

# **GAS DOES NOT EQUAL DEVELOPMENT:** **Why public finance for fossil gas is not the solution for women in Asia and Africa**



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## CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Climate change and energy poverty affect women differently in Asia and Africa	5
The dash for fossil gas in Asia and Africa	6
The fossil gas crisis perpetuates gender inequality	7
Fossil gas projects violate women's rights and do not promote energy access	8
MDB policies supporting fossil gas projects	10
Public finance supporting the dash for fossil gas in Asia and Africa	10
Promoting fossil gas at project level	13
MDBs' policies and gender responsiveness	13
Case stories on fossil gas infrastructure and gender	15
Women's experiences with the Unique Meghnaghat LNG Power Plant in Bangladesh	15
In the shadows: Ghotki's plight with Engro Powergen Qadirpur Limited	18
Conclusions and recommendations	21
Endnotes	23

## INTRODUCTION

The oil and gas industry has repositioned itself as vital to solving the climate crisis.<sup>1</sup> Exxon Mobil for example, which has the second largest historic emissions among the top 20 oil, fossil gas, and coal producers<sup>2</sup>, continue to fund think tanks and public relations companies to outrightly deny global warming and seed doubt on the science behind it.<sup>3</sup> More recently however, we see the same companies arguing that fossil gas, particularly liquified natural gas (LNG), is the “cleanest burning fossil fuel” and is a vital part of the energy transition and fighting poverty.<sup>4</sup>

The fossil fuel industry also claims to be part of the solution to sustainable development: women's empowerment and energy access (Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 7 (SDGs)). Oil and gas companies have attempted to co-opt these issues to promote and justify their fossil fuel projects, especially in developing countries in Asia and Africa. For example, fossil gas giant Exxon Mobil has been promoting itself as an enabler of women's empowerment by showcasing women working in the industry. They claim that women can break barriers in the traditionally male-dominated field and help drive 'development' for their countries<sup>5</sup>.

Fossil gas companies have found support for their climate and development narrative in multilateral development banks (MDBs), such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the World Bank Group (WBG). Through their individual energy sector policies and strategies, and the Joint MDB Framework for Paris Alignment, the MDBs have defined a role for fossil gas energy transition and powering development.

Fossil gas is a high carbon emitting fossil fuel that contributes to climate change, causing devastating floods, droughts, and health problems in communities in developing countries receiving fossil gas investments and beyond. New fossil gas development is incompatible with the Paris Agreement's goal to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees<sup>6</sup> as it emits methane, a powerful greenhouse gas that is 80 times more potent at warming than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period.<sup>7</sup> Dangerous distractions such as carbon capture, utilisation and storage (CCUS) are being included in the narrative of fossil gas promoters to try to alleviate concerns about increased GHG emissions from fossil gas plants. This in turn justifies the further build-out of fossil gas projects and only locks in the reliance on fossil fuels instead of leaving them in the ground and focusing more on transitioning to renewable energy.

The continued justification of fossil gas projects with the backing of public finance from MDBs undermines both women's rights as well as the just transition to sustainable renewable energy. Moreover, financing more fossil gas projects is worsening gender inequalities and the climate crisis. As climate change progressively worsens, so does gender inequality.<sup>8</sup> Patriarchal values and structures that relegate women to unpaid care and domestic work while barring them from access to and control of resources such as land, water, food, and services, make women more vulnerable, and also makes it harder for them to adapt to climate change. In Asia and Africa, for example, rural women who are reliant on agriculture but are landless must work harder in times of droughts and floods because the responsibility of securing water, food, and fuel for their families falls hardest on their shoulders.<sup>9</sup> Lack of meaningful participation in decision-making makes it difficult for women to influence policy and decisions on energy, which in turn increases the burden of their work, as well as their vulnerability to climate change.<sup>10</sup> The livelihoods and health of women living near the fossil

gas infrastructures funded by MDBs in developing countries are also being negatively affected (see Box 1, and case stories from Bangladesh and Pakistan).

On the other hand, renewable energy presents considerable opportunities for women's empowerment. Studies show that the renewable energy industry's employment of women is higher than in the traditional oil and gas sector.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, smaller-scale, devolved renewable energy solutions can empower women by providing access to electricity needed for small businesses, lightening the burden of domestic work, improving girls' education, and improving night-time safety.<sup>12</sup> However, this cannot be realised if public finance continues to be channelled into fossil fuels. Recent research from Recourse finds that despite a downward trend in MDB fossil fuel investments in the past five years, this is not translating to a commensurate increase in renewables funding. Fossil fuel finance decreased 75% between 2017 and 2021, while clean energy investments only increased a meagre 26%.<sup>13</sup> Public finance must rapidly shift away from and exclude all fossil fuels, including fossil gas, and instead support sustainable renewable energy that can provide energy security and enable women to claim and exercise their rights.

This report discusses why climate change and energy poverty cause gender inequalities in Asia and Africa, as well as how public funding of fossil energy projects worsens these inequalities and blocks progress on SDGs 5, 7, and 13. Cases from Africa and Asia provide context and evidence from the ground on how fossil gas infrastructure enabled by public funding do not promote energy access and have resulted in violations of women's rights. Recommendations provided at the end of the report point to stopping public funding of fossil gas projects and redirecting these resources to energy projects that enable energy access for women and promote the just transition to renewable energy.

## **CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENERGY POVERTY AFFECT WOMEN DIFFERENTLY IN ASIA AND AFRICA**

Energy poverty is prevalent in Asia and Africa. Of the 675 million people that were still without access to electricity in 2021, 75% live in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Asia.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, communities in these regions are also the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.<sup>15</sup>

Women in Asia and Africa bear the disproportionate challenges of energy poverty and the impacts of climate change. Female-headed households, especially in rural areas, tend to have less access to modern energy than male-headed households.<sup>16</sup> Gender roles imposed on women make them responsible for cooking, cleaning, fetching water, and small-scale agriculture, which could be made safer and less time-consuming with access to modern energy. Energy poverty contributes to hunger and negatively affects women's health and education due to long hours spent on labour-intensive and often unpaid care work, including collecting fuel for cooking and heating homes.<sup>17</sup> Energy and time poverty disadvantages women from accessing paid work outside their homes. It even excludes girls from getting an education as they tend to be withdrawn by their parents from school in times of energy scarcity to support their families' energy needs.<sup>18</sup> While women are mainly responsible for energy-intensive tasks inside the household, they rarely make the energy-purchasing decisions in households.<sup>19</sup> Even when a family's access to energy has improved, it is men who decide on what types of appliances can be purchased, and these choices are often based on leisure and improving children's education. However, these types of choices often do not help lessen the domestic drudgery experienced by women.<sup>20</sup>



At the same time, women are more vulnerable to and less capable of adapting to the impacts of climate change compared with men. In the aftermath of disasters, women in Asia and Africa experience an increase in gender-based violence as well as reductions in consumption of food and spending for their needs compared with men.<sup>21</sup> Lack of access to information on impending disasters, the discouragement to learn lifesaving skills such as swimming and climbing trees,<sup>22</sup> clothing that hinders easy mobility, as well as being more responsible for saving children have contributed to women's deaths during climate-induced disasters. Meanwhile, the lack of power in decision-making makes it difficult for women to evacuate to safety without their husbands' or elders' consent during disasters.<sup>23</sup> This decreased capacity to adapt to climate change results in women being 14 times more likely to die from climate related disasters, such as hurricanes, typhoons, cyclones, or floods.<sup>24</sup>

Gender disparity in decision-making inside households is also extended into the energy sector as well as into government bodies that influence energy and climate policies. Globally, women represent only 16% of the labour force in the energy sector.<sup>25</sup> This reduces to between 3% and 15% in Asia<sup>26</sup> and to 14% in Africa<sup>27</sup>. Globally, women are also under-represented in government policy-making positions related to climate change and energy, such as environment departments (32%) and energy, natural resource fuels, and mining departments (11%).<sup>28</sup> Women are also under-represented in parliaments of Asia (21%) and Sub Saharan Africa (25.6%) which create laws related to climate, energy, and each country's overall development.<sup>29</sup>

Addressing the interconnected challenges of gender inequalities, energy access, and climate change in an integrated manner is an imperative. These have been recognised in the UN's Agenda 2030 and the sustainable development goals, under SDGs 5 (Gender Equality) and 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy). The MDBs have endorsed these goals and have claimed to support their advancement through their lending. However, the current dash for fossil gas in Asia and Africa, which MDBs support through enabling policies and financing, runs counter to these goals and hinders their progress.

## THE DASH FOR FOSSIL GAS IN ASIA AND AFRICA

The dash for fossil gas in Asia and Africa continues despite the exacerbating effects of fossil gas on global warming. The rise in demand for fossil gas that started around 2017 was fuelled by several factors, including falling LNG prices because of oversupply in exporting countries, exploration of new markets to sell this fossil gas to, as well as big oil companies betting on fossil gas to compete with wind and solar, given that investments in oil and coal are projected to decline.<sup>30</sup> Middle-income countries received nearly \$16 billion a year in international public finance from wealthy countries for gas-related projects between 2017 and 2019.<sup>31</sup> Public finance has also played an important role in the expansion of fossil gas infrastructure. G20 government institutions were involved in financing 82% of new Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) export terminal capacity built from 2012 to 2022, and their loan portion alone made up 24% of all capital investment in new LNG export terminals during this period.<sup>32</sup>

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2021 tightened the supply and drove up prices for fossil gas around the world. Europe strove to replace Russian piped gas with LNG, which caused prices to hit record high levels in 2022. As a result, demand for LNG in Asia dropped 7%,<sup>33</sup> the first annual drop since 2015. Decreasing domestic production<sup>34</sup> and the Russian war on Ukraine on the other hand increased Europe's demand for Africa's fossil gas, as European countries turned elsewhere to source their energy needs. Oil and gas giant Eni, for example, signed deals and fast tracked its LNG projects in Africa to meet this need.<sup>35</sup> Senegal and

Mauritania are also looking into increasing their fossil gas exports into Europe.<sup>36</sup>

The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that there will be a 25% increase in new approvals for the development of new oil and gas resources in 2023, as fossil gas-importing countries want to replace the shortfall in Russian gas and as gas prices ease up.<sup>37</sup> In Asia, over 100 billion cubic metres (bcm) of LNG import capacity is set to be added by 2025, half of which will be in China.<sup>38</sup> Crisis-hit Pakistan and Bangladesh plan to restart LNG imports as prices start to cool down in 2023.<sup>39</sup> Meanwhile, the dash for Africa's gas will turn the continent into Europe's, and possibly the world's, gas station, while more than 40% of its population is energy-poor.<sup>40</sup> According to Global Energy Monitor, the "[e]stimated capital expenditure for in-development LNG terminals is \$103 billion, 92% of which would be for LNG export terminals. This total would increase the region's 79.3 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) of LNG export capacity by 111%, while doing little to improve electrification on the continent".<sup>41</sup>

## THE FOSSIL GAS CRISIS PERPETUATES GENDER INEQUALITY

The extreme price volatility of fossil gas in global markets puts developing countries at high risk of energy and economic insecurity. The Russian invasion of Ukraine left developing countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh having to pay exorbitant prices for LNG. Both countries have signed long-term LNG contracts for around 50% of their needs, while the other half is bought from spot markets.<sup>42</sup> However, these long-term contracts did not provide security from price volatility as suppliers either provided minimum quantities (Bangladesh)<sup>43</sup> or simply reneged on their contracts to deliver LNG (Pakistan) since spot market prices were more profitable.<sup>44</sup>

The high financial burden of LNG imports, which are to be paid in US dollars, are having knock-on effects on the two countries' economies which then in turn affect women. Blackouts and high electricity prices in both countries are negatively affecting their textile and garment industries. Factories are either shutting down or working at reduced capacity.<sup>45</sup> The downturn in the garment and textile industries, which are major employers of women in Pakistan and Bangladesh, has caused some companies to lay off workers.<sup>46</sup>

Households also continue to grapple with high electricity prices, further squeezing already tight budgets because of crippling inflation of other goods, including food prices.<sup>47</sup> Studies have shown that inflation burdens women more than men and further worsens gender disparities because women are more job insecure, subject to lower wages, they carry the burden of managing food and energy needs of their households, while the needs of men in health, food, and education are prioritised during economic crises.<sup>48</sup> The loss of jobs and poverty during economic crises and after disasters also increases the incidence of domestic violence against women, and makes women less able to walk away from abusive situations.<sup>49</sup>

LNG projects and pricey imports have also raised concerns over the two countries' ballooning external debts.<sup>50</sup> Austerity measures as a consequence of debt crises, often imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)<sup>51</sup> in exchange for a bailout, have negatively impacted gender equality by lowering public investments in social protection, including support for new mothers and children, and privatising health and energy services on which women are very dependent.<sup>52</sup>

## FOSSIL GAS PROJECTS VIOLATE WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND DO NOT PROMOTE ENERGY ACCESS

Fossil gas projects that received public funding from 2016 to 2021 were generally not for energy access for poor communities. Especially for Africa, most publicly funded infrastructure built/being built for fossil gas is for servicing the needs of export markets, such as South Africa and countries in Europe and Asia, rather than poor communities' energy needs in the region. Oil Change International's data showed that only around 6.8% of the \$17.65 billion of the G20's and MDBs' finance for fossil gas in Asia Pacific between 2016 and 2021 went to projects that include energy access. For the same period and the same institutions, only around 1.2% of the \$55.04 billion public funds for fossil gas in Africa supported energy access for poor communities.

The Myingyan gas power plant in Myanmar is an example of a fossil gas project that did not address the energy needs of nearby communities.<sup>53</sup> The Myingyan gas power plant was slated as an energy access project by the government of Myanmar<sup>54</sup> and was funded by the ADB in 2015, as well as the IFC and the AIIB in 2016. However, villagers in the 13 nearby affected communities did not get any access to electricity from the power plant that affected them. During public consultations, villagers asked for at least power to pump water from the Ayeyarwaddy river to irrigate their fields if the power plant will not supply their households with electricity. This request was not granted, and individual households now pay steeply to connect to the grid.

If publicly funded fossil gas projects are not designed for energy access for people living in poverty, it is likely that poor women, especially in the rural areas, have little to no benefit from these projects, which can lead to loss of livelihoods and access to land, too (see Box 1 on LNG projects in Mozambique and Senegal).

### **Box 1. Impacts of fossil gas projects in Mozambique and Senegal on women**

Senegal and Mozambique are two countries in Africa that are rich in fossil gas and oil resources that companies such as Exxon, British Petroleum, and Eni are exploiting. Senegal has the largest fossil gas deposit in West Africa as of 2021. Due to this large deposit of gas that was discovered in 2014, there are two main projects underway: the SNE (Sangomar) oilfield and the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim liquified natural gas.<sup>97</sup> According to the IFC, by providing grid stability, natural gas will facilitate the deployment of – and transition to – renewable energy solutions in Senegal.<sup>98</sup> In Mozambique, oil and gas giants are planning to resume their operations after halting in 2021 due to violent attacks from armed groups. In these two countries, not only did the fossil gas projects fail to provide energy access to women and their communities, they disconnected women from their livelihoods and worsened their marginalisation.

#### **Mozambique**

Women in rural areas are disproportionately affected by forced displacement and resettlement due to LNG projects, such as Afungi LNG Park, Mozambique LNG, and the Coral South LNG, resulting in loss of livelihood. Traditional livelihoods, such as farming or fishing, may be disrupted or lost due to land acquisition or environmental changes associated with LNG projects, impacting women who heavily rely on these activities. According to Friends of the Earth Mozambique,<sup>99</sup> displaced families in the fishing industry were relocated to a distant village called Quitunda, where they have no access to the ocean and were allocated fishing grounds in the nearby village of Salama. The



only way for them to get to their new fishing ground is by taking a bus, operated by Total Energies, which goes back and forth once a day. However, this was impractical for fishing since it cannot be done on a fixed schedule. Women who used to collect shells, plants, and small animals at the shore, were now restricted from doing so, resulting in losses of incomes.

Due to customary practices and laws in Mozambique, women's access to land is mediated through male relatives. This is because a deeply entrenched patriarchal system prevails in the country, and women are usually viewed as subordinate to men. Moreover, the land women own would be from clearing forests near the community. The presence of international gas companies in Cabo Delgado has led to the displacement and relocation of several families in the region. For example, the construction of the Afungi LNG park destroyed farmlands, forests and the natural shoreline, places that are home to many animals and plants as well as local communities that are highly dependent on the land and the ocean for their livelihoods. Women involved in farming were severely affected as they were relocated to areas where they did not have access to farmland or have any claim to land, as most of the land in the area they were moved to was already being used. As a result, women have not only lost their livelihoods but have also had their access to clean water for domestic use compromised, as land is linked to access to water. To compensate women for their loss of land they were given an inadequate \$50 one-off payment.<sup>100</sup>

### **Senegal**

Large-scale oil and gas projects can have adverse environmental effects, such as habitat destruction and pollution. Women, especially in rural areas, often bear the brunt of such environmental degradation, as they are traditionally responsible for natural resource management and water collection. The women of the Saloum Islands claim that after the establishment of twenty-three oil wells off Sangomar, there has been a noticeable and alarming increase in sea levels, leading to severe coastal erosion.<sup>101</sup> This rise in sea level is posing a significant threat to their essential socio-economic activities, such as oyster farming, beekeeping in mangrove areas, seafood harvesting, fishing, salt production, fishery product processing, and ecological tourism.

In Saint-Louis, 90% of the town's 250,000 people rely on small fish farming, and since the exploration of gas and oil in the Greater Tortue, they have struggled to carry out these activities. The residents of this area were already facing challenges with fishing due to soil erosion and climate change amongst other things, however the setting up of gas and oil exploration rigs by BP and Kosmos Energy and Senegal and Mauritania's state-owned oil companies led to the collapse of their fishing activities. The loss of the fishing economy has rendered many men jobless, and women have had to step in to fend for their families.<sup>102</sup> To fill the income gap, women have been forced into prostitution as it is the most reliable and quickest source of income in comparison to other jobs. Women felt obligated to fend for their families through sex work to feed their children and pay rent.<sup>103</sup> In response to the draft of this report, the World Bank<sup>104</sup> said that to date, the project has received no direct complaint of the nature mentioned in this report through its complaint mechanism, the Regional Development Committees, and the periodic consultations at national and local level which include women-only focus groups.

## **Box 2. Clean cooking fuel for women<sup>105</sup>**

Worldwide, the number of families who cook on dirty, polluting fuels, such as wood, dung and charcoal, remains extremely high at over 2.4 billion, and 3.8 million people die prematurely each year because of indoor air pollution predominantly from these cookstoves.<sup>106</sup> SDG 7 on access to affordable and clean energy does not have a gender target although women are vulnerable to energy poverty and are more likely to be exposed to the health hazards of dirty energy sources, especially when cooking for their families.

The MDBs have supported access to clean cooking. For example, the AIIB's 2022 Energy Sector Strategy (ESS) states that under its Principle 1: Promote energy access and security, the bank will put emphasis on promoting, directly or indirectly, access to modern energy, including electricity, clean cooking and heating, to those who currently have little or no access. However, the AIIB's ESS results management framework does not actually include any target or indicator to monitor whether this emphasis is indeed implemented in its energy investments.

The other MDBs have also launched their own initiatives on clean cooking, such as the AfDB's Sustainable Energy Fund for Africa (SEFA), the World Bank's Clean Cooking Fund and the Advancing Gender-Equal Benefits In Clean Cooking Operations, the IFC's Clean Impact Bond (CIB), and the ADB's Maximising Poverty Alleviation and Gender Co-benefits through Innovative Clean Energy Solutions in Asia and the Pacific. The MDBs' support for clean cooking often includes access to liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) in communities, especially for women. Because of the health impacts of dirty biomass on women's health, LPG has been marketed in both Asia and Africa as the cleaner alternative that not only reduces indoor air pollution, but also reduces time poverty and enables women to engage in paid labour and socialising or entertainment.<sup>107</sup>

However, recent LPG price volatilities as a result of the Russian war on Ukraine show that women's access to clean cooking will need more than being able to cook with LPG, which is often imported. In India for example, the increase in LPG prices is forcing women in poverty to return to biomass for fuel.<sup>108</sup> Clean cooking for people living in energy poverty requires additional resources and efforts to make the fuel accessible and affordable to people living in energy poverty. As the exorbitant increases in LPG prices showed, dependence on imported fuels does not entirely solve energy poverty and can also worsen it. There are a number of cooking solutions beyond LPG that are more appropriate and affordable for both urban and rural communities. These include ultra clean wood or charcoal stoves, such as the rocket stove, solar cooking, renewable biogas, and innovations in affordable electric cooking. Any cooking option must be appropriate to the social and cultural cooking needs of the communities.<sup>109</sup>

## **MDB POLICIES SUPPORTING FOSSIL GAS PROJECTS**

### **Public finance supporting the dash for fossil gas in Asia and Africa**

Both Asia Pacific and Africa still receive large amounts of public finance for fossil gas projects despite the MDBs and funder countries committing to the Paris Agreement in 2015. According to Oil Change International's monitoring of the G20's and the MDBs' finance on energy,<sup>55</sup> Asia Pacific received around \$17.65 billion in approved gas and oil and gas projects between 2016 and 2021. Approved clean energy projects in the region received only \$15.19 billion. On the other hand, public finance for gas and oil and gas projects in Sub Saharan Africa and North Africa account for more than twice the amount invested in clean energy. From 2016 to 2021, approved gas and oil and gas projects received \$55.04 billion while approved clean energy projects received only \$21.89 billion.

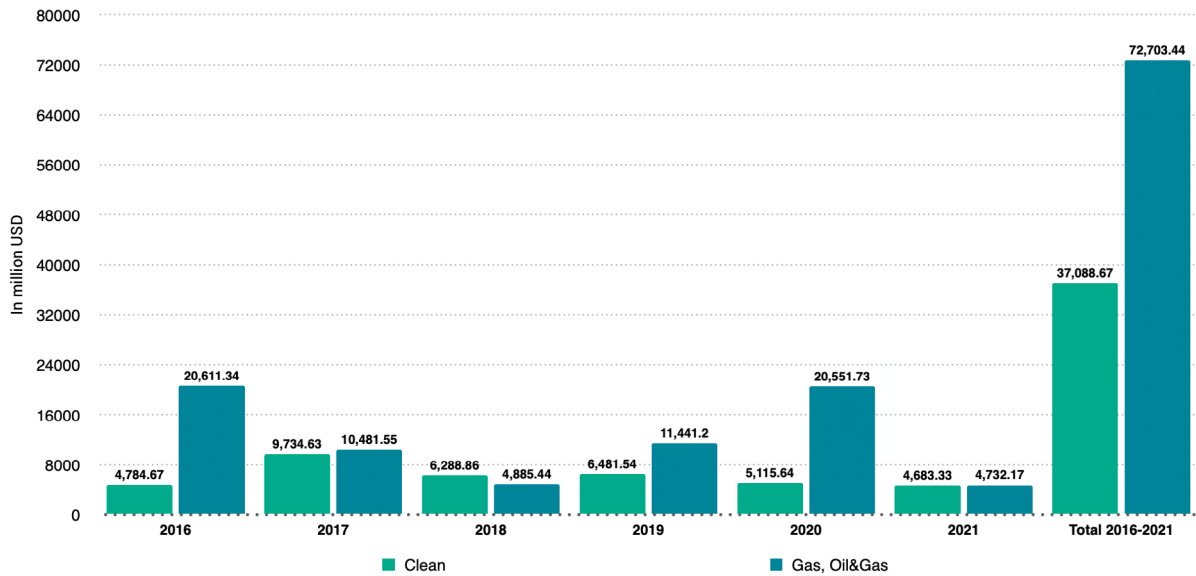


Figure 1. G20 and MDBs' finance for gas and oil and gas projects in Asia Pacific and Africa decreased between 2016 to 2021. However, the total amount given to such projects is still higher than that given to clean energy projects in the same period.<sup>56</sup>

MDBs are instrumental in continuing this fossil fuel addiction. In Asia Pacific, the World Bank Group (WBG), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) collectively contributed around \$3.94 billion or almost a quarter of the public finance for gas and oil and gas projects from 2016 to 2021. In Africa, the WBG and the African Development Bank (AfDB) contributed \$5.27 billion or around 10% of the public finance for gas and oil and gas projects for the same time period. These figures for both regions include mostly direct investments and technical assistance. Harder-to-monitor investments made through financial intermediaries (FI), such as banks and private equity funds, are obscured as the chain is longer and difficult to fully uncover because of non-transparency in FI subprojects (see Box 3).

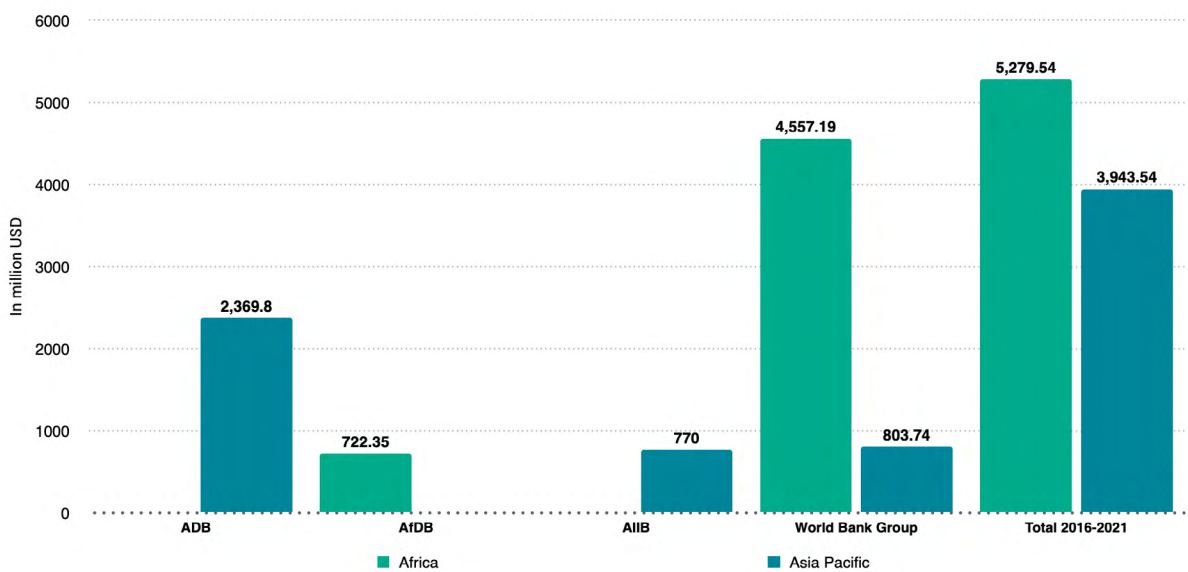


Figure 2. MDB funding for gas and oil and gas projects from 2016 to 2021.<sup>57</sup>

### **BOX 3. TRANSPARENCY PROBLEMS IN FINANCIAL INTERMEDIARY LENDING**

Transparency is a major problem with the MDBs' FI investments. This arms-length form of lending can lead to harmful investments, including fossil fuel projects, due to the lack of timely disclosure of the sub-projects. For example, ADB has 135 active non-sovereign FI investments between January 2010 and June 2023. However, the ADB website does not list the sub-projects of 98% of these FI investments.<sup>58</sup> While the IFC committed to disclosing the sub-projects of both private equity and commercial bank clients, and the AIIB of its private equity clients, transparency is delayed until after project approval. Transparency becomes even more problematic when a sub-project funded through an FI investment releases funds to another sub-project. An example of this is the AIIB's \$150 million investment in the Emerging Asia Fund in 2017, which is managed by the IFC. Although the IFC's project website<sup>59</sup> lists the fund's portfolio, it does not list specific sub-projects by the clients. One of the fund's clients, the Commercial Bank of Ceylon (CBC) joined a syndicated loan facility led by Hatton National Bank (HNB) in November 2021 to finance the 350MW liquefied natural gas (LNG) power plant by Sobadhanavi Ltd, a subsidiary of Lakdhanavi Ltd.<sup>60</sup> The LNG power plant is currently under construction in Kerawalapitiya and it is the first of its kind in Sri Lanka.

Aside from financial resources, MDBs also shape energy investment policies and standards in Asia and Africa. The ADB, and AfDB's individual energy sector policies, and the AIIB's energy sector strategy all have provisions that support funding fossil gas.<sup>61</sup> Although these MDBs no longer support 'upstream' fossil gas exploration activities, they do fund midstream and downstream fossil gas projects, such as infrastructure for processing, storage, power generation, as well as transmission and distribution.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, the AfDB's energy sector strategy says it will support environmentally and socially sound practices as well as promote policies, principles, and practices that promote transparency in fossil gas projects. The ADB's Energy Sector Policy and the AIIB's Energy Sector Strategy further indicate that the Banks will support mid- and downstream fossil gas investments provided that these follow a specific criteria, including consistency with a country's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement, do not create a risk of carbon lock in and stranded assets, and do not displace economically viable renewable energy investments. Almost the same provisions on supporting gas can be found in the World Bank Group's Climate Change Action Plan.<sup>63</sup> However, MDBs continue to fund fossil gas projects that violate these restrictions (see subsection below on *Promoting fossil gas at project level*).

The MDBs' efforts to contribute to the implementation of the Paris Agreement also have not excluded support for fossil gas. In 2018, several MDBs<sup>64</sup> announced that they will work together and develop a dedicated approach to align their activities with the goals of the Paris Agreement.<sup>65</sup> Almost five years after this declaration, the Joint MDB Methodological Principles for Assessment of Paris Agreement Alignment was released as the guidance to inform and facilitate the Paris Alignment assessments of each MDB's financing operations.<sup>66</sup> Each MDB is supposed to build on these joint methodological principles to develop their own methodological guidance and toolkits. However, the Joint MDB Methodological Principles, as well as the World Bank Paris Alignment Instrument Methods<sup>67</sup> and the AIIB's Methodology for Assessing the Alignment of AIIB Investment Operations with the Paris Agreement<sup>68</sup> only rule out support for coal and peat, while not oil and gas. The criteria for NDC alignment, prevention of carbon lock in, and non-displacement of economically viable renewable energy are also present in these Paris alignment methods. Using consistency with NDCs as a benchmark for Paris alignment does not set the level of

ambition required on fossil gas phase out and will prolong reliance on fossil fuels, thereby worsening global warming. NDCs are non-legally binding targets for climate mitigation and adaptation that are designed at country level. The current level of ambition of the NDCs is too low to effectively cut greenhouse gas emissions to prevent runaway climate change. The United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Emissions Gap Report 2022 predicts that basing emissions projections on NDCs will lead to a 2.4°C to 2.6°C warming by the end of the century<sup>69</sup>. Fulfilling current NDC ambitions is therefore not sufficient to meet the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C warming goal.

In 2022, calls to reform the MDBs policies and practices to respond to the development setbacks caused by the multiple crises were made by developing countries, as well as the Group of 7 (G7). Among the challenges that the MDB reform needs to address is increasing financing to enable developing countries to address the impacts of climate change. However, none of the official conversations on reforming the MDBs are proposing the exclusion of financing for fossil gas.

### **Promoting fossil gas at project level**

Support for fossil gas in the 2022 AIIB energy sector strategy, the 2021 ADB energy sector policy, and the 2023 Joint MDB Methodological Principles for Assessment of Paris Agreement Alignment is supposed to be contingent on meeting a set of criteria, which include alignment with the host-country's NDCs, does not create a risk of carbon lock-in and stranded assets, and does not displace economically viable renewable energy investments. However, these criteria can also be misinterpreted in order to push through with a fossil gas investment. Flawed environmental impact assessments and inadequate alternatives analysis have allowed fossil gas projects to receive support from MDBs. For example, the AIIB's investment in the Unique Meghnaghat LNG Power Plant in Bangladesh. The AIIB described the power plant as 'Paris aligned' despite clearly presenting risks of locking Bangladesh into carbon, because it is a greenfield project that has a lifespan of 20 to 30 years. This undermines the goal of cutting GHG emissions by half by 2030 to keep global temperature rise within 1.5° Celsius.<sup>70</sup> The LNG project also displaces viable renewable solar and wind energy projects that the AIIB dismissed without providing an analytical basis.<sup>71</sup>

### **MDBs' policies and gender responsiveness**

The ADB, the AfDB, and the IFC have guidelines on mainstreaming gender in projects falling under the energy sector and the oil and gas sector. These guidelines include addressing women's energy needs, livelihoods and employment, participation in consultations, as well as addressing gender-based violence.<sup>72</sup> The MDBs' gender policies and environmental and social frameworks (ESFs) can shed more light on how much these bank's policies uphold gender rights in their operations, including in fossil gas investments.

According to a report led by Gender Action in 2023, only the ADB's gender policy received a majority of strong scores across 11 indicators that assessed how the MDBs' gender policies are responsive to gender issues (see Box 4). The AfDB's and the WBG's individual gender policies on the other hand received strong scores in less than 50% of these indicators.<sup>73</sup> The gender and climate change indicator in particular is "concerned with the extent to which each gender policy discusses, and protects against, the wide-ranging, gender-specific impacts of climate change." Only the ADB's gender policy scored strongly on the gender and climate change indicator while the AfDB and the World Bank scored weakly on the same indicator.



The AIIB does not have a gender policy, but its Corporate Strategy commits the bank to “enhance its contribution to gender equality in Asia by increasingly incorporating gender considerations into projects, which can be mapped against SDG 5.” This lack of gender policy resulted in inadequate gender considerations in the bank’s energy projects. Analysis by BRICS Feminist Watch and Recourse of all approved projects in the AIIB’s energy portfolio as of the end of 2022 revealed that almost half did not match against any of the gender indicators (see Figure 3) used to assess the projects. None of the projects included specific language on energy access for women.<sup>74</sup>

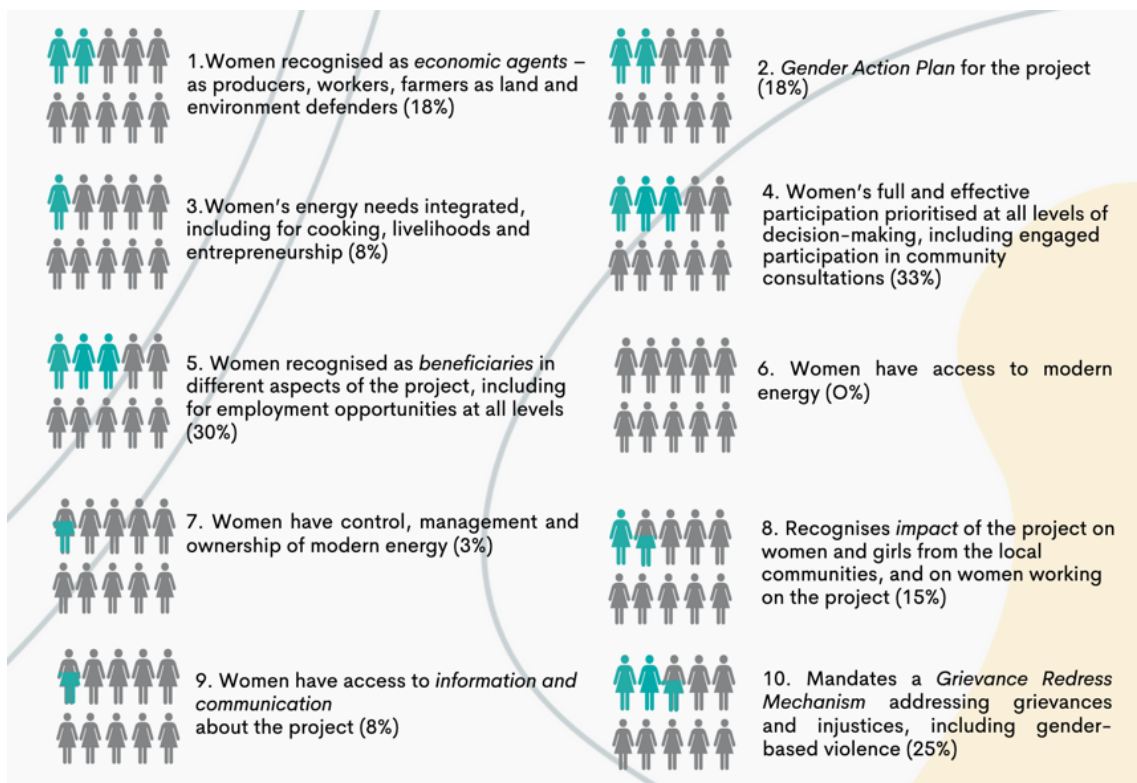


Figure 3. Assessment of approved AIIB energy projects (as of end 2022) against BRICS Feminist Watch and Recourse’s gender indicators<sup>75</sup>

#### Box 4. Indicators used to assess MDBs’ individual gender policies

1. Goals
2. Priorities
3. Mandate
4. Gender and climate change
5. Gender, environment and biodiversity
6. Mechanisms to engender operations
7. Staffing
8. Gender monitoring and evaluation
9. Sexual and gender minorities
10. Sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment
11. Unpaid care work

#### Box 5. Indicators used to assess MDBs’ ESFs

1. Gender mandate/safeguard
2. Gender in environmental and social risks assessments
3. Gender dimension of debt
4. Gender discrimination and rights
5. Gender and climate change
6. Gender, environment and biodiversity
7. Gender and information disclosure
8. Gendered information and consent
9. Gender in resettlement and compensation
10. Gender monitoring and evaluation
11. Sexual and gender minorities
12. Sexual and gender-based violence and sexual exploitation, abuse and sexual harassment
13. Gendered labour

The Gender Action report also examined how well these banks' ESFs mandate protection for gender equal rights and gender equality by using 13 indicators, (see Box 5). The ADB, AfDB, AIIB, WB, and the IFC all received weak scores in at least 50% of the said indicators. These banks also scored weakly in the gender and climate change indicator.

Meanwhile the ADB and the AfDB scored weakly on the gender, environment, and biodiversity indicator. The weakness on the integration of gender, climate, environment, and biodiversity concerns in the MDB's gender policies and ESFs raises serious concerns on how women's rights on the ground are/will be protected in the current dash for fossil gas, given the inherently risky nature of fossil gas projects. Furthermore, the ADB, the AfDB, and the IFC also scored weakly on gendered consultations and consent which can further exacerbate women's lack of meaningful participation in decision-making processes.

Experiences of communities with fossil gas projects supported by the MDBs show that the implementation of the gender policies and ESFs were also not adequate to protect women from rights violations. For example, the Myingyan gas project in Myanmar that was supported by the ADB in 2015, as well as the IFC and the AIIB in 2016 failed to implement gender sensitive consultations and consent with project affected communities.<sup>76</sup> The Myingyan gas project intruded into local farm areas which affected livelihoods, and especially the livelihoods of women; project information was not disclosed in the local language, and the community was not informed about their right to access the IFC accountability mechanism<sup>77</sup>. According to the IFC<sup>78</sup>, their disclosure documents which describe how to access the Office of the Compliance Advisor/Ombudsman-IFC's independent accountability mechanism-are found on the website of the company and IFC. The Bhola Integrated Power Plant (Bhola IPP) funded by the AIIB in 2018 was enabled by land-grabbing, which negatively affected women farmers' access to land and their livelihoods.<sup>79</sup> The power plant also polluted the communities' source of drinking water, which resulted in the consumption of dirty water. Women were expected to make a two- to three-kilometre journey to collect clean water as a direct result.

## **CASE STORIES ON FOSSIL GAS INFRASTRUCTURE AND GENDER**

The following case stories are on the impacts of fossil gas projects on women who have been affected by fossil gas projects funded by MDBs in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

### ***We don't want a power plant, we want a healthy life.***

### **Women's experiences with the Unique Meghnaghat LNG Power Plant in Bangladesh<sup>80</sup>**

#### ***Coastal Livelihood and Environmental Action Network – Bangladesh***

The Unique Meghnaghat 584 Megawatt (MW) liquefied natural gas (LNG)-based power plant is being developed by Unique Meghnaghat Power Limited (UMPL), a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) of Unique Hotel and Resorts Limited (UHRL), GE Capital Global Energy Investments, Nebras Power Investment Management, and Strategic Finance Limited (SFL). The greenfield power plant is situated in Dudhghata, Korbanpur, and Chanderchak villages on the right bank of the Meghna River in Pirojpur Union under Sonargaon Upazila in Narayanganj District of Bangladesh. In December 2022, the AIIB approved a \$110 million loan to build the LNG power plant. The AIIB claimed that the fossil gas plant is Paris aligned

even though it had not yet made its Paris alignment methodology public at that time.<sup>81</sup>

The construction phase of the Unique Meghnaghat power plant has resulted in several human rights violations, including land grabbing and the destruction of the local environment on which the surrounding communities depend for livelihoods. These impacts are borne disproportionately by women who have less access and control over land compared to men.<sup>82</sup> For women in the nearby communities, the Unique Meghnaghat LNG power plant has caused economic insecurity, damage to their property, health problems, and food insecurity.

### **Land grabs, damage to property, and broken promises**

Land acquisition by UMPL has been very problematic. Evidence suggests that the actual land that the UMPL is occupying is 6.88 acres more than the land it purchased.<sup>83</sup> UMPL made promises of infrastructure and alternative jobs to convince communities to sell their land. However, residents received below market prices for their land and have not seen the other promises fulfilled. According to a resident, Sathi,<sup>\*84</sup>

*“They bought per satoshi<sup>85</sup> from others by paying 7 to 8 lakh BDT (\$6,442 to \$7,362) but they only paid me 1 lakh BDT (\$920). They said that they will do various development infrastructure ... that my husband would be the manager of the restaurant and my family members will get jobs ... For transportation, the company widened the roads by acquiring lands forcefully bought from many people. They have not kept their word after taking the land. The villagers who lead their life depending on this area are now living miserable lives.”*

Sathi and her family's living conditions have also worsened due to the proximity of the power plant construction to their home.

*“They placed one of the generators very near my house and their toilet was next to our kitchen. They removed their toilet when we complained. However, the electricity line for the construction is hanging close to the roof of our kitchen which is dangerous. While carrying out the landfilling, it felt like an earthquake was happening. My balcony and kitchen got cracked but they didn't compensate for the damages”*

Like Sathi's, Salma's<sup>\*86</sup> house was also damaged from the construction works but she did not get compensated: *“The power plant's landfilling work caused big cracks on my floors. I have covered some floors with plastic sheets to hide the cracks.”*

Sathi pointed out the lack of an accessible complaints mechanism for their community:

*“There is a complaint box for the workers in front of the power plant but there is no complaint box for the villagers. No development activities have been done for us.”*

### **Blocking access to clean water, increasing the burden of domestic work, and economic insecurity**

The ongoing construction is blocking access to the river and causing water pollution, depriving the women of clean water for drinking, cooking, and hygiene. It also increased the burden of domestic work on women.

*“Previously, the river was brimming with clean, clear water. They [UMPL] acquired the charland<sup>87</sup>, and local people were prohibited from going to the river bank. The authorities deposited sand, and the area was surrounded by an embankment made with tin. As a result, we do not have access to the river.” – Sathi*

*“A few days ago, an old woman fell and broke her leg while going down to the river. The steep pathway to the river is very risky and accident-prone. There is no ghat<sup>88</sup> for taking baths.” – Salma*

*“We are fully dependent on this river for water. Now there is a lot of dirty water, and the water is very smelly. The water level is very low due to the bank being raised so high. Also, we use cloth during our periods because we cannot afford disposable napkins. These have to be cleaned several times a day, which takes a lot of clean water.*

*We have no tubewell in our house, so I have to go to the river due to the lack of water. Usually, girls are physically sick during their periods, and then it is very difficult to go up and down such a steep hill with a heavy pitcher. During our menstruation we feel insufferable pain in the lower abdomen. I can't get down from the high bank at this time.*

*Then the pain gets worse, and for this reason, I can't breathe when I get up from the river.” – Salma*

For Manika,<sup>89</sup> the lack of access to the river means economic insecurity.

*We used to plant many dhonche trees<sup>90</sup> on the banks of the river for fuel. We are unable to obtain this for the acquisition of charland. Now, for the fuel, we have to buy wood which is expensive for us. We used to sell fish we caught from the river which earned us about 3,00,000 BDT (\$2761) per year. We didn't have to buy fish. Now we can't do this anymore because the river bank is occupied by them [UMPL].*

### **Food insecurity and adverse health impacts**

UMPL dumped sand on the roads and adjacent lands for the construction of the power plant. This made the land unsuitable for vegetables which the women grow to feed their families. According to Salma, : *“Our children face problems going to school because the sand blocked the road. I have a cow, but it cannot graze because no plant grows in the sand.*

We used to plant many vegetables, like tomatoes, beans, pumpkin, chilli, onions, and garlic. The few vegetables we plant now do not grow well because of sand.

Manika also faces similar problems: *“A food crisis has started for the villagers and their cattle. I had some domestic animals that used to eat the grass on the plateau. However, I had to give up our cattle because I could not buy grassfeed from far away at BDT 20 (\$0.18) per bunch. Plants do not grow well in the sand.”*

The sand also affects the women and their families' daily routines as well as their health. Women have noticed health problems affecting them and their families since the construction of the power plant started. A sick family member increases unpaid care work for the women.

*“They dumped sand which is equal to a one storey building. When the wind blows, all the sand comes inside our house. None of us could eat the food that we cooked on the day of our Eid (religious festival). Everything had to be thrown away. My grandson, who is 7 days old, could not breathe because of the sand. We were taken to the hospital. My husband now has a respiratory disease.” – Sathi*

*“Locals are suffering from various diseases such as allergies, respiratory problems, sneezing, etc. The wind drives the sand into our houses. My daughter and I have experienced a demoralising skin disease from the sand. I have already spent 30,000 BDT (\$274) for her treatment. I am also suffering from headaches, respiratory diseases, allergies, and many other diseases. Our economic condition is not enough to bear the cost of that kind of treatment. We don't want a power plant; we want a healthy life.” – Salma*

## **In the shadows: Ghotki's plight with Engro Powergen Qadirpur Limited**

### **Indus Consortium – Pakistan**

Engro Powergen Qadirpur (EPQL) stands as Engro Energy's first flagship business, launched in 2007. It is located in Qadirpur Deh Belo Sanghari about 3 to 3.5 kilometers away from the city of Ghotki, Sindh Pakistan. The construction of a 217MW combined cycle gas power plant began in 2008. Engro Powergen Qadirpur officially declared 27 March 2010 the start of its commercial operations. The project converts low-BTU,<sup>91</sup> high-sulphur-content permeated gas, which was previously flared, into electric power. The IFC invested \$70.20 million in October 2008, which includes a loan of \$67.2 million and a \$3.0 million equity, and exited the project in 2017.<sup>92</sup>

Despite EPQL's commitment towards community development and the IFC's Performance Standards (PS) in areas where they operate, the villages in Ghotki found themselves shrouded in a state of despair. The socio-economic effects of the EPQL on the local communities in Ghotki are far-reaching and profound. Numerous families are facing



hardships and reduced quality of life due to environmental pollution and limited access to stable employment opportunities, leading to heightened economic vulnerability. EPQL's failure to provide sufficient opportunities has left the majority of the local residents to rely on low-skilled labour for their livelihoods. Women suffer from increased domestic work, lack of other livelihood opportunities, and the consequences of inadequate health care facilities, which in turn worsens and reinforces their marginalisation in their highly patriarchal communities.

### **Long blackouts**

The Village Development Organisation Ghotki (VDO Ghotki) and GROW Green Network are working with the residents of the Ghotki community to advocate for environmental and climate justice and just energy transition. According to Mr. Ali Hassan Mahar, a local social activist and the founder of VDO Ghotki, electricity is being produced for the national grid rather than the community, leaving them to suffer frequent blackouts.

*“We face more than 12 to 15 hours of black-outs in the summer season every year. The electricity generated from the power plant is mostly sent to the national grid to be used by urban centres and factories in northern Pakistan.”*

### **Lack of livelihoods, heavier domestic work, and increased women's marginalisation**

Mr. Mahar reported that EPQL's safety standard operating procedures and other frameworks are not implemented to protect the health, environment, and other natural resources of the community. The 2022 climate change-induced floods that devastated various places in Pakistan, including Ghotki, caused the power plant's water storage reservoir to contaminate surrounding waters and soils. According to him-

*“During the 2022 floods, the water storage reservoir facility at the power plant overflowed, flooding the nearby land and communities. After wastewater treatment, the water is discharged back into the same canal from which it was taken for the power plant's use. However, the water is still not suitable for use.”*

The leaching of toxins and pollutants from the power plant-contaminated canal has caused adverse effects on livestock, agricultural productivity, and local livelihoods. Ms. Yasmen Tahira, a social worker from Dring Malook village, expressed her concern about how this has reinforced patriarchy and women's marginalisation in the community.

*“Our last means of livelihood, the livestock, are also falling sick due to contaminated water. There are hardly any employment opportunities or skill developing programmes for women, which has led to a decrease in our employability and financial independence. Consequently, our roles in decision making and community development are often undermined.”*

Gender roles imposed on women make them responsible for domestic tasks, such as preparing food, and collecting water and firewood. Water contamination along with blackouts and gas load shedding increase the time they spend doing domestic tasks. The recent heat waves that have affected Pakistan not only make domestic work harder for women, but also endanger their health.

*“To feed the children, we have to go far to fetch water and gather firewood in the intense heat. With no electricity and gas load shedding, women are left with no option other than to collect firewood from far flung areas for cooking purposes which is increasing the burden of their responsibilities and causing more labour intensive care work for the family.” – Ms. Tahira.*

Fetching water from long distances leaves women with very little time for proper rest and well-being. The increased burden of domestic work further limits women's involvement within the community and time for education, especially for young girls as they help in these activities. This in turn reinforces the patriarchal structure in their communities where women's voices are marginalised. Their demands for better safe living conditions and better health care facilities have largely been ignored because of this marginalisation.

### **Health impacts**

There has been an increase in health problems among the community, especially women and children, caused by air and water pollution. Water contamination has increased the cases of hepatitis B and C, which have surged in both women and children along with skin ailments. Increases in eye diseases among children, women and elderly individuals have also been reported. The increased incidences of eye and respiratory diseases are putting more pressure on the already inadequate local health facilities, including in the gynaecology ward, where shortage of equipment compounds the difficulties. Lack of access to medical services has left the village helpless against the rising tide of illness. Due to the scarcity of clinics in the nearby rural areas, villagers have to travel many kilometers to access hospitals in Ghotki city.

*“Due to air and water pollution, the cases of eye and respiratory diseases have increased among children and women. There are health centres available, but they lack necessary medical equipment which leaves us with no choice other than to visit private clinics which are very expensive and not affordable for us.” – Ms. Tahira.*

Despite making substantial profits, corporate social responsibility (CSR) by EPQL lacks any meaningful impact on the local community. With little or no medical facilities provided, the health crises are escalating.

The effects of Engro Powergen Limited's power plant on the local communities in Ghotki have been devastating. Relevant authorities, like the Ministry of Energy of Sindh, Planning and Development Department of Sindh and Sindh Environmental Protection Authority (SEPA) need to reconsider the energy needs of Ghotki to address these issues and enhance the overall quality of life in Ghotki. IFC should address harms caused by fossil projects they have supported over the years. Furthermore, the IFC and the Sindh government should offer incentives and grants to communities to meet their energy requirements through the establishment of utility-scale renewable energy projects and increased representation and participation of women in community decision-making processes to address their specific needs and concerns.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Public finance for fossil gas projects worsens the climate crisis which disproportionately impacts women, fails to provide women access to sustainable energy, and further exacerbates their economic and social marginalisation. In contrast, decentralised renewable energy (DRE) projects are more promising in terms of empowering women. While women in general are marginalised in employment in the whole energy sector, the renewable energy industry fares better at giving employment to women.

Globally, 32% of the workers in the renewable energy industry are women, compared to the 22% employment of women in the traditional oil and gas sector.<sup>93</sup> Compared to large scale fossil gas, which often produces energy for the consumption of industries and already-connected households<sup>94</sup> at the expense of the communities bearing the costs of loss of access to lands and environmental destruction, DRE bypasses the need for extensive transmission infrastructure to provide energy access to those living without it. In rural India, solar water pumps and solar silk spinning machines have been able to lighten women's domestic work and enhance their livelihoods in agriculture.<sup>95</sup> In Zimbabwe, solar energy access for healthcare facilities in communities without connection to reliable energy improved access to medical services and procedures that contributed to reduced child mortality and death.

Because of its potential to facilitate women's empowerment and address energy poverty for women and their communities, DRE has a role to play in the just transition to renewable energy. MDB's policy and financial support should be channelled to these types of energy projects that directly enhance women's rights instead of promoting climate-wrecking and women-disempowering fossil gas projects.

In order to prevent harms to women and promote their rights and economic empowerment, MDBs should:



**Stop public funding for fossil gas.** Extend the exclusion of support for coal to fossil gas in the MDBs' individual policies/strategies and various lending instruments, including through financial intermediaries.



**Truly align MDBs' investments to the goals of the Paris Agreement.** Include fossil gas investments in the list of universally non-aligned investments in the MDBs' Paris alignment methodologies. Close the loopholes in the MDBs' Paris assessment methodologies that allow continued financing of fossil gas projects.



**Ensure transparency and full, prior public disclosure of all energy projects funded by the MDBs through financial intermediaries.** MDBs should disclose the name, sector and location of these sub-projects on their websites as well as clients' websites.



**Ensure meaningful, and gender-sensitive consultations** to enable women to participate in decision-making about MDBs' investments, including energy projects, to be implemented in their communities. Introduce compulsory gender indicators and gender action plans for all projects. Women should be actively engaged in project development, including ensuring proportional representation in project-affected community consultations, as well as separate women-only consultations.



**Prioritise MDB investments towards renewable energy access** for women and communities living in poverty. Ensure that these investments are aligned with the SDG 5 and SDG 7, as well as uphold and protect the rights of women and the communities that they live in.



**Prevent gender-based violence, address past harms and support the right to remedy and reparations of communities affected by fossil gas projects.** MDBs must be held to account for past harms caused by fossil gas investments they have supported over the years. To address this, the MDBs should commit to work with their clients in ensuring remedy is provided and future harms are prevented in consultation with affected communities, particularly addressing any issues raised by women as well as other marginalised groups (including Indigenous Peoples and sexual minorities). The World Bank's practice of including in its procurement policy<sup>96</sup> the disclosure of previous incidents of gender-based violence, having a code of conduct, ensuring qualified personnel are tasked with social and environmental issues, and a grievance mechanism to receive complaints is a step in the right direction and something the other MDBs could emulate.

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