

NEXUS BETWEEN GENDER RESPONSIVENESS AND CLIMATE CHANGE

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The nexus between gender responsiveness and climate change recognizes that climate impacts, adaptation, and mitigation efforts affect people differently due to socially constructed roles, responsibilities, and power relations. Climate change is not gender-neutral, it interacts with existing inequalities and often amplifies them. Women and girls, particularly in developing countries such as Zambia, frequently experience disproportionate climate impacts because they depend heavily on climate-sensitive sectors for their livelihoods.

In Zambia, climate variability has manifested through prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall patterns, floods, and rising temperatures, all of which directly affect agriculture, and rural livelihoods. Women constitute a large proportion of the agricultural labour force and are heavily engaged in informal trade, and small-scale natural resource management activities such as firewood collection and water fetching. These roles increase their exposure to climate risks. For example, drought conditions often force women and girls to travel longer distances in search of water and firewood.

At the same time, women are not merely victims of climate change; they are critical agents of resilience and environmental stewardship. Across rural Zambia, women play a central role in preserving indigenous seed varieties, managing household food systems, and adopting climate-smart farming techniques. Gender-responsive climate strategies therefore seek to strengthen these roles by promoting climate-smart agriculture, improving access to drought-resistant and resilient seed varieties.



Zambia's constitutional and legal framework provides a strong normative foundation for gender-responsive climate action. The Constitution guarantees equality before the law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex. It affirms the right of all citizens to participate in national development including environmental management and sustainable development. These instruments collectively create an enabling policy environment for ensuring that women and men are treated as equal rights holders in development planning, environmental governance, and climate action.

Furthermore, Zambia's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) emphasize adaptation measures in key sectors such as agriculture, forestry, water, and energy areas, where gender considerations are particularly important.

Integrating gender into these sectors ensures that climate interventions reflect the needs, capacities, and knowledge systems of both women and men. When women have equal access to land, climate information, agricultural extension services, and finance, adaptation strategies become more effective and sustainable.

However, achieving an effective gender climate nexus requires adopting an intersectional approach. Gender intersects with other dimensions of vulnerability such as poverty, age, disability, and geographic location.

Rural women, elderly women, persons with disabilities, and female-headed households often face layered disadvantages that intensify climate risks. Climate interventions must therefore be context-specific, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of marginalized groups in order to ensure equitable resilience-building.

Despite the importance of this nexus, several constraints continue to limit the effective implementation of gender-responsive climate action in Zambia. These constraints include:

•Unequal access to productive resources, particularly land and finance. Although women play a central role in agriculture, one of the sectors most vulnerable to climate variability, they often lack secure land ownership rights, especially under customary tenure systems where land allocation is largely controlled by traditional authorities. Without secure land tenure, women face difficulties investing in climate-smart technologies, accessing agricultural credit, or benefiting from climate adaptation financing.

•Limited women's participation in climate governance and decision-making structures. While Zambia has established progressive institutional frameworks, including the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment, women remain underrepresented in key decision-making bodies such as local disaster management committees, community forest management groups, and national climate policy platforms. *This underrepresentation reduces opportunities to integrate women lived experiences, traditional ecological knowledge, and local innovations into climate policies and programmes.*

•Access to climate finance also presents a persistent challenge. Although Zambia is a signatory to the Paris Agreement and has incorporated gender considerations into national climate commitments, global and national climate financing mechanisms often fail to reach grassroots communities.

Rural women, in particular, encounter structural barriers such as limited information, low financial literacy, and restrictive lending requirements, which prevent them from accessing climate-related funding and investment opportunities.

•Cultural norms and social expectations continue to influence gender relations and shape climate vulnerability. In many communities, traditional roles limit women's control over income, land, mobility, and participation in public decision-making processes.



Even where formal policies promote gender equality, these deeply rooted social norms can prevent women from fully benefiting from climate programmes or assuming leadership roles in environmental governance.

Addressing these challenges requires a multi-dimensional and transformative approach. Strengthening local governance systems is essential to ensure inclusive participation in climate planning and implementation. Policies must prioritize improving women's access to land, agricultural inputs, climate information services, and financial resources. Investments in gender-disaggregated data systems are also critical to support evidence-based policymaking and effective monitoring of climate initiatives.

Ultimately, gender responsiveness in climate action goes beyond merely including women in climate projects. It seeks to address the structural and institutional drivers of inequality by transforming practices that limit women's agency and access to resources. A transformative gender approach recognizes women not only as beneficiaries of climate interventions but also as agents of change in building climate-resilient communities.

Promoting gender-responsive climate action therefore strengthens resilience, advances social justice, and contributes to sustainable development. When climate policies and programmes are inclusive and equitable, they produce more effective and lasting solutions. Ensuring that both women and men participate meaningfully in climate governance and benefit equitably from climate investments is essential for building a resilient, prosperous, and sustainable Zambia



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