

Beyond inclusion:

Empowering women and girls for smarter, fairer Nature-based Solutions to climate change



Until we are all equal



August 2025

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Suggested Citation: Smith, W., Pellini, K., Wen, S.Q., Soni, T. (2025). Beyond inclusion: Empowering women and girls for smarter, fairer Nature-based Solutions to climate change. Plan International Australia, Melbourne.

Plan International Australia is a global independent development and humanitarian organisation. As one of the oldest, largest and most experienced organisations in its field, Plan works alongside children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the injustices facing girls and the most marginalised children.

Overview

The world is facing a dramatic climate crisis, with its impacts disproportionately affecting those who are already in positions of extreme vulnerability. Women and girls in low- and middle-income countries are at the forefront of this crisis – not because they are inherently more affected but because social and economic structures shape their vulnerability. Climate change intensifies existing inequalities, placing greater burdens on women within households, livelihoods and communities. At the same time, women play a critical role in climate adaptation and environmental management, often leading efforts to secure food and water, adopt sustainable practices, and build community resilience. However, their contributions remain constrained by structural and cultural barriers, including limited access to land, financial resources and decision-making.

By placing women and girls at the heart of climate solutions, the report argues that we not only strengthen environmental outcomes but also contribute to more just and resilient communities.

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) are increasingly adopted as a primary means of building climate resilience, with multilateral banks and governments mainstreaming them across urban, coastal and rural initiatives. Yet, a review of NbS projects reveals that gender equality and social inclusion remain largely peripheral, leaving most projects without the structures needed to convert ecological gains into equitable benefits. This report synthesises decades of research on the intersections of gender, climate and the environment, providing a foundation for Plan International Australia's approach to designing more equitable and effective NbS.

A comprehensive analysis of climate adaptation literature underscores that supporting women and

girls is not just a matter of equity but a fundamental strategy for achieving more effective climate adaptation outcomes. Research shows that women, particularly young women, are often more likely than men to adopt innovative climate adaptation practices, alongside being core actors in climate change adaptation within households and communities. They also hold distinct and important bodies of knowledge around adaptation. Despite this, adaptation strategies often fail to recognise or support their leadership in responding to climate change, leaving their knowledge and efforts underutilised. Young people, especially girls, play an important role in building climate resilience, yet their contributions to household economies and adaptation are also poorly recognised and seldom supported.

Informed by both research and our emerging experience, Plan International Australia has developed a set of guiding principles for gender-transformative NbS. These principles go beyond simply including women in climate initiatives; they address structural inequalities that limit their participation and work towards shifting power dynamics to ensure that women and girls can fully engage in and benefit from adaptation efforts. Without deliberate efforts to integrate gender equity into NbS programming, climate solutions risk reinforcing existing disparities rather than challenging them.

This document provides a clear justification and evidence base for gender-transformative NbS, drawing from extensive research on women's roles in conservation and climate resilience, and highlights the need for greater research focused on girls and youth in NbS work. It outlines why gender must be central to NbS design, implementation, and governance, demonstrating that interventions that fail to account for gender are less effective, less sustainable, and less equitable. By placing women and girls at the heart of climate solutions, the report argues that we not only strengthen environmental outcomes but also contribute to more just and resilient communities.



Gender and climate adaptation: Why support women and girls?

Decades of research on gender and climate has demonstrated that women and girls are not inherently more impacted by climate impacts than men, but social and economic structures determine their vulnerability.¹ This vulnerability is furthermore intersectional, and shaped by race, disability, ethnicity and economic status. There is a broad consensus that climate-related stressors intensify gendered burdens, particularly within households and livelihood systems. As extreme weather events become more frequent, women take on greater responsibilities in securing food, water, and household stability, often with limited access to financial resources, land, and decision-making power.² Across multiple regions, rising temperatures and water scarcity have forced women to spend more time managing household needs, while diminishing employment opportunities in agricultural processing have eroded their financial independence.

The gendered and intersectional impacts of climate change extend beyond livelihoods and are increasingly well documented, affecting multiple aspects of women's health, education and personal security. Studies indicate that climate disasters disproportionately impact women's mental health, with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide following extreme weather events.³ Recent meta-reviews provide powerful evidence of the negative links between climate change and reproductive health, which alongside reduced fertility and impacts of foetal health, demonstrate the increasingly poor obstetric outcomes for women during and after climate change-linked disasters (e.g., heatwaves).⁴ Gender-based violence has also been documented in the aftermath of climate shocks, particularly in disaster-prone regions such as Pakistan and Bangladesh.⁵ In the Philippines, worsening flooding due to sea-level rise has repeatedly disrupted schools, particularly in low-income coastal areas, leading to significant learning losses for children, with lasting consequences for gendered educational inequalities and increased burdens of care on women.⁶ The cumulative impacts of these pressures have impacts beyond immediate hardship, influencing long-term outcomes such as education access and economic mobility.

Women are, however, not passive victims of climate change. Despite structural barriers, women – especially young women and girls – are key actors in climate adaptation, particularly given that they are often responsible for managing household economies and intra and inter-community networks of mutual aid. Research from multiple regions indicates that young women are as likely as men to lead the

adoption of climate adaptation practices, if not more likely in many areas. In rural Kenya, for example, farms managed by women, or where women play a significant role, report higher participation in climate smart agricultural initiatives.⁷ Research from across Bangladesh consistently highlights their role in securing household resilience through anticipatory savings and livelihood diversification in response to climate-driven disaster events.⁸ Findings from across Africa,^{9,10} the Pacific and South America consistently highlight the importance and distinct role of women in adaptation, who frequently pursue distinct strategies and priorities in resilience building to men. While there is some considerable variation both within and across countries, women often focus their efforts on securing household subsistence in the face of changing climate conditions. For example, research from Papua New Guinea's National Research Institute¹¹ has demonstrated how women in Enga Province have begun switching their subsistence plots to heat-tolerant staples like cassava, taro and sweet potato. This was an adaptation choice reported only by female farmers, while men continued to prioritise coffee and cash income, showing a distinctly gendered response to climate stress. These adaptation strategies are also shaped by differing preferences for socially based resilience, often rooted in networks outside of households, in contrast to the technocratic and frequently individualised focus of men. In the Philippines¹², women in flood-prone Nueva Ecija pre-stock rice and draw on neighbour lending circles for emergency food and cash. Men instead raise field dikes and shift planting dates.

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However, despite this evidence of women's roles in household and community-focused resilience, their ability to lead adaptation efforts is frequently constrained by unequal access to land, credit, knowledge and agricultural extension services, all of which limit their capacity to scale up climate-smart practices^{13,14}. Furthermore, because much of this adaptation work takes place within household and informal settings, it remains less well documented and unsupported by policy.



In rural Vietnam, research focused on gendered approaches to adaptation shows that while men favour technical solutions (e.g., dam construction), women advocate for household-based strategies that better support long-term resilience. Yet, their perspectives remain underrepresented in decision-making at both household and policy levels. As such, efforts to build climate resilience have often overlooked gendered realities, privileging men's adaptation strategies and risk tolerances, which has tangible impacts for both household security and gender equality. Similarly, research from Rwanda highlights how national climate-smart agriculture programs have prioritized commercial crops like maize, despite women's preference for more resilient staple crops such as sweet potatoes, which provide greater food security in times of climatic stress.¹⁵ Policies that fail to recognize women's expertise and adaptation priorities risk deepening gendered inequalities within rural economies by supporting strategies that exclude their perspectives and expertise.

The vulnerability and role of women and girls in climate change adaptation is not static. Arguably, structural transformations unfold across the Global South, such as the increasing role that women play in agricultural work (often termed the feminization of agriculture), have and continue to intensify the adaptation burdens placed on women.¹⁶ As men migrate to urban centres for wage labour, women are increasingly responsible for farm management and climate adaptation yet the decision making related to what to grow, where to sell and how to use the income continues to rest with men. While this shift presents potential opportunities for women in sectors traditionally dominated by men, their participation in lucrative commercial farming and fishing is frequently limited to contractual, seasonal, and lower-paid roles.¹⁷ For young women and girls in particular, efforts to seize emerging economic opportunities remain significantly more precarious compared to their male peers.¹⁸ Adolescent girls and young women in particular are impacted by expectations that they take up child rearing and associated activities at very young ages, which hampers their ability to take on a range of opportunities outside of households. These emerging dynamics heighten the urgency for adaptation strategies that not only recognise women's expanding responsibilities but also redistribute resources and burdens of work, enhance security and ensure their full and fair participation in climate-resilient economies.

Despite increasing global attention to gender-responsive climate action, women remain underrepresented in policy-making and adaptation planning processes, both at national and community levels. While climate governance spaces are gradually becoming more gender-inclusive, participation still falls far short of gender parity.¹⁹ Without targeted efforts to integrate women's perspectives into national adaptation strategies, agricultural policies, and disaster risk reduction frameworks, adaptation efforts will continue to reinforce existing gender inequities. In sum, we argue that recognising women as critical actors in climate adaptation is essential, but policies must avoid reinforcing gendered burdens of care. Gender is increasingly adopted into key global and national policies that guide adaptation, and while these shifts offer opportunities for women to take on greater leadership in climate-sensitive sectors, they also exacerbate unpaid labour burdens and financial precarity. Placing disproportionate adaptation burdens on them without redistributing resources and decision-making power will only exacerbate existing inequalities and demonstrably result in smaller uptake of adaptation practices.²⁰

In light of this evidence, we understand that a core feature of gender-transformative adaptation involves moving beyond inclusion to actively redistribute power and resources. Plan International defines its gender-transformative approach as one that confronts the root causes of gender inequality and actively reshapes unequal power relations to secure girls' rights and broader gender equality. It does this by amplifying girls' agency, engaging boys and men to challenge harmful norms, and using the [Gender Transformative Marker](#) to ensure every programme advances both daily conditions and the structural position of girls and young women. In the context of climate change adaptation efforts, it requires creating space for women and girls on the decision-making table and investing in women's leadership, embedding gender equity into climate governance, and recognising women and girls as critical agents of change, not simply as caretakers or beneficiaries. Meaningful adaptation must balance their growing responsibilities with genuine decision-making authority, financial support, and recognition of their knowledge systems. Without deliberate structural change, adaptation efforts risk deepening gendered inequalities rather than addressing them.

The gendered aspects of nature-based solutions

As this body of evidence shows, women and girls are not only affected by climate change, but they are also central to building resilience within households and communities. Yet, many of the adaptation strategies that receive funding and policy attention fail to meaningfully include their voices or recognise their leadership. This oversight is particularly evident in the growing field of Nature-based Solutions (NbS). Within a wider adaptation crisis, NbS have emerged from a growing recognition that ecosystems play a fundamental role in addressing global challenges such as climate change, food security, and disaster risk reduction. The concept draws on long-standing environmental approaches, including ecosystem-based adaptation and integrated landscape management, but was formally articulated in the early 2000s by international conservation organisations seeking to bridge biodiversity conservation with sustainable development.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was a key proponent in shaping NbS as a structured framework, formally defining it in 2016 as actions that protect, restore, and sustainably manage ecosystems to provide both environmental and societal benefits. The European Commission also played a significant role by integrating NbS into its research and innovation agenda, particularly through the Horizon 2020 program, which promoted nature-based urban resilience and climate adaptation strategies. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) have further advanced NbS through global initiatives on ecosystem restoration and climate-smart agriculture.

Today, the explicit recognition of conserving and enhancing ecosystems to support climate action is embedded in major global policy frameworks and donor priorities, including the Paris Agreement, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Its application spans diverse sectors, from mangrove restoration for coastal protection to agroforestry for climate-smart agriculture, demonstrating its potential to integrate ecological integrity with economic and social resilience, particularly around climate. NbS approaches are becoming increasingly important in the context of both increasing climate change impacts and unsustainable pressure on ecosystems that support adaptation and mitigation.

However, despite the excitement and promise of NbS approaches to address climate change adaptation and mitigation, we suggest that gender is not sufficiently or appropriately considered in the design, implementation and

policy architecture of NbS applications globally. This gap has implications not only for justice and equity but, as the above review of gender and adaptation indicates, is crucial to effectiveness of climate change adaptation interventions.

Women have historically been marginalised from biodiversity conservation, since the inception of state-driven regimes of resources in colonial states over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries, leading to a persistent “gender gap” in state conservation efforts.²¹ This has occurred, and continues, for a range of interrelated reasons: established gender norms in many societies do not recognise and undervalue the authority of women’s knowledge and practice, practitioners and policymakers are not sufficiently aware of women’s role in environmental management and the design of new community institutions for conservation purposes may lend themselves to women’s exclusion.²² More recently, in many countries experiencing a rise on authoritarian populism violence against environmental defenders has become increasingly gendered. In the Philippines^{23,24}, for example, poverty, rural isolation and Indigeneity combine to make Filipina environmental defenders the most frequent targets of lethal retaliation, especially in mining and logging conflicts where militarised corporate impunity prevails. Their assassinations, typically drive-by shootings or raids that enter homes, terrorise families and use sexual violence, weaponise patriarchal norms to silence women’s activism, rendering the brutality distinctly gendered. These received wisdoms, biases and threats of violent reprisal have powerful downstream effects on project design. For example, local committees established as part of environmental management initiatives typically allow for the participation a single household member, which often leads to the exclusion of women. When women are included in participatory forums, they often do not speak or are not allowed to speak or worse, their comments and suggestions aren’t documented or inform the decisions.

Sitting alongside this ongoing exclusion, there is a small but consistent stream of evidence that demonstrates how including women in environmental management can lead to better outcomes. A major review²⁵ of India and Nepal’s pioneering and extensive experiences in localising environmental management, for example, argues that increasing women’s participation in community forest management leads to significantly better conservation outcomes. Local forest management groups with higher proportions of women, particularly those with all-women executive committees, achieved greater improvements in forest condition,

even when starting with more degraded forests. This positive impact is attributed to women's stronger commitment to forest protection, better rule compliance and their knowledge of sustainable resource use, as well as increased cooperation among women in enforcing conservation efforts.²⁶ As primary providers of water, food, and fuel for their families in many communities, women have a deep, lived understanding of the direct connection between the survival of their immediate environments and their own well-being.

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However, despite the ongoing struggle to centre gender within environmental management and the sustained research that argues for a greater role for women within conservation efforts, meaningful and systemic inclusion has arguably not been realised in practice. This ongoing exclusion also extends to emerging NbS policies and practices, which remain poorly examined. Emerging evidence from NbS projects in West Africa²⁷ indicates that women's involvement remains limited by structural inequities, entrenched gender norms and restricted access to resources. Tokenism and lack of meaningful participation persist in the design, implementation and governance of many NbS projects. While many organisations claim to prioritise gender equity, their

approaches are often superficial, rarely addressing deeper intersectional inequalities related to class, age, and marital status. Evidence focused on enhancing women's participation in NbS suggests that meaningful involvement in environmental governance requires far more than the facilitation of participation and involves comprehensive efforts to support women's leadership and address discriminatory social and gender norms that limit inclusion.²⁸ Despite the nominal focus on GEDSI within emerging NbS approaches and policy frameworks, gender remains a poorly examined aspect of NbS approaches, and a critical space in need of more research, particularly regarding the role and impact of adolescent girls.²⁹ Research commissioned by Plan International Australia in the Pacific has highlighted the enthusiasm of girls and young women to be involved in climate action and conservation-driven solutions to climate change, despite the systemic barriers they face across local and regional scales.³⁰

Recent evaluations of gender-focused biodiversity conservation have emphasised that despite decades of sustained critique, progress on women's involvement remains elusive in practice. We argue women's inclusion within NbS approaches to climate change is more vital than ever and women and girls' involvement is crucial to the efficacy and efficiency of NbS approaches. Our approach to NbS is guided, in particular, by sustained criticisms that women-focused biodiversity initiatives have increased the burden of care on women, thus leaving men abrogated of their responsibilities, without a corresponding increase in compensation. Bluntly, “women in [conservation] projects also added the 'environment' to their already long list of caring chores”.³¹



Principles for gender transformative Nature-Based Solutions

Most existing NbS interventions and policy frameworks aim to be gender-sensitive or gender-responsive – ensuring that women and girls are included or that their needs are considered. However, this approach often leaves the deeper systems of inequality untouched and does not engage with the extensive research focused on women's involvement in conservation and environmental management. Addressing these issues, we argue, requires a gender-transformative approach that actively challenges and shifts the power relations that underpin economic and social inequities. This means not only addressing barriers to participation, but redistributing decision-making power, recognising and valuing women's and girl's leadership around resource use and management, and confronting the gender norms that limit recognition of expertise around the environment.

The seven principles outlined below are grounded in both the evidence reviewed above and Plan International Australia's practice, which highlights the structural inequalities shaping women and girls' experiences of climate change, biodiversity conservation and environmental management. This research has shown that while women and girls play a critical role in climate adaptation and conservation, their contributions are constrained by systemic barriers, including unequal access to land, financial resources and decision-making power. This evidence also demonstrates that merely including women in NbS initiatives is insufficient; without actively addressing these inequalities, adaptation efforts risk reinforcing existing gender disparities rather than challenging them. A gender-transformative approach is therefore essential, not just to improve equity, but to enhance the effectiveness of NbS themselves. NbS can move beyond tokenistic participation to effective climate change adaptation by shifting power dynamics, recognising and valuing women's leadership, and dismantling discriminatory norms.

These principles aim to operationalise this approaches, acting as a set of evidence-based basic criteria in the design of gender-transformative NbS projects, ensuring that gender equity is not an afterthought but a foundational pillar of nature-based climate resilience. These gender-transformative NbS principles differ from standard models such as the [IUCN Global Standard for Nature-based Solutions](#), which keeps a largely technical checklist and frames gender as a safeguard rather than a entry point for systemic change. By placing power redistribution, adolescent leadership and intersectionality at the centre, the approach turns ecosystem restoration into a route for concrete social and economic empowerment of women and girls, in line with

emerging guidance on gender and social inclusion in NbS. The principles also reflect the intent of the eight internationally endorsed Locally Led Adaptation principles by ensuring that decision-making authority, resources and accountability remain with frontline communities, which matches growing global commitments to LLA practice. Within Plan International, they build naturally on the [Pathways to Resilience](#) framework by deepening the "healthy environment" pathway and setting out practical mechanisms, such as women-led governance and nature-positive livelihood pathways, that link ecological integrity to wider community resilience outcomes. These principles may be adopted in whole, or in part, where appropriate as part of program design.



1. Women's Leadership and Decision-Making in NbS

Research focused on women's and girl's involvement in biodiversity conservation and environmental management has emphasised the limits of tokenistic inclusion. Gender-transformative NbS requires actively and meaningfully positioning women as leaders in governance and decision-making processes. Across many regions, women's participation in climate adaptation remains limited due to structural inequalities and deeply ingrained cultural norms. Effective NbS initiatives must ensure that women are not only included but have central roles in shaping climate resilience strategies. Embedding women's leadership in governance structures at community, national, and global levels challenges traditional exclusions and promotes systemic change. At a local level, this means delicately engaging with systems of descent and inheritance that may exclude women from land ownership and management. Women must be empowered to take on decision-making roles in planning, design, and management to ensure their perspectives are included in environmental governance and climate policies.



2. Equitable Access to Environmental Knowledge and Capacity Building

For women and girls to effectively participate in climate adaptation, they must have access to relevant knowledge, skills, and resources. Many women face barriers to education, technical training, and financial resources, limiting their ability to engage in NbS initiatives that may involve engaging with complex ideas around ecological function or new technologies. Gender-transformative approaches ensure that training programs address

the gaps women traditionally face in accessing education and resources, equipping women and girls with the technical understanding needed to implement NbS effectively. The current consensus from research and practice indicates that integrating scientific knowledge with local and indigenous knowledge strengthens adaptation strategies, in addition to recognising the often-hidden environmental knowledge held by women. Our experience indicates that alongside environmental knowledge, capacity-building must also extend to financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and access to resources that enable women to manage nature-positive economic opportunities and take leadership in environmental governance.



3. Transforming Gender Norms in Adaptation and Conservation

Evidence from longstanding research on women and environment, alongside our emerging insights focused on NbS programming, has demonstrated how deeply rooted gender norms often exclude women from environmental management and biodiversity conservation. In many regions, women's roles in agriculture, water management and ecosystem restoration are undervalued, despite their extensive environmental knowledge. This is particularly true within national-level policies and mandates. Gender-transformative NbS approaches must actively challenge deeply rooted gender norms that exclude women, girls and other marginalised groups from environmental management and biodiversity conservation, including within national level policies and mandates, as well as in community level actions.

Plan International's experience in gender transformative programming suggests that engaging men and boys as allies is a critical strategy for shifting perceptions and promoting shared responsibilities in adaptation efforts. It also aims to break the barriers that prevent men and boys from embracing gender equality, exercising their rights and being champions of change. NbS interventions must work to dismantle discriminatory norms by promoting women's agency and leadership, in culturally appropriate ways, ensuring that gender equality is embedded within climate action rather than treated as a secondary concern.



4. Strengthening Policy Influence and Advocacy

Beyond community-level interventions, it is clear that women and girls remain underrepresented in the national and regional level policies that guide climate change adaptation and environmental management in many regions of the world. Over a longer timescale this means that women's voices must be amplified in climate policy discussions to ensure equitable and effective NbS implementation. Environmental governance at the local, national,

and international levels often lacks adequate representation of women and marginalised groups. Effective NbS initiatives should equip women and girls with advocacy skills to influence climate policy frameworks and decision-making processes. Training programs on policy engagement, strategic communication, and governance structures help strengthen women's capacity to advocate for more equitable policies that shape their well-being and access to resources. Any changes in climate and environmental policy also require budgeting and accountability mechanisms to ensure that progress is adequately funded and measured. A key tool for this work involves establishing knowledge-sharing platforms and advocacy networks further support women's participation to ensure that gender-transformative approaches to NbS gain traction in policy and governance at all levels.



5. Community-Driven and Inclusive Implementation

Effective NbS interventions must be participatory and inclusive so that solutions reflect the needs of those most affected by climate change. Women, Indigenous peoples, and other marginalized groups often have deep ecological knowledge and sustainable management practices, yet their perspectives are frequently overlooked in mainstream conservation and adaptation programs as a result of enduring biases about who holds environmental knowledge. To address this issue, NbS approaches must integrate community-driven planning, where women and marginalized voices are actively included in defining adaptation priorities. Gender-sensitive risk assessments are essential to address potential backlash against women's leadership and participation and foster a longer-term enabling environment for change.



6. Empowerment Through NbS

Research on gender-environment linkages has cautioned that a focus on women as environmental guardians can increase their burden of care. Following this, we argue that an increase in responsibility must be matched by a corresponding increase in economic benefits. For NbS interventions to be truly transformative, they must create economic opportunities that support women's long-term resilience and distribute unpaid care work more equally at the household level. Many women, particularly in rural and climate-vulnerable regions, rely on small-scale agriculture and natural resource-based livelihoods. This approach ensures that NbS interventions – such as reforestation, regenerative agriculture, and sustainable fisheries – enhance both environmental health and economic security. Supporting women in climate-resilient agriculture and nature-based enterprises, providing access to financial resources, and facilitating market

linkages can transform NbS into a tool for economic empowerment. When women have control over financial resources and decision-making in climate adaptation, both household and community resilience are strengthened.



7. Intersectionality and Inclusion of Adolescent Girls

A gender-transformative approach to NbS must recognise that women and girls are not a homogenous group and that intersecting factors, such as age, disability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and indigeneity shape their ability to engage in climate adaptation. Despite evidence that adolescent girls are highly motivated to participate in climate action, they remain largely invisible in NbS initiatives due to restrictive gender norms, limited decision-making power, and economic barriers. Research shows that girls play

critical roles in household resilience and climate-smart practices, yet their contributions are often overlooked. Without deliberate inclusion, NbS risks reinforcing these exclusions. Targeted strategies, such as leadership pathways, tailored capacity-building, and recognition of girls' ecological knowledge, are essential to ensuring meaningful participation. Embedding intersectionality in NbS not only strengthens adaptation outcomes but also expands opportunities for adolescent girls to lead and participate in biodiversity conservation, resource use, and management.



Plan International Case Study: Pacific Climate Champions

Fiji, The Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea

Climate change presents a profound threat to Pacific communities, with rising temperatures, extreme weather, sea level rise and ocean acidification disrupting livelihoods, food systems, and water security. Women and girls in the region face a double burden: they are disproportionately affected due to their caregiving and community roles yet often excluded from adaptation planning and decision-making. Despite gender-responsive policies, women's voices remain marginalised at all levels. NbS have significant traction in the Pacific and are promoted as a cost-effective way to address climate change and achieve a wide range of social and environmental co-benefits. However, across the region, these initiatives frequently fail to comprehensively or systematically recognise women's environmental knowledge or support their leadership. This exclusion is doubly amplified in terms of youth and girl's involvement. This lack of recognition holds significant risk, reinforcing existing inequalities and excluding women and girls from emerging opportunities in the nature-positive economy and broader climate resilience efforts.

Recognising this gap, Plan International Australia initiated a co-design process in 2023 with local stakeholders and implementing partners to develop a regional approach to NbS. This included workshops in Fiji in 2023 and again in Honiara in 2024 to co-design a theory of change, evaluation framework and equitable ways working. The result of this process, the Pacific Climate Champions program is a new multi-country initiative designed to address issues of equity in NbS, which is critically important given the growing importance nature-based resilience as the de facto approach to climate adaptation across the Pacific. The collaborative process of program design has helped inform the development of our gender-transformative approach and principles to NbS program design and now guides the development of nature-based resilience programming across the Asia Pacific.

Operating across multiple island nations, starting in 2025, the program aims to demonstrate how integrating gender equity into NbS not only enhances environmental outcomes but can also drive systemic



social change around gender and youth inclusion. The program involves supporting women and girls in Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea to have a more active role in the design, implementation and ultimate benefits arising from NbS activities. Rather than a singular NbS activity, the project works with local CSOs in each country to develop contextually appropriate interventions to address key climate and environmental challenges.

The program designs represent the enactment of many of the gender-transformative principles for NbS work. One of the most important aspects of the project is its emphasis on women's leadership and decision-making in NbS (Principle 1). In many Pacific communities, women play a crucial role in managing natural resources, yet they are often excluded from formal governance structures or receive recognition in wider government policies as experts. The project directly addresses this gap by providing leadership training, creating opportunities for women to take active roles in community decision-making and supporting their participation in climate governance at local and national levels. Women's groups have been formed or strengthened to oversee key NbS activities, including mangrove restoration, climate-smart agriculture and sloping land stabilization. This aims to ensure that adaptation efforts reflect the lived experiences and priorities of those most affected by climate change.

Equitable access to climate information is a longstanding issue in the Pacific, and a core focus of the project is its commitment to capacity building (Principle 2). Recognizing that effective NbS require both technical expertise and localized knowledge, the project combines scientific approaches with Indigenous environmental practices. Through structured training programs, women, youth, and community leaders gain the skills needed to assess climate risks, design nature-based interventions,

and implement sustainable land-use practices. The promotion of adaptation planning processes, which focus on participatory resilience building at a community level, aim to ensure that learning is context-specific and grounded in local economic and cultural aspirations. In line with broader debates and discussions around definitions and measurements of resilience, our focus is on centring local understandings and indicators of resilience.

The project also integrates economic empowerment through NbS (Principle 6), ensuring that women not only contribute to environmental restoration but also benefit financially from these efforts. Women-led initiatives, such as community nurseries and agroforestry enterprises, will provide sustainable livelihood opportunities while strengthening ecosystem resilience. Local CSOs will provide technical support to help women with design and implementation, allowing them to generate income while actively participating in climate adaptation. This economic dimension is focused on the long-term sustainability of adaptation interventions, demonstrating that gender-transformative NbS can simultaneously address climate vulnerability and enhance financial security.

By embedding these principles into its design and implementation, the Pacific Climate Champions project exemplifies how gender-transformative NbS can lead to more inclusive and sustainable climate adaptation. Women who were previously excluded from decision-making are being supported to lead climate resilience initiatives, communities are benefiting from knowledge-sharing and skills development, and NbS interventions are delivering both ecological and economic benefits. Alongside these key outcome areas, the aim of the program is to produce a model that provides a scalable and replicable approach for integrating gender equity into NbS across the Pacific.



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