



The Invisible Work of Resilience:

A Pilot Study Exploring the Intersection Between Women's Unpaid Care Work & Climate Change in Three Districts in Sri Lanka

FOREWORD

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This research publication of the Women and Media Collective is an important contribution to the discourse on and policy advocacy for recognizing the intersection of climate change and unpaid care work in Sri Lanka. Unpaid care work encompasses all the unremunerated work of care undertaken primarily by women every day, for the wellbeing of household members. It is the work that is undervalued because of social and ideological notions around gendered roles of women, overlooked in mainstream economic models that estimate the GDP of a country, and that are not assessed in relation to the time and labour expended.

Climate change is a phenomenon that Sri Lanka has to address urgently in light of the intensification of disasters across the country. Climate disasters can take many forms including that of floods which require rapid relocation of communities, increased levels of heat where populations are issued health warnings and, drought which extend over long periods of time, and hence often are not seen as requiring immediate or urgent responses but are in fact equally devastating on the lives of communities. These phenomena are not confined to the arena of 'natural' disasters but are also outcomes of development planning that fall short of incorporating findings of long-term environmental impact assessments.

Drawing on the lived experiences of women in three districts in Sri Lanka, Colombo, Monaragala and Gampaha, the research documents and analyses the ways in which floods, droughts and urban heat impact on women. The research included a time use survey on the daily activities of women, documentation of how women build and use social support networks at the community level which then become crucial in times of such crises, what formal processes they are able to access for relief, and most importantly the perceptions and understanding of women themselves about how climate change affects their lives.

This study significantly builds on the research and advocacy of WMC on recognizing unpaid care work in Sri Lanka. I would like to thank the WMC team that carried out this study, led by Druvinka Samuel, and closely supported by Tharanga de Silva, Anushka Opatha and Dulani Hannadige.

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Monaragala, Sri Lanka
Drought-affected dried-up water body

INTRODUCTION

Unpaid care work is the essential, yet often invisible, labour that sustains families, communities, and the planet - performed disproportionately by women and girls, worldwide. We define direct unpaid care work as “hands-on caring for the well-being of people in one’s family or household, including children, elderly and sick relatives as well as non-kin people in one’s community via volunteer work” (Macgregor, Arora-Jonsson & Cohen, 2022). Care work also encompasses domestic tasks which create the conditions for wellbeing including cleaning, laundry, cooking, and provision of food and water (Macgregor, Arora-Jonsson & Cohen, 2022). Household care work intersects with environmental work, often in the form of subsistence farming or gardening. Environmental impacts of climate change, then, also impact care burdens. Within the context of climate change, care work is the very foundation of survival - absorbing the shocks of crisis, while shouldering the burden of recovery and resilience.

Yet, despite its centrality, care work remains systemically undervalued and largely absent from climate and economic policy and planning (Kottegoda & Pieris, 2023; ILO, 2024). This invisibility contributes to persistent time poverty, a deeply gendered phenomenon, widely understood to encompass “conflicting claims on people’s limited time that restrict their freedom to allocate their time toward activities that maximise wellbeing” (Rodgers, 2023, p.80). Globally, women shoulder disproportionate and increasing demands on their time compared to men, performing about 76% of all unpaid care work for a cumulative total of 16 billion hours a day (Connelly & Kongar, 2017; WHO, 2024; Addati et al, 2018). Such demands on their time leave women with less earnings and decreased time for education, leisure, and political engagement (Rost et al., 2015).

As extreme weather events become more frequent and the scale of destruction and disruption caused by these disasters become increasingly

unprecedented – it is women and girls who perform the bulk of the work required before, during and after a climate disaster, including recovery and rebuilding, and in addition to their daily unpaid responsibilities (UN Women, 2023; Bradshaw & Linneker 2014). They walk longer distances to fetch water, and within the context of a high emissions scenario, it is estimated that daily water collection times for women without household access can increase by 30% by 2050 (Carr et al., 2024). Moreover, women spend more time rebuilding and recovering their homes and livelihoods after floods, spend more energy finding food and water when basic resources become scarce, and perform more care when family, and even community members, fall ill or sustain injuries during these extreme weather events (UN Women, 2017).

Deepening time poverty further marginalises women in accessing vital decision-making spaces, and their ability to engage in paid work and income generation (Sarker & Puskur, 2022; IDRC, 2024). Time poverty and its associated stresses within the context of climate change is then compounded in rural female-headed households, where it is estimated that on average, households experience an annual income loss of 8% due to floods and heat stress globally (Sitko et al., 2024).

Despite these escalating and overlapping burdens, women remain systematically excluded and marginalized from climate governance, overall - from the very processes through which data on climate impacts are recorded, decision making spaces, adaptation and mitigation needs, community priorities, and just transition processes. This exclusion has a trickle-down effect, diametrically limiting their adaptive capacity and access to essential resources. Women - particularly women working outside of the formal labour force - are often sidelined as target recipients of extension services, and are also overlooked and unrecognised as community leaders, custodians of local natural resources and ecosystems, and

INTRODUCTION	COUNTRY CONTEXT	METHODOLOGY	DISTRICT PROFILES	DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	SECTION 1 TIME USE SURVEY & PERCEPTIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE	SECTION 2 CHANGES IN THE CARE BURDEN	SECTION 3 COPING AND MANAGING THE CARE BURDEN		SECTION 4 INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES	SECTION 5 HEALTH IMPACTS AND ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES	SECTION 6 HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE EVENTS	LOCAL COUNCIL INTERVIEWS	CONCLUSION	GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	REFERENCE	3
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crucially, as beneficiaries of climate change mitigatory policies and processes. Their knowledge and lived experiences are underrepresented, which in turn significantly diminishes the effectiveness of interventions designed to strengthen adaptation on every sphere, household, community and national levels.

While recognition of women's experiences is a necessary and crucial stepping stone in equitable policymaking and intervention design, in this report we highlight that in the face of an escalating climate crisis which exacerbates existing inequalities, 'recognition' does not suffice. Wider research and advocacy surrounding women's unpaid care work calls for the 5R framework – Recognise, Redistribute, Reduce, Represent and Respond – within the intersection of care and climate justice. We argue that these components are inextricable from one another and cannot be conceptualized or addressed in isolation. The 5Rs encompass sociocultural shifts and policy developments necessary to meaningfully addressing care work:

Recognize: Acknowledge unpaid care work as valuable and essential economic and social contributions which includes incorporating measures of paid and unpaid care work in national statistics and in measures of economic progress, measuring time-use and unpaid care work and its distribution within families and communities, and recognising women's work and care responsibilities across their life course. This should include the formal recognition of women as first respondents in upholding food security, specifically their labour in food production, seed saving, which becomes critical when commercial crops fail due to erratic weather.

Reduce: Alleviate the burden of unpaid care work, especially on women and girls, by investing in public services, infrastructure, and technology that lessen time-consuming care tasks like water access, reliable transport, and provision of electricity. The

primary focus must be placed on removing the physical drudgery that intensifies as ecosystems degrade due to climatic changes.

Redistribute: Currently, when families are displaced by natural disasters or extreme climatic events, women spend a vast majority of their day shouldering the bulk of unpaid care work in temporary camps. preventing them from accessing relief, such as cash transfers, food distribution points, livelihood support, documentation and registration processes for relief and recovery, as well as returning to work, post-disaster. Therefore, there is a need to promote the equitable sharing of unpaid care responsibilities between women and men, and across households, the state, and community, to achieve a fair division of labour by investing in quality, affordable, and accessible care services. This includes, implementing gender-responsive maternity and paternity leave, family-friendly workplace policies, and shifting social norms and gendered stereotypes around care.

Respond: A significant portion of women in Sri Lanka engage in agriculture-based/nature-based livelihoods in climate-sensitive sectors, where their care for the environment and ecosystems they work in is often underpaid or unpaid entirely. Responding to these challenges requires that their rights are enshrined and protected in climate policy and climate action. This includes fair wages, social protection and recognition for paid care workers to improve their economic and social status (this includes for daily wage workers, gig workers, and seasonal workers and those in the informal economy.)

Represent: Ensure unpaid and paid caregivers have voice, rights, and representation in decision-making processes, social dialogue, and collective bargaining by formalizing care and domestic work. Mandatory quota systems should be in place to ensure that climate decision making bodies are composed of women, specifically those representing rural

women's cooperatives or plantation worker unions. This paves the way for women caregivers to demand that Loss and Damage funds (from international climate finance) are allocated to care infrastructure, not just industrial rebuilding in the future.

For climate adaptation and mitigation measures to be effectively gender-responsive, they must account for care work, as climate change is not just an environmental issue, it is also a time-poverty crisis. Research shows that governments and other actors have focused primarily on women's economic activities and overlooked how paid and unpaid care are interconnected or how intra-household care work is distributed when designing climate response measures (Westholm & Arora-Jonsson, 2015).

The approach to the climate and care nexus employed in this pilot study appraises both aspects as directly and dynamically proportional to one another: when climate disasters intensify, so too does the scale and complexity of women's unpaid care labour.

By rooting the study on women's lived experiences across districts with distinct climate vulnerabilities (Colombo, Gampaha and Monaragala), in addition to a plethora of other compounding variables such as the level and scale of urbanisation, this approach allows us to understand care work as a burden that does not happen in isolation, but rather, one that is reshaped and compounded by climatic conditions.

Moreover, to approach this nexus as directly proportional, is to also consider aspects of care work within the context of climate change - work that does not just include the direct and indirect care of families and communities, but that which also includes unpaid care work performed for the environment, and the work undertaken to adapt to and mitigate an intensifying climate crisis. This expansion of labour exacerbates time poverty; as climate changes intensifies, the physical distance to resources, such as potable water, firewood increases, effectively transferring the "cost" of environmental degradation onto women's time and physical health (Ho et al., 2021). Furthermore, this nexus must account for the emotional and mental labour of climate anxiety. Women, as the traditional "shock absorbers" of the household, bear the psychological burden of managing food rations during extreme climatic events and ensuring the safety of the vulnerable such as children and the elderly (Macgregor et al., 2022). Thus, climate adaptation and meaningful resilience cannot be designed without adequate recognition, redistribution and reduction of women's work. To bypass this step would result in a transition that is neither fair nor just, built on the backs of women's labour.

COUNTRY CONTEXT

Sri Lanka is extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Long-term data from 1993 to 2022 outlines Sri Lanka's vulnerability, with the Germanwatch Global Climate Risk Index ranking the nation 59th out of 171 countries (Germanwatch, 2025). This climate susceptibility carries severe economic implications; the Asian Development Bank projects that without proactive adaptation and mitigation, Sri Lanka faces a 1.2% contraction in its annual GDP by 2050 (ADB, 2023). Sri Lanka frequently experiences extreme weather patterns and natural disasters such as droughts, flooding, and landslides. The impacts of these disasters are made worse by lack of mitigation and adaptation measures, effective early warning systems, and resources for climate resilience. Sri Lanka is susceptible to high levels of climate risk with 19 million of the population living in locations set to become moderate or severe climate hotspots by 2050 (United Nations Sri Lanka, 2023).

Six in ten Sri Lankans are multidimensionally vulnerable to climate impacts due to its cross-cutting effects across different aspects of daily life (UNDP Sri Lanka, 2023). Climate change often acts as a magnifier of prevailing social, political and economic inequalities, with the capacity to spotlight policy-level 'blind spots' (Tschakert et al, 2013; Parsons et al, 2024). In Sri Lanka - a climate vulnerable, lower middle-income country - extreme and escalating climate effects pose significant threats to the economy and its resilience (UN Women, 2022). When extreme weather effects overlap with other crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or Sri Lanka's economic crisis (2021-2025), women and girls are left with limited access to opportunities and relief, thus establishing a vicious cycle of vulnerability to both, future crises and the escalation of ongoing ones (Ratwatte, 2023). Intersecting or overlapping crises demand more of women's time and labour, specifically resulting in an additional demand for women's unpaid care labour.

As is elsewhere in the world, in Sri Lanka, unpaid care work is predominantly performed by women and is systematically undervalued and unrecognized – often

excluded from national accounting processes (DCS, 2020) and climate and labour policies. According to the Sri Lanka Time Use Survey conducted in 2017 by the Department of Census and Statistics, the overall participation rate for unpaid domestic services related activities for men and women are 54% and 86.4% respectively (DCS, 2020). Further, due to a lack of adequate care facilities in Sri Lanka unpaid carers provide care services for largely the youngest and oldest members of the population (ILO, 2024). Inadequate transport, healthcare, education, and social protection systems intensify the care burden, particularly during extreme weather. When climate disasters hit, these systemic failures force unpaid carers to shoulder the dual weight of ensuring household survival amidst displacement and shortages while managing heightened care demands (UNFPA, 2025). Many of these inequalities can increase vulnerabilities to climate shocks, given many women and girls may lack appropriate access to disaster information, to financial services, to participation in community decision-making and resource allocation, and to rights that govern property and mobility (WFP, 2021).

Furthermore, due to the demands in physical and mental labour, and time constraints associated with managing household and care responsibilities, women often enter the informal labour force, which ultimately places them on yet another layer of precarity, with low, daily wages and limited labour law protections, such as regulated hours of paid work, safe working conditions or benefits such as pension, health insurance, or paid sick leave (ILO, 2024; ILO, 2023; ILO, 2020). Globally, women are overrepresented in informal and vulnerable employment, with more than half of the working women in South Asia being in the informal sector (World Bank, 2023). The overrepresentation of women in the informal labour market combined with their disproportionate care burden heightens the vulnerability of women engaged in unpaid care work during climate disasters as they lack job security, reliable pay, and the ability to take leave during climate disruptions while their care responsibilities multiply (ILO, 2022).

According to the Sri Lankan Labour Force Survey in 2023, the informal labour market is the dominant mode of employment, accounting for 67.7% of the total workforce. Women consist of 60.3% informal employment rate. This informality is most acute in the agriculture sector, a sector that is highly vulnerable to climate change, where 92.4% of workers operate without formal protections, disproportionately impacting rural women who serve as the backbone of food production (DCS, 2024).

Moreover, the large number of women in the agriculture sector in Sri Lanka who bear care responsibilities are similarly vulnerable to climate shocks. Rural women, who traditionally manage household water, family gardens, and livestock, are on the frontline of coping with water scarcity and food insecurity during slow onset climate events and natural disasters.

As climate-driven crop failures and inconsistent rainfall patterns trigger a withdrawal from agriculture and drive rural-urban migration of men, women are left behind to shoulder the resulting economic and domestic fallout. This invariably leads to women working for longer hours to support their families and husbands while attending to household responsibilities (Gunawardena, 2020).

Climate-induced labour migration of men has a notable increase in a woman's care burden of household responsibilities, childcare and agricultural work. Oftentimes women are pressured to find additional sources of income further to farming. Increasing levels of poverty among agricultural communities due to reducing income imputable to slow onset climatic conditions and natural disasters cause substantial damage to children and youth. As noted by the International Labor Organization in 2018, this leads to abuse, neglect, disruption of education and even child labour (Mombauer & Wijenayake, 2020).

A socio-economic ramification which stems from climate-induced migration is an increase in rural women being entrapped in debilitating debt traps. Most women and their families engage in subsistence agriculture and have little to no access to formal employment opportunities that would offer a stable income source. But household expenses continue to increase and must be met somehow (Arambepola & Romeshun, 2019). According to the report of the UN Expert on Debt and Human Rights, more than 2.4 million women in Sri Lanka have taken loans from micro financing institutions, which charge high interest annual rates (30% to 220%). This indicates the challenges that Sri Lankan women face when it comes to access credit (Munasinghe & Wijesinghe, 2019).

An estimated 25.9% of Sri Lankans were living below the poverty line in 2023, with labour force participation declining sharply among women and urban workers due to widespread Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) closures. Faced with high prices and underemployment, households are increasingly forced into debt to cover essential costs for food, health, and education (World Bank, 2024). As of March 2023, approximately 17% of Sri Lankans faced moderate acute food insecurity, a crisis increasingly compounded by the climate emergency. Rising temperatures and erratic weather patterns threaten the availability of water and food, specifically undermining the production of rice and other essential staples (United Nations, 2023). The escalating climate crisis is projected to intensify the gendered labour burden, as women's caregiving roles increasingly serve as a buffer for household wellbeing against declining agricultural yields and rising living costs. Findings from a study conducted by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) across four high climate risk provinces in Sri Lanka indicates that in prioritizing these responsibilities, women frequently experience nutritional and health deficits by reducing food intake and forgoing essential medical care (Arulingam et al., 2024).

Research studies indicate that worsening climate conditions affecting women who are both farmers and caregivers, can lead to increased psychological and physical abuse by their partners (Gunawardena, 2024). Climate shocks also push vulnerable groups, including children, further into poverty and at the same time increase their risk of experiencing adverse effects of climate change, due to factors such as rising food prices, food insecurity and impacts on health (e.g., stunting). Impacts such as this, ultimately add to an increasingly heavy burden of care undertaken by women - pushing them to shoulder the responsibility of recovery of family members who fall ill during extreme weather conditions (UN Women, 2023; UNICEF, 2023).

Sri Lanka's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (2026-2035) acknowledge the real challenges for women in agriculture to improve climate resilience such as limited access to and ownership of productive assets like land and equipment and, lack of representation in relevant governance and decision-making. It is acknowledged that women's livelihoods and care responsibilities again intersect as they do not have access to improving their incomes or easing their care burdens amid intensifying extreme weather patterns causing crop failures, damage to fields and homes, and worsening health outcomes (Ministry of Environment, 2025). The climate policy landscape in Sri Lanka lacks meaningful inclusion and examination of the intersecting or multiple "knock on" impacts of climate change along gendered lines. In this context, social protection mechanisms and everyday facilities, like public transit infrastructure or childcare, eldercare or care for people with disabilities facilities, are not sufficiently explored as avenues for climate adaptation. Sri Lanka's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (2025-2035) nominally acknowledge that worsening climate conditions particularly affect women who are caregivers as women's care responsibilities intensify during natural disasters. The NDCs also state that unpaid care work is a

critical challenge to women's employment and mobility, and thereby, their ability to engage in green employment or upskilling.

The CEDAW Committee, in its 2025 periodic review of Sri Lanka, expressed concern about the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work on women and the limited involvement of rural women in decision-making processes. Sri Lanka has begun developing a National Roadmap and Action Plan on Care based on the ILO's 5R framework to address the need for better care systems for the country's ageing population (The Morning, 2025). This initiative is led by a working group comprising the Women and Child Affairs, Labour, Health, and Finance Ministries. Sri Lanka is also developing a new National Adaptation Plan (NAP) for climate change as the previous one was intended to be in effect until 2025, providing an opportunity for better incorporation of the cross-cutting gendered impacts of climate change in terms of infrastructure, public health, and economic security.

The social costs attached to climate disasters that recur at increasing frequency remain statistically invisible and therefore are given little to no attention in damage assessments, disaster emergency response system design and post disaster recovery planning and management. Projected average temperatures in Sri Lanka indicate significant warming, subjecting the country to severe temperature increases, exacerbated heatwaves, and increased heat stress (UNFPA, 2025). Projections also indicate more frequent and intense heavy rainfall events as well as increasing trends in drought severity (UNFPA, 2025). As Sri Lanka faces an increasing frequency and worsening magnitude of climate change-induced natural disasters, disaster response and climate adaptation and mitigation strategies must account for gendered experiences and impacts. Gender-sensitive responses must recognize, reduce, and redistribute unpaid care work in the context of climate impacts.

METHODOLOGY

The findings discussed in this report are informed by an eight month pilot study conducted by the Women and Media Collective, from the months of May to December of 2025. The study explored how climate change impacts women's unpaid care work in three districts in Sri Lanka: Colombo, Gampaha and Monaragala (see next section for district profiles).

The study employed a mixed methods approach, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data from a sample of 60 women, 20 per district. The 60 women were identified by employing a purposive sampling method, where respondents were selected with the support of community-based organisations. Following this, and where necessary, the snowball sampling method was implemented to better locate respondents who fall under the nexus of climate and care, whilst also providing evidence for more nuanced manifestations and experiences on caring in the era of climate change and the impact of one on the other. This includes carers for dependents with disabilities, those shouldering the dual burden of income generation and care work, those whose work is inextricably linked to climate vulnerable sectors such as agriculture, and more.

The quantitative method consisted of a comprehensive questionnaire that entailed six key sections in addition to basic demographic data¹:

Section 1:

A time use survey that looked at time spent on care related tasks on a typical day. Perceptions on climate change.

Section 2:

Changes in care burden - how care-related tasks have shifted or become more strenuous in the event of a climate disaster.

Section 3:

Coping and managing the care burden.

Section 4:

Institutional support services





Section 5:

Health impacts caused by climate disasters, and access to healthcare services

Section 6:

Household expenses in the face of climate events

Overall, the criteria used for sample selection were the following:

	Gender
	Household income level
	Age (between 18-70)
	Proximity to climate vulnerable locales

¹ Profile of respondent (age, civil status, ethnicity, education level, source of income, monthly income), household information (number of and ages of family members, disability status, etc), neighbourhood information (availability of services)

² A typical day, in this instance, refers to a day that is not disrupted by a climate disaster or extreme weather event

DISTRICT PROFILES

The qualitative component involved focus group discussions with three respondents from each district, selected to reflect the diversity of experiences captured in the initial questionnaire. These discussions were conducted as semi-structured interviews designed to probe more deeply into themes and insights that emerged from the initial survey.

In addition to focus group discussions, 2 local councillors per district were interviewed in order to gauge priorities and perceptions pertaining to climate change as it affects women, children, elderly and people with disabilities. Moreover, these interviews provided additional context on the institutional factors shaping local climate responses, particularly the gaps, constraints, and opportunities for more inclusive and gender-responsive adaptation measures.

Limitations

The study had shortcomings that affected the generalisability of the findings. Due to limitations in funding, a small sample of 60 women across three districts were selected. The sample, as well as the lack of variability within the sample and across districts - particularly with 2 of the 3 districts being in the Western Province - limits the study's validity as it pertains to other regions of Sri Lanka, and other communities facing multidimensional vulnerabilities such as post war communities, plantation-sector workers, and households in remote, other disaster-prone regions, whose socioeconomic and environmental conditions present distinct forms of vulnerability not captured

within this sample. To mitigate the potential for homogenous findings - within the 2 districts in the Western Province- emphasis was placed on levels of development between the three districts, which ultimately deepened the findings, highlighting the variance in experience across urban, semi urban and rural locales. Thus, the data provides rich contextual evidence and illustrates differences in experiences and perceptions between districts, even those that fall within the same province.

Further, time constraints also pose a challenge to the generalisability of findings. The survey was largely administered during the months of July and August of 2025, periods of heightened rainfall in the South and West of Sri Lanka, and seasonal instability, potentially introducing a seasonal bias into the data, as respondents' experiences during this window may not reflect conditions throughout the year. Overall, these constraints indicate that while the study offers valuable insights, future research would benefit from broader sampling, greater geographic diversity, and longitudinal data collection.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study bring to light the necessity to collect more systematic gender-disaggregated data, without which the distinct and varied vulnerabilities and burdens shouldered by women remain under-recognised in climate and development planning.

Climate Vulnerability and Disaster Risk by District

It is forecasted that the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events and natural disasters will increase in Sri Lanka, posing significant threats to communities directly affected (De Alwis & De Noy, 2019). Floods and droughts are among the disasters expected to become more frequent and impact Sri Lanka in the coming years, both of which have a significant capacity to disrupt livelihoods, agriculture, infrastructure, in addition to access to essential resources such as food and water (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2014). For the purpose of this project, three districts were selected: Colombo, Gampaha and Monaragala.

Colombo is an urban district prone to increased heat, flooding and air pollution (Nanayakkara et al, 2023). Its urban environment experiences the urban heat island (UHI) effect, where temperatures are higher than in surrounding rural areas, due to factors like rapid and unscaled development, including high building density, dark surfaces and reduced vegetation, thus making already warm conditions more intolerable (Nanayakkara et al, 2023; Emmanuel et al, 2023; Rangalge et al, 2017). The Kolonnawa urban council area was selected as the focal point for research in the district of Colombo, due to it being a frequent site for extreme weather events, particularly flooding caused by both; urbanisation as well as the overflowing of water bodies (Dissanayake & Sangasumana, 2017). Moreover, according to Fernando (2018), it has also been recognised as an urban area that exhibits a 71% susceptibility to UHI, with 14 identified vulnerable Grama Niladari Divisions- however with the significant upward trend in Heat Index - as was evidenced with 2024 being the warmest year on

record for Sri Lanka, it can be sufficiently assumed that the land area identified for UHI patterns, has indeed increased (Sumaiya et al, 2025; Perera & Perera, 2025; Piratheeparajah & Dhanushan, 2024).

Gampaha is a semi urban city prone to flooding due to its proximity to the Kelani River and shares with Colombo the issue of rapid and unplanned urbanisation, increasing 'impervious surfaces,' thus hindering water retention (Arambegedara and Nwankwo, 2025; Dammalage and Jayasinghe, 2019). According to residents in Gampaha town, flash floods in the last 7 years have largely been attributed to authorised and unauthorised landfilling including for infrastructural projects like the highway from Kadawatha to Mirigama as well as road development, where construction was carried out without consideration for drainage facilities, as it was seen as an unnecessary expense (Warakapitya, 2024). The focal point for research in Gampaha were the areas of Biyagama and Malwana - two high-risk zones along the Kelani River basin, that frequently bear the brunt of extreme and recurrent flooding, environmental degradation, and infrastructure-led vulnerabilities intersect to produce compounded climate risks at the household level (Liyanarachchi, 2024; Samarasinghe et al, 2022).

Typically, Sri Lanka has 2 major monsoon seasons; the Maha season, associated with the Northeast Monsoon (September-March), and the Yala season, associated with the Southwest monsoon (May-August). Though these monsoons are not uncommon to the island, their intensity and destructive capacity have increased due to climate change, leading to rainfall variability intensifying over time, leading to extreme rainfall events, prolonged dry spells, and disruptions in traditional weather patterns, making flooding one

of the biggest and most frequent climate disasters affecting Sri Lanka in recent years (De Alwis & De Noy, 2019). According to Abeywardhana (2024) all major floods in Sri Lanka, since 2010 have been attributed to climate change. Colombo and Gampaha, two districts chosen for this project, have experienced multiple floods in recent years, including in 2020, when - according to the Disaster Management Centre - over 40,000 people were displaced, and in 2024, when the number rose to over 150,000 (Floodlist, 2020; Relief Web, 2024).

Similarly, according to current climate change predictions, droughts in Sri Lanka are expected to become significantly more frequent and intense due to rising temperatures and altered rainfall patterns (as mentioned above). Between 2008-2018, up to 8 million people were affected by droughts in Sri Lanka, leading to widespread water scarcity and reduced agricultural yields (Igoor, 2024). The Dry Zone in Sri Lanka, particularly in the Northeastern parts of the island and in the Uva province is identified as especially vulnerable. Of these, Monaragala in the Uva province – one of the three chosen locations for this project– is recognised as a severely drought prone district (Ministry of Environment, 2020). The focal point for this research in the district of Monaragala is the Balaharuwa GND due to its recurrent exposure to prolonged dry periods and increasing evaporation rates, with communities in these areas face heightened food insecurity, economic instability, and challenges in accessing sufficient water resources, further exacerbating existing vulnerabilities (UNDP, 2024).

It is important to note that the data collection period for this project was undertaken in the months of July and August of 2025 - approximately three months before Cyclone Ditwah made landfall on the 28th of November 2025. This disaster diametrically affected the three districts in which this project was conducted, among many others in Sri Lanka. Following the subsequent flooding and landslides, over 640 people were confirmed dead, over 203 missing and more than 2.3 million people affected as of December 2025 (Mustafa, 2025).³ Thus, the findings of this project are not inclusive of the most recent major climate disaster that took place, at the time of writing, but rather, is a retrospective account of disasters that have afflicted the 60 women surveyed, before and during July 2025.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Demographic and profile data on the 60 women surveyed, reveal that women are indeed shock absorbers of both household care and climate stress, with limited institutional support - a near total absence of care infrastructure - and remarkably high dependency ratios.

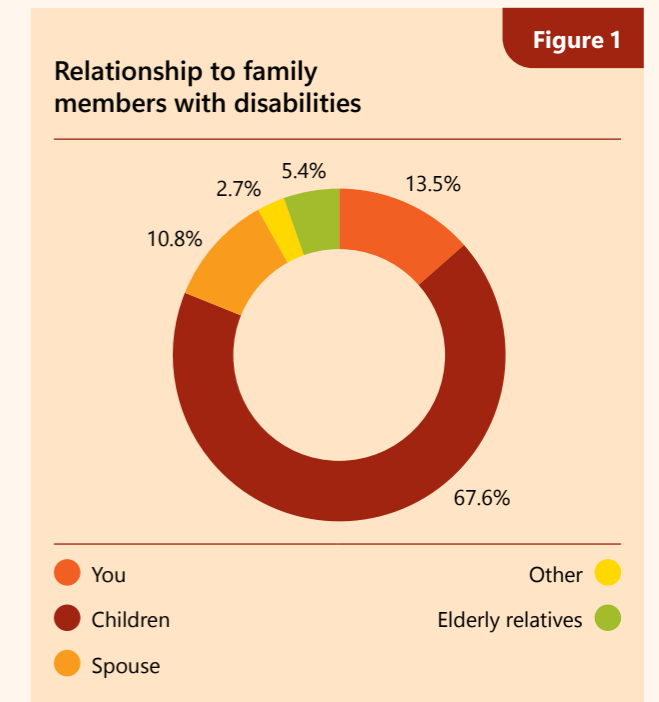
A significant majority of respondents of the total sample are married - 76.7% (46 individuals). 83.3% (50 individuals) of the total sample care for dependent children:

- Monaragala and Gampaha record the highest childcare responsibilities, with 18 of 20 women per district caring for dependent children, while Colombo had 14 women carrying out child-care duties.

A significant portion of the sample also carried out disability-related care:

- 61.7% of the total sample care for at least one person with disability.

The data also reveals that following children with disabilities are the women themselves (13.5%), underscoring a layered burden many carries; as caregivers with disabilities, and as individuals with specific climate adaptation needs - in addition to the specific needs required for an ordinary day.



	Colombo	Monaragala	Gampaha
Yes	95.0% ⁴	30.0%	60.0%
No	5.0%	70.0%	40.0%
Base	20	20	20

Notably, among women who reported caring for a family member with a disability, the majority of these dependents were children (67.6%), placing them - as well as the women who care for them - high in vulnerability when climate events affect mobility, access to medication, relief or the continuity of vital services.

Extended family care is most pronounced in Gampaha, with 55% (11 of 20) respondents caring for non-immediate family members - in addition to immediate family - far more than that of the sample in Colombo (25%) or Monaragala (20%) (see table 2). Notably, Gampaha also records the highest concentration of self-employed women when compared with the total sample (45% of total district-level sample). Taken in tandem, these factors mean that climate impacts such as monsoonal and riverine flooding - as is specific to this area - fall unevenly on households with multiple dependents

³ These numbers do not make up an official count as recovery and relief operations are - at the time of writing - not yet completed.

⁴ It is worthwhile to bear in mind that the community-based organisation that supported in identifying the Colombo sample, is a disability rights organisation. Despite this, 95% of women in a concentrated area care for at least one person with a disability, with no disability or care support beyond a communal disability network.

and limited support networks, whilst also pushing these women into deeper precarity when their livelihoods are disrupted.

Table 2

Non immediate family living in household

	Colombo	Monaragala	Gampaha
Yes	25.0%	20.0%	55.0%
No	75.0%	80.0%	45.0%
Base	20	20	20

However, respondents across districts confirmed that extended members of the household most often do support with household chores and domestic work, revealing some informal coping systems that buffer, but do not eliminate, women's burdens.

The responses to the question of availability of childcare centres are demonstrated in table 3:

Table 3

Availability of childcare centres in close proximity to households

	Colombo	Monaragala	Gampaha
Yes	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%
No	100.0%	100.0%	90.0%
Base	20	20	20

Notably, although district-level responses suggest some awareness of childcare centres, the overall picture is bleak:

- Only 3.3% of the total sample confidently confirmed their awareness and/or the availability of childcare centres in their area. This awareness was highest in:

But these responses, and the extremely low overall confirmation rate do not just reveal limited availability, but poor visibility, poor trust, or poor access to childcare services, suggesting that women overwhelmingly rely on informal care structures that are fragile and overextended.

...even if there were available and affordable childcare centres, I know that no one will know how to care for him [son with disability] the way I do. His needs are different, and they won't understand that.

Woman, 44, Colombo

Moreover, respondents across all three districts unanimously reported the absence of eldercare centres in their communities. This gap has significant implications for climate resilience, as older persons require intensified and often continuous care during climate-related events and disasters. Households with multiple elderly dependents - as seen in Gampaha - are therefore exposed to compounded and escalating risks during climate disruptions, stretching already limited caregiving capacity.



SECTION TIME USE SURVEY & PERCEPTIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Monaragala, Sri Lanka
Farmer in drought-affected area

A time use survey was included in the questionnaire, where respondents were asked to note how many hours a day they spend on direct and indirect care related activities, in addition to income generation and recreational time. The function of a time use survey - a tool to map time spent on care-related activities within a typical day - here, serves three seminal purposes that sheds light on the varied forms 'labour' takes - particularly in the context of climate change. More specifically, a time-use survey quantifies the extent of work undertaken within a day, illustrates the manifestation of time poverty, as well as contextually outlines how climate events, and their associated disruptions, increase an already burdensome workload. This section will primarily discuss the former - the extent of work undertaken on a normal day - and section 2 will bring to light the disruptive capacity of climate change on daily routines and women's work.

Across all three districts, the data states that women's time is overwhelmingly consumed by direct care work, reaffirming the centrality of unpaid care work in shaping women's lives and economic choices, among other things. Direct care in this instance refers to work that is personal, relational and consists of direct contact with a dependent - such as feeding a baby, spending time with children on schoolwork, or even caring for a sick or elderly person (Addati et al, 2018).

Overall, respondents spend the greatest share of their time on childcare, with more than half of the women in both Colombo and Monaragala reporting 3-5 hours of direct interaction with their children on a typical day. Strikingly, in Colombo, 50% of the sample of women who perform childcare (14 individuals) spend more than 7 hours on the task. To reiterate an earlier observation, the Colombo district sample had a higher concentration of women caring

for children with disabilities than in the Gampaha and Monaragala samples (see figure 1). Caring for children with disabilities requires more continuous supervision and vigilance, in addition to emotional labour and medical support where necessary, which thus substantially elevates women's time poverty and constrains their ability to engage in paid work, or even community life.

Gampaha, on the other hand, had the highest number of respondents caring for elderly/sick persons, as mentioned before. Among women undertaking this responsibility (9 individuals), 44.4% spend 5-7 hours, and 11.1% spend 3-5 hours on elder/sick care daily. This distribution illustrates a consistently heavy care workload that likely corresponds with extended-family co-residence - as was noted during the period of data collection. The intensity of eldercare in Gampaha is particularly significant when read alongside earlier findings: many women here are also responsible for the care of non-immediate family members.

In Monaragala, although the total number of respondents caring for elderly or sick persons is small (4 individuals), 75% spend at least one hour daily on this task. This is notable given the district's rural profile and greater geographic dispersion, which often implies reduced access to healthcare, public transport, and even community networks. Moreover, in Colombo, 66.7% (6 of total respondents performing eldercare) spend the same amount of time doing the same in Colombo.

Cooking

Overall, more than half the respondents across the three districts spend between 1-3 hours cooking for the household per day. During the focus group discussions, it was revealed that cooking - for some women - is the first task undertaken for the day, often before sunrise. Where women care for dependents with disabilities or overlapping illnesses, more time is spent preparing specialised meals and sourcing/tending to healthier ingredients for balanced meals.

Cleaning

The majority of respondents across the three districts also spend between 1-3 hours on cleaning and house maintenance. These tasks often happen in tandem with others - such as, for example, cooking and cleaning, or cooking and childcare - and often involve repetitive and labour-intensive upkeep, sweeping, washing, laundry, organising and managing household sanitation. For many women, these responsibilities expand in scope and intensity when caring for infants or dependents who are ill, elderly or with disabilities.

Water collection

While cooking and cleaning are universal daily responsibilities performed by all 60 women, water collection, home gardening and firewood collection are responsibilities that hinge upon the availability - or lack thereof - of resources. Colombo and Gampaha had one and two respondents, respectively, for whom collecting water is a daily necessity. Here, all three respondents spent no more than 1 hour on the task, which included collecting water from a private well on their property or a community well in their neighbourhood.

Monaragala, however, being a rural and agrarian district prone to severe droughts, has 12 women in the sample, who have to fetch water on a daily basis. Of this subset of 12, (41.7%) spend no more

1.1 Time spent on direct care

Table 4

Time spent by women on care activities on an ordinary day

	Yes (%)	No (%)	0-1hrs (%)	1-3hrs (%)	3-5hrs (%)	5-7hrs (%)	7+ hrs (%)
Cooking for the household	98.3	1.7	37.3	62.7	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cleaning and house maintenance	93.3	6.7	37.5	46.4	12.5	3.6	0.0
Taking care of children	76.7	23.3	13.0	37.0	10.9	10.9	28.3
Taking care of elderly/sick persons	31.7	68.3	47.4	21.1	10.5	21.1	0.0
Collecting water (if applicable)	25.0	75.0	46.7	53.3	0.0	0.0	0.0
Collecting firewood (if applicable)	53.3	46.7	46.9	40.6	12.5	0.0	0.0
Farming/home gardening (if applicable)	30.0	70.0	44.4	27.8	5.6	11.1	11.1
Income generating activities (if applicable)	43.3	56.7	8.7	13.0	26.1	34.8	17.4
Sleeping	100.0		3.3	11.7	21.7	45.0	18.3
Leisure (TV, reading, socialising, etc)	53.3	46.7	34.4	53.1	6.3	3.1	3.1

than an hour, while 58.3% spend between 1-3 hours on water collection. Upon conducting the survey, it was revealed that these respondents are often required to walk to the temple where there are dedicated timetables for water collection, between 7-9AM, and 12-2PM, each day. Depending on the respondent's proximity to the temple, as well as the availability and accessibility of public transport - revealed to be lacking in this surveyed area - the journey can range from 2 to 5 kilometres - often requiring women to walk the distance, on a daily basis.

Firewood collection

Firewood collection in Monaragala proved to be even more time-intensive: among 19 respondents:

- 52.6% spent 1-3 hours
- 10.5% spent 3-5 hours
- 36.8% managed within an hour.

By contrast, the burden is markedly lighter in the other districts: only 4 of 20 respondents in Colombo and 9 in Gampaha collect firewood, with the task taking around 3 hours. Even in Gampaha – where the firewood collection is somewhat more common – only 22.2% of these 9 respondents (2 individuals) spend as long as 3-5 hours.

It is noteworthy to highlight here that not all respondents collect firewood on a daily basis; where access to resources is greater, this task is performed once a week. This was especially prevalent in Colombo where respondents pointed to the availability of firewood bundles that can be purchased at nearby local shops. Further, a subset of respondents in both, Colombo and Gampaha, had access to gas stoves which, despite it not being a daily utility, are used where and when firewood is inaccessible, such as in the monsoon months. In Monaragala, however, scarcely any households

had access to alternative stoves with most using firewood stoves. This reliance on biomass reflects both limited access to modern energy and heightened vulnerability in the face of climate change.

Home gardening and farming

Of the total sample of 60 women, only 30% (18 individuals) engage in home gardening and subsistence agriculture. Of this, just 2 of 20 respondents from Colombo engage in home gardening - spending less than an hour on the task. This is largely due to the crowded living settlements, limited space and the lack of green spaces in highly urbanised zones such as Kolonnawa. The lack of green spaces further marginalises these communities during flooding events - a frequent and devastating occurrence in Kolonnawa - due to the lack of permeable surfaces that otherwise accommodate processes like infiltration and evapotranspiration.

We used to have a garden, but it was destroyed when that land was taken for the development and widening of the Wellampitiya road⁵
 Woman, 50, Colombo

⁵ Orugodawatte - Ambatale road in Wellampitiya, Kolonnawa

Further, only 5 of 20 respondents from Gampaha engage in home gardening, this too, taking no more than an hour a day. Despite having more access to - with some women even having ownership of private land - the available data might suggest that due to the fact that Gampaha contained the highest percentage of women shouldering the dual burden of unpaid care work and paid work, they are left with insufficient time to tend to subsistence agriculture or home gardening. It is also worth noting that the surveyed area is home to seasonal fruit such as rambutan, and due to this, commercial agriculture is not a task performed on a daily basis, rather a seasonal one.

Farming and home gardening, in Monaragala, serves as an integral part of these women's livelihoods. Nearly half of the 11 respondents who engage in this activity spend 1-3 hours, but over a third spend 5 hours or more, with 18.2% (2) of these 11 respondents spending more than 7 hours. Home gardening and farming, here, are both, a means of survival as well as a source of income, which in turn places a dual burden on women, whilst also positioning them in a place of heightened precarity, in the context of climate change.

I spend all my free time tending to my cultivation. Sometimes even working into the night to protect the crops from pests.
 Woman, 50, Monaragala

Income generation

Of the 60 women surveyed, 23 (43.3%) engage in income generating activities, with 8 from the total district sample of 20 in both Monaragala and Gampaha, and 7 in Colombo. Of this:

- 4 women spend over seven hours
- 7 spend between 5-7 hours
- 5 spend between 3-5 hours
- 5 spend up to 3 hours daily

Common sources of income include card making (greeting cards), preparing food parcels, running small home-based local stores (kade), preparing and selling food such as food parcels or short eats, sewing, pottery, and commercial agriculture. Among them are also daily wage workers, who work as domestic helpers in better off houses or as day labourers in agriculture, among other things. A smaller subset of respondents work in the private sector (6.7% - 4 individuals), which includes working in the garment sector, or grocery stores.

Less than half of the total sample have sources of income generation and even fewer work full-time jobs with steady benefits such as paid or maternal leave.

Leisure and rest

While more than half of the total sample confirmed that they engage in some recreational activity such as reading, watching TV or listening to the radio (53.3%, 32 women), it is noteworthy that much of these recreational activities, along with many other care tasks, are carried out within the capacity of supervisory care, i.e., the unpaid care undertaken by a caregiver where they are not directly interacting with the care recipient, but remain available if the need for direct care should arise (UN Women, 2025). Thus, often leisure overlaps with direct and indirect care related activities, such as watching television while folding laundry, or listening to the radio while cooking, for example. As such, one

woman noted that she “spends” 5-7 hours watching television – a seemingly significant amount of time – but then clarified that the television is left running for her son who has both, cognitive and physical disabilities – including paraplegia⁶. While she performs her daily care-related responsibilities, the television runs in the background for him, and she occasionally catches fragments of TV programs. Despite this, she considers this within the realm of leisure. This emphasises the lack of autonomy women have over their time as well as how multitasking – in the form of supervisory care and otherwise – remains integral to women’s routines.

Across the three districts, women’s sleeping patterns reveal widespread and uneven forms of rest deprivation which is closely tied to their unpaid care and domestic workloads. In Colombo, the majority of women cluster around 5-7 hours of sleep, however, Monaragala presents the broadest and most concerning spread: while a quarter of women report sleeping more than 7 hours, others experience acute sleep deprivation, with some sleeping as little as 3 hours or less due to the demands of subsistence labour, and time-intensive, resource-related household tasks such as water and firewood collection.

Gampaha, on the other hand, displays a different pattern of strain, with half the sample sleeping fewer than 5 hours, which is a sign of persistent, routine sleep restriction linked to heavy care burdens as well as their income generating responsibilities. For instance, one woman prepares lunch parcels for over 85 garment factory workers who have to be at their workplace by 6am. This means that the respondent wakes up at 12am, each day to prepare food parcels, often getting no more than 3 hours of sleep a day. Similarly, another woman who runs a shop outside her house, wakes up at 2:30am, each day, to prepare breakfast items in the form of short eats and porridge (kola kenda)

⁶ Paralysis from the waist down

so she can cater to commuters on their way to work in the mornings. Taken together, the above data reveal how women’s downtime and sleep are consistently compromised by the organisation and weight of the workload undertaken for their households and communities.

1.3 Perceptions on climate change

When asked which extreme weather-related events these women have experienced in the last 2 years, women across the three districts reported a broad range of climate impacts, with notable variation in exposure and severity.

Table 5

Experiences of extreme weather events in the last 2 years

	Yes	No
Drought	30.0	70.0
Flood	65.0	35.0
Heatwaves/Extreme heat	95.0	5.0
Landslide/soil erosion	1.7	98.3
Strong winds/storms	85.0	15.0
Crop failure or loss of income (small scale commercial agriculture)	23.3	76.7
Clean water shortage	40.0	60.0
Base	60	

Heatwaves and extreme heat emerged, by far, as the most universally experienced weather event. With 95% of all respondents (57 of 60), and 95% in every district (as shown in table 6), reporting exposure. This points to the intensifying baseline of heat stress across Sri Lanka affecting all parts of the island (Alahakoon et al., 2022)

In addition to heat, flooding, too, emerged as a prominent concern, reported by 65% (39 of 60) of women overall. District-level patterns show stark contrasts (see table 6): 90% of respondents in Colombo and 100% in Gampaha (respectively) have experienced flooding in the last 2 years, compared to 5% in Monaragala. The data on Colombo and Gampaha reflect a mix of urban drainage challenges, riverine flooding, unprecedented, longstanding monsoon seasons and localised unseasonal heavy rainfall events that disproportionately affect low-lying and poorly serviced areas.

Strong winds and storms, too, were commonly experienced, with 85% of the total sample reporting them. Monaragala (100%) and Gampaha (95%) were particularly affected, aligning with known seasonal wind patterns and the vulnerability of rural and agricultural landscapes to storm-related disruptions. Despite Colombo ranking lower (at 60%) in experiencing wind related hazards, many households that were visited during the period of

Table 6

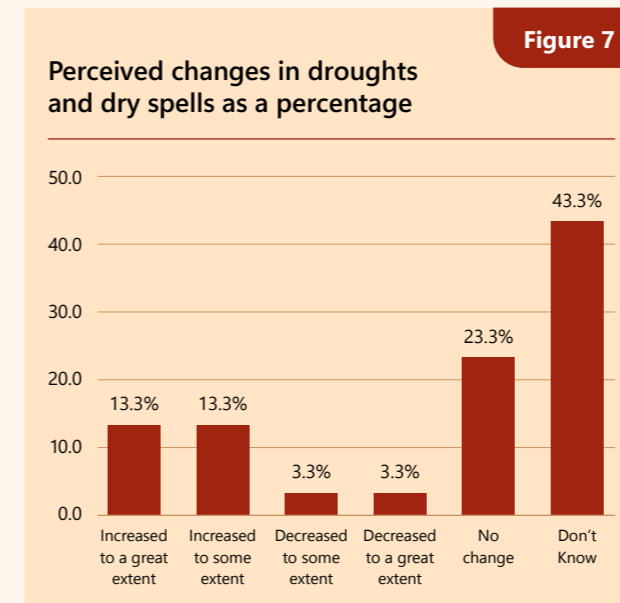
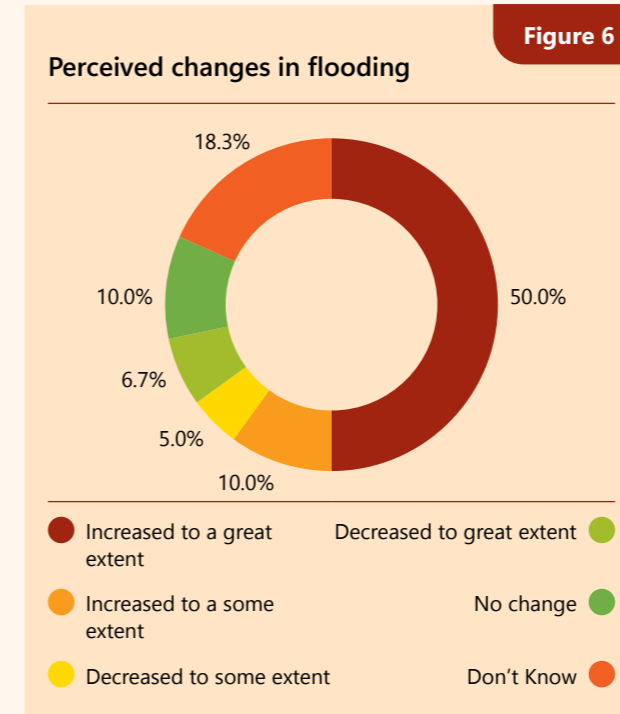
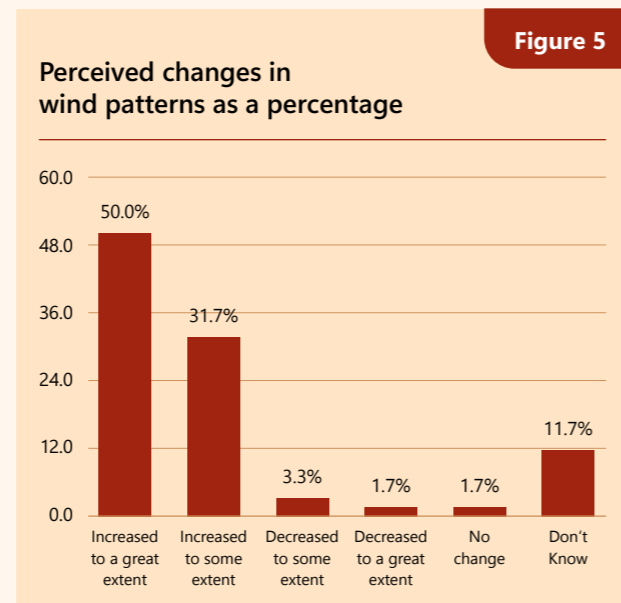
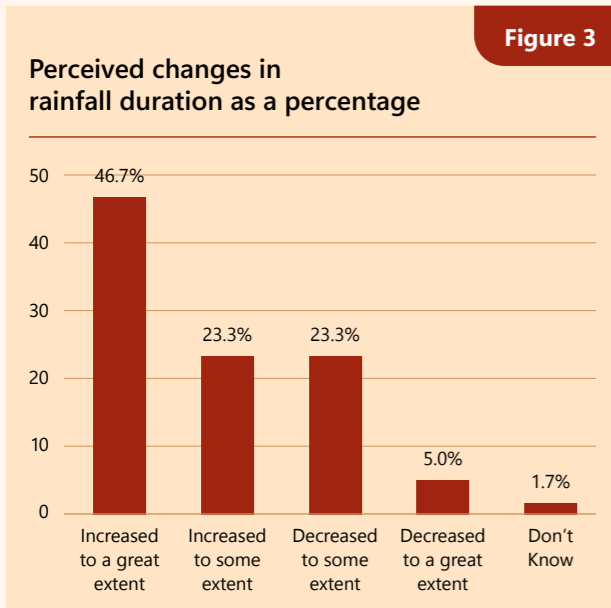
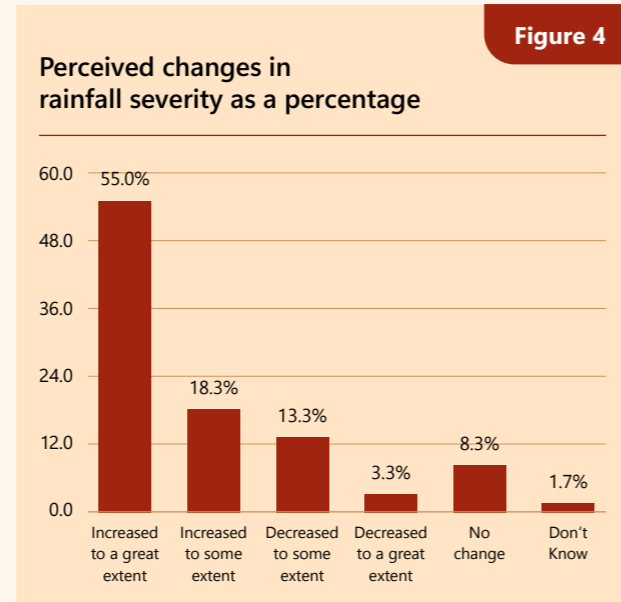
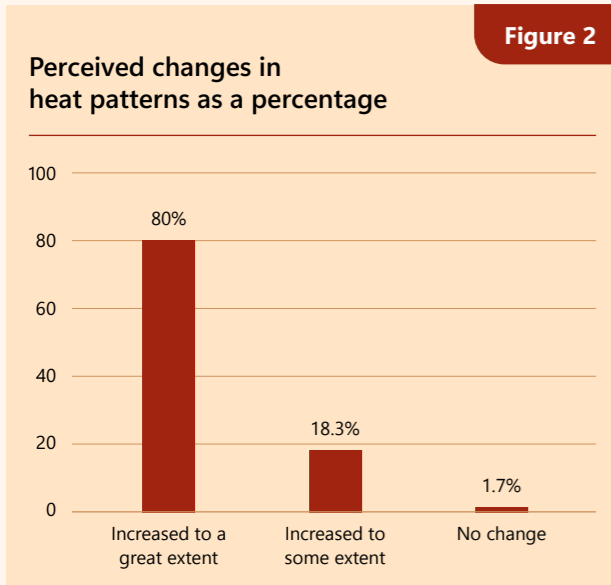
Experiences of extreme weather events in the last 2 years (district breakdown)

	Colombo	Monaragala	Gampaha
Drought	20.0%	65.0%	5.0%
Flood	90.0%	5.0%	100.0%
Heatwaves/Extreme heat	95.0%	95.0%	95.0%
Landslide/soil erosion	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%
Strong winds/storms	60.0%	100.0%	95.0%
Crop failure or loss of income (small scale commercial agriculture)	5.0%	55.0%	10.0%
Clean water shortage	15.0%	65.0%	40.0%

data collection had visible effects of longstanding damage caused by heavy winds, including fallen and broken walls and windows and damaged roofs.

The total sample indicates that drought was less uniformly felt in the last 2 years (30%). The district-level patterns, however, highlight that 65% of women (13 individuals) reported having faced prolonged dry spells, with more than half observing an overall increase in drought frequency. These dry spells directly impact water security, reflected in the 65% who reported clean water shortages from Monaragala - the highest concentration amongst the three districts.

On the same vein is crop failure, which was reported by 23% of the overall sample, but the district-level breakdown reveals its rural concentration: 55% in Monaragala compared to the 10% in Gampaha, and 5% in Colombo. This highlights a dual pressure for women in Monaragala: sustaining families and local ecosystems through unpaid labour, while also absorbing climate and economic shocks when small-scale farming falters.



A perceptions section was embedded into the main survey in order to gauge respondents' awareness on climate change. It was also pertinent to understand what narratives govern the respondents' ability to identify climate disasters, and thus crucially, differentiate them from seasonal weather changes and, 'natural disasters.' Narratives, in this case, represent the potential to prevent or mobilise a critical appraisal of the changing and intensifying weather cycles. This data was cross-tabulated based on district, age and level of education.

Overall, most respondents showcased a keen awareness on the changing weather patterns - most of whom - especially in the districts of Colombo and Gampaha - observed a significant increase in rainfall duration, rainfall severity, wind patterns and flooding - all of which affect their daily routines and care burdens, further rendering these women vulnerable to the ever-intensifying impacts of climate change.

The flooding has increased. It flooded three times last year... and all three times, we had to evacuate.

Woman, 49, Colombo district, Sri Lanka

When compared to the landscape of climate hindrances in Colombo and Gampaha - Monaragala is indeed an outlier. This is, in part, due to its profile as a rural, agrarian district based in the dry zone. In Monaragala, the observation of rainfall patterns reflects a contrasting picture to that of Colombo and Gampaha. While respondents from Colombo and Gampaha have largely emphasised the increase in rainfall duration, more than half the respondents from Monaragala district identified that the duration of rainfall has decreased, with only 30% of the total district sample perceiving that the duration of rainfall has 'increased to some extent.'

Similarly, 40% of respondents in Monaragala reported that the severity of rainfall has decreased to some extent - which could suggest a lack in rainfall as well as a shift in rainfall patterns, thus indicating increasing water scarcity as well as economic precarity in and around the district.

Further, it was in Monaragala that extended dry spells and droughts were experienced the most, with more than half of the respondents reporting that dry periods have increased in severity (see table 8). It is worthwhile highlighting here that 20% of the total district sample, as well as 55% from both Colombo and Gampaha reported 'don't know,' when asked about dry spells and droughts. While it is somewhat probable to assume that this is a result of a lack of awareness around key drought indicators - it can also be reasonably assumed that this lack of awareness stems from confusion around measuring the effects, impact and duration of a drought itself - which, unlike the abrupt and unprecedented disruption of a flood, storm or cyclone - occurs at a slower pace, with subsequent consequences that are just as gradual in their visibility.

Interestingly, however, the apt recognition of a drought or recent extended dry spells, did not factor into the work some women undertake to prepare for and mitigate its effects. For instance, despite identifying prolonged water scarcity, women did not report undertaking anticipatory measures such as adjusting cropping or home-garden practices, increasing water storage, or redistributing household labour in advance; instead, their work intensified reactively once water shortages became unavoidable.

Table 7

Perceived observations of rainfall duration	Colombo	Monaragala	Gampaha
Increased to a great extent	70.0%	0.0%	70.0%
Increased to some extent	25.0%	30.0%	15.0%
Decreased to some extent	0.0%	60.0%	10.0%
Decreased to a great extent	5.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Don't Know	0.0%	0.0%	5.0%
Base	20	20	20

Table 8

Perceived observations of droughts and dry spells	Colombo	Monaragala	Gampaha
Increased to a great extent	10.0%	30.0%	0.0%
Increased to some extent	10.0%	25.0%	5.0%
Decreased to some extent	5.0%	5.0%	0.0%
Decreased to a great extent	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%
No change	20.0%	10.0%	40.0%
Don't Know	55.0%	20.0%	55.0%
Base	20	20	20

Cross tabulation by age

Cross tabulating this data by age was done to identify whether age is a factor that contributes to level of awareness on climate change and extreme weather events, amongst respondents. The responses are as follows (note, responses to 'increased to a great extent,' and 'somewhat increased,' have been amalgamated here):

Table 9

Weather event	Perceived changes	Age Group					Total
		18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	
Heat	Increased	100.0%	92.9%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	59
Rainfall timing	Increased	0.0%	35.7%	65.0%	81.8%	100.0%	37
Rainfall duration	Increased	0.0%	57.1%	75.0%	81.8%	100.0%	42
Rainfall severity	Increased	20.0%	64.3%	85.0%	81.8%	80.0%	44
Strong winds	Increased	80.0%	64.3%	95.0%	81.8%	80.0%	49
Flooding	Increased	0.0%	42.9%	65.0%	81.8%	80.0%	36
Droughts	Increased	60.0%	35.7%	20.0%	18.2%	20.0%	16

Overall, the data indicates that respondents within the 18-29 age bracket are less likely than those in the 40-60+ age category, to identify patterns in weather change, specifically those that pertain to rainfall, and even flooding. The identification of these weather patterns seems to increase with age, with respondents within the 60+ category more readily identifying these shifts. Droughts, however, once again provide a contrast, where those within the 18-29 age category have identified shifts and an intensification in droughts and dry spells more readily than those within the 50-60+ age category.

These findings suggest that age plays a mediating role in how climate variability is perceived and interpreted, shaped by differing temporal and lived experience and forms of environmental engagement. Older respondents appear more attuned to gradual or cyclical changes in rainfall patterns and flooding, likely attributable to longer term experiential baselines, against which such shifts can reasonably be measured. In contrast, younger respondents - demonstrating a heightened sensitivity to droughts and prolonged dry spells - may be attributed to the increasing salience of water scarcity and even heat stress in recent years, as well as potentially, greater exposure to contemporary climate discourse.

Based on the above data, it is possible to rationalise that education may influence awareness for more complex, less immediately noticeable climate events, such as droughts. Where highly visible and immediate events like rainfall duration, strong winds and even extreme heat, are almost universally recognised - regardless of education level - more invisible and less frequent events and patterns (rainfall timing, rainfall severity, flooding and droughts) show more variation across education levels.

In other words, education seems to correlate more clearly with awareness of events that are less frequent or less directly experienced, such as droughts. For highly visible events, direct experience dominates perception.

Moreover, while education certainly could be a factor affecting awareness and perception, it is also possible that women who have a qualification that is less than the ordinary or advanced levels may have more direct experience with various climate disasters and patterns, particularly those that pertain to rainfall. Further, access to information may also vary across districts. For example, in urban districts, better media and information access may vary from rural districts, where direct exposure overrides education.

Despite this, while direct experience shapes understanding and awareness, there is both a national and global push for programs to improve climate literacy as a mitigatory tool to better support women (Choden, 2024; Kwauk, 2019). This would then mean that women are able to better anticipate and manage climate impacts on their pre-existing workloads, lives and livelihoods. Further, climate literacy as a catalyst for agency through awareness, too is widely regarded as an equitable approach to resilience and adaptation (The Economist, 2025).

Cross tabulation by education level

Cross tabulating perceptions by respondents' education level was done primarily to gauge whether there exists a correlation between level awareness with education. The responses are as follows (note, responses to 'increased to a great extent,' and 'somewhat increased,' have been amalgamated here).

Table 10

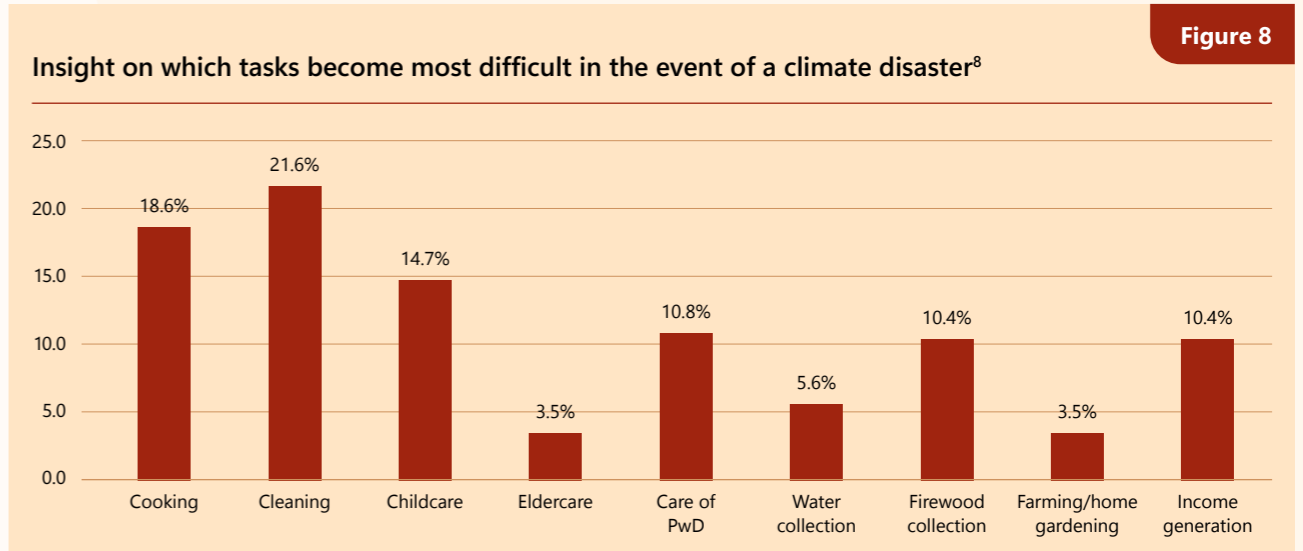
Perceived observations of climate disasters (cross-tabulated by education level)							
Weather event	Perceived changes	Up to grade 5	Up to grade 8	Up to O/L	Up to A/L	Other ⁷	Base
Heat	Increased	100.0%	100.0%	96.8%	100.0%	100.0%	59
Rainfall timing	Increased	66.7%	53.8%	61.3%	71.4%	66.7%	37
Rainfall duration	Increased	100.0%	69.2%	61.3%	71.4%	100.0%	42
Rainfall severity	Increased	66.7%	84.6%	67.7%	71.4%	100.0%	44
Strong winds	Increased	100.0%	84.6%	77.4%	85.7%	66.7%	49
Flooding	Increased	83.3%	53.8%	54.8%	71.4%	66.7%	36
Droughts	Increased	0.0%	23.1%	29.0%	42.9%	33.3%	16

⁷ 'Other' in this context, primarily includes women who did not receive a formal education, or those that received an education up to a grade/level that is not grades 5, 8, O/L or A/L

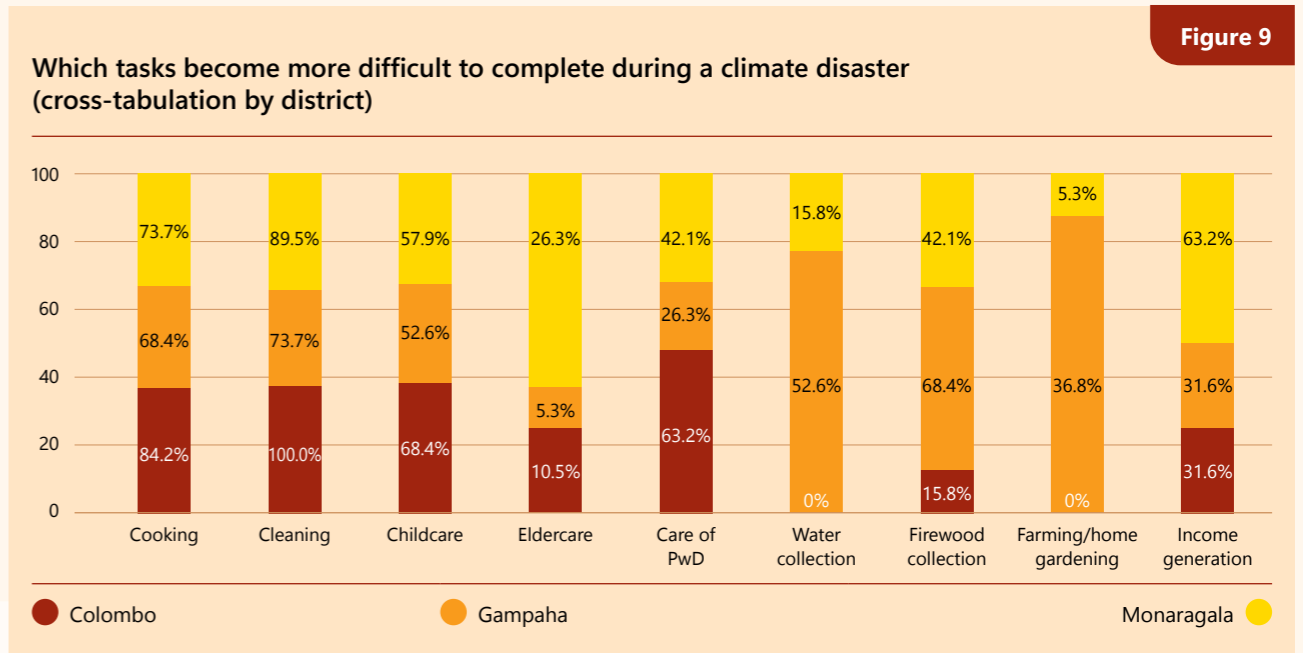
SECTION CHANGES IN THE CARE BURDEN

Colombo, Sri Lanka
Polluted sewage canal visible from
a woman's window in Kolonnawa

Of the sample, 95% of respondents (57 women) reported that their care tasks become more difficult and time consuming in the event of extreme weather, with only one respondent per district indicating no noticeable change. This near universal acknowledgement underscores the extent to which climate shocks directly magnify unpaid care burdens. Section 2 reveals more insight into how these difficulties manifest across specific tasks.



As per actual daily tasks, there was no noticeable variation between direct (childcare, eldercare, care for people with disabilities) versus indirect (cooking, cleaning, water/firewood collection). Instead, the degree of difficulty was overwhelmingly determined by resource accessibility, time scarcity as well as the scale of the disaster and its associated environmental disruption. This reveals how climate disasters, to a large extent, collapse the boundary between care categories, as well as the stability of routine that keeps them in place. All tasks expand simultaneously and thus compete for the time and labour of unpaid care work.



INTRODUCTION	COUNTRY CONTEXT	METHODOLOGY	DISTRICT PROFILES	DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	SECTION 1 TIME USE SURVEY & PERCEPTIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE	SECTION 2 CHANGES IN THE CARE BURDEN	SECTION 3 COPING AND MANAGING THE CARE BURDEN	SECTION 4 INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES	SECTION 5 HEALTH IMPACTS AND ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES	SECTION 6 HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE EVENTS	LOCAL COUNCIL INTERVIEWS	CONCLUSION	GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	REFERENCE
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Cleaning

Cleaning was highlighted as the most difficult responsibility to carry out. This was especially prevalent amongst the Colombo and Gampaha sample, due to their vulnerability to frequent, unprecedented and intensifying floods. Women revealed that difficulty stems from:

- The need to extend extra effort to maintain hygiene during floods due to contaminated floodwater entering homes, especially in households with sick and elderly people as well as people with disabilities - thus creating a constant sanitation burden.
- The presence of sick, elderly, or disabled household members, heightening hygiene demands
- The cyclical and constant nature of cleaning during floods, often meaning that during a flood, cleaning is a task that is repetitively undertaken, as opposed to at a dedicated time in the day, as is the case on typical 'non-disaster,' days.

Thus, cleaning becomes the most time-consuming task due to it being a responsibility that does not cease, or resume within a normal routine, until long after floodwaters recede.

I sometimes spend more time cleaning during floods than I spend time taking care of them [children] because the water that comes into our houses is contaminated and dirty and getting to a clinic if someone falls ill during the floods is very difficult... Everyone falls ill anyway, our feet get wounds from walking in dirty water.

Woman, 49, Colombo district

Cooking for the household was highlighted as the next most strenuous and difficult task to carry out, and was identified as a particularly time consuming responsibility due to the lack of resources and supplies available to families and low-income households, during an extreme weather event. This includes,

- Access to cooking supplies such as firewood and gas stoves.
- Damaged kitchens and/or unsafe indoor spaces, including spending long periods of time in front of a fire during heatwaves and dry spells.
- Access to healthy, nutritious food and clean drinking water.
- Crop losses or shortages in the market.
- Reduced household income during disasters, limiting ability to purchase food.

Some women in Colombo reported being unable to leave their homes during extreme weather events to purchase basic food items such as rice and vegetables. In contrast, in Monaragala - and to some extent in Gampaha, where climate impacts on agriculture are pronounced - drought-induced crop failures and flood-related destruction directly compromise food availability and access for low-income households.

One woman from Colombo described having to prepare meals on a makeshift stove - assembling pieces of wood, stones, and paper atop a large barrel - after her kitchen was inundated during a previous year's floods.

During the droughts, I try my best to make three meals a day, but it is not always possible. Most times I skip a meal, but there have been occasions when my children have had to skip meals too.

Woman, 51, Monaragala district

Childcare and caring for people with disabilities

Childcare and care for people with disabilities are highlighted as the next most difficult tasks to carry out during extreme weather events. The difficulty and strain around these tasks' manifests in various different ways - pointing to multiple layers of strain:

- School closures during floods, drought and extreme heat, keeping children confined to the home and requiring constant supervisory care.
- Children falling ill during disasters - fevers, respiratory issues, gastrointestinal problems, heat rashes, etc - require close tending to and intensive direct care.
- Safety concerns - preventing children from hazards associated with the disaster itself, such as injury, drowning, slipping, etc.
- More strenuous and time intensive care that is required when caring for children with disabilities to prevent injury, an exacerbation of a pre-existing illness, and supervisory care - among other things.

A woman disclosed that even during floods she would attempt to sit down with her son and do educational workbooks with him to ensure that he does not fall behind in school, despite his not being able to attend.

Direct care during disasters - particularly with children and children with disabilities - often encompasses constant supervision to ensure that they do not fall ill or get injured.

It doesn't get less hot in the nights here [Kolonnawa], it is the same temperature throughout the day - especially in the hot months. I always wet some clothes and place them around my children as they sleep and sometimes wake up periodically in the night to sponge their bodies with water to prevent heatstroke.

Woman, 49, Colombo

In extreme cases where the family is required to evacuate their houses due to flooding, for instance, women have to work overtime to ensure that the evacuation processes are safe and inclusive, often supervising and supporting in the handling of evacuations where people with special needs are concerned, and then, ensure that children are protected and safe in relief centres. Similarly, challenges associated with disability care in relief centres was a recurrent theme during the period of data collection, where women reported a lack of disability access in relief centres and evacuation processes. They described having to spend time

cleaning public spaces and creating special arrangements to ensure that their children's specific needs - particularly those pertaining to hygiene - are met. This points to a lack of accessibility, privacy and adequate infrastructure in disaster management processes.

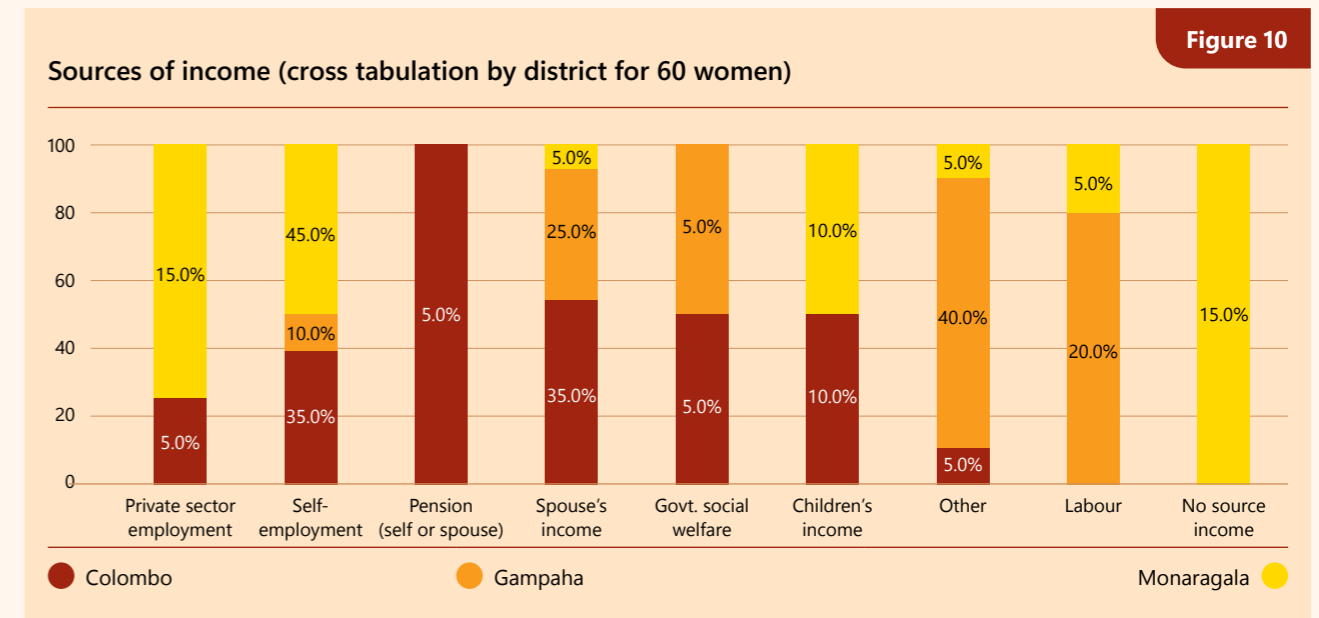
During the 2016 floods we were evacuated to a nearby temple, but he [her son with Down's Syndrome] could not handle the unfamiliar setting and the crowds of people, which overwhelmed him. Also, I ended up coming back home and placing him on top of two stacked tables, until the water receded.

Woman, 47, Colombo district

The above quote features a testimony of a woman who cares for a son with Down's Syndrome. It highlights the intersectional vulnerabilities faced by caregivers to children with disabilities, forced to choose between an unsafe home in disaster situations, and inaccessible relief centres and evacuation processes. Disability access in the event of a climate disaster is often structurally overlooked in emergency processes. It can, in this case, include dedicated spaces for people with disabilities, better facilities within relief centres - such as wheelchairs and disability toilets - as well as safer and more inclusive evacuation processes.

Income generation

Evidence from this study suggests that climate disasters - most notably floods and droughts - significantly hinder women's income generating activities. As the data from this survey suggests, a large percentage of the total sample of women who have avenues for income generation, are self-employed - engaged in small home-based enterprises, seasonal agricultural work, or informal services, among other things. Thus, climate disasters create a two-pronged obstruction to women's economic participation.



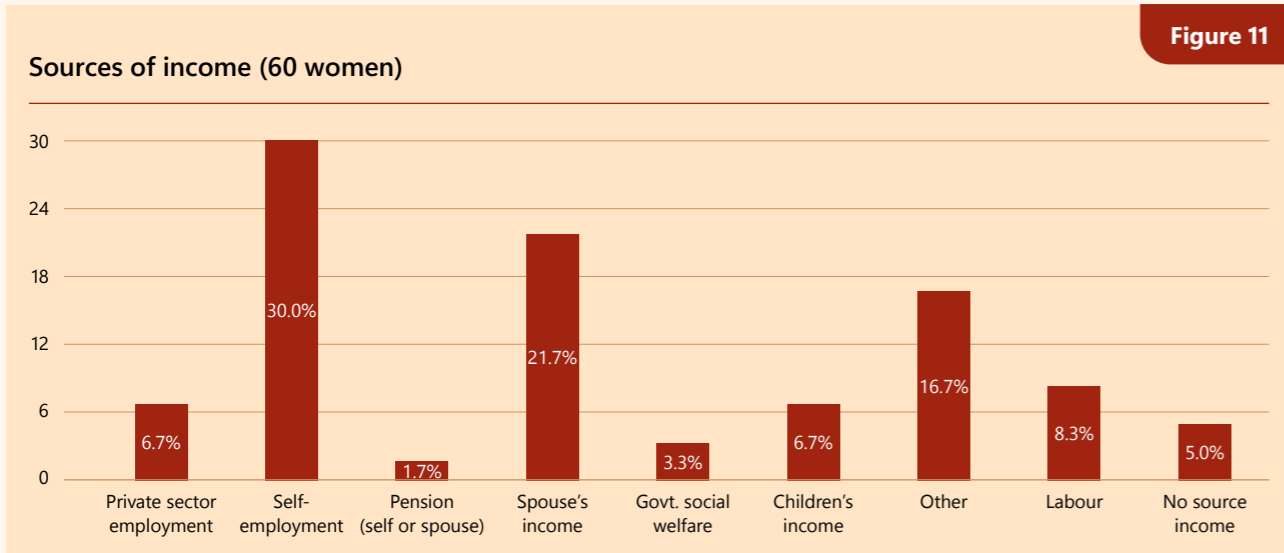


Figure 11

1. Immediate disruption of livelihood activities

Floods, drought, strong winds and unseasonal rainfall directly interrupt income generating activities by damaging equipment interrupting access to markets, limiting mobility, destroying crops, etc. For home-based workers, inundated spaces and power outages too, particularly during floods, make it impossible to continue work. For agricultural and daily wage workers, climate events eliminate or significantly reduce available workdays, creating income uncertainty and precarity.

2. Increased financial strain and the burden of recovery

Post-disaster recovery is both costly and labour intensive. Often, households are left to repair damaged structures, replace broken appliances and other necessary assets, purchase essential items lost in disaster, as well as any other damages incurred during disaster, such as those pertaining to health of family members. The interruption posed on work and income generation then puts households in a vicious cycle of vulnerability, where addressing

I work in the pottery industry and each time it floods, our [pottery] wheels get destroyed. We don't have time to pull it or move it, and it is usually too heavy for us to take. So, when the water recedes, we have to find money to replace these machines, because they are usually beyond repair.

Woman, 46, Gampaha

these expenses forms both an immediate and necessary need that cannot be avoided or postponed. Women often shoulder this burden disproportionately - redirecting time spent on their livelihoods and income generating activities, to unpaid work which thus includes, repairing and rebuilding, in addition to daily and post-disaster care.

Cumulatively, these consequences manifest as a series of interruptions that ultimately add to an already inflexible burden of care, whilst also compounding economic precarity, thus widening pre-existing inequalities in gender, the gendered division of labour and access to relief.

Firewood collection

Firewood collection was tied with income generation as one of the more difficult tasks to carry out during climate disasters and further illuminates another layer of the vulnerability faced by women during climate shocks. This was identified as particularly difficult during heatwaves and dry spells, as well as during floods. In Monaragala, notably, women venture out on foot in search of firewood, and during droughts, time spent outdoors leaves these women and their families particularly vulnerable to heatstroke, skin-related rashes and other health issues compounded by water scarcity in arid areas.

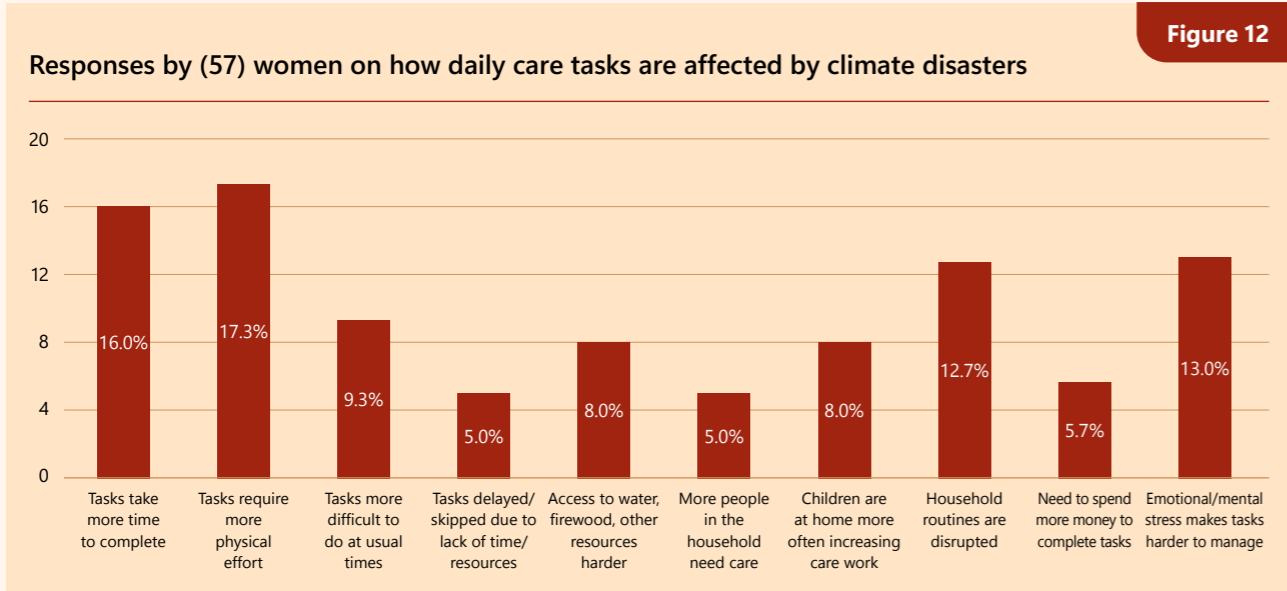
Conversely, firewood collection during monsoon months and floods becomes extremely difficult due to usable firewood not being available. This often means that women turn to gas stoves that

are kept aside specifically for emergencies, which is expensive - adding further strain on an increasingly weighted burden. The reliance on biomass also reflects both, limited access to modern energy, as well as a heightened vulnerability in the face of climate change.

Thus, access to resources shapes productivity, time use and efficiency during climate disasters. This includes access to firewood - highlighted as one of the top 5 factors adding weight to an increasingly heavy care burden, with a majority of women from Monaragala reporting that they now spend significantly longer hours searching for usable firewood due to erratic rainfall and degraded forest cover. The increase in unpaid care and domestic labour directly limits their ability to pursue income-generating activities, or access training and livelihood opportunities - ultimately deepening gendered inequalities and vulnerability during moments of crisis.

Other constraints in access to resources, as raised by women, include:

- Access to safe drinking water
- Electricity and lighting
- Sanitation facilities
- Mobility and transport
- Income to purchase emergency supplies, and other materials needed post-disaster
- Spaces that provide specialised care facilities for those with special needs

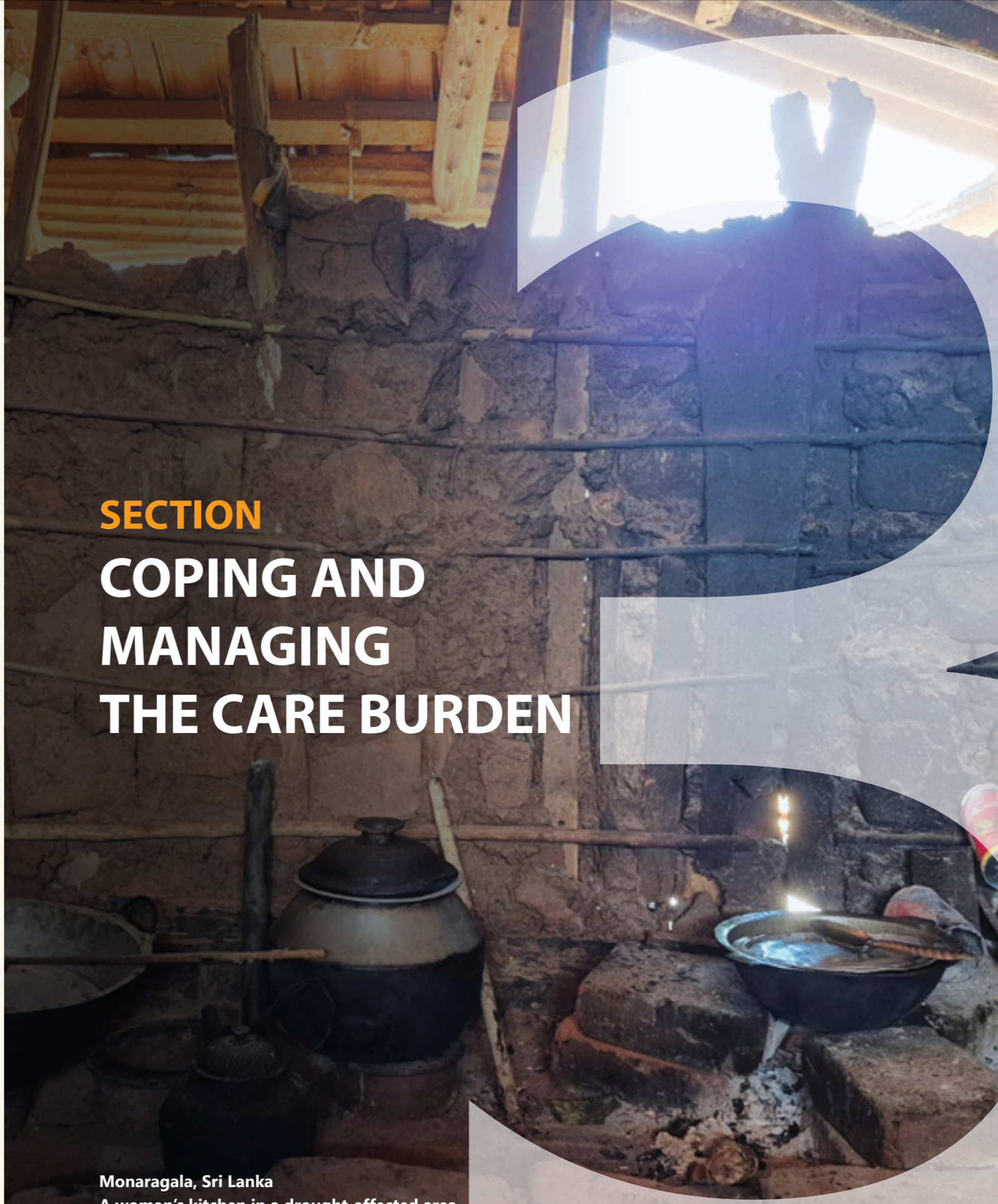


Moreover, when asked how these tasks become harder to complete, a significant portion of women reported that difficulty primarily stems from the additional physical effort that is required of them during an extreme weather event. Respondents described having to fetch water over longer distances during droughts, spend more time protecting harvests and crops from drying, clean mud and debris - often contaminated - following floods, cook with limited fuel or electricity, and substitute for the absence of functioning and equitably accessible services, like healthcare. This was closely followed by 16% of women stating that daily tasks take more time to complete. Household routines, as mentioned above, are thus disrupted with women instead having to shoulder multiple responsibilities, sometimes singlehandedly, and often simultaneously.

Beyond the physical labour and increased time demands - often cited as primary ways in which care burdens intensify during climate disasters - women are also disproportionately responsible for the emotional and psychological labour required to sustain households through crisis - as is referenced by the number of responses citing the emotional/mental toll that make tasks harder

to manage. Several respondents identified the mental and emotional toll of sustaining households under conditions of uncertainty and precarity as a key factor making care work harder to manage. This includes the constant monitoring of children, older persons, family members with disabilities and household members who are unwell due to illnesses or injuries, anticipating shortages of food, water, medicine, and managing fear, stress, and even conflict within the household, as well as the cost and burden of recovery, post-disaster which includes the financial and emotional costs. Thus, climate disasters amplify the gendered expectation that women manage both the reproduction of everyday life as well as the conditions of survival, thus producing heightened stress and anxiety.

These forms of affective and relational labour remain largely unrecognised within dominant disaster management frameworks, which tend to privilege infrastructural damage and economic loss and subsequent resilience. Even where relief and aid are extended, psychosocial care is marginalised, reinforcing the systematic devaluation of care work and mental wellbeing in disaster response and recovery.



SECTION COPING AND MANAGING THE CARE BURDEN

Monaragala, Sri Lanka
A woman's kitchen in a drought-affected area

In the absence and remoteness of adequate and timely support services both, during and immediately after an extreme weather event, women undertake a renewed workload, finding new or alternative ways to navigate the interruptions and disruptions posed to daily responsibilities. In other words, women find ways of coping and managing the care burden in the event of disaster, thus, bridging gaps in intervention, relief and support services. This section reveals the newer strains to the labour undertaken by women to stabilise households and communities in moments of crisis. It examines how this labour expands and intensifies in the aftermath of extreme weather events, often without recognition and in the absence of institutional support, thus reinforcing pre-existing gendered inequalities.

Of the 60 women surveyed, 51 (85%) attested to approaching their daily responsibilities differently to manage household work and care responsibilities (see table 11). A range of responses were recorded by way of a series of statements where respondents were asked to select all that apply to their respective experience. The statements embedded into the survey are as follows:

1. I cook, clean, or fetch water in advance or at a different time of the day (e.g. early morning or evening, or in preparation for the disaster)
2. I ask other family members to help with household work more often
3. I get help from neighbours, friends, or relatives more often
4. I use things that make work easier (e.g., water collecting techniques, gas cookers, etc)
5. I priorities certain tasks over others when there is not enough time or energy (e.g. doing the most important work first and leave the other tasks for later)
6. I send children or elderly to stay with relatives/ other trusted people during hard times
7. Other (please specify): _____

Of the recorded responses by the 51 women, the most selected statements were:

- I ask other family members to help with household work more often (20.6%)
- I cook, clean, or fetch water in advance or at a different time of the day (18.4%)
- I get help from neighbours, friends, or relatives more often (16.2%)
- I priorities certain tasks over others when there is not enough time or energy (16.2%)

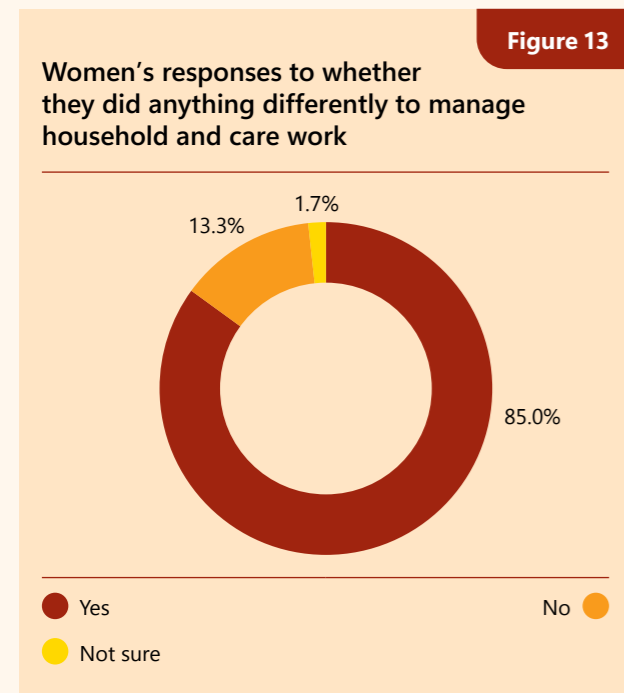


Table 11

Changes or new ways of coping and managing the care burden during extreme weather events (cross tabulation by district)

	Percent
I cook, clean, or fetch water in advance or at a different time of the day	18.4%
I ask other family members to help with household work more often	20.6%
I get help from neighbours, friends, or relatives more often	16.2%
I use things that make work easier	11.0%
I priorities certain tasks over others when there is not enough time or energy	16.2%
I send children or elderly to stay with relatives/other trusted people during hard times	14.0%
Other	3.7%
Base	51

That support is sought externally, primarily from family members, but also from community networks such as neighbours, specifically in times of disaster and crisis, speaks to an otherwise overreliance on the self at individual capacity. In the context of an extreme weather event then, women's labour is not automatically reduced by way of delegation, collaboration or goodwill, but rather is momentarily reorganised and temporarily re-distributed. In other words, it is largely a necessity-driven adjustment, where women remain the primary coordinators and managers of household labour and responsibilities even when tasks are shared.

The involvement of neighbours, friends and relatives also highlights the significant role that informal networks play in climate adaptation. While these networks are often framed as indicators of social resilience and thus certainly speak to the enduring role of community and the collective - the

data also suggests that they function as substitutes for systemic gaps and absences in climate-friendly care infrastructure and state support during and after disasters. Further, women's mobilisation of these networks do, on occasion, involve negotiation and reciprocal obligations that additionally expand the scope of unpaid labour undertaken during crises. For example, one woman in Colombo, described relying on neighbours to temporarily supervise children when flooding made it unsafe to leave them alone while attending to other urgent tasks such as securing household belongings and accessing relief supplies. This support was often accompanied by an implicit expectation that care would be reciprocated at a later time, particularly during future emergencies. Another woman in Monaragala recalled borrowing water and vegetables from a neighbour during a dry spell in exchange for taking care of her neighbour's child at alternative water collection times.

Similarly, the practice of cooking, cleaning or fetching water at different times, as well as task prioritisation, highlights how adjustments of this nature often fall along a spectrum of sacrifice. Where temporal shifts take place, as seen in the decision to reorganise routines, women often wake earlier, work later or longer, and compress rest periods. This includes walking longer distances to fetch water during droughts and dry spells, waking earlier to complete the preparation of breakfast and lunch earlier in order to avoid standing by fire during heatwaves, and the situational necessity to clean more frequently in the event of a flood or extreme rains. Task prioritisations, too, are rarely neutral, often involving trade-offs that affect nutrition, hygiene, rest and the quality of care. For example, one woman in the district of Monaragala, revealed how in times of scarcity and precarity, she would often sacrifice a meal in favour of feeding her family, and in dire contexts of prolonged droughts and dry spells, the entire household will have to resort to a single meal a day.

These ultimately contribute to physical exhaustion and emotional strain, indicating how these strategies speak to a practice of coping rather than relief, thus, placing the burden of adaptation squarely on the individual rather than on responsive public infrastructure, services, or even members of the household who otherwise benefit from the unpaid and unrecognised labour of survival. These findings on coping and managing, reveal that women play a critical, albeit unrecognised,

role in bridging institutional gaps during and after extreme weather events. Their unpaid labour enables households, and by extension, communities and institutions to continue functioning despite systemic failures in disaster preparedness and response. Moreover, women's adaptive strategies and individual capacities contribute to recovery, on both a micro and macro, individual and collective level, and in doing so, contribute to narratives of resilience. Ultimately, undertaking this work out of necessity also means that they do so at significant personal costs to freedom, independence and self-sufficiency. Thus, the need for adequate disaster response mechanisms and climate action frameworks that explicitly account for the reduction and redistribution of unpaid labour instead of relying on it as an invisible safety net, remains crucial.

SECTION INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Gampaha, Sri Lanka
A woman's kitchen in a flood
affected area

The rationale for the integration of a section on support services and access, was to understand what gaps and issues may persist in the provision of support, what exactly 'support' entails, when it is afforded and to whom.

As mentioned earlier, women often mobilised networks of friends, family and community in the event of crisis and management. These support networks form a temporary measure in alleviation and function on the basis of kinship or affinal where institutional and formal support systems have emerged inadequate. While 70% of respondents reported having received some form of support in the event of a climate disaster or extreme weather - the nature, source, and duration of this support point to structural gaps in state and institutional care rather than comprehensive protection.

Support - to the respondents who have reported having received it - primarily came from family members (47.7%, 19 individuals), followed by neighbours and community (27.7%, 12 individuals), with formal or institutional actors accounting for the smallest share (24.6%, n=9). While this distribution does not allow for binary conclusions pertaining to adequacy and inadequacy, or capacity and incapacity - highlights a deferring of responsibility. In other words, the responsibility for managing crises and impacts is displaced from the State onto households, hence a reliance on kinship ties and social networks to compensate for institutional inadequacy - ultimately a pattern that disproportionately burdens women. Further, while kinship and affinal networks can provide immediacy and familiarity in times of disaster and crisis, they are inherently uneven and relational, privileging those with stable family ties while marginalising women who are widowed, separated, elderly, disabled, or socially isolated.

All respondents were asked specific questions relating to sources of support. The responses are recorded below:

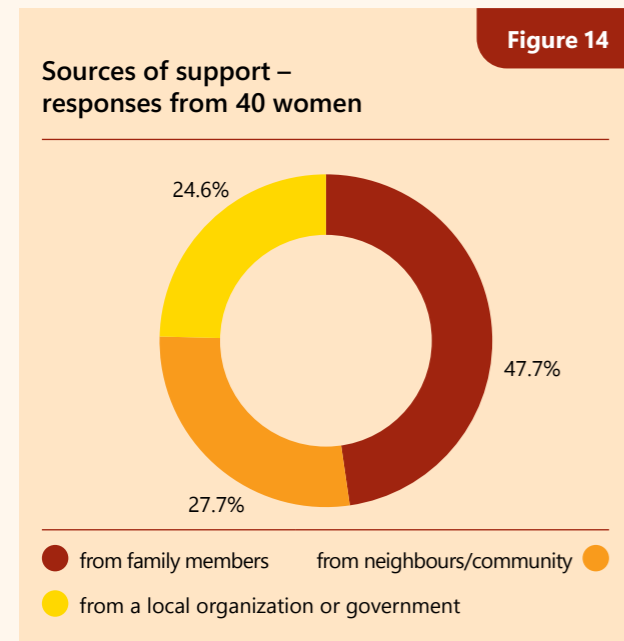


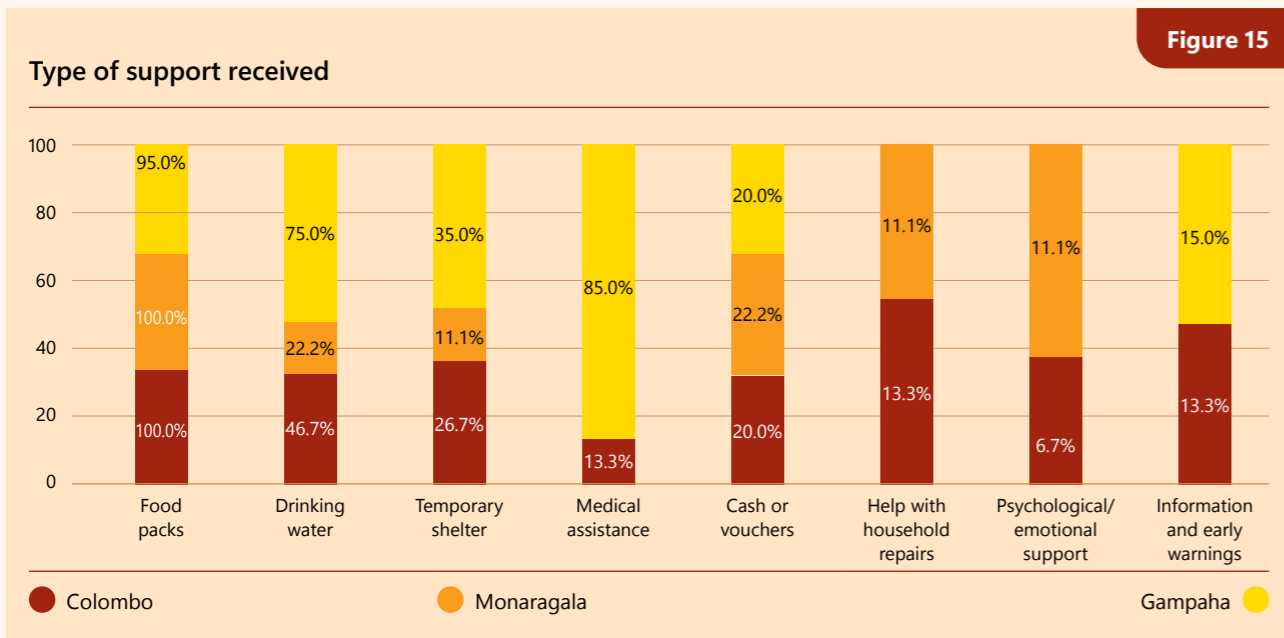
Table 12

Institutional and non-government sources of support following an extreme weather event

	Percent
Ministry of Social Services	0.6%
Local Municipal Council/Urban Council/Pradeshiya Sabha	2.4%
Social protection services	1.2%
Grama Niladhari (GN)	17.6%
Divisional Secretariat (DS office)	6.1%
Health workers/Public health midwives	6.7%
Police/Military/Navy assistance	11.5%
Local school or religious institution	1.8%
Private company (CSR, donations, etc.)	0.6%
Local politician	6.1%
NGO or civil society organization	10.9%
Faith-based organization	7.9%
Individuals	12.1%
No support received	9.7%
Other	4.8%
Base	60

Of the most highly reported institutional/formal support services - Grama Niladhari, policy/military/navy, NGOs or civil society organisations- emerge largely as secondary and often reactive sources of assistance. The nature of this support then, is

primarily immediate relief and short-term recovery, including (but not limited to), evacuation, food distribution, access to clean drinking water, shelter and basic medical assistance. More clarity on the type of support received is provided below:



This data reveals where priority lies in the face of crisis; formal disaster response mechanisms, in the experience of these women, are primarily oriented towards crisis containment rather than sustained recovery or long-term care. The top three, here, being food, water, shelter, followed by medical assistance. The limited provision of psychological/emotional support, support with household repairs and access to timely information and early warning systems point to a fundamental inadequacy in the comprehension of the gravity of impact as well as the complex and expansive nature of the climate crisis. Thus, this data reveals both the length to which formal support mechanisms extend, as well as the timeline for priority in relief and recovery.

Further, during the period of data collection, significant information on the process of gaining access to available services for immediate and mid-term relief was discussed. In crisis situations, it was revealed to by local councillors in Colombo

and Monaragala, that there exists the risk of an overextension of previously limited resources including monetary compensation (usually reserved for repairs and recovery). Thus, State actors are compelled to comply with a process of prioritisation and elimination, determining eligibility on rapid needs-based assessments. These needs are primarily determined, with aid subsequently disseminated, through local administrative structures including Divisional Secretariats and Grama Niladhari officers, whose assessment forms the basis for relief lists and compensation approvals - as is stipulated in the Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005, and other guidelines such as the National Emergency Operation Plan 2017 (Government of Sri Lanka, 2005; Disaster Management Centre, 2017). Further, other informal or temporary networks and mechanisms, such as word-of-mouth processes and digital disaster relief platforms, are set up in crisis.

Despite this, respondents' accounts suggest that these needs-based assessments, early warning systems, access and rights to relief or compensation, are not neutral or uniformly applied. Women reported instances of discrimination, inconsistency, inaccessibility and opacity in disaster processes - including perceptions that access to relief was influenced by social proximity to disseminating officials, and in some cases, depended on visibility of damage, the ability to repeatedly engage with tedious bureaucratic processes, and even nearness to main roads - meaning that responsible officials do not frequently visit inner-city/secluded houses away from the main roads and access channels.

Several women - especially in the districts of Colombo and Monaragala - reported that Grama Niladhari officials assigned to their area did not visit their homes following the repeated 2024 floods. When asked why, respondents explained that these officials often neglect houses located farther away from the main roads. This discrepancy in relief distribution was made clear throughout the period of data collection, as many of the women surveyed, who lived along the main roads, had - in the past - received food packs and clean drinking water, at the very least. More recently, following the devastation left in the wake of cyclone Ditwah, one woman from Colombo (53) recounted how the Grama Niladhari official overseeing her area refused to provide her with essential and immediate relief - including essential medication for her son (15) who suffers from multiple overlapping health complications and disabilities - after learning that she had received basic dry rations from the nearest temple.

When my house flooded last year (2024), I left my family at a friend's house which is located at a higher elevation. I walked every day in the afternoon and night to the temple to receive food packs that I bring for my family. We skip breakfast during this time or save left over food from dinner, for breakfast the next day. I sometimes have to walk through the floods to bring the food, but sometimes, people help me.

Woman, 52, Colombo

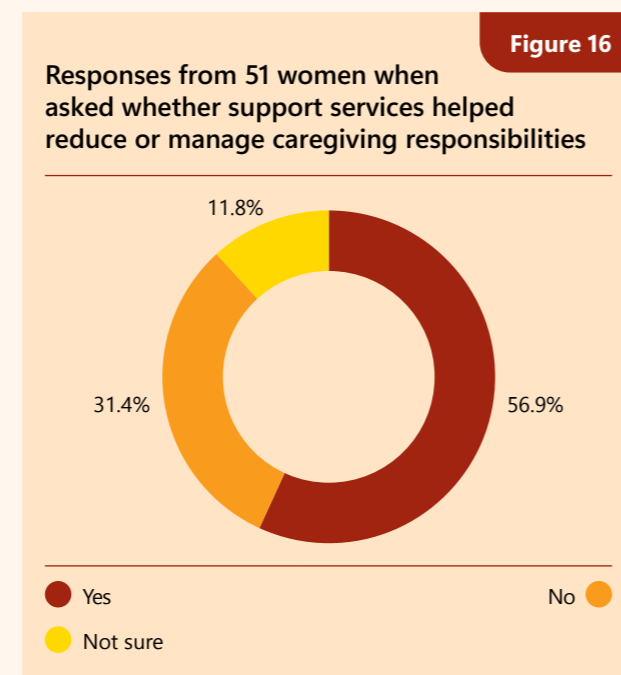
The bureaucratic and logistical prerequisites underpinning access to basic support and relief, too, pose an added burden upon an increasingly heavy workload. Women often have to make the commute to visit Grama Niladhari officials or to Divisional Secretariat offices to request these provisions where formal household visits have not been made. This is both a time consuming and costly process, particularly in times of crisis where time poverty and basic resources are scarce, and the needs and demands for care are high.

Moreover, the district-level cross tabulations highlight yet another inequity in access to relief and support in the event of a climate disaster or extreme weather event. While 15 respondents from Colombo and all 20 respondents from Gampaha have been recipients of some form of relief and support in the last 5 years, just 9 respondents (of 20) from Monaragala confirmed receiving any assistance during the same period. While this can be for a myriad reasons, it is significant that droughts despite being recognised in Sri Lanka in 2005 as among the most frequent, slow-onset and yet longstanding climate stressors affecting Monaragala and the Uva province at large, are rarely treated as disasters. This then points to the question on what constitutes a 'disaster,' or an 'emergency.' Women from Monaragala too were perceptive to this, highlighting that situations that have occasioned aid and relief distribution were during monsoon seasons, rather than long dry spells and droughts. While immediate relief is not a pertinent factor within the context of droughts, the absence of sustained and anticipatory support mechanisms - such as water security interventions and livelihood protection, among other things, results in prolonged vulnerability and cumulative loss.

This is evidenced in the National Emergency Operation Plan (DMC, 2017), where quantifiable and clear instructions are listed for issuing Early Warning communications in the event of floods (water levels reaching flood levels in rivers and reservoirs) and cyclones (cyclone paths 550km away from coastlines). However, the language surrounding the recognition of droughts remains obscure, vague and unquantifiable; "significant rainfall deficit is forecast for a long period or /and observation of prolonged dry spell, significant drinking/domestic water scarcity, significant food insecurity condition or significant agricultural impact." (DMC, 2019, p.28). The NEOP also states: "For the purpose of relief distribution drought is defined as the loss of agricultural production in two consecutive seasons." (p. 52). This framing ultimately delays recognition and intervention until losses are fully realised, effectively excluding households - particularly female headed ones - from timely support during the early and intermediate stages of crisis, thus intensifying the unpaid care and resource management burdens borne by women in drought-prone districts such as Monaragala.

It is worthwhile to note here, that when elaborating on how this support - when it was received - helped in managing the care burden, most respondents stated that help - in any form - was appreciated in the event of such extreme and unprecedented destruction and disruption. Such gratitude, stemming from a realization of scarcity of support and resources, while understandable, risks obscuring critical questions of sufficiency and equity.

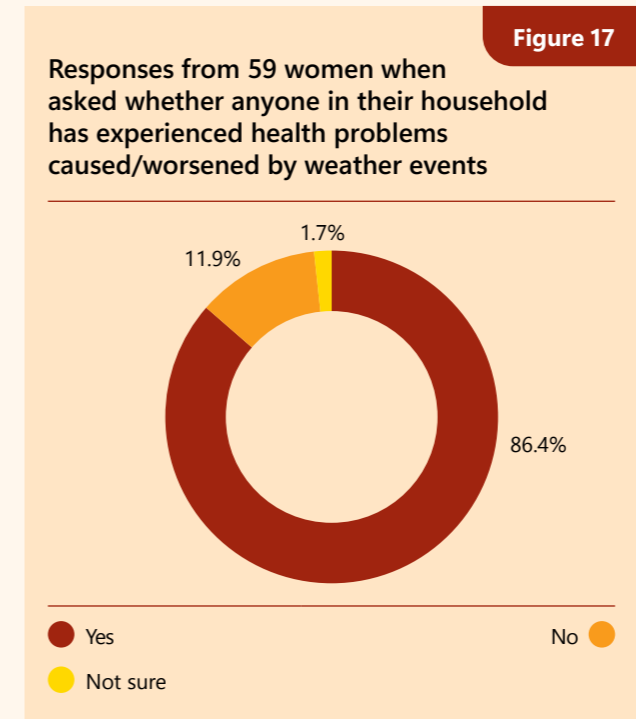
This section demonstrates that while support and relief mechanisms do reach some women affected by climate disasters and extreme weather events, access remains uneven, short term, deeply reliant on perceived and immediacy of impact, and often mediated by informal networks and discretionary administrative processes. Addressing gaps in institutional responses, recognition, targeting and anticipatory action also requires a crucial shift from reactive relief and support towards gender-responsive and care-sensitive disaster governance that recognises and actively reduces the disproportionate burdens borne by women, many of which - as demonstrated above - substitute for systemic shortcomings.



SECTION HEALTH IMPACTS AND ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES

Monaragala, Sri Lanka
Subsistence crops dried up under the harsh sun

Within the intersection of climate change and unpaid care work, health remains a recurring and critical concern. Findings from the survey illuminate challenges in access to healthcare in the event of climate disasters, as well as how women absorb these shocks.



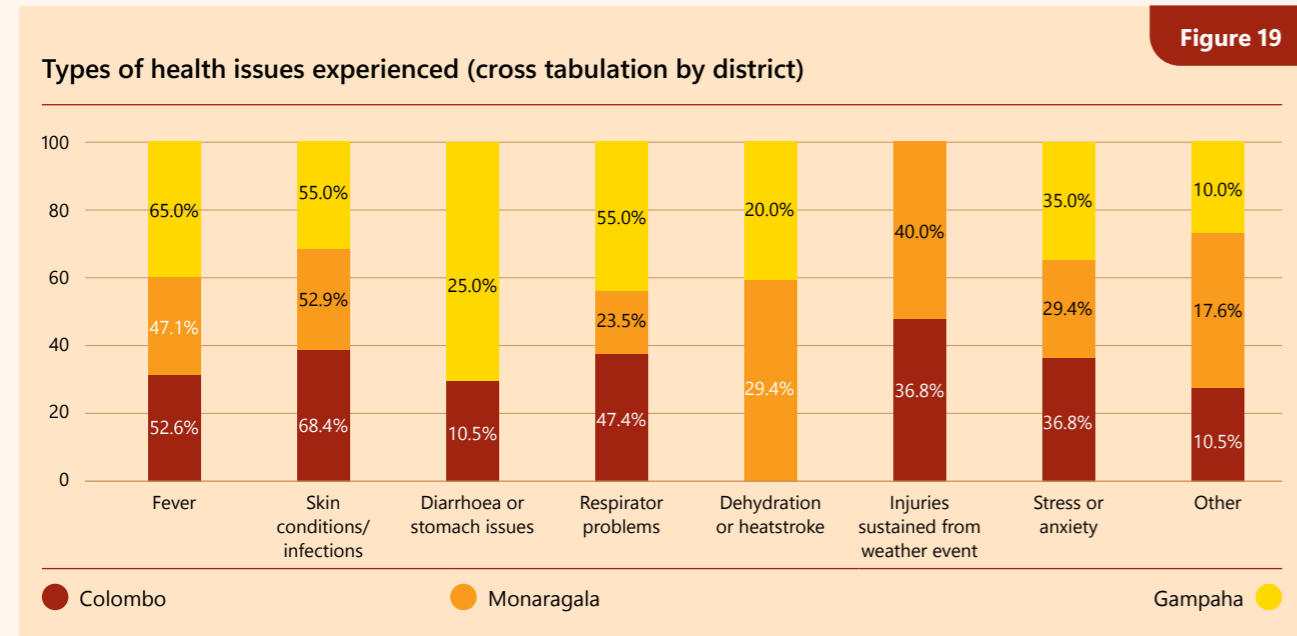
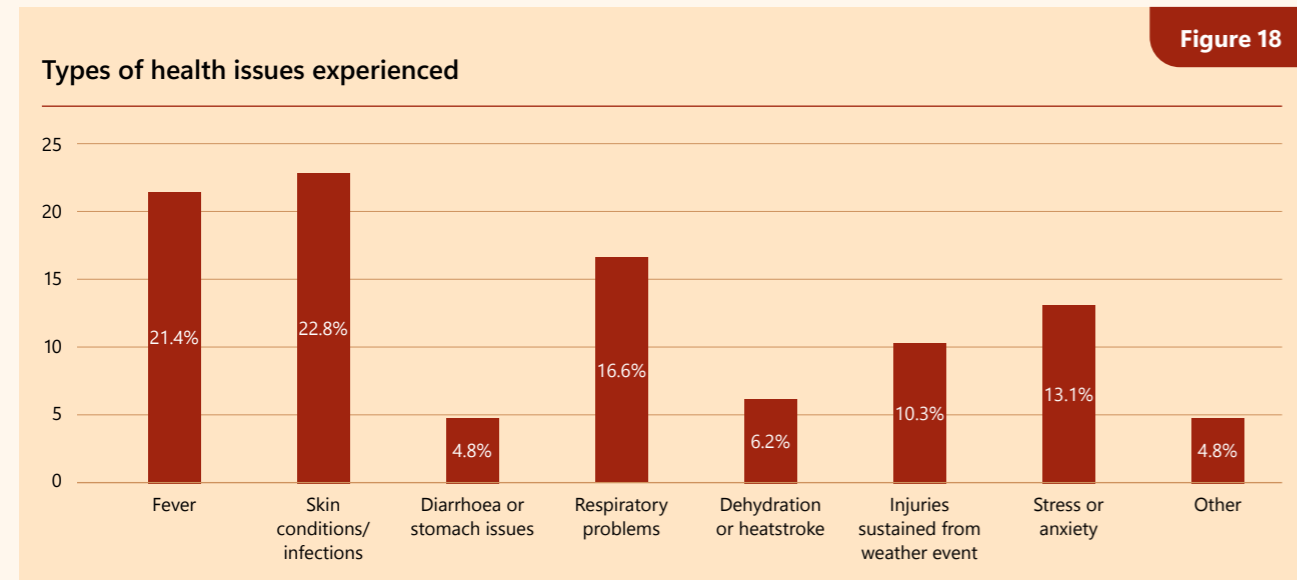
It was then revealed that unequivocally across all three districts, it was the women, i.e., the respondents themselves, who have fallen ill the most, followed then, by children under the age of 18, and persons with disabilities or chronic illnesses (see table 13). This distribution brings to light the gendered nature of health vulnerability in disaster contexts, where women's own health is often compromised even as they continue to shoulder primary caregiving responsibilities.

Table 13
Who has fallen ill the most?

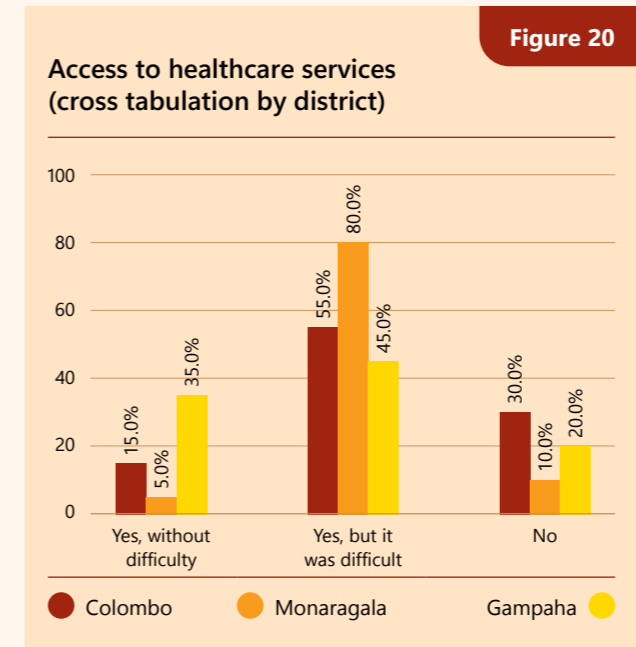
	Percent
Me	32.7%
Children (under 18)	26.5%
Adults (18–59)	9.2%
Elderly persons (60+)	11.2%
Persons with disabilities or chronic illness	19.4%
Other	1.0%
Base	54

With a base of 56, the most common health issues experienced were skin conditions and infections (see figure 18). This is consistent with the nature of climate-related disasters experienced, as such conditions arise across varied contexts, from extreme heat to flooding. At the time of data collection, in July 2025, a woman in Colombo indicated a rash on her leg that she sustained during the 2024 floods. She elaborated that due to the recurrent flooding in 2024, the rash - as well as several wounds on her legs - has failed to heal due to repeated exposure to floodwaters. However, she further explained that she had been unable to seek follow-up medical care after her initial visit, due to her husband working in another district, and thus not having alternative support to undertake her daily care responsibilities. Heat-related rashes too emerged as a recurrent health issue, particularly in the districts of Colombo and Monaragala.

Skin conditions, infections and rashes were closely followed by fever and respiratory problems both of which are commonly associated with prolonged exposure to damp conditions, contaminated water, and extreme heat.



Beyond the prevalence of illness, the findings also revealed significant constraints in accessing healthcare during and after climate disasters. 60% of the total sample reported having been able to access healthcare services but with significant difficulty. This was particularly prevalent in Monaragala and Colombo (See figure 20). 20% of the women reported not having been able to access healthcare services at all.



like Balaharuwa. Thus, making the task a time consuming one, often taking up an entire day and posing significant barriers for women whose daily routines are effectively structured around continuous and non-deferrable care work.

Closely following transport/mobility constraints is yet another temporal constraint: difficulty in allocating time for necessary healthcare demands amid competing household responsibilities. Undertaking the labour of care in the event of extreme weather or disaster often means that the workload is significantly more demanding and urgent. Thus, women deprioritise and abandon medical visits altogether. This reflects a deeply gendered organisation of care and labour, wherein women's health is routinely subordinated to the maintenance of household functioning - and in times of crisis where the labour of survival takes on a new and added urgency, sacrifices of this nature are viewed as practical and even natural.

Factor	Percent
Hospital/clinic was not accessible	24.1%
No transport available	38.0%
High cost of treatment or medicines	10.1%
Difficulty to allocate time with household responsibilities	12.7%
Lack of information or awareness	3.8%
Other	11.4%
Base	60

Obstructions to access were largely attributed to transport and mobility constraints, particularly during floods, where in highly prone areas, women describe having to access naval support to evacuate flooded neighbourhoods, before transferring to public transportation. Such journeys have a double-edged nature, where delayed access to healthcare assistance exacerbates the condition(s) requiring healthcare, whilst simultaneously imposing physical, emotional and financial strain on the women already managing crisis conditions.

In Monaragala, however, mobility constraints manifest differently but were no less restrictive. Respondents describe longer journeys due to infrequent public transportation in areas

Overarchingly, financial constraints and limitations too were cited as a factor that hinders access to healthcare. In the event of a climate disaster or crisis, specifically those that disrupt and destruct livelihoods, daily routines and homes - accessing healthcare centres and being treated for health-related issues are seen as secondary issues that lack pertinence in comparison to wider destruction and disruption that needs tending to. One woman in Colombo recounted a particular experience where she had been a recipient of a State sponsored compensation following the aftermath of the 2016 floods, however due to her son falling critically ill after the floods, the compensatory sum was used in its entirety for his medication and welfare. She pointed out damage her house had sustained during the 2016 floods, including broken windows and damaged walls, the repairs of which she has not been able to afford, thus indicating a vicious cycle of precarity, mediated by a hierarchy of need and necessity.

Further, the data on healthcare availability and utilisation reveals a clear disjuncture between formal presence of health facilities and women’s ability to meaningfully utilise them, particularly in the context of climate disasters. While government hospitals, MOH clinics, government dispensaries, and even mobile clinics are reported to be widely available, their frequent use is far more limited amongst respondents. Notably, private hospitals - despite being available to 60% of respondents - were rarely or never used by over 86% of women, pointing to cost as a significant barrier, particularly in the aftermath of climate disasters (see table 15). Similarly, over 40% of respondents reported never having used mobile clinics during extreme weather events, suggesting limitations in access and outreach as well as a non-alignment with specific care needs, particularly as they pertain to the elderly and people with disabilities and chronic illnesses.

Table 15

Availability and use of healthcare services

	Do you have this facility in your area?			Do you use this facility in your area?			
	Yes	No	Don't know	Very often	Somewhat often	Rarely	Never
Is there a MOH clinic or a government dispensary in your area	81.7	15.0	3.3	10.2	16.3	38.8	34.7
Is there a government-based district hospital, Provincial teaching hospital or National hospital in your area	95.0	5.0	0	56.1	28.1	10.5	5.3
Are there any Private hospitals in your area	60.0	31.7	8.3	5.6	8.3	41.7	44.4
Is there a private dispensary in your area	80.0	18.3	1.7	12.5	22.9	37.5	27.1
Is there an ayurvedic medical facility in your area	73.3	23.3	3.3	6.8	27.3	29.5	36.4
Is there a Mobile clinic in your area	85.0	11.7	3.3	2.0	33.3	21.6	43.1

SECTION HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE EVENTS

Colombo, Sri Lanka
Clogged drain prone to flooding during rainfall

When asked whether women have had to spend more money on household needs due to extreme weather events, 55 of 60 respondents answered in the affirmative. Of this money was spent on the following:

Expenses during climate disasters		Table 16
		Percent
Buying drinking water or water for household use	14.3%	
Extra food	11.3%	
Medicine or health costs	22.6%	
Transport	14.3%	
Replacing lost or damaged items	10.7%	
Repairing the house due to damages sustained by the disaster	10.1%	
Buying fuel, firewood, or gas	8.9%	
Paying someone to help with housework or caregiving	1.8%	
Other	6.0%	

As illustrated in the above example of the woman who spent her post-disaster compensatory fee on her son's medication, resulting then, in a house that still bore signs of disaster prodded defacement - it is reasonable to conclude that climate-related shocks are not discreet events insofar as they are sustained and enduring economic stressors that penetrate everyday life, particularly in the domains of social reproduction and care. An intensified economic vulnerability posed upon an existing network of vulnerabilities only reinforces systems of inequality and thus inhibits freedom. Where livelihoods are lost or destroyed, as they are in climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture - as in Monaragala - male household members go in search of alternative avenues of employment and income generation - frequently migrating internally to urban centres, thus leaving women to attend to a mounting mass of unpaid labour, including that of post-disaster recovery, in addition to daily care responsibilities (UNDP, 2024).

Moreover, this data suggests that climate disasters are inherently mechanisms of economic extraction at household level. Women's disproportionate responsibility in managing these expenses - oft tying in with both, the labour of recovery and survival - reveals how climate vulnerability is produced by way of environmental exposure as well as through the structural organisation of care and a mediation of consumption.

LOCAL COUNCIL INTERVIEWS

Two local councillors per district - Colombo, Gampaha and Monaragala - were interviewed to complement and facilitate findings from the data collected from the 60 women respondents. An open-ended interview guide was developed wherein local councillors were asked about current policies, budget allocations, future programs and plans, disaster management and inclusivity frameworks - as they pertain to climate change. It should be emphasised that these interviews were conducted in tandem with data collection from July to September 2025. Thus, views expressed here are not inclusive of the destruction and devastation of Cyclone Ditwah in November and December of 2025.

Of the 6 local councillors interviewed, 4 were women and 2 were men.

Political parties:

- National Peoples Party (NPP): 3 local councillors (Colombo and Gampaha)
- Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB): 1 local councillor (Colombo and Gampaha)
- Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP): 1 local councillor (Monaragala)
- United National Party: 1 local councillor (Monaragala)

Thematic analysis

1. Depoliticization of climate risk

In Colombo and Monaragala, climate change was predominantly articulated through an event-based governance lens, where extreme weather events are understood as precedented and episodic, with 3 of 6 local councillors attributing floods and droughts to "natural disasters." This was accompanied by a displacement of blame, where - particularly in Colombo - councillors attributed flooding to individual actions, such as residents blocking

drainage canals, improper household waste disposal and pollution - thus, obscuring the role of infrastructural neglect and uneven and unplanned development. This speaks to a depoliticization of climate risk that can stem from a range of variable factors from a lack of climate literacy and awareness - as is laid bare in the conflation of 'seasonal' and 'natural disasters,' with climate disasters.

2. Reactive disaster management

Local climate governance across all three districts is largely characterised by reactive disaster management paradigms, with institutional capacity or political attention concentrated predominantly in mid and post-disaster management rather than on anticipatory adaptation or mitigation. This was especially recurrent in interviews with local councillors in Colombo and Gampaha, who unanimously posited that pre-disaster mitigatory measures cannot extend beyond warning and information systems.

Relief measures were described in terms of food aid (rice parcels) and temporary shelters, while adaptation measures - such as drainage upgrades, sustainable infrastructure, and even early warning systems - were framed as aspirational or conditional on extreme disaster events. Despite this, local councillors repeatedly noted the inadequacy of these processes in safeguarding their constituencies and attributed this systemic inaction to budgetary processes and limitations, both of which they noted were arduously bureaucratic and thus, endangering.

Budgetary processes were described as trigger-based, activating only after disaster declaration, thereby structurally excluding adaptation planning from routine fiscal cycles. This reinforces a myopic pattern in disaster governance that hinges on immediacy, - and in most cases, as evidenced

in this report, visibility (of destruction and/or severity) - where visible relief efforts are politically legible, while long-term risk reduction remains underfunded and institutionally marginal.

3. Universalist vulnerability narratives

A dominant narrative across interviews was that climate disasters affect “everyone equally,” resulting in the absence of targeted provisions for extremely vulnerable individuals and communities including women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. This universalist framing of vulnerability obscures differentiated exposure and adaptive capacity, core concepts in climate risk analysis.

Gendered assumptions surfaced implicitly, including the idea that those able to move through floodwaters are men and boys (as stated by a Gampaha local councillor when highlighting plans for committees to be set up in event of disasters), while care-related vulnerabilities remained largely unacknowledged. Even where councillors recognised women’s disproportionate impacts, such as drought-driven unemployment and vulnerabilities in agriculture, these insights were then not translated into budgetary or disaster responses, thus indicating a disconnect between lived realities and systemic action.

4. Fiscal precarity and limitations of local governance structures

A recurrent theme was the fiscal and administrative precarity of local councils. Councillors reported insufficient budgetary allocations, which then lead to needs-based assessments - a concept, described as a necessity borne from inadequate funding. This ultimately skews previous observations that ‘all victims of disaster are affected equally,’ a standpoint that was articulated by 5 of 6 local councillors to de-necessitate the need for special disaster provisions and allocations for women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

Moreover, local councillors highlighted a limited discretionary spending authority and an overall lack of clarity regarding budgetary decision-making processes - this was particularly salient in interviews with the 2 local councillors from Colombo. This ultimately reflects a broader structural constraint within prevailing (decentralised) governance systems, where local authorities are tasked with, often large scale, disaster response responsibilities without corresponding financial or technical capacity. In Monaragala, these constraints were explicitly linked to the de-prioritisation of social infrastructure such as childcare centres. One local councillor highlighted that this certainly is a constraint preventing women from taking on paid agricultural work. From a feminist political economy perspective, this reveals how care-supportive infrastructure is systematically excluded from climate budgets, despite its central role in household and community resilience (Muchhala, 2024).

5. Political biases and the contingency of entitlement

In Monaragala and Gampaha, the explicit acknowledgement that party affiliation influences access to disaster relief and support illuminates the politicization of vulnerability. Local councillors as well as respondents during data collection highlighted how relief distribution hinges on, or is prioritised for, individuals and households that align themselves with a certain political party. Aid distribution then becomes a site of political negotiation rather than rights-based provision. Technically, this also undermines needs-based targeting and introduces systemic bias into vulnerability assessments and relief allocation.

The findings of this study demonstrate that unpaid care work is not a peripheral concern in the context of an escalating climate crisis, but rather a foundational one that exposes the limitations and inadequacies of pre-existing approaches to climate action, adaptation and mitigation. The consideration and centering of unpaid care work - as it relates to climate change - remains pivotal in fulfilling the ‘leave no one behind’ principle. Mitigation and adaptation, then, have to be inextricably grounded in principles of climate justice and meaningful resilience, in the absence of which, climate action pathways run the risk of reinforcing pre-existing social harms and inequalities - as was demonstrated throughout this report.

Across urban, semi-urban and rural contexts, women function as “shock absorbers” of climate crises, stretching their time, labour and bodies to sustain households and communities where public infrastructure, formal care services, gender responsive climate action and support fall short. As findings of this study indicate, by fulfilling responsibilities such as, fetching water over longer distances or providing home-based medical care when clinics are inaccessible, women effectively subsidize the cost of climate disasters. This invisible safety net allows the state to maintain a reactive, rather than proactive, disaster management paradigm. As climate shocks intensify in frequency, duration, scale and impact, so too do the demands placed on women’s unpaid care work, pushing many into deeper time poverty and economic precarity. Where adequate pre and post disaster support prove to be lacking or inaccessible, women shoulder the burden of survival and recovery. Climate disasters function as mechanisms of economic extraction from the household. When women are forced to redirect income toward disaster-related health costs or replace equipment like pottery wheels destroyed by floods, they are essentially paying a ‘climate tax’ with their limited capital and time. This cycle deepens the ‘debt traps’ already prevalent among rural women.

Despite the pivotal role and centrality of care, it remains systematically invisible in climate adaptation planning, disaster preparedness and management, labour policy and national accounting frameworks. This invisibility is far from benign. It actively shifts the costs of climate breakdown onto women’s unpaid labour, reproducing gendered inequalities and undermining the very sustainability of adaptation and resilience efforts. In other words, a climate response that relies on women’s unrecognised and unrelieved care work is neither resilient nor just; it is extractive. The primary data also serves to outline the ‘universalist’ narrative held by local governance that disasters “affect all citizens equally,” this is a policy blind spot. The data proves that while a flood might hit an entire village, the duration of recovery is longer for a woman caring for a child with a disability, and the caloric deficit is higher for a mother who skips meals to feed her family during drought.

Even when women report ‘leisure,’ it is often compromised by supervisory care, remaining constantly available to dependents. This ‘on-call’ state prevents women from engaging in the upskilling or political participation necessary for a ‘just transition’. This leads to a clear realization that climate policy must not only reduce physical tasks but also the mental and emotional ‘load’ of managing household survival.

Importantly, this report also seeks to demonstrate how women’s experiences of climate change and responsibilities of care are not homogenous. The burden of flooding and urban heat in Colombo and Gampaha, drought and water scarcity in Monaragala, disability-related care, informal livelihoods, extended family and communal responsibilities, proximity to roadways, and access - among many other things - intersect to produce differentiated and compounding vulnerabilities, invariably. These findings flag the urgent need to situate women’s lived experiences in climate

CONCLUSION

policies - policies that are just, inclusive and gender-responsive. Unequivocally, in the context of climate change, recognition alone does not suffice. Without concrete measures to - primarily - reduce and redistribute care work, expand care infrastructure and meaningfully represent and prioritise women in policy, decision-making spaces and meaningful resilience initiatives - recognition risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative.

This study therefore reinforces a critical proposition: climate adaptation and just transition pathways in Sri Lanka cannot succeed without placing unpaid care work at their core. Investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, climate smart technology, early warning systems, disaster response mechanisms, energy transitions, and livelihood diversification must be accompanied by parallel investments in public care services, accessible relief systems, disability-inclusive disaster management processes, inclusive relief and recovery operation, and social protection for informal workers. Thus,

care must unambiguously be understood not as a private responsibility borne by women, but as a public good crucial to collective survival in an era of climate uncertainty. While limited in scale, this pilot offers compelling evidence for the necessity of more longitudinal, and nationally representative research on the climate-care nexus. It also calls for a fundamental shift in how climate vulnerability is measured, how resilience is conceptualised, whose labour is counted and who is included in adaptation, mitigation and recovery processes.

The findings demand a move beyond symbolic recognition of women's roles. Without state investment in climate-resilient care infrastructure such as communal childcare centres or accessible water systems, climate adaptation in Sri Lanka will remain a regressive process built on the backs of women's uncompensated labour.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proposed, based on the findings of this study and shaped from global recommendations following the 5R framework.

Recognise:

- Make care inequalities - including gender norms and social reproduction visible - so that they are not reproduced or exacerbated by climate change interventions that require additional responsibilities or time from carers.
- Formally acknowledge unpaid care and domestic work as essential climate work within national climate policies, including Sri Lanka's National Adaptation Plan (NAP), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), National Policy on Climate Change and disaster risk reduction and management frameworks. This goes beyond basal recognition of "women's work," but rather calls for an explicit identification of the unpaid labour that is undertaken by women in lieu of systemic interventions.
- Revise current disaster management frameworks and policies - including and especially the Disaster Management Act 2005 - that do not explicitly highlight and provide actionable recommendations towards women, children, elderly and people with disabilities.
- Explicitly recognise women as frontline climate responders and adaptors, rather than passive victims or beneficiaries of climate interventions.
- Formally define and include environmental care work, the unpaid labour women perform to tend to family livestock, community gardens, and local ecosystems—as a specific category of unrecognized work.
- Explicitly include the mental and emotional load of climate anxiety and the stress of managing household survival during crises as part of the recognized care burden.

- Strengthen evidence and accountability by systematically collecting gender-disaggregated data - including data on time use, disability-related care, health impacts - during and after climate disasters to inform equitable recovery.
- Integrate unpaid care work into Climate Vulnerability and Impact Assessments, including assessments conducted for infrastructure development, urban planning, energy transition and climate intervention projects.

Reduce:

- Provide labour and time saving domestic and agricultural technologies - such as clean cooking solutions, water and drainage infrastructure, renewable energy access - that simultaneously mitigate climate change, while reducing care burdens.
- Expand access to localised and accessible care-sensitive climate information and early warning systems, ensuring information reaches carers, informal workers, and households with dependents, including elderly family members, young children and people with disabilities.
- Design early warning systems and emergency operations that account for caregiving constraints, mobility limitations, disability access, and time poverty.
- Develop adaptive social protection that links welfare databases with climate data for automatic and efficient support in the event of a crisis. This includes that social protection mechanisms are gender-responsive, including cash transfers, food assistance, access to medication and livelihood protection that activate early and continue throughout recovery.
- Expand eligibility criteria for social protections to include informal workers, unpaid carers, and households affected by slow-onset disasters such as droughts and heat stress.

- Integrate care considerations into disaster preparedness and response plans, ensuring that post-disaster conditions do not increase unpaid care burdens through inadequate sanitation, inaccessible shelters, inadequate social protections or lack of childcare and disability support.
- Prioritise and implementation of accessible, gender-responsive climate literacy initiatives as a resilience measure, that provide clear and relevant information on climate change, trends, health risks, resource access and response options, thereby reducing women's reliance on informal knowledge, ad hoc decision making, necessity-driven adaptation and unpaid anticipatory labour.

Redistribute

- Implement targeted, community-based interventions that challenge gender norms and cultural attitudes that naturalise women's responsibility for unpaid care, particularly during crises.
- Engage men and boys in redistribution efforts to promote shared responsibility for care work.
- Introduce and scale up state-provided, disability-inclusive and climate-resilient childcare and eldercare services, especially in climate-vulnerable districts, as explicit targets within national climate and development policies.
- Ensure care facilities are climate-resilient, accessible during disasters, and integrated into evacuation and relief planning.
- Require climate finance to allocate funding directly to gender-responsive adaptation, including investments in care infrastructure and social services.
- Mandate that social protection transfers (like cash or vouchers) be delivered directly to women, but paired with community programs that prevent this from reinforcing the stereotype that only women should manage household survival costs.

Represent

- Ensure women - particularly informal workers, unpaid carers, women with disabilities, and caregivers of dependents with disabilities - are meaningfully represented in local, district, and national climate decision-making spaces.
- Institutionalise consultation mechanisms that are not tokenistic but rather enable women to shape climate priorities, resource allocation, implementation, special non-economic needs assessments.

Respond

- Ensure evacuation processes and centres and temporary shelters are disability-accessible, gender-responsive, and equipped to support caregiving needs.
- Move beyond short-term/immediate relief towards sustained recovery mechanisms, including medium- and long-term relief operation, that reduce long-term care burdens and prevent the reproduction of vulnerability.
- Introduce specific recovery grants meant to replace care-related assets (e.g., destroyed wells, cooking equipment, or assistive devices for family members with disabilities) to prevent women from using their food or education budget for these repairs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, following are key policy recommendations relevant to the climate change and care nexus:

1. Strengthening Disaster Management and Governance

- Reform the Disaster Management Act No. 13 of 2005 and update the legislation to explicitly include provisions for caregivers and those with specific needs, ensuring that "needs-based assessments" are not just reactive but account for the pre-existing care burdens of women.
- Establish Care-Sensitive Early Warning Systems (EWS) with Design EWS that reach beyond main roads to secluded households, using community health midwives and local networks to ensure information reaches women who are often "time-poor" and managing multiple dependents.
- Implement mandatory quotas in climate bodies to ensure that local and national climate decision-making bodies have a mandatory representation of women from rural cooperatives, plantation unions, and caregivers for people with disabilities.

2. Investing in Climate-Resilient Infrastructure

- Prioritize localized water and energy Security, especially in districts like Monaragala (with vulnerable to prolonged droughts) invest in solar-powered village wells and piped water to eliminate the 1–3 hours women spend walking for water—a task that intensifies during droughts.
- Construct disability-inclusive relief centers which ensure all temporary shelters and evacuation centers are equipped with accessible sanitation, private care spaces, and medical supplies for chronic illnesses to prevent caregivers from having to choose between an unsafe home and an inaccessible shelter.

- Develop communal care facilities that integrate climate-resilient childcare and eldercare centers into national development policies to provide professional support during disasters, reducing women's reliance on fragile informal networks.

3. Economic and Social Protection

- Deploy adaptive social protection by creating a "Climate Care" cash transfer mechanism that automatically activates during disasters (like heatwaves or floods) to help women cover the "climate tax"—extra costs for medicines, clean water, and repairing damaged livelihood tools like pottery wheels.
- Livelihood recovery grants for informal workers where direct grants are provided rather than loans to women in the informal sector to replace equipment lost in disasters, preventing them from falling into high-interest debt traps.
 - Integrate care into national statistics with an added mandate to the Department of Census and Statistics to conduct regular Time-Use Surveys that specifically measure the increase in unpaid labour during climate events to inform budgetary allocations for social infrastructure.

4. Health and Literacy

- Expand mobile health clinics in flood-prone and remote areas, specifically targeting "carer health" to address skin infections and respiratory issues that women often deprioritize due to their care duties.
- Design and launch a National Climate Literacy Program as a gender-responsive climate literacy initiative that provides practical information on managing heat stress, water sanitation, and disaster preparedness, reducing the "mental load" of managing household survival.

INTRODUCTION	COUNTRY CONTEXT	METHODOLOGY	DISTRICT PROFILES	DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION	SECTION 1 TIME USE SURVEY & PERCEPTIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE	SECTION 2 CHANGES IN THE CARE BURDEN	SECTION 3 COPING AND MANAGING THE CARE BURDEN	SECTION 4 INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES	SECTION 5 HEALTH IMPACTS AND ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES	SECTION 6 HOUSEHOLD EXPENSES IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE EVENTS	LOCAL COUNCIL INTERVIEWS	CONCLUSION	GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS	POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	REFERENCE
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