



### Climate-Induced Displacement and the Gendered Realities of Migration in Pakistan: A Case Study Approach

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Vol. 4, Issue 1, 2025

#### Article Information

##### Received:

2025-03-23

##### Revised:

2025-05-21

##### Accepted:

2025-06-19

#### ABSTRACT

In Pakistan, climate change has a severe impact on the mechanisms of displacement, with various floods, droughts, and extreme weather conditions regularly displacing communities. This paper highlights the gendered impacts of displacement caused by climate change, placing a particular emphasis on the vulnerability of women at risk. It uses a qualitative method to explain how the socio-cultural norms, structural disparities, and institutional gaps increase the vulnerability of women. There is empirical evidence based on field observations and secondary sources, illustrating how displaced women face increased risks like gender-based violence, lack of mobility, and poor access to health and legal services, and are mostly left out of the decision-making, concerning climate adaptation. The results support the need to have gender-sensitive policies and locally contextual measures of adaptation responding to intersectional vulnerabilities. In a broader context, the study contributes to the existing demands to shift climate discourse toward the focus on social justice and gender equity and concludes that gender considerations should be incorporated into climate resilience strategies as an ethical imperative and a necessary condition of sustainable adaptation.

**Keywords:** *Climate Change, Gender, Displacement, Vulnerability, Migration, Pakistan, Adaptation Policies.*

#### Citation: APA

Ahmed, S., Jaleel, S & Tahira, A, N. (2025). *Climate-Induced displacement and the gendered realities of migration in Pakistan: A case study approach*, *Journal of Climate and Community Development*, 4(1), 303-310.



## Introduction

Social capital has been defined in a number of ways. Climate change is one of the major global challenges of the twenty-first century with major impacts on the environment, the economy, and the society. Displacement caused by climate change has become a key concern of humanitarian and developmental fields, among other consequences of the climate. The figure of more than 32 million of the displaced worldwide in the year 2023 alone, owing to extreme weather conditions such as heatwaves, droughts, and floods were reported by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2024). The displacement caused by climate change is becoming more widespread and dramatic in countries such as Pakistan, which is especially susceptible due to institutional, socioeconomic, and geographic conditions. The report of the Global Climate Risk Index stated that Pakistan ranked among the ten countries that were most affected by climate change (Eckstein et al., 2021). Recurring flooding, declining glaciers and droughts have led to numerous internal migrations in the nation, particularly in the Sindh and Punjab provinces.

The impact of this type of displacement, however, is not gender neutral. Climate-induced migration disproportionately impacts women and girls but is compounded by pre-existing social injustices of economic dependency, patriarchal cultures, and reduced mobility. Alston (2019) states that climate change is a gender inequality threat multiplier, which exacerbates the existing vulnerability and further loads of women, especially those living in rural and low-income families. The displacement crises such as the disastrous floods in Pakistan in 2010 and 2022 have been used to reveal the gendered fault lines of climate impacts, as in both, women rarely have access to land ownership, legal protection, and decision making.

Climate migration and displacement are a growing area of academic research, but studies with a gendered lens are limited, especially when it comes to Pakistan. The existing policy responses still focus on technocratic and infrastructure-driven solutions to the problems, and the experience of women who migrated, lost their livelihoods, and suffered the breakdown of community support systems remains under-

investigated (Mustafa et al., 2021). As an example, women systematically miss out on land-redistribution programmes in post-displacement contexts, are exposed to increased cases of gender-based violence in relief camps, and lack access to health care and education, both their own and that of their children. At the same time, women do not become helpless spectators; they take up leadership positions that arise, develop household survival tactics, and become fundamental in building community resilience. A qualitative, case-study approach that puts women at the centre of its focus and concentrates on their experiences and their daily lives is therefore necessary to better understand these complex dynamics.

This paper aims to analyse the perceptions, coping mechanisms, and adjustments women living in flood-prone areas in Pakistan make with regard to the difficulties of migration and subsequent resettlement. By using focus-group discussions and in-depth interviews based on key communities, the study will attempt to deconstruct the psychological, sociocultural, and economic impacts of displacement on women, and explore how gender influences their participation, protection and access to relief assistance. The ultimate goal of the study is to assist in the evolution of more inclusive disaster-management procedures and to influence gender-responsive climate policies within the context of Pakistan.

## Review of Literature

In the last 20 years, the displacement caused by climate has become a contemporary topic in the study of migration and climate-change studies. As it is explained by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022), such phenomena as droughts, extreme weather events, and increased sea levels are the main drivers of displacement. These impacts are especially severe in developing countries, where poverty, poor infrastructure, and poor governance add to the impact. Pakistan, which is often cited as one of the most climate-vulnerable states (Eckstein et al., 2021), experienced millions of displaced people over the last decade due to frequent floods and environmental erosion.

### *Climate Change and Displacement in Pakistan:*

The empirical work confirms a causal relationship between climatic changes, and displacement in

Pakistan. The floods that swept the country in 2010, which were classified as the worst in the history of Pakistan, affected over 20 million people and caused displacement of some 14 million people (World Bank, 2011). Similar tendencies are observed in the 2022 monsoon floods, which covered a third of the national territory and forced more than 8 million people to displace (UNHCR, 2022). These incidents highlight how internal mobility patterns and settlement geographies are changing because of environmental shocks.

Relatively few studies have looked at the social and gendered aspects of such mobility, even though many have addressed the physical and infrastructure effects of displacement (such as harm to housing, livelihoods, and public health systems). Given that not all populations are equally impacted by climate change, this disparity is especially concerning. Gender is a key factor in determining exposure, resilience, and recovery, and vulnerability is socially differentiated (Ravera et al., 2016).

### ***Gendered Vulnerability in Climate Displacement:***

According to the theory of gendered vulnerability, men and women experience climate risks differently because of institutional arrangements and social norms. According to Bradshaw and Fordham (2014), patriarchal social structures frequently restrict women to domestic, informal, or unpaid labour, thereby limiting their mobility, information access, land ownership, and decision-making power. In South Asia, the three interdependent factors, such as low female literacy, economic dependency, and cultural norms that define the nature of participation in the public domain by means of “purdah” (gender seclusion) can be seen as explaining why gender disparities persist in the region.

Vulnerability is the key point of the intersection of environmental and gender relationships. In the rhetoric of climatic crises, empirical studies have shown that women are more gravely impacted by food insecurity, increasing gender-based violence as well as the interruptions in reproductive health services. A good case in point is flood-related displacement in Pakistan: in this instance, the loss of community-based support systems has been the norm, exposing women in camps and other

makeshift shelters to sexual harassment, and significantly reducing the availability of maternal care (Amnesty International, 2010).

The inability of women to access communication networks and the process of disaster preparedness planning, as was reported in a study of flood early warning systems in Pakistan by Mustafa et al. (2021), is compounded by the lack of attention to women and their interests in the sphere of public policy and technical discussions. This kind of exclusion places women at a disproportionately high risk in times of disaster since they get less advanced warning and are less prepared to act. This side-lining reveals an internal systemic discrimination in the humanitarian aid systems, as well as the climate governance systems.

### ***Agency and Adaptation:***

The extent to which women can only be theorised as passive victims of displacement due to climatic change is also being challenged in contemporary scholarship. As empirical research shows, women display a significant amount of agency in their attempts to respond to the degraded environment and reconstruct their livelihoods after being forcefully displaced. As an example, Arora-Jonsson (2011) warns against the overuse of the victimising narrative that overshadows the diversity of means in which women can exert agency in limiting conditions. Women in many Pakistani rural contexts have played active roles in resource governance, diversification of household income through remote labour, and in community initiatives in both response and recovery phases of a crisis.

Even so, agency is frequently used within unequal power structures. For example, after being displaced, women might have to shoulder more caregiving or financial responsibilities while still not having a say in local rehabilitation planning decisions. The fine-grained, situation-sensitive reconceptualization of gender is essential when the paradox of visibility in work and invisibility in leadership is realised.

### ***Policy Gaps and the Need for Gender-Responsive Frameworks:***

The migration and climate policies of Pakistan are gender-blind despite the complicated social realities they are targeting. Recognition of gender is restricted to a brief mentioning in the National

Climate Change Policy (NCCP, 2021) that does not provide a specific structure of women protection or their participation during relocation and displacement procedures. Both state and non-state actors frequently neglect to incorporate gender-sensitive indicators or gender-disaggregated data in their humanitarian responses (Fatima & Haider, 2020). Lack of consistent and stable indicators hinders the targeted distribution of resources, exposes the social exclusion, and obscures the long-term recovery processes.

Climate adaptation requires an intersectional approach to question how gender intersects with other identities (class, age, caste, and rural-urban location, among others), an agreement that is now largely shared by gender researchers and development professionals (Kaijser and Kronsell 2014). Therefore, context-specific, community-led approaches to implementing the policy in Pakistan must prioritize women and their lived experiences and perceptions at all levels of the policy lifecycle, including risk assessment and recovery.

### ***Theoretical Framework and Research Gap:***

This paper aims to go beyond abstract and generalised arguments and enter the lived experiences of displaced women in flood-affected areas of Pakistan by combining the perspectives of feminist political ecology and intersectionality theories. The study uses a qualitative case-study approach to gain insight into the complexity of how women survive, adjust and persevere after displacement, focusing on their socially constructed roles.

Despite the growing acknowledgement of gender in global climate discourse, there is still a dearth of empirical research from Pakistan that reflects the gendered experiences of climate induced displacement at the local level. Therefore, by emphasising women's stories, this study fills a crucial gap and advances both academic understanding and policy change.

### **Research Methodology**

To investigate the gendered aspects of climate-induced displacement in Pakistan, this study uses a qualitative case study methodology, concentrating on the lived experiences of women in flood-affected areas. In situations where

quantitative data might ignore socio-cultural complexities, the qualitative paradigm is well-suited for obtaining detailed, nuanced insights into how women view, negotiate, and adjust to displacement.

In this empirical study, the scholar will identify one such district in the South Punjab or Sindh based on its history of being prone to flooding. In particular, the location has experienced various mass displacements, the last of which was the 2022 monsoon floods.

25–30 female participants will be chosen through purposive sampling, including displaced women who are presently living in government relief camps, informal settlements, or temporary shelters. In terms of age, marital status, and socioeconomic background, the sample will strive for diversity.

Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) will be used to gather data. While FGDs will promote group reflection and experience comparison, interviews will offer personal accounts. Key informants, including female health workers, local NGO employees, and community organizers involved in post-disaster relief, will provide additional insights.

To find reoccurring patterns, emotional reactions, coping mechanisms, and obstacles to receiving assistance and rehabilitation, thematic analysis will be used. To understand vulnerability and resilience, multiple layers of identity—such as gender, class, and rurality—will be considered during the data collection and interpretation process, which will be guided by an intersectional feminist lens.

Throughout the entire research process, ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity will be closely adhered to. To protect the identities of participants, findings will be reported using pseudonyms.

### **Findings**

Following the 2022 monsoon floods, 28 displaced women from flood-affected areas of Sindh and South Punjab participated in in-depth interviews and focus groups. The main themes that arose from these discussions are presented in this section. Four main themes surfaced from the thematic coding of the data: **(1) Gendered**

## **Vulnerability During Displacement, (2) Erosion of Livelihoods and Food Security, (3) Gender-Based Violence and Protection Risks, and (4) Women's Agency and Adaptive Roles.**

### **1. Gendered Vulnerability During Displacement:**

Participants frequently highlighted how their vulnerability during displacement was increased by traditional gender roles. Most women stated that they relied on male family members to make evacuation decisions for them and that they had no advance notice of the floods. One Rajanpur, Punjab, participant made the following observation:

*"The men decided when to leave. We waited until the water entered our homes. We didn't even know where we were going."*

Numerous women reported being left out of decisions about relief and frequently depending on male family members or aid workers—nearly all of whom are men—to obtain necessities like food, shelter, and water.

### **2. Erosion of Livelihoods and Food Security:**

Prior to being displaced, most women interviewed worked from home or in informal agricultural labour. Their only sources of food and income were destroyed by the floods, which also destroyed household gardens, livestock, and standing crops.

*"We lost everything—our goats, our wheat, even the grinding stone. Now we eat once a day, if that,"* said a widow from Khairpur.

There were no accommodations for expectant or nursing mothers, and food distribution in the camps was characterised as unpredictable and badly run. Many of the respondents claimed that for their kids to eat, they had to skip meals.

### **3. Gender-Based Violence and Protection Risks:**

Conditions brought about by displacement greatly raised the likelihood of harassment and violence. Lack of privacy, dim lighting, and a dearth of female security guards made women feel unsafe in camps. One adolescent girl shared:

*"There are no toilets for women here. We wait until it's dark, and then we go in groups."*

Others spoke of verbal abuse and exploitation

during aid distribution, and two women reported experiences of attempted sexual assault. Many complained about having to rely on male aid workers for basic supplies, health care, and sanitary products.

### **4. Women's Agency and Adaptive Roles:**

Many women showed agency in adjusting to their new circumstances despite harsh limitations. For their families, older women served as emotional support, informal teachers, and carers. A group of women in one camp established a small sewing cooperative using repurposed materials and started a rotating cooking schedule:

*"We couldn't wait for someone to save us. We had to make a life here, even if it's temporary,"* said a 35-year-old mother of four.

The modern contexts of displacement are increasingly allowing young women to take up civic roles that they have been denied, such as facilitating nongovernmental organization (NGO) relief efforts and mediating between humanitarian actors and local communities.

### **Summary of Key Insights:**

The climatic change-induced displacement inflates the existing gendered inequalities since it exposes women to increased risks in physical, financial, and emotional terms. At the same time, displacement produces new arenas of female agency, allowing women to exercise leadership and resilience in new unprecedented settings. The co-occurrence of these dynamics highlights the fact that disaster-response and climate adaptation policies that lack an intersectional and gender-sensitive approach are prone to worsen, rather than reduce, the marginalisation of populations affected by disasters.

### **Discussion**

This paper assesses the actual lived experiences of women who are displaced by the 2022 floods that struck Sindh and southern Punjab in Pakistan in a framework that prioritizes the gendered aspect of climate-induced displacement. Its conclusion shows that displacement is a disproportionate burden on women and girls and it shows how institutional failure and cultural norms can interact to compound structural inequality. Also, the analysis reveals cases of female leadership and resilience, which are enlightening on the strategies

that have been underrepresented in the existing discourse on climate displacement. To conclude, the findings are supportive and added value to what is already known about gendered vulnerability and displacement due to climate change.

### ***Displacement as a Gendered Process:***

These current results support the idea that climate-induced displacement is not gender-neutral as Bradshaw and Fordham (2014) and Daz and Dekens (2017) suggest. Instead, there are highly established patriarchal systems that mediate the phenomenon that affect the process of evacuation, who gets evacuated, when, and how the resources are distributed. The voices of women are systematically ignored, including in the situations threatening their lives; according to the participants, women were not involved in making evacuation decisions, and they did not get early warning messages, even though their lives were at risk.

The view of Mustafa et al. (2021) is supported by empirical evidence and discovers gendered exclusion of Pakistan in terms of flood early warning systems. This underrepresentation is further aggravated by the fact that efforts to coordinate relief are characterized by the insignificant inclusion of women, a factor that Alston (2019) explains as the “*invisibility*” of women in climate governance and disaster response.

### ***Economic Insecurity and Erosion of Livelihoods:***

The current research records the fact that displacement not only destroys home structure but also informal work activities of women, making agriculture and animal keeping activities unsustainable. Interviews conducted using a wide range of women demonstrate a holistic breakdown of household stability and a vertiginous decline in food security- an observation that is consistent with the reports of the IPCC (2022) on populations facing climatic risks.

The empirical evidence portrays that exposure to economic shocks that occur after disasters increases more among women than men. Factors like the dominance of informal, unrecognized, and unprotected labour that is particularly disproportionate among women make them

particularly vulnerable. Ravera et al. (2016) agree, stating that gender differences are exacerbated by climate variability due to the fact that women are the victims of gendered economic roles. Some of the consequences of displacement, such as the loss of land, can lead to total disempowerment, further enforcing gender inequality within displaced populations in Pakistan, where women hardly ever have land rights or property.

### ***Protection Gaps and Gender-Based Violence:***

Displacement-related risks are among the most alarming pieces of evidence that still exist, and the gender-based violence risks are not an exception. The women who have been displaced face prolonged insecurity caused by harassment, poor access to proper hygiene, and the lack of women security officers. Although these trends have been well documented in humanitarian situations elsewhere (Amnesty International, 2010), very little peer-reviewed literature exists to provide a country-specific perspective on Pakistan.

The displacement camps which aim to protect the displaced populations, usually recreate gendered vulnerability. The current research shows that such sites could reinforce gender based violence (GBV) instead of alleviating it. Results indicate that gender-sensitive conceptual and operational frameworks are necessary in the design of disaster-response at its inception, and that protection should be a main, and not a secondary, goal.

### ***Women’s Agency and Emergent Leadership:***

Notwithstanding the challenges listed above, the current research clarifies the instances of leadership, adaptation, and agency. The concept of situational resilience, as formulated by Arora-Jonsson (2011), refers to a localised coping and adaptation mechanism, which is commonly disregarded in the top-down policy-making processes. An example of this phenomenon is the women who, according to their means, established informal cooperatives, set up collective cooking systems or served as NGO intermediaries.

The analysis herein highlights the fact that women are active participants in social cohesion and recovery efforts and not just passive victims as most portrayed. However, the extent of their input is largely shrouded since formal policy spaces are still dominated by gender-silencing, technocratic

views.

### ***Implications for Gender-Responsive Climate Policy:***

The current study has vital outcomes that significantly contribute to the Pakistani disaster relief and climate change agendas. Fatima and Haider (2020) conclude that, despite the introduction of significant principles, the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) does not present a clear mechanism to incorporate gender and is ambiguous in how it addresses women. The paper thus indicates the urgency of gender-disaggregated data collection, community-based planning that is led by women, and institutional changes that protect women across the whole disaster response cycle, including risk assessment as well as rehabilitation.

According to Kaijser and Kronsell (2014), an intersectional framework must be used to explore displacement. The combination of class, marital status, disability, and rural location produces non uniform experiences of vulnerability and resilience hence ruling out universal inclusive policy of adaptation. Such subtle factors have to be considered by the policymakers to create fair and efficient forms of displacement mitigation.

### **Conclusion**

In order to explain the gendered aspects of climate-induced displacement in Pakistan, this research focused on the testimonies of the women who experienced 2022 floods in Sindh and South Punjab. Using qualitative case studies, it was determined that displacement is not only a form of geographical relocation, but also a process of rearranging gender relations, labour division, and social stratification.

There is empirical evidence showing that women and especially those living in low-income settings or rural areas bear disproportionate harm during and after displacement. These difficulties include

reduced mobility, loss of livelihoods, insufficient access to aid, and increased vulnerability to gender-based violence. These vulnerabilities stem from historical patriarchal systems that keep women out of decision-making processes pertaining to evacuation, aid distribution, and recovery after a disaster, in addition to the environmental crisis itself. Simultaneously, the study presented instances of female leadership and resilience, demonstrating how women can rebuild support networks, creatively adjust to crisis situations, and, in certain situations, take on new public roles.

The study adds to the increasing understanding that an intersectional, gender-sensitive framework is needed to address displacement and climate change. The National Climate Change Policy is one of Pakistan's current policies that lacks the clarity and depth required to guarantee inclusive disaster response. Strengthening protection mechanisms in displacement contexts, investing in gender-disaggregated data collection, and incorporating women's voices and agency into climate governance are all urgently needed.

This study has limitations even though it provides valuable insights. Future research should encompass a variety of geographic regions and marginalised identities, such as transgender people, disabled women, and religious minorities, as the findings are based on a case study with a region-specific focus. Further depth would be added by longitudinal studies that monitor the long-term effects of displacement on women's empowerment, education, and health.

Finally, this study urges a change in the way that policy and academic research are conducted, from viewing women as passive recipients of aid to acknowledging them as crucial players in enhancing climate resilience in Pakistan and elsewhere.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

### **Funding**

### **Funding**

The authors did not mention any funding for this research.

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