



Gender- and age-responsive adaptation to climate change in southern Africa

The case for inclusive policy

Introduction

The current situation of women, children, youth and the elderly in southern Africa is variable and improving in some areas but remains generally poor. Women continue to suffer disproportionately from lack of access to education, health care and job opportunities (the majority being poor subsistence and small scale farmers), malnutrition, and weak economic and political participation (Table 1; Midgley & Antzooylatos, 2010). Female-headed households are poorer than those headed by males. Women possess low levels of reproductive choice, and are frequently exposed to gender-based violence. A strong focus across southern Africa on education and child health under the MDG programme has improved these services in most but not all countries. However, progress is too slow and the chances of achieving the related MDG targets by 2015 are dwindling.

According to UNICEF (2008), prospects for child survival in sub-Saharan Africa are poor. Although the aggregate under-five mortality rate has fallen since 1990, the average annual rate of reduction falls far below the 4-plus per cent annual rate required to keep on track for MDG 4 by 2015. Recent MDG Reports across southern Africa confirm the fragile status of this indicator (Chapman *et al.*, 2011).

The challenges faced by the youth (defined here as people aged 15–24 years) are often focused on education and employment (UNECA, 2011a). However, they go beyond these to include a lack of civil participation and empowerment, risks of contracting HIV/AIDS and a lack of female marital and reproductive choices. However, youth have better access to information and more adaptive capacity than previous generations.

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Under projected climate change scenarios the region faces the challenge of mobilising under-utilised natural and human resources to deliver pro-poor growth.

Women, children and youth are vulnerable and under-represented in government and have specific health needs which limit their ability to cope and adapt (Denton, 2002; Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance, 2010). However they do have reservoirs of untapped talent and energy, and this should be developed to increase the resilience of communities.

Multi-sectoral focus on gender and age is required for effective climate change policy, finance and mechanisms

Policy recommendations

- **Focus** on positive impacts of improved access to nutritious food, safe water, improved sanitation and health care on women, children, youth and older people.
- **Ensure** that risk and vulnerability monitoring and analysis, including food security and health monitoring, is sex- and age-disaggregated.
- **Develop** policy to support diversified economic participation, improved mobility and accelerated access to information, training and extension, technology, finance, and markets for women and youth.
- **Increase** participation by and consultation with women, youth and older people at local, regional and national levels to inform policy development, governance, disaster risk management, and conflict resolution.
- **Improve** research-based understanding of gender- and age-differentiated impacts and vulnerability to climate change.
- **Integrate** this understanding into regional and national policy frameworks and establish institutional, governance and financing measures for implementation.

(Röhr, 2007). To achieve this, a better understanding is required of the differential circumstances and vulnerabilities of men and women, children and youth, and how their important role in adaptation work can be maximised.

Why are women, children and older people so vulnerable in southern Africa?

The differential roles, duties and responsibilities assigned to women and men vary widely in detail across southern Africa, depending on sociocultural systems and norms. While women are mainly concerned with family feeding, health care and care of children and the elderly, they are also the main producers of staple crops, providing around 80% of household food needs (Brody *et al.*, 2008). Household water and wood fuel collection is also usually their responsibility. Men tend to provide for the family through wage labour and other forms of cash income.

Men and women experience stress differently when hardship strikes and family survival is threatened.

Driven by resource shortages and lack of livelihood opportunities, many men migrate in search of jobs. This increases the burden of family care borne by women and older people. A significant additional layer of strain on women and older people in the context of the already high burden of disease results from the HIV/AIDS pandemic. They care for the sick, are themselves sick and unable to work, or have to work harder when family members become too weak to work.

Older people are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and are repositories of indigenous knowledge and experience that could contribute to local and national adaptation. Despite these significant vulnerabilities and potential contributions, older people continue to be excluded from debates on climate change and disaster risk. (HelpAge, 2009).

Young females (ages 15–24) are clearly at greater risk of contracting HIV/AIDS (Figure 1), particularly in Swaziland, Lesotho and Botswana. Despite their multiple roles, responsibilities and expectations, most

Table 1: Key indicators of the status of women in SADC countries

KEY INDICATORS OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN SADC COUNTRIES ¹															
%women	Angola	Botswana	DRC	Lesotho	Madagascar	Malawi	Mauritius	Mozambique	Namibia	Seychelles	South Africa	Swaziland	Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe
GOVERNANCE															
Parliament	38.6	7.9	7.7	22.9	10.3	21.2	18.8	39.2	26.9	23.5	42.7	21.9	30.7	15.2	17.9
Local government	na	19.3	na	58	6	n/a	6.4	35.6	41.8	n/a	39.7	17.9	34.2	6.6	18.5
Cabinet	25.7	21.1	14.3	31.6	15.4	22.7	12	32.1	18.2	16.7	41.2	23.5	20	13	17.1
EDUCATION															
Primary school	46	49	45	51	49	50	49	47	51	51	49	48	50	49	49
Secondary school	44	52	36	56	48	44	52	44	54	51	52	50	44	45	48
Tertiary level	40	53	26	44	49	39	54	38	56	57	53	50	32	53	n/a
ECONOMY															
Economic decision-making	24	44	14	21	16	18	0	25	25	31	23	40	21	23	23
Income ²	na	38	na	28	na	41	27	41	28	na	31	28	na	34	37
SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH															
Using contraception	6	44	31	37	15	42	76	17	55	41	65	43	41	30	60
Births attended by skilled personnel	46	99	61	55	51	54	100	48	81	100	92	74	46	47	69
HIV AND AIDS															
Comprehensive knowledge on HIV and AIDS	7	40	15	26	19	42	68	43	65	67	27	52	45	34	44
Living with HIV as proportion of total	61	58	58	58	58	58	19	60	50	42	59	57	55	57	60
HIV positive pregnant women receiving PMTCT	14	95	4	71	1.8	14	68.3	28	58	99	83	69	68	60.9	42.6
MEDIA															
Overall	na	46	73	22	33	23	33	27	40	na	50	40	36	33	13
Board of directors	na	24	47	18	10	27	36	25	39	na	38	30	22	27	38
Senior management	na	39	50	8	30	26	22	35	35	na	35	29	30	33	10
Top management	na	30	56	18	13	19	25	17	42	na	25	33	21	11	13
Female staff in institutions of higher learning	na	37	18	67	44	29	79	28	47	na	50	33	28	29	25
Proportion of students in institutions of higher learning	na	54	77	73	71	50	82	26	60	na	64	37	60	61	57
News sources	na	20	19	32	23	20	19	14	20	31	20	19	21	14	16

¹ All figures refer to % of women in that category; the figures are derived from the tables in the report. Sources of all data are indicated in the relevant tables throughout the report. na= not available; n/a = not applicable. All numbers have been rounded to the nearest decimal point.

² The percentage of women's income is arrived at by adding male and female income for each country as determined by the ILO and then expressing female income as a percentage of the total.

Figures highlighted in red are those in which women constituted 50% or more of a particular indicator.

Source: Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance, 2010

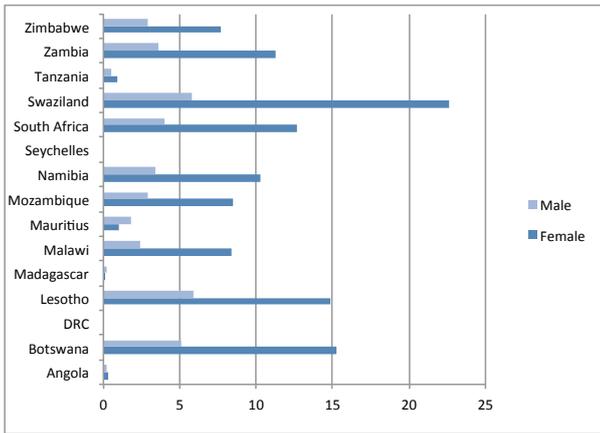


Figure 1. Prevalence of HIV (% ages 15–24). Data source: World Bank MDG database (online): <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/GMIS/gdmis.do?siteId=2&menuId=LNAV01HOME3>

women and older people do not possess significant decision-making powers outside of their homes (Table 1), especially in countries such as DRC and Zambia (Southern Africa Gender Protocol Alliance, 2010; Midgley and Antzoilatos, 2010). These realities leave women and older people more vulnerable to additional shocks, such as those induced by unpredictable and extreme weather. Coping with climate-related stresses requires a level of decision-making, supported by resources and information that most women simply do not have, despite their extensive indigenous knowledge and resourcefulness. When women cannot cope, children also suffer. (See Save the Children, 2008; UNICEF UK, 2008.) Driven by lack of access to sufficient nutritious food, child malnutrition remains stubbornly high in many countries (Figure 2). Food shortages are often linked to drought, and water stress (living with deficient water quantity and quality) substantially increases health risks to children. Water and sanitation-related diseases such as diarrhoea are also primary causes of child mortality, while climatic circumstances are often linked to outbreaks of fatal vector-borne diseases such as malaria. Access to maternal and other health care is inadequate and contributes to female mortality (progress on this MDG target is very slow). High numbers of orphans result. Orphans and homeless children are very vulnerable and climate-related shocks such as floods, droughts and food shortages impact disproportionately on them.

Despite numerous international agreements and national policies aimed at eliminating human rights abuses and lack of security, women and children continue to suffer from these ills. Climate disasters drive displacement and migration, and the separation of families leads to potential conflicts within families and communities. The gender- and age-based violence, sexual predation and exploitation to which women and children are frequently exposed is worsened in

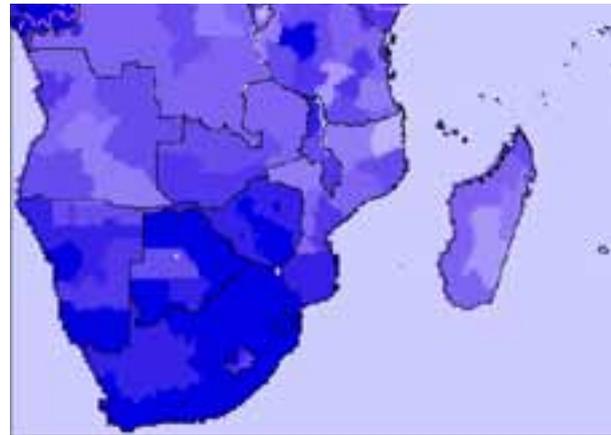


Figure 2. Malnourishment in children under 5 years old, calculated as percentage of children with weight-for-age z-scores that are more than two standard deviations below the median of the NCHS/CDC/WHO International Reference Population. Mapped by R.Davies for Midgley *et al.* (2011).

Data source: Global Sub-national Prevalence of Child Malnutrition dataset (CIESIN, 2005). Lighter blue areas represent areas of higher malnourishment.

these circumstances.

While constitutional and legal reforms are moving progressively towards gender equality (UNECA, 2011b), the actual situation of women is not necessarily improving. In many cases dual legal systems are in place, including both common law and customary (traditional) law, with the latter affording women fewer legal rights. For example, under some traditional laws, women lack property and inheritance rights and are unable to secure loans without male consent.

How will climate change affect women, children, youth and older people?

Climate change in southern Africa manifests itself in more variable rainfall (longer dry spells, more droughts, heavier rainfall and floods), seasonal shifts and higher temperatures. These conditions compound the difficulties experienced by the most vulnerable, least resilient members of society.

Climate change is projected to reduce staple crop yields (particularly maize) by about 30%, with rising year-on-year yield variability (Lobell *et al.*, 2008). With specific nutritional needs, women and children are always at greater risk and any climate-driven deterioration in food security will impact disproportionately on them. Local and international market conditions are likely to lead to persistent food price increases. Women are expected to feed their families, but are encumbered by some traditions and lack of resources. They lack access to: new fields; farmer extension support and infrastructure (Table 2; Midgley and Antzoilatos, 2010); bridging finance or compensation for crop losses, and the establishment

of food stores, market opportunities or alternative cash-generating employment.

“As a woman who is a head of my family, I go through a lot of stress when my crops fail. It means I have nothing to sell and nothing for the family to eat. I will have to think and work harder to find a way to feed the family and still get money to do other things” (Babugura, 2010).

Women and girls are primarily responsible for household water collection (Brody *et al.*, 2008). Increasing water scarcity and deteriorating quality, as projected by changing climatic conditions, increase the risk of exposure to diseases, to which children have a lower resistance. The risks of diarrhoea, cholera and malaria are increased by unsanitary conditions and, poor access to safe water especially in peri-urban informal settlements. In societies where women have low social, economic and political status they are more vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters – as a result of which more women than men suffer or are killed (Brody *et al.*, 2008). For all climate extremes and disasters, women are in the front lines of family protection, but often have less exposure to early warning systems, or are unable to respond to them effectively owing to physical or culturally imposed immobility and other impediments.

Climate-related stress and disasters bring all kinds of negative social impacts, and alongside compromised sanitation and health care systems and the displacement of families and communities, women, children and youth (particularly girls/young women) may be subjected to sexual harassment and abuse (WHO, 2009). According to Omolo (2011), human rights abuses and conflict could rise with increasing climate-related stress. It is therefore important that women, children and youth are involved in response and conflict resolution processes and given the opportunity to make a contribution to peacemaking and the protection of the vulnerable.

During the 2001 regional drought, maize production across Malawi fell to 1.4 million tonnes, significantly below the estimated need of 2 million tonnes per annum. “There were many family breakups, at these times there can be no structure and there is chaos. Everyone is doing their own thing and there are no [family] rules to regulate.” Focusing on the vulnerability of children, the chairman of the Chingale Community Based Organisation (CBO) in the Mlumbe Traditional Authority of Zomba District, stated that “in our area (comprising about 20 000 people) 69 children died during the drought”. (OneWorld, 2011).

Women form the majority of the informal employment sector (usually on small farms) and are more vulnerable than men to income shocks when climate stresses destroy crops and reduce employment. Migration, driven by climate shocks in combination with socioeconomic factors, appears to be increasing,

and is expected to rise further (Ribeiro and Chauque, 2010). Because social and family commitments frequently prevent women from migrating, they often do not have the capacity to improve their economic situation. Many resort to firewood/charcoal and beer sales to survive. Some, in worst case scenarios, resort to prostitution. Thus arises a vicious cycle of natural resource degradation and gender-based abuse.

Lack of alignment between gender/youth and climate change policies

International conventions around equality and human security include the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979), the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). The principles contained in them are being domesticated in Africa (Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, 2005) and in southern Africa, through the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2008) and the establishment of the SADC Gender Unit. At national level, all SADC Member States have enshrined equality and human rights in their constitutions (although not always in legal frameworks), and some countries, such as Zimbabwe, Angola and South Africa, have established ministries responsible for the needs of women and youth. Policies and strategies are following, albeit slowly.

Simultaneously, SADC Member States are participating in the climate change multinational processes under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and are developing strategies and policies for adaptation, and the financial and governance architecture required for implementation. For example, National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs) submitted to the UNFCCC by Least Developed Countries (LDCs), identify urgent priority adaptation activities. NAPA activities should benefit those people most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. However, few NAPAs have addressed the specific vulnerabilities and needs of women, or incorporated them as participants and beneficiaries. Notable exceptions include Malawi which has mainstreamed gender into its NAPA, and Mozambique which has developed a national Strategy and Action Plan for Gender, Environment and Climate Change (2010). Similarly, the SADC Gender Protocol does not explicitly address climate change: although progress towards achieving the objectives and targets of the protocol could be set back significantly by the impacts of climate change, the protocol could also strengthen climate resilience and these important linkages are not made (Gender Links, 2011).

The NAPA guidelines do not mention the rights of children or have specific provision for their needs. NAPAs from southern Africa are virtually silent on this



When men migrate in search of jobs, the burden of family care borne by women is increased.

aspect. Considering that 26% of the global number of malnourished children live in Africa, and more than 40% of the population of most sub-Saharan countries are below 15 years old, the lack of attention to child and youth vulnerability is cause for great concern. Equally, the vulnerabilities of older people are not addressed.

Gender- and age-responsive policies and plans to reduce vulnerability to climate risk

What should be done to better weave the cross-cutting issues of climate change and gender/age into developmental and sectoral policies and plans? (For more information see Gender CC – Women for Climate Justice, 2009.)

The body of evidence urgently needs to grow and be made available to policy makers. Misunderstanding of gender- and age-differentiated vulnerability constitutes a significant barrier to the mainstreaming of gender/age into climate change policy. Targeted research is needed, for example, into the following areas:

- men/women, children/youth and elderly in rural vs rapidly urbanising areas;
- the role of cultural context with its imposed roles, restrictions but also positive aspects;
- women and older people's rich indigenous knowledge; and
- linkages with poverty, education and health;
- research on how to effectively combine social protection measures to mitigate vulnerability and support adaptation to climate change in different contexts (OECD, 2009).

The strong regional focus on the MDGs could provide a common research platform for the above.

Other research needs include:

- the constitutional and legal framework as it

- pertains to gender equality in participating in climate change-related decisions and responses;
- greater economic participation and labour rights for women and youth;
- gender- and age-sensitive responses to climate change-related disasters and displacement; and
- human security and human rights issues.

Effort needs to be stepped up to better integrate gender/age into development, climate change and related sectoral policy frameworks

Regionally, these include the emerging climate change frameworks and strategies, the SADC Health Protocol, the SADC Regional Agricultural Policy, and the SADC Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Plan, and the SADC Gender Protocol amongst others. Nationally, it would also include the MDG and development strategies and plans, in addition to sectoral policies. It is crucial that the priorities and needs of women, children/youth and older people are addressed in revised NAPAs in the context of LDC and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MIC) development efforts. Good policy does not always translate into tangible benefits for communities. Therefore institutional, governance and financing measures must be put in place to ensure implementation within set timelines, supported by regulation and monitoring (UNECA, 2009). Local representative bodies involving men, women, youth and older people must be empowered to push the case for their communities, bridging the gap between overall policy and decision making and delivering to the on-the-ground needs that will support development.

Greater economic participation of women and youth must be supported

This can be achieved through policy which accelerates access to information, training and extension, technology, finance (particularly microfinance), transport and markets in both agricultural and non-agricultural employment. Supportive gender-sensitive trade and tax structures are important. Trade policies often have a strong redistributive effect: they can create opportunities for women's empowerment but can also disrupt markets in which women operate (Petrie, 2010).

Climate forecasts and disaster warnings must reach women and youth

When climate disasters strike it is essential that strategies and implementation systems ensure timely access for all to climate forecasts and early warning and response information, in a locally contextualised and gender-differentiated framework. Early warnings for rising food insecurity, disease outbreaks or flooding must be rolled out to both men and women, and include youth and active older people who can make major contributions to relief and recovery efforts.



The Regional Climate Change Programme Southern Africa (RCCP)

The RCCP aims to contribute to the achievement of southern Africa's climate change adaptation needs, socioeconomic development and poverty alleviation objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals.

By synthesising the relevant climate change science, developing strategic research and strengthening science-policy-governance-finance dialogue, the RCCP will build an evidence base for appropriate transboundary responses, strengthen the region's voice on international platforms and negotiations, and enhance its ability to equitably access the necessary finance for effective climate change adaptation.

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