

30 Lessons for gender-responsive nationally determined contributions

Hannah Girardeau, NDC Partnership

The Paris Agreement calls for gender equality and women’s empowerment to be among the guiding principles of climate action. The process of developing new nationally determined contributions (NDCs) offers an important opportunity to incorporate gender considerations more thoroughly into national climate commitments and long-term plans. Drawing on the experience of the NDC Partnership, including in Burkina Faso and Cambodia, this chapter explores good practices around inclusive design and implementation of the nationally determined contributions and suggests how development partners can best support countries to align their NDCs with development priorities and make them attentive to gender equality, just transitions, intergenerational equity and human rights.

Key messages

- Countries are moving towards better alignment with the Paris Agreement’s principle of gender equality and the accompanying enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its gender action plan.
- More support is needed for expanding gender-responsive stakeholder engagement or capacity building within governments to integrate gender into the nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to ensure that climate action better responds to and supports the diverse gender and socio-economic needs of individuals at local and national levels.
- The new generation of NDCs can draw on a range of experiences and best practices, including from Burkina Faso, which used gender analysis to design its long-term emissions reduction strategy, or Cambodia, which incorporated gender indicators into its sectoral climate action plans.

The next generation of nationally determined contributions could be the most gender-responsive yet

Every five years, Parties to the Paris Agreement submit nationally determined contributions establishing their targets for mitigating climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions and often outlining their priorities to adapt to climate change impacts.¹ The first Global Stocktake of how Parties are meeting climate goals, completed at the 2023 United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP28), underscored that Parties are significantly off track in meeting their Paris Agreement goals due to insufficient ambition in the current NDCs, ineffective mobilisation of finance and inadequate progress in implementing communicated targets. Against this backdrop, the 2025 NDCs will be a powerful signpost to where the global community is headed in terms of climate ambition as well as the societal impacts of economic shifts and the outcomes of the just energy transition. In the words of Simon Stiell, Executive Secretary of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), “This next round of NDCs may be the most important documents to be produced in a multilateral context so far this century” (UN Climate Change News, 2024^[1]).

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Leading up to COP 30 in 2025, signatories to the Paris Agreement are required to develop new and more ambitious NDCs. At the same time, they must also close the implementation and financing gaps highlighted in the Global Stocktake, including through accelerated implementation of the national mitigation and adaptation commitments set out in their current NDCs, long-term low-emission development strategies (LT-LEDS), national adaptation plans and national biodiversity strategies.² These documents are developed through consultative processes across governments, communities, organisations and businesses and should reflect the priorities and realities of these distinct but interconnected groups. As set out in the Lima Work Programme on Gender and its gender action plan,³ emphasising gender equality and social inclusion within these processes is a proven pathway to ensure that policies and commitments are sustainable, equitable and achievable for all members of society. It should be noted that while gender equality – the focus of this chapter – is a key element of social inclusion, inequalities are systemic. Countries could better acknowledge the intersection of the needs of young people and children, indigenous

peoples, marginalised social groups, rural communities, and all other members of society whose perspectives are not always included in national policies.

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Countries need support on three fronts to create a virtuous cycle of ambition and action:

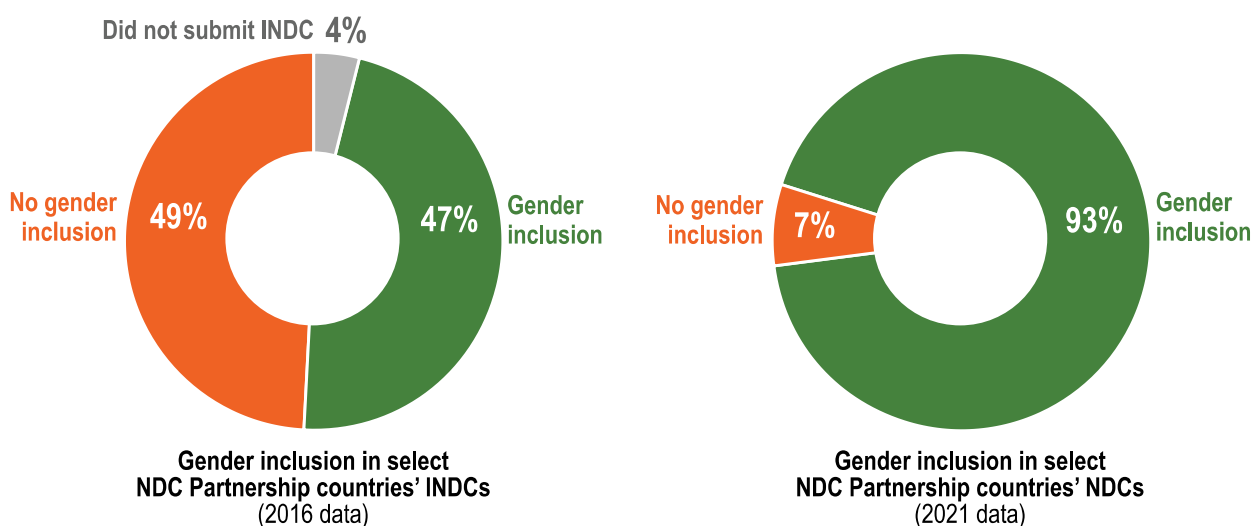
1. to implement their NDCs
2. to mobilise finance needed for climate investments
3. to develop more ambitious and inclusive NDC targets.

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Most national climate targets and strategies now mention gender considerations or women

Analysis conducted in collaboration with the International Union for Conservation of Nature of 57 NDCs submitted by NDC Partnership members (NDC Partnership, 2022^[2]) found that 93% included mention of gender considerations and/or women,⁴ a substantial increase compared with the share of intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs)⁵ that included gender in 2016 (Figure 30.1). For nearly half of the countries analysed (24 of 57), the most recent NDC was the first time that gender considerations had been reflected (NDC Partnership, 2022^[2]).

Figure 30.1. Nearly all current nationally determined contributions analysed by the NDC Partnership mention gender or women, particularly in sections on adaptation strategy and targets



Source: NDC Partnership (2022^[2]), *Supporting Gender-Responsive NDCs*, <https://ndcpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/supporting-gender-responsive-ndcsinsight-brief-feb-2022.pdf>.

Gender inclusion takes different forms and has different meanings in the current NDCs:

- Gender equality or topics impacting gender appear more frequently in adaptation than in mitigation sections, but gender is included in both sections in the NDCs of 11 countries (NDC Partnership, 2022^[2]).
- Many NDCs address gender in cross-cutting sections and, when countries consider gender in specific sectors, it is most often included in the agriculture, energy, health, water and forestry sectors (NDC Partnership, 2022^[2]).
- Women are still more likely to be recognised as parts of vulnerable populations or stakeholders in action rather than as agents of change who are instrumental in driving climate action.

A smaller number of NDCs mentioned often marginalised groups such as youth (25 NDCs), indigenous peoples (12 NDCs) and members of the LGBTQI+ community (2 NDCs) and topics such as gender-based violence (2 NDCs) and intergenerational equity (5 NDCs) (NDC Partnership, 2022^[2]).

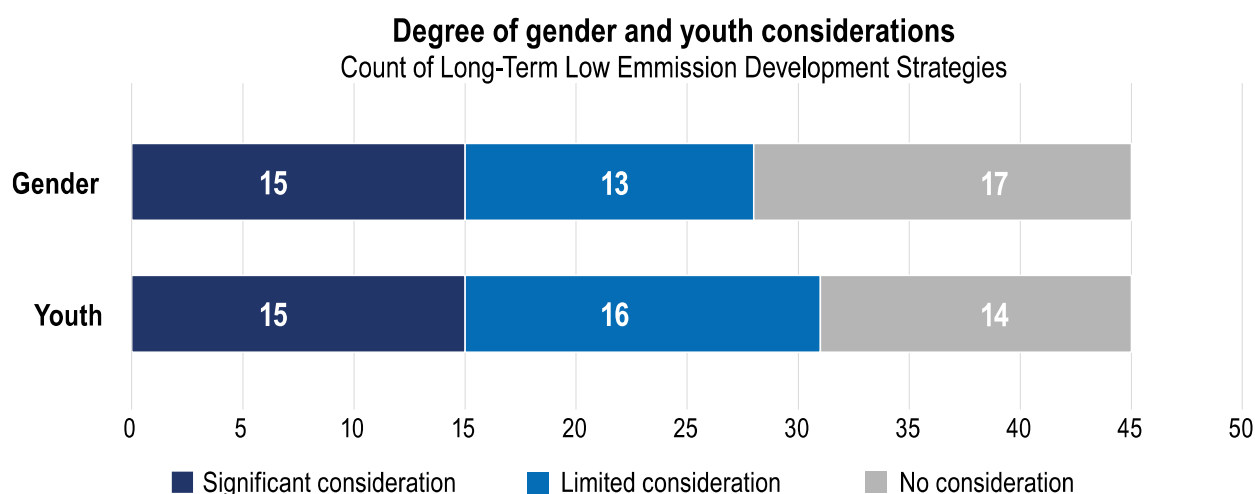
Integrating gender considerations throughout the development of new nationally determined contributions can support more equitable and sustainable climate action

Taking gender inclusion to the next level requires utilising gender analysis to set targets, including budgets for gender-focused actions, strengthening gender indicators for measuring progress on commitments and taking an intersectional approach to topics.

Cambodia's NDC, for example, was one of two that met all the gender-responsive criteria⁶ (IUCN, 2021^[3]). The 2020 process and resulting document integrated gender considerations throughout the development process thanks to work across government ministries and with women's organisations and gender-focused stakeholder groups. The NDC notes many gender indicators throughout sectoral plans and has built gender into the online tracking system for measuring progress on NDC implementation (UN Women and CDRI, 2021^[4]).

Like the NDCs, the LT-LEDS outline a country's vision for the future but look beyond the timeline of the NDCs to 2050. These should consider the far-reaching socio-economic impacts of climate action and can facilitate a clear just transition (UNDP, 2023^[5]). However, a synthesis report from the UNFCCC has noted a significant lack of gender considerations in these long-term planning documents⁷ (UNFCCC, 2022^[6]). Additional analysis found that only 33% of the 45 LT-LEDs reviewed⁸ gave significant consideration to gender⁹ (Figure 30.2) (NDC Partnership, 2024^[7]). Countries could maximise the impact of long-term planning by integrating gender and youth inputs within specific sector planning, through target setting, and by deepening alignment with other development priorities for more equitable and sustainable development.

Figure 30.2. Long-term strategies to lower emissions are less likely than nationally determined contributions to consider youth and gender



Note: “Significant consideration” means gender and youth stakeholders are considered extensively within LT-LEDS documents. “Limited consideration” means gender and youth are mentioned within LT-LEDS documents but only in terms of broader stakeholder engagement. “No consideration” means gender and youth are not considered within LT-LEDS documents. See: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2022_06_adv.pdf.

Source: NDC Partnership (2024^[7]), *Gender and Youth in Long-term Low Emission Development Strategies*, <https://ndcpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/gender-and-youth-long-term-low-emission-development-strategies.pdf>.

Burkina Faso has taken steps to maximise gender co-benefits as part of its development process (GGGI and UN Women, 2024^[8]), including through gender analysis to identify sectors important for women’s future employment, a standing Gender Technical Working Group that analysed gender impacts and consultative workshops (GGGI and UN Women, 2024^[8]). This process also produced a step-by-step guide for other countries to integrate gender into their LT-LEDS (GGGI and UN Women, 2024^[8]).

A growing number of countries – to date, 53 – are requesting targeted support from the NDC Partnership to develop or update their NDCs, LT-LEDS or both, including to integrate gender into the process. In the lead-up to COP30 in 2025, the number of requests is expected to grow. Implementing partners must be prepared to respond to help ensure that NDC development processes are inclusive and support whole-of-society engagement to bolster the implementation of climate strategies.¹⁰

Recommendations to strengthen gender inclusion in climate policy

The next round of NDC submissions is an opportunity for all countries to align their climate action to the global goal of a sustainable future that leaves no one behind. While many countries are still finalising implementation plans for their current NDCs, they must also look ahead to develop 2035 targets. The NDC Partnership is supporting efforts to meaningfully strengthen the integration of gender equality issues in this round of NDC planning and ongoing implementation with developing countries.¹¹ Significant support is still needed to build capacity for the design and implementation of climate policies and actions that fully integrate gender considerations.

Opportunities for the global community to streamline NDC enhancement efforts include:

- Expanding and funding gender-responsive stakeholder engagement processes to develop long-lasting, inclusive and meaningful consultations processes, including by drawing on a range of

experiences and best practices to ensure inclusive stakeholder engagement (NDC Partnership, 2024^[9]).

- Supporting the alignment of NDC enhancement with other strategies, such as the LT-LEDS, national adaptation plans, national biodiversity strategies and gender equality policies. Alignment of these critical documents and of the government agencies, partners and funders implementing climate commitments can ensure a clear path towards a sustainable and equitable future.

Partners have highlighted opportunities to make the next set of NDCs the most attentive to gender equality, just transitions, intergenerational equity and human rights. Some recommended actions include:

- Deepening gender considerations within the sectoral commitments of the NDCs. Strengthening sectoral gender targets and indicators through informed gender analyses offers an impactful framework for future integration into project design, just transition considerations and inclusion as elements of NDC financing.
- Developing strong gender indicators and measurement, reporting, and verification systems as cornerstones for measuring progress against gender equality and social inclusion goals. Thoughtful data collection is essential to understand how climate actions are impacting communities and individuals within a country, sector or workforce.

As stakeholders raise ambitions on the mobilisation of finance to meet collective goals, they should consider:

- Mobilising funding in line with the implementation of NDCs, ensuring that social inclusion principles apply. Financial institutions are rapidly adopting gender strategies and policies, and these frameworks can be replicated for increased alignment around gender equality and inclusive climate finance (NDC Partnership and IUCN, 2022^[10]).
- Supporting capacity building within governments to integrate gender and inclusion into the NDCs, implementation plans, investment frameworks and project development. These efforts should also ensure that expertise within national gender agencies is fully tapped and that a whole-of-government approach supports mainstreaming throughout NDC development and implementation.
- Budgeting appropriately for gender-focused actions and projects that mainstream gender equality. Gender-responsive budgeting showcases a meaningful allocation of the required resources and is crucial to implementing gender-focused actions.

The Paris Agreement calls for approaches that are participatory, cross-cutting and gender-responsive. These will drive more robust and inclusive policy design that will lead to stronger development outcomes for countries and communities. The impacts and effects of climate change are far-reaching and interconnected. The responses must be as well.

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Notes

¹ The Paris Agreement was adopted in 2015 as a legally binding international treaty setting forth the goal to hold “the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and to pursue “efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels”. The treaty and related information are available at: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>.

² NDCs are a country’s commitment on actions it will take to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to adapt to the impacts of climate change. The LT-LEDS are voluntary country communications providing a vision for future development. For more information, see: <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-paris-agreement>. National adaptation plans allow Parties to outline plans for reducing vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and facilitate adaptation measures in policies. More information can be found at: <https://unfccc.int/topics/adaptation-and-resilience/the-big-picture/introduction>. National biodiversity strategies are instruments for implementing the Convention on

Biological Diversity and outline country strategies for conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. For more information, see: <https://www.cbd.int/nbsap/introduction.shtml>.

³ The enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its gender action plan were adopted at COP25 in 2019. More information is available at: <https://unfccc.int/topics/gender/workstreams/chronology-of-gender-in-the-intergovernmental-process>.

⁴ The 57 countries whose NDCs were part of the analysis included 4 developed countries (among them the European Union) and 53 developing countries.

⁵ Parties to the UNFCCC were invited to communicate their INDCs in advance of the Paris Conference held in 2015. These documents were intended to outline national efforts toward low emissions and climate-resilient development in pursuit of the goals of the draft Paris Agreement. As countries formally joined the Paris Agreement in 2016, their INDCs could be converted to or resubmitted as nationally determined contributions. See: <https://www.wri.org/indc-definition> for more information.

⁶ Gender-responsive criteria in the International Union for Conservation of Nature's 2021 report focused on if gender and/or women were mentioned in the NDCs, how women were portrayed, how gender-responsive components were included in the NDCs, and how gender was mainstreamed across adaptation and mitigation actions and sectors. For more information, see: <https://genderandenvironment.org/gender-and-ndcs-2021>.

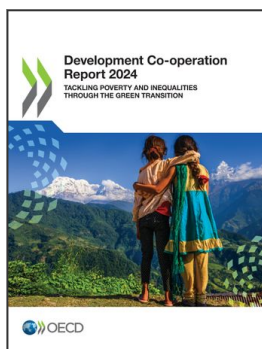
⁷ This analysis is based on the UNFCCC LT-LEDS synthesis report (<https://unfccc.int/documents/619179>) and the synthesis report on gender-responsive climate policies, plans, strategies and action (<https://unfccc.int/documents/613847>).

⁸ The LT-LEDS analysed were submitted by NDC Partnership members in 18 developed countries and 27 developing countries.

⁹ "Significant consideration" means gender and youth stakeholders are considered extensively within LT-LEDS documents. "Limited consideration" means gender and youth are mentioned within LT-LEDS documents but only in terms of broader stakeholder engagement. "No consideration" means gender and youth are not considered within LT-LEDS documents. See: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cp2022_06_adv.pdf.

¹⁰ In response to growing requests for NDC enhancement support, the NDC Partnership and the UNFCCC are developing an NDC 3.0 Navigator with technical inputs from the United Nations Development Programme, the World Resources Institute and more than 30 partners. The tool is meant to help countries take stock of current ambition efforts, identify nationally appropriate opportunities to further raise their ambition, consider the key strategies to strengthen implementation and unlock finance, and identify relevant guidance and sources of support. The tool will offer countries a broad menu of options to identify opportunities that work best for them, taking into account the calls of the first global stocktake and preparing for implementation and mobilisation of finance in the development of their NDC update. This effort is guided by the principle that NDCs should be owned by all and underpinned by robust whole-of-society processes.

¹¹ Environment and Climate Change Canada provides support to the NDC Partnership for gender equality initiatives.



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