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Examining the Climate-Mobility Nexus in the Philippines: Emphasizing Gender-Responsive Policies

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Introduction

Ranked number one in the World Risk Index, the Philippines stands at the forefront of climate migration and adaptation challenges, necessitating urgent and feasible policy interventions.¹ Given research showing climate change disproportionately affects women in high-risk settings, this paper offers actionable solutions that center women's leadership and needs in climate resilience and mobility.

In 2010, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Conference of the Parties identified three types of mobility likely to increase as a result of climate change: migration, displacement, and planned relocations.² These movements, shaped by environmental hazards and gender inequality, affect women disproportionately, especially in rural and coastal areas. In addition, those unable to move are often termed "trapped" populations, who also face heightened vulnerability.³ Yet disasters and their responses are often addressed in isolation, failing to account for the complex intersections between gender disparities and disaster response.

This paper argues that while climate change affects everyone, its impacts are deeply gendered. In this way, climate change is a women's issue in every sense. Effective responses must therefore integrate a gender lens throughout climate adaptation and mobility planning. This brief proposes a dual response strategy supporting in-place adaptation for those who choose to remain, and planned migration for those who must relocate, ensuring that women have agency in both pathways.

Gender-Climate-Migration Nexus in the Philippines

The Philippines is an archipelago of over 7,600 islands and consistently ranks as the world's most disaster-prone country because of high exposure to climate hazards and limited adaptive capacity.⁴ Located in the Pacific Ring of Fire and the Northwestern Pacific typhoon belt, the country experiences an average of 20 typhoons annually.⁵ In November 2024, six storms displaced over 200,000 people and damaged approximately 250,000 homes. Climate experts warn that storms will become more frequent and intense in the future.⁶ While climate disasters affect entire communities, their impacts are deeply gendered. Because climate risks exacerbate existing inequalities, disasters often limit the mobility of women, heightening their

¹ Statista Research Department, "Disaster Risk Index of Most Affected Countries 2023," *Statista*, March 15, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1270469/disaster-risk-index-most-affected-countries/>.

² United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), *Negotiating Text: Note by the Secretariat*, FCCC/AWG/LCA/2010/14 (2010), <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2010/awglca12/eng/14.pdf>.

³ Migration Policy Institute, "Climate Change and Trapped Populations," *Migration Policy Institute*, March 10, 2022, [https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/climate-change-trapped-populations.​:contentReference\[oaicite=0\]{index=0}](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/climate-change-trapped-populations.​:contentReference[oaicite=0]{index=0})

⁴ World Bank Group and Asian Development Bank, *Climate Risk Country Profile: Philippines*, August 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1596/36370>.

⁵ Encyclopædia Britannica, "Ring of Fire | Definition, Map, & Facts," last modified August 13, 2010, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ring-of-Fire>.

⁶ Ayesha Tandon, "Record-Breaking Philippines Typhoon Season Was 'Supercharged' by Climate Change," *Carbon Brief*, December 12, 2024, <https://www.carbonbrief.org/record-breaking-philippines-typhoon-season-was-supercharged-by-climate-change/>.

vulnerabilities.⁷ For example, in 2013, Super Typhoon Haiyan affected more than 14 million Filipinos, killing at least 8,000 and displacing 4 million people.⁸ Of those who died, women comprised at least 64% of the fatalities.⁹ Similarly, in Bangladesh in 1991, Typhoon Gorky resulted in 14 women dying for every man.¹⁰

Yet, gendered typhoon risks go beyond the visible and immediate toll of destruction. In the Philippines, researchers found that typhoons can have severe long-term consequences for female infants.¹¹ Analyzing data from 1979 to 2008, one study reports that, in the year following every major storm, there were up to 15 times more baby girl economic deaths as opposed to direct typhoon-caused deaths.¹² Deaths of baby girls were not due to physical exposure from the typhoons, but rather due to the post-disaster economic strains on families such as reduced spending on health care and nutrition, disproportionately affecting young girls.

In the aftermath of disasters, there are also more threats to women's livelihoods and safety. A year after Super Typhoon Haiyan, many women in Leyte—the island hit hardest—found that temporary evacuation shelters had become long-term housing.¹³ These shelters are isolated from city centers, cutting off access to essential social and health services. Moreover, the incidence of gender-based violence (GBV) increases the longer women remain in temporary sites. The International Organization for Migration notes that Super Typhoon Haiyan exacerbated risks in a region already considered a trafficking hotspot, where 46% of national trafficking incidents occur.¹⁴ These conditions underscore the urgent need for safe migration pathways prioritizing women's protection.

Execution of Initiatives: Actionable Steps for the Filipino People

Due to the diverse socioeconomic realities across regions, a multi-pronged approach is essential to advancing gender-responsive climate migration strategies.¹⁵

⁷ "More Support Needed for Women and Girls in Super Typhoon-Ravaged Philippines | UN News," United Nations, February 7, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/02/1111392>.

⁸ Kathryn Reid, "Typhoon Haiyan: Facts, FAQs, and How to Help," World Vision (blog), October 17, 2023, <https://www.worldvision.org/disaster-relief-news-stories/2013-typhoon-haiyan-facts>.

⁹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), *Strengthening Gender-Responsive Adaptation: A Policy Brief*, November 2022, https://seors.unfccc.int/applications/seors/attachments/get_attachment?code=50OG4R4YB27W6H1RS8R3L8L5RTU06ZFS.

¹⁰ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR), *Disaster and Gender Statistics* (Bangkok: UNISDR Asia-Pacific, 2015), https://www.unisdr.org/files/48152_disasterandgenderstatistics.pdf.

¹¹ Madison Park, "Report: Typhoon's Long, Deadly Toll on Female Infants," CNN, November 22, 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/11/22/world/asia/typhoon-long-term-toll/index.html>.

¹² Madison Park, "Report: Typhoon's Long, Deadly Toll on Female Infants," CNN, November 22, 2013, <https://www.cnn.com/2013/11/22/world/asia/typhoon-long-term-toll/index.html>.

¹³ Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), *Strengthening Gender-Responsive Adaptation: A Policy Brief*, UNFCCC Side Event Publication, 2014, https://seors.unfccc.int/applications/seors/attachments/get_attachment?code=50OG4R4YB27W6H1RS8R3L8L5RTU06ZFS.

¹⁴ International Organization for Migration (IOM), "Fears Grow of Increase in People Trafficking in Typhoon-Affected Philippines," January 14, 2014, <https://www.iom.int/news/fears-grow-increase-people-trafficking-typhoon-affected-philippines.IOM>

¹⁵ "Waiting for the 'Big One' – Natural Hazards in the Philippines: A UN Resident Coordinator Blog," United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2023,

1) Pursue National Coordination on Gender and Climate

This policy recommends calling on the Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council to prioritize bills on gender-climate governance.¹⁶ This should be accompanied by formalized, gender-focused data collection and sharing. Filipino women also need the Office of the President to scale a unified approach to gender-climate governance by standardizing agency responsibilities through Memoranda of Agreement that clearly define roles and timelines. Quarterly coordination meetings—timed around ASEAN summits—can align regional gender goals and foster cross-border policy learning.¹⁷

2) Build Climate Resilience for Those Who Stay

Women are among the groups least capable of moving away when conditions become desperate. This initiative proposes strategies to ensure that staying is a safe and supported option:

- **Enhance Gender-Sensitive Preparedness and Warning Systems:** Explicitly expand national warning blast systems to deliver priority protocols for pregnant women, the elderly, and families with small children. Alerts should inform stayers of how to best support these populations in flood settings and be distributed through networks to reach women and others with limited digital access.
- **Invest in Inclusive, Storm-Resilient Infrastructure:** Prioritize protective measures such as coastal defenses, flood barriers, and mangrove reforestation.¹⁸ Implement processes with community consultations that center women, informal settlers, and persons with disabilities to avoid reinforcing existing inequalities.

3) Facilitate Safe and Planned Migration for Displaced Populations

As climate impacts intensify, internal displacement will become unavoidable for many Filipinos facing recurrent typhoons, flooding, and livelihood loss. Planned relocation must be gender-responsive and focus on the following:

- **Gendered Vulnerability Mapping:** Identify at-risk women-headed households, informal settlers, and persons with disabilities using climate risk data and tools such as GeoRisk Philippines.¹⁹ Engaging with women's groups in mapping workshops can help inform agencies of traditionally underrepresented groups.

<https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/waiting-%E2%80%98big-one%E2%80%99-%E2%80%93-natural-hazards-philippines-un-resident-coordinator-blog>.

¹⁶ Legislative-Executive Development Advisory Council (LEDAC), *LEDAC Website*, National Economic and Development Authority, 2024, <https://ledac.neda.gov.ph/>.

¹⁷ Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), "ASEAN Summit," 2024, <https://asean.org/about-asean/asean-summit/>.

¹⁸ World Bank, *Getting a Grip on Climate Change in the Philippines: Executive Report*, June 2013, <https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/EAP/Philippines/Final%20ExReport.pdf>.

¹⁹ "GeoRisk Philippines Initiative," Department of Science and Technology – Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (DOST–PHIVOLCS), n.d., <https://georisk.gov.ph/>.

- **Ensure Land Tenure and Legal Protections for Women:** Integrate tenure regularization, legal documentation, and recognition of community land claims into relocation policy. In the Philippines, women hold only about 30 percent of land titles, and informal settlers are often excluded from housing schemes.²⁰ Without secure land rights, many women are excluded from resettlement and compensation processes, leaving them vulnerable to continued cycles of urban inequality even after relocation.
- **Support Women’s Sustainable Livelihoods:** Because women migrants face distinct employment barriers, local government units should collaborate with existing programs—such as the Livelihood Development Assistance Program and the *Balik Pinay Balik Hanapbuhay* Program—that provide skills training and startup capital for displaced women.²¹ These initiatives are gender-sensitive models and facilitate economic reintegration. In parallel, host communities should organize town halls to openly address livelihood loss and family separation.

4) Improve the Safety and Functionality of Temporary Shelters for Both Stayers and Migrants

Evacuation centers play a dual role as they provide immediate refuge for those who choose to stay or leave dangerous situations, and serve as transit shelters for individuals and families in the process of migrating. Consider the following approaches.

- **Standardize Shelter Safety and Services:** Conduct inspections of evacuation sites using a standardized checklist that prioritizes women’s safety, including gender-segregated spaces, lockable toilets, adequate lighting, and access to female health services. Standardize safety and accessibility in the more than 10,300 multi-use evacuation sites across the Philippines—including schools, churches, and gymnasiums.²²
- **Enforce Duration Protocols:** Prolonged shelter stays expose women and girls to increased risks of gender-based violence and reduce access to services like education.²³ Evacuation centers must have clearly enforced time limits, communicated in advance, and paired with pre-planned return or relocation strategies. These protocols protect vulnerable populations, reduce overcrowding, and ensure timely transitions for both stayers and migrants, minimizing strain on shared community resources.

²⁰ Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (APWLD), *Strengthening Gender-Responsive Adaptation: A Policy Brief*, 2014,

https://seors.unfccc.int/applications/seors/attachments/get_attachment?code=50OG4R4YB27W6H1RS8R3L8L5RTU06ZFS.

²¹ Department of Migrant Workers Regional Office IV-A CALABARZON, *Overview of DMW Regional Office Institutional Arrangements, Programs and Services, and Challenges*, September 26, 2024,

<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/25946c91a13cb7faa1d8b222421cb2d2-0070012024/original/2-DMW-Region-4A-Overview-of-DMW-Regional-Office-Institutional-arrangements-Programs-and-Services-and-Challenges.pdf>.

²² Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), *Geotagging and Multi-Hazard Assessment of Evacuation Centers in the Philippines*, 2022, https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/ncs/paper-presentations-manuscripts/Geotagging%20and%20Multi-Hazard%20Assessment%20of%20Evacuation%20Centers%20in%20the%20Philippines_0.pdf.

²³ Daniela Donia and Manuel von der Mühlen, *Philippines: Incorporate Women’s Perspectives for Climate Resilience*,” PreventionWeb, March 10, 2025,

<https://www.preventionweb.net/news/when-womens-perspectives-are-ignored-its-recipe-climate-disaster>.

5) Reinforce Women’s Meaningful Participation in Climate-Responsive Action and Decision-Making

Women are often the first to respond in climate-related emergencies—organizing local efforts, bridging families and barangays, and identifying critical needs.²⁴ Their leadership is essential to building inclusive, grounded, and effective climate adaptation and migration strategies.

Yet, women are alarmingly underrepresented in climate narratives. Only one in four sources quoted in news stories about climate change published between 2017 and 2021 were women.²⁵ This means that most narratives about climate change are told through the eyes of men.

This initiative supports women’s participation through the following actions:

- **Ensure Women’s Representation in Climate and Migration Governance:** Appoint and elect women to leadership roles in local and federal government agencies to ensure policies reflect lived realities and prioritize inclusive resilience.
- **Embed Intersectional Inclusion in Decision-Making:** Actively elevate the voices of indigenous women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and women with disabilities, whose unique risks are often overlooked in traditional governance structures.

Strategic Implementation and Conclusion

To finance these initiatives, the Philippine government must demonstrate its commitment through targeted budget allocations. Implementing agencies are called upon to dedicate an additional 3 percent of their annual budgets, on top of the existing 5 percent general gender mandate, to gender-responsive climate adaptation and migration over the next five years.²⁶ Performance tracking should also be conducted, led by the Department of Budget and Management, and verified by the Philippine Commission on Audit.

This domestic financial commitment strengthens the Philippines’ position to attract international gender climate financing. Donors, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), increasingly prioritize local co-financing to demonstrate government buy-in. Headquartered in Manila, ADB is a key partner, having approved a \$500 million loan to support Philippine climate initiatives and committed to allocating 50 percent of its annual lending to climate finance by

²⁴ Daniela Donia and Manuel von der Mühlen, "Philippines: Incorporate Women’s Perspectives for Climate Resilience," PreventionWeb, March 10, 2025, <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/when-womens-perspectives-are-ignored-its-recipe-climate-disaster>.

²⁵ Sanam Mahoozi, "Women and Girls on the Frontline of Climate Change: Hear Their Stories," PreventionWeb, March 7, 2025, <https://www.preventionweb.net/news/women-and-girls-are-frontline-climate-change-their-stories-are-seldom-heard>.

²⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Capitalizing Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Initiatives through Gender-Responsive Budgeting," October 23, 2024, <https://www.undp.org/philippines/press-releases/capitalizing-gender-equality-and-women-empowerment-initiatives-through-gender-responsive-budgeting>.

2030.²⁷ As ADB aspires to become the “climate change bank of the region,” early alignment with its gender-responsive priorities can unlock further resources.²⁸ Additionally, the biannual ASEAN summits provide a platform to advance regional cooperation and position the Philippines as a leader in gender-resilient climate mobility.

Effective implementation will require vigilance to avoid over-prioritizing physical infrastructure at the expense of social systems. While coastal defenses and infrastructure are essential, they must be matched by investments in social resilience, especially for women and children. Community-based adaptation—such as mangrove reforestation led by women’s cooperatives—can strengthen ecological and social systems. Disaster preparedness programs should incorporate GBV prevention training and inclusive evacuation protocols to ensure protection before, during, and after displacement.

Finally, this policy must remain adaptive as climate and social conditions evolve. Typhoon reporting with gender-sensitive metrics, paired with regular inter-agency coordination and women’s leadership, will ensure responsiveness to emerging risks. By grounding implementation in the lived experiences of women and other marginalized groups, this strategy can remain gender-centered and resilient over time.

²⁷ Neil Jerome Morales, “ADB Approves \$500 Mln Loan for Philippines’ Climate Change Efforts,” Reuters, November 26, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/sustainable-finance-reporting/adb-approves-500-mln-loan-philippines-climate-change-efforts-2024-11-26/>.

²⁸ David Lawder, “ADB to Devote Half Its Lending to Climate Finance by 2030,” Reuters, September 6, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/sustainable-finance-reporting/adb-devote-half-its-lending-climate-finance-by-2030-2024-09-06/>.

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Empowerment Initiatives through Gender-Responsive Budgeting." October 23, 2024.

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