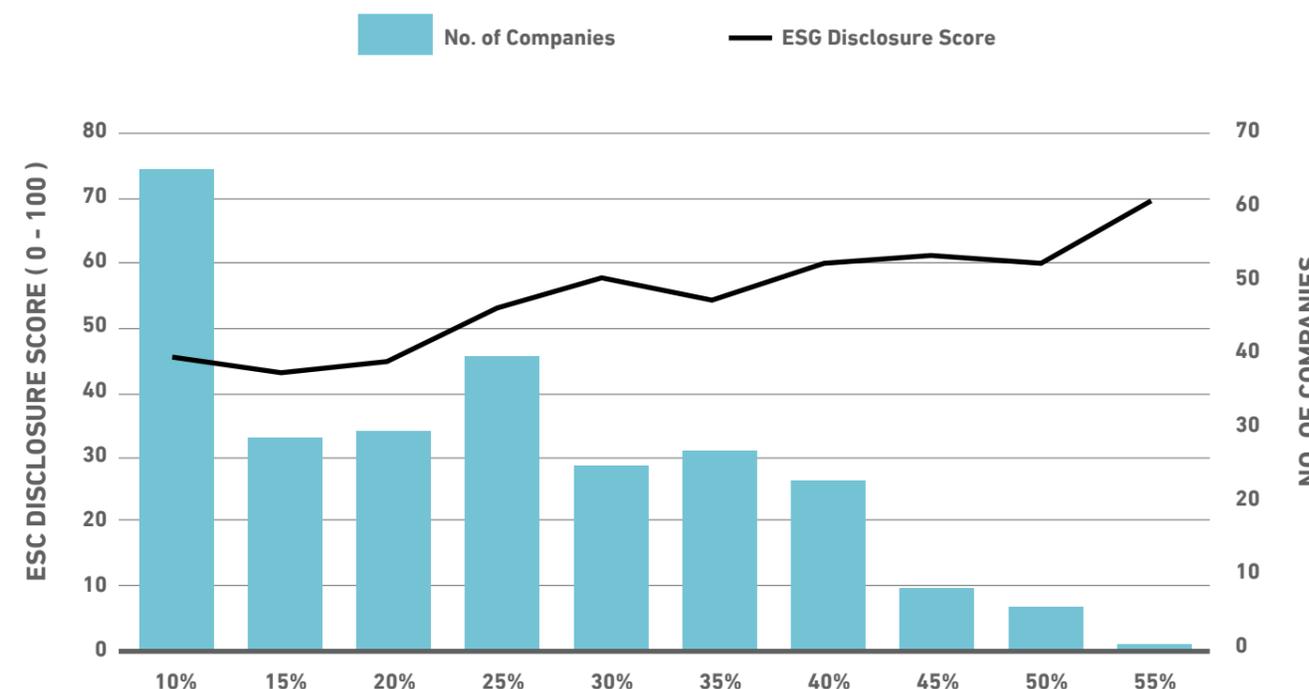


Figure 3 demonstrates a strong correlation between higher board diversity and improved ESG disclosure scores. Companies with 10% women on their boards achieve an average ESG score of approximately 42, while those with 55% women reach close to 60.<sup>48</sup>

Considering these factors, women's leadership is essential for impactful climate action. As explored in the examples, their involvement enhances policy inclusivity, directs resources toward community resilience, and promotes transparency—each crucial for effective climate adaptation and mitigation.

<sup>32</sup> Habtezion, Senay. "Gender, Adaptation, and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy Brief." United Nations Development Programme, 2016. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP%20Gender,%20Adaptation%20and%20DRR%20Policy%20Brief%20WEB.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> OKAI, ASAKO. 2022. "Women Are Hit Hardest in Disasters, So Why Are Responses Too Often Gender-Blind?" United Nations Development Programme, March 24, 2022. <https://www.undp.org/blog/women-are-hit-hardest-disasters-so-why-are-responses-too-often-gender-blind>

<sup>34</sup> H.E. Dr. Hend Al-Muftah Remarks on the Panel "Doha Climate Talk: Women's Leadership in Climate Change". Qatar National Dialogue for Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.

<sup>35</sup> MRFJ. "Women's Participation: An Enabler of Climate Justice." MRFJ, November 2015. [https://www.mrfj.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/MRFJ\\_-\\_Womens-Participation-An-Enabler-of-Climate-Justice\\_2015.pdf](https://www.mrfj.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/MRFJ_-_Womens-Participation-An-Enabler-of-Climate-Justice_2015.pdf)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Agarwal, Bina. "Gender and Forest Conservation: The Impact of Women's Participation in Community Forest Governance." Ecological Economics 68, September 15, 2009. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0921800909001852?via%3Dihub>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Lesi, Silvia. "To Fight Climate Change, More Female Leaders Are Fundamental." European Investment Bank. July

28, 2023. <https://www.eib.org/en/stories/female-leaders-climate>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Jennifer Morgan Remarks on the panel "Doha Climate Talk: Women's Leadership in Climate Change." Qatar National Dialogue on Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.

<sup>42</sup> World Bank. "World Bank Group Gender Strategy 2024 – 2030: Accelerate Gender Equality to End Poverty on a Livable Planet." World Bank, October 10, 2024. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/gender/brief/gender-strategy-update-2024-30-accelerating-equality-and-empowerment-for-all>

<sup>43</sup> McKinsey & Company. "Diversity Matters Even More: The Case for Holistic Impact." McKinsey & Company.

December 5, 2023. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-matters-even-more-the-case-for-holistic-impact>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Dr. Sabrina Schulz Remarks on the Panel "Doha Climate Talk: Women's Leadership in Climate Change". Qatar National Dialogue for Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

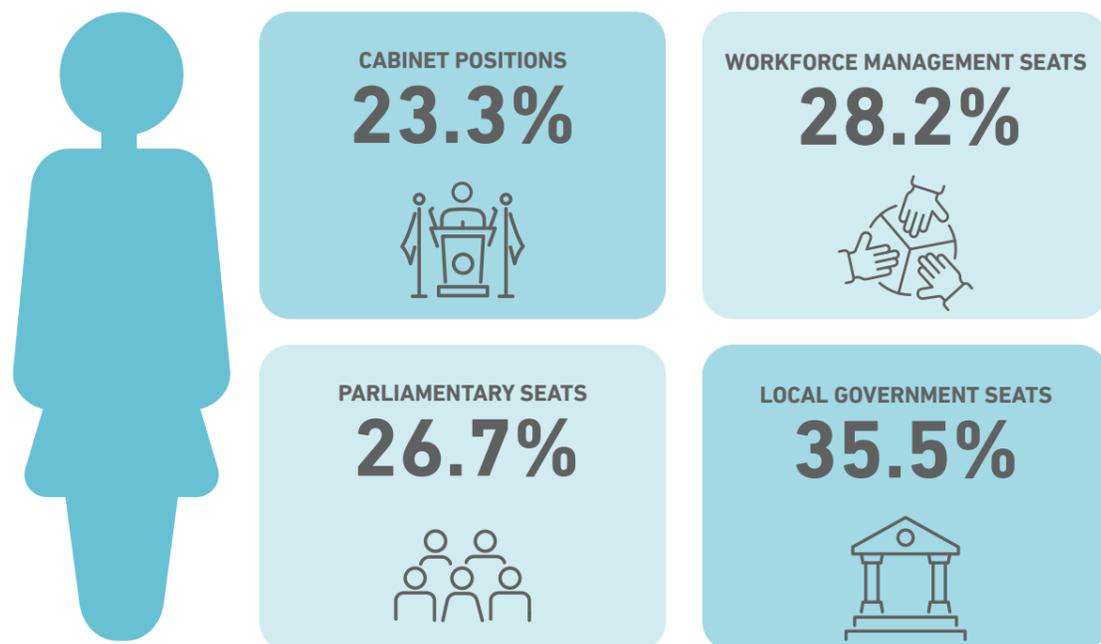
<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

# CURRENT LANDSCAPE: WOMEN IN CLIMATE LEADERSHIP

The landscape for women in climate leadership is marked by significant underrepresentation across high-impact roles, underscoring a gender gap that persists in decision-making spaces critical to climate action. At the Doha Climate Talk panel, Jennifer Morgan highlighted the underrepresentation of women at critical climate discussions, noting that only 35% of party delegation members at COP27 were women.<sup>49</sup>

Building on this, Ambassador Patricia Espinosa highlighted the critical need to bridge this gap. She underscored the essential role of women's perspectives in shaping effective and inclusive climate-related decision-making processes.<sup>50</sup> She noted that although women bring unique insights crucial for fostering inclusive and effective solutions, their voices are still too often overlooked in key climate action discussions.<sup>51</sup>

Figure 4: Women's Global Representation in Leadership Roles



According to UN Women, only 23.3% of cabinet positions globally, responsible for leading ministries and shaping policy areas, are held by women as of January 2024.<sup>52</sup> Globally, women occupy just 26.7% of parliamentary seats, 35.5% of local government positions, and 28.2% of management roles in the workforce.<sup>53</sup> Even fewer occupy key roles such as ministers of environmental sectors 15%.<sup>54</sup> These data highlights the fact that women are not in enough decision-making positions to influence the crucial decisions regarding climate change at the global level. These gaps are pronounced despite strong evidence that gender diversity in leadership promotes more comprehensive and effective climate policies.

Women's leadership in climate action is increasingly visible within grassroots and non-governmental organizations, where women advocate for sustainable practices and climate justice. Initiatives led by women at the community level have been instrumental in advancing climate adaptation, particularly in areas severely affected by climate change, such as Southeast Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Here, women are pioneering initiatives focused on resource management, agricultural adaptation, and resilience against extreme weather. Despite this vital role, a lack of institutional support and funding for women-led climate projects often limits their impact, underscoring a need for more equitable funding mechanisms and policies that empower female leadership in climate initiatives.

<sup>44</sup> Agustina, Rahayu and Barokah, Zuni. "Women on Boards and ESG Performance: Empirical Evidence Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia and Malaysia." Corporate Governance, April 19, 2024. <https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/CG-10-2023-0415/full/html>

<sup>47</sup> "The Effect of Women on Environmental, Social and Governance Factors". White & Case, June 29, 2023. <https://www.whitecase.com/insight-our-thinking/changing-face-mining-effect-women-esg>

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Jennifer Morgan Remarks on the panel "Doha Climate Talk: Women's Leadership in Climate Change." Qatar National Dialogue on Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.

<sup>50</sup> Ambassador Patricia Espinosa Cantellano Remarks on the Panel "Doha Climate Talk: Women's Leadership in Climate Change". Qatar National Dialogue for Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures>

<sup>53</sup> UN Women. Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2023. UN Women, September 2023. <https://www.unwomen.org>

<sup>54</sup> IUCN. "New Data Reveals Slow Progress in Achieving Gender Equality in Environmental Decision Making." IUCN, March 2021. <https://iucn.org/news/gender/202103/new-data-reveals-slow-progress-achieving-gender-equality-environmental-decision-making>

# CASE STUDIES: SUCCESS STORIES FROM QATAR AND BEYOND

## WOMEN-LED CLIMATE INITIATIVES IN QATAR: EXAMPLES OF LOCALIZED IMPACT AND LEADERSHIP

Qatar has made remarkable strides in environmental sustainability, emerging as a leader in climate resilience within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The nation has seen a rise in individuals, especially women, and organizations dedicated to promoting sustainable practices, climate research, and environmental stewardship. These initiatives range from community-driven projects led by young advocates to advanced research at leading institutions. Qatar's story is one of innovation, community engagement, and proactive policymaking, with leaders from various backgrounds shaping the nation's environmental future.

It is important to recognize that Qatar's progress in environmental sustainability didn't occur spontaneously. The Qatari government has actively fostered this growth by implementing laws and regulations aimed at addressing gender inequalities, thereby creating supportive spaces and opportunities for women to lead in sustainable development. These government-led efforts have been instrumental in empowering women removing systemic barriers and by establishing hubs and platforms where they can thrive as leaders in sustainability. Some of these key laws, regulations, and initiatives include:



**70%  
GRADUATES**

- **INFORMATION SYSTEMS**
- **COMPUTER ENGINEERING**
- **SCIENCES**
- **MEDICINE**

- The Qatari Constitution includes protections against gender discrimination, guaranteeing equal rights for all citizens. These constitutional provisions support women's access to education, healthcare, and employment, laying a foundation for gender equity across sectors.<sup>55</sup>
- Qatar's National Vision (QNV 2030) emphasizes gender equality as essential to social and economic development, promoting gender parity in leadership and encouraging women's contributions to sustainability and climate action.<sup>56</sup>
- Central to achieving QNV 2030 is the National Development Strategy (NDS), which has progressed through three phases to drive Qatar's social, economic, and environmental development. The latest phase, the Third National Development Strategy (NDS3), launched in January 2024, prioritizes sustainable growth across seven Strategic National Outcomes: Sustainable Economic Growth, Fiscal Sustainability, Future-ready Workforce, Cohesive Society, Quality of Life, Environmental Sustainability, and Government Excellence.<sup>57</sup> NDS3 envisions a cohesive society where women can lead, contribute, and thrive across all fields.<sup>58</sup> Efforts are focused on recognizing women's contributions not only in the workplace but across all areas of society.

- Qatar has made substantial investments in education for women, especially in STEM fields, leading to high enrollment rates among women in universities. As of 2021, women constituted 70% of graduates in disciplines such as information systems, computer engineering, general engineering, medicine, pharmacy, and sciences.<sup>59</sup> Qatar has made substantial investments in education for women, especially in STEM fields, leading to high enrollment rates among women in universities. This focus on enhancing women's capabilities and empowerment aligns with Qatar's National Vision 2030, which considers advancing the status of women a fundamental pillar in achieving the nation's goals. This focus equips women with the skills needed for leadership in climate and environmental sectors.<sup>60</sup>

- In the public sector, Qatar enforces equal pay policies, supporting economic equality and encouraging women to pursue high-impact roles, including those related to sustainability and environmental governance.<sup>61</sup>

- Approximately 21% of Qatari women are entrepreneurs, supported by policies that simplify business registration and encourage women's entrepreneurship, thereby strengthening their economic independence and leadership potential.<sup>62</sup>

- Qatar upholds a zero-tolerance policy on gender-based violence, creating a secure environment that allows women to participate fully in professional and public life without fear of discrimination or violence. This policy is vital for empowering women to engage in leadership roles, including those within climate and environmental governance.<sup>63</sup>

Below are a few success stories echoing Qatar's commitment to empowering women leaders and fostering impactful, sustainable change across various sectors.

### Research Centers

Qatar has invested substantially in research institutions dedicated to sustainability, establishing pioneering centers that drive innovation in areas such as clean energy, environmental conservation, and climate resilience. The Qatar Environment and Energy Research Institute (QEERI), part of Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), exemplifies this effort. Led by a team of women engineers and scientists, QEERI advances research in solar energy, carbon capture, and desalination. These efforts are critical to addressing Qatar's unique environmental challenges and play a pivotal role in positioning the nation as a regional leader in sustainable innovation.



Reinforcing Qatar's commitment to sustainable development and inclusive growth, the Qatar Business Incubation Center (QBIC) is one of the Middle East's largest incubators, nurturing innovation, and entrepreneurship across sectors, including those advancing sustainable business practices. Under the visionary leadership of women, the center expanded its impact, providing entrepreneurs with essential support services such as funding, workspace, mentorship, and guidance. The strategic direction at QBIC has helped incubate over 123 companies, generating notable economic impact and fostering a diverse entrepreneurial ecosystem.

These centers and initiatives underscore Qatar's dedication to sustainability, providing women with the spaces and opportunities to step into leadership roles and design solutions that uplift and support other women. This "by women, for women" approach strengthens the role of female leaders in

<sup>55</sup> Al Meezan - Qatar Legal Portal. "The Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar." Al Meezan. <https://www.almeezan.qa/LawArticles.aspx?LawTreeSectionID=6677&lawId=2284&language=en>

<sup>57</sup> Third Qatar National Development Strategy 2024-2030. Planning and Statistics Authority. [https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/nds1/nds3/Documents/QNDS3\\_EN.pdf](https://www.psa.gov.qa/en/nds1/nds3/Documents/QNDS3_EN.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> Marhaba. "Qatari Women are 70% of STEM School Graduates". Marhaba, April 30, 2024. <https://marhaba.qa/qatari-women-are-70-of-stem-school-graduates/>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> [https://ossform.qdb.qa/en/Documents/female\\_ent\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://ossform.qdb.qa/en/Documents/female_ent_report_en.pdf)

<sup>63</sup> Gulf Times. "Gender Equality, Female Empowerment Central to Qatar's Vision." Gulf Times, March 29, 2021. <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/687649/gender-equality-female-empowerment-central-to-qatars-vision>

### Women in Executive Climate Leadership

Qatari women are also at the forefront of high-stakes climate leadership, taking on roles that shape both regional and global environmental strategies. For example, Eng. Bodour Al Meer, Sustainability Executive Director at the Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC), has been instrumental in setting and implementing sustainability standards for the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, marking it as the first carbon-neutral World Cup in history. Her leadership has focused on creating sustainable infrastructure, from environmentally conscious stadium designs to reforestation and renewable energy projects aimed at offsetting carbon emissions.



At the QNDCC, during the panel on Qatari and German Success in Environmental Sustainability, Eng. Bodour highlighted Qatar's commitment to embedding "sustainability and legacy in every step of hosting the tournament".<sup>64</sup> She emphasized the achievements of Qatar's robust sustainability strategy, which included reducing energy consumption of stadiums by 30%, using 40% less water, and recycling 80% of construction waste.<sup>65</sup> Qatar also implemented best practices in dust control on construction sites, created over 850,000 square meters of green space around stadiums, and invested in advanced cooling technology for year-round stadium use.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, they recycled 80% of tournament wastewater, converting the

## SUCCESS STORIES IN THE MENA REGION: WOMEN-LED INITIATIVES DRIVING CHANGE

Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, women-led initiatives are driving sustainable development and environmental conservation as well as addressing gender disparities that ultimately empowering more women to rise into leadership roles. Two outstanding examples illustrate the profound and far-reaching impact of women's leadership in these areas:

remaining 20% into green energy, and planted over 16,000 trees.<sup>67</sup> Al Meer's initiatives in resource efficiency, waste reduction, and long-term legacy projects illustrate the vital contributions of Qatari women in executive climate leadership, fostering sustainable development that extends far beyond the tournament itself.

### Youth Advocates

A youth-led climate advocacy initiative, Greener Future, founded and led by young women, exemplifies the power of grassroots environmental action in Qatar. The organization, focused on fostering sustainable practices, engages communities through activities such as beach clean-ups, tree planting, and recycling workshops. These efforts help preserve Qatar's natural landscapes while empowering citizens—particularly young women—to take ownership of environmental stewardship. Greener Future has become a key player in environmental education, bringing climate awareness to schools and inspiring the next generation to prioritize sustainability in their lives and careers. This movement highlights the growing impact of youth-led climate action in Qatar, demonstrating how grassroots advocacy can contribute to the nation's broader sustainability goals and promote a resilient, environmentally conscious future.

### Initiatives and Conferences Driving Collective Action

Recognizing the global nature of the climate crisis, Qatar actively participates in and organizes events that bring leaders together to collaborate on sustainability solutions. For instance, the Doha Women and Climate Event, held on May 30 2024 in partnership with the New York-based nonprofit Women and Climate, with support from the U.S. Embassy in Qatar and Birba—an Oman-based company dedicated to fostering innovation for sustainable economies—brought together women from diverse sectors to collaboratively address climate action.<sup>68</sup> landmark event—the first of its kind in the Gulf—provided a platform for women in technology, policy, engineering, science, and entrepreneurship to share insights and strategies for a sustainable future. Institutional support in Qatar has created spaces and opportunities that empower women to rise into leadership roles. The examples above are just a few among many inspiring success stories.

### Women-led Initiatives in Sustainable Development

Founded in 1962, Al-Nahda Society exemplifies the power of women-led organizations in bridging gender gaps and empowering women to lead transformative initiatives.<sup>69</sup> The society provides essential resources, mentorship, and skills to help women advance in education, economic empowerment, and professional development. Through the guidance of influential

women leaders, Al-Nahda has become a key institution for empowering women in Saudi Arabia.

In 2019, Al-Nahda was officially accredited by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) as a non-governmental organization with consultative status, further solidifying its role in global efforts to address gender disparities.<sup>70</sup> The society's programs focus on financial literacy, vocational training, and capacity building, equipping women with the tools needed to make impactful contributions across communities and industries.<sup>71</sup>

Al-Nahda is not just a support organization; it is a transformative platform that fosters women's advancement and empowers them to rise through the ranks, establishing themselves as agents of change in Saudi society. Through its work, Al-Nahda is forging a lasting legacy for gender equity and leadership, paving

the way for women to take on pivotal roles, including in fields such as environmental sustainability.

Similarly, Omani women are at the forefront of environmental conservation, shaping impactful initiatives to protect the nation's natural heritage. The Environment Society of Oman (ESO), the country's leading non-governmental organization dedicated to environmental protection, was co-founded by a woman leader.<sup>72</sup> ESO has pioneered conservation efforts, from safeguarding endangered sea turtles along Oman's coastlines to reducing plastic waste through community-driven programs.<sup>73</sup> ESO also plays a critical role in environmental education, engaging schools and local communities to foster sustainable practices and awareness.<sup>74</sup> Through these initiatives, women in Oman highlight the vital contributions of Omani women in climate action, ensuring a resilient and sustainable future for Oman's unique ecosystems.

## GLOBAL EXAMPLES OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN CLIMATE ACTION

Moreover, women worldwide are at the forefront of innovative climate solutions, demonstrating that inclusive leadership is essential for effective environmental action. From grassroots movements to high-level policymaking, women leaders

are pioneering initiatives that drive sustainability, enhance community resilience, and create lasting environmental impact. These international examples offer valuable insights and serve as models for best practices in climate governance.

### Women Leaders in Global Climate Action

Ambassador Patricia Espinosa, former Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), has emerged as a prominent figure in the global fight against climate change.<sup>75</sup> During her tenure at the UNFCCC, Espinosa was instrumental in finalizing the Paris Agreement Rulebook at COP26, establishing guidelines for accountability and transparency in countries' climate commitments under their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).<sup>76</sup> Before her role at the UNFCCC, Espinosa served as Mexico's Secretary of Foreign Affairs, where she advanced critical climate initiatives, including Mexico's leadership role in climate diplomacy during the 2010 Cancun COP16.<sup>77</sup> Under her leadership, COP16 successfully advanced the Green Climate Fund and laid the groundwork for robust climate finance mechanisms aimed at supporting climate adaptation and mitigation efforts in developing countries.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Espinosa has been a formidable advocate for women in climate action and leadership, championing inclusive policies with a lasting impact. She was instrumental in advancing the Gender Action Plan, which integrates gender perspectives into climate policy and empowers women to lead at every level of climate decision-making.<sup>79</sup> In interviews, she has emphatically emphasized that "effective climate action

requires 100% of the population to be engaged,"<sup>80</sup> underscoring that women's participation is not optional but essential to limit climate change. Espinosa's ability to bring diverse parties to the negotiating table reflects her exceptional diplomatic skills and her commitment to equitable climate solutions.

At the grassroots level, women are spearheading climate action in their communities, particularly in rural areas, by driving local initiatives to combat climate change. A powerful success story comes from Kenya, where the Green Belt Movement transformed climate action by merging environmental conservation with women's empowerment. The initiative focused on tree planting to combat deforestation and soil erosion while also providing employment and educational opportunities for women.<sup>81</sup> Since its inception, the Green Belt Movement has planted over 51 million trees across Kenya and inspired similar projects worldwide.<sup>82</sup> The movement's legacy demonstrates how environmental action can uplift marginalized communities, enhance biodiversity, and strengthen grassroots resilience, providing a model for linking climate action with social development.



<sup>64</sup> Gulf Times. "Gender Equality, Female Empowerment Central to Qatar's Vision." Gulf Times, March 29, 2021. <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/687449/gender-equality-female-empowerment-central-to-qatars-vision>  
<sup>65</sup> Eng. Bodour Al Meer Remarks on the Panel "Qatari and German Successes in Environmental Sustainability". Qatar National Dialogue for Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.  
<sup>66</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>67</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>68</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>69</sup> Zawya. "Women and Climate: Taking Bold Action for Sustainable Future". Zawya, June 3, 2023. <https://www.zawya.com/en/press-release/events-and-conferences/women-and-climate-taking-bold-action-for-a-sustainable-future-19vck684>

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>71</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>72</sup> "Environment Society of Oman". <https://eso.org.om/>  
<sup>73</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>74</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>75</sup> United Nations Climate Change. "Executive Secretary Communications: Former Executive Secretary." United Nations Climate Change. <https://unfccc.int/about-us/executive-secretary-communications/former-executive-secretary>

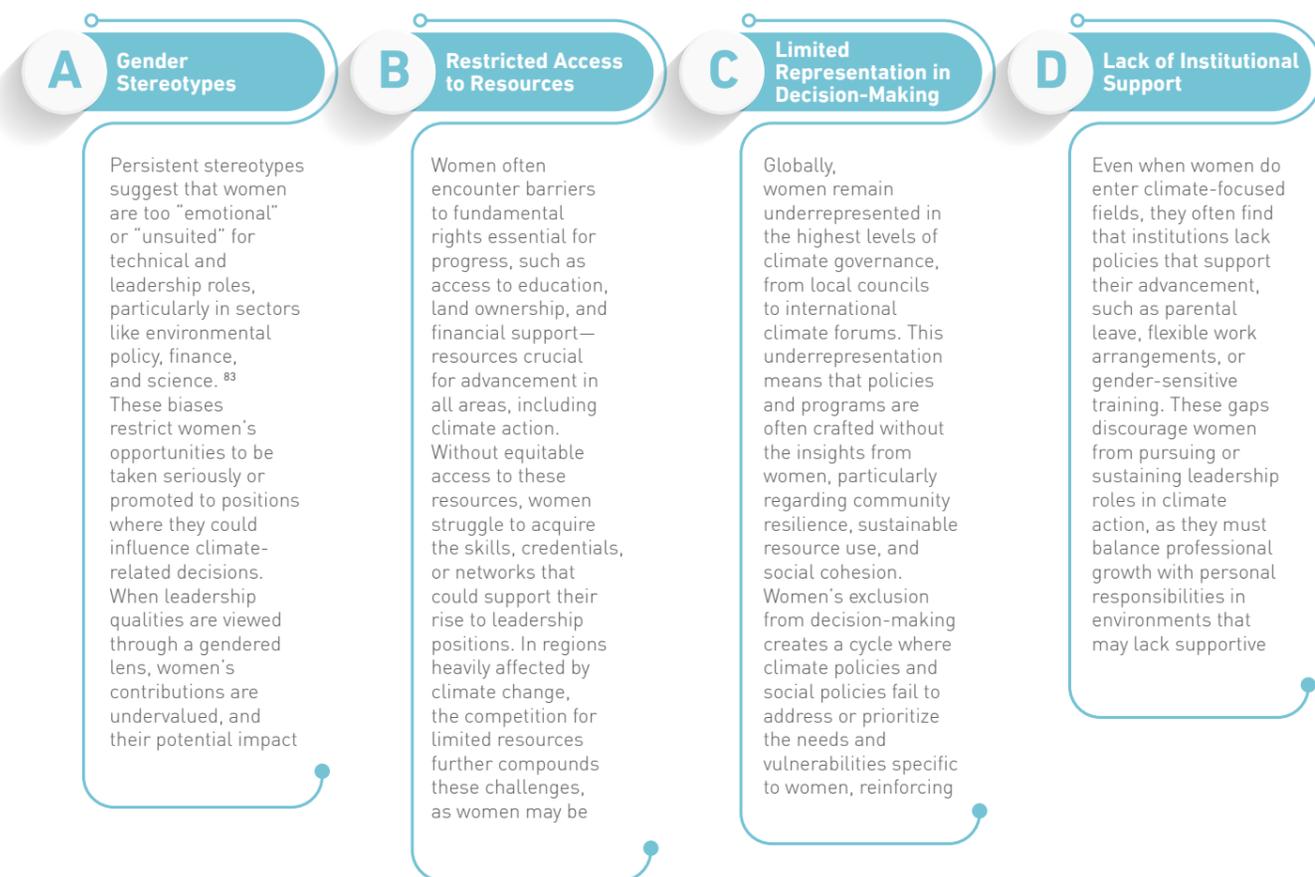
<sup>76</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>77</sup> United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). "Climate Change Diplomacy, From Cancun to Durban: Open Dialogue with the President of COP16." UNITAR, February 28, 2011. <https://unitar.org/about/news-stories/news/climate-change-diplomacy-cancun-durban-open-dialogue-president-cop-16>  
<sup>78</sup> United Nations Climate Change. "Green Climate Fund." United Nations Climate Change. <https://unfccc.int/process/bodies/funds-and-financial-entities/green-climate-fund>

<sup>79</sup> United Nations Climate Change. "Gender and Climate Change - Global Launch Event (Gender Action Plan A & Gender Action Plan D)." United Nations Climate Change, June 8, 2020. <https://unfccc.int/event/gender-and-climate-change-global-launch-event-gender-action-plan-a-gender-action-plan-d-0>  
<sup>80</sup> InsuResilience Global Partnership. "Interview with Patricia Espinosa Executive Secretary, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)." InsuResilience, March 20, 2020. <https://www.insu-resilience.org/news/interview-with-patricia-espinosa-executive-secretary-united-nations-framework-convention-on-climate-change-unfccc/>  
<sup>81</sup> "The Green Belt Movement". <http://www.greenbeltmovement.org/>

# CHALLENGES TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN CLIMATE ACTION

## PRE-EXISTING GENDER INEQUALITY: THE IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE PERPETUATE AND MAGNIFY STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES

Climate change's far-reaching impacts intensify existing gender inequalities, with women already marginalized in many societies around the world. Often central to sustaining families and communities, women are particularly vulnerable, facing gender-based barriers that vary widely across cultural, economic, and social contexts. This becomes a significant challenge for women to take leadership roles in climate action for several key reasons.



# OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENHANCING WOMEN'S ROLES

While climate change highlights and worsens gender inequality, it also presents a pivotal opportunity to reimagine gender roles and strengthen women's contributions in climate leadership. Women's involvement in climate action offers the potential for more inclusive, community-centered, and resilient solutions, enhancing the overall effectiveness of climate strategies. Around the world, successful female leaders in climate change and sustainability are breaking barriers and providing inspiring examples of what can



<sup>83</sup> Carli, Linda, Laila Alawa, YoonAh Lee, Bei Zhao, and Elaine Kim. "Stereotypes About Gender and Science: Women ≠ Scientists." Sage Journals, January 6, 2016. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0361684315622645>

<sup>84</sup> Dr. Fatima Al-Suwaidi Remarks on the Panel "Doha Climate Talk: Women's Leadership in Climate Change". Qatar National Dialogue for Climate Change, Doha, Qatar, October 1, 2024.

<sup>85</sup> "She Changes Climate." <https://www.shechangesclimate.org>

<sup>86</sup> Jiggins, Janice, R. K. Samanta, and Janice E. Olawoye. "Chapter 9 – Improving Women Farmers' Access to Extension Services." FAO. <https://www.fao.org/4/w5830e/w5830e0b.htm>

<sup>87</sup> "Empowering Women for Effective Climate Change Adaptation: The Role of the Private Sector." Adaptation Community. <https://www.adaptationcommunity.net>

# CONCLUSION

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This white paper underscores the undeniable role of women in driving meaningful climate action, advocating for the dismantling of systemic barriers that continue to limit their potential. Evidenced by research and panel insights—especially highlighted in the Doha Climate Talk at QNDCC—empowering women in climate leadership is not merely a matter of equity but a powerful catalyst for sustainable, inclusive growth. Discussing these themes at events such as QNDCC, a platform for shaping national and international climate policies, is significant, as it amplifies the voices of women and emphasizes their critical role in building resilient communities and advancing innovative solutions. Addressing the barriers they face—whether access to resources, representation in decision-making, or opportunities for technical skill-building—remains fundamental to maximizing women’s impact in climate action.

To achieve true climate resilience, the full engagement of women at every level of climate governance is critical. This calls for collaborative efforts among governments, institutions, and communities to invest in gender-inclusive frameworks that provide women the tools and support needed to lead effectively. The future of climate action depends on harnessing the strength of diverse voices and perspectives. By empowering women, we empower communities and create a foundation for a sustainable world that can better withstand the challenges of a rapidly changing environment.



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