

GENDER RIGHTS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND FOOD SECURITY IN AFRICA

Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu & Emoit Peter O. Imatari

Abstract

This paper delves into the impact of climate change on the livelihoods of the people in relation to their gender. This is because evidence shows that men and women adapt differently according to their traditional roles, but women have extra roles and burdens in addition to farming roles and other daily household chores. This paper in spite of delving into the impact of climate change on differentiated gender, it will focus on women. This is because women are the most vulnerable to the extremes of climate change because of dependence on natural resources for livelihood. That is, they depend on water, food, wood fuel for cooking and land in a unique way. This paper, therefore, inquired into the impact of climate change on different gender in the following areas: food production, land, access to water, social fabric, health, economic impacts, etc. It also did a brief critique of this experience and impact and proposed a way forward. The expository and critical methods of inquiry were employed for the purpose of this study.

Keywords: African, Climate Change, Food, Security, Africa, Kenya, Land, Water

Introduction

The question of climate change and its extreme effects is now a reality that is glaring to Africans. Focusing on Kenya, most of her citizens are vulnerable to food insecurity due to the effects of climate change that has hit hard on their dependent livelihood- agriculture that is rain fed. The impacts of climate change have hence led to erratic rainfall patterns and long drought that have changed the farming seasons. This has left the communities struggling to cope with the shocks that have taken toll on their livelihoods. This paper would study the impacts of climate change to the livelihoods of the Kenyan people in relation to their gender. This is because evidence shows that men and women adapt differently to the realities of climate change according to their traditional roles; the focus is more on women because of their extra roles and burdens in addition to farming roles and other daily household chores (Tatlonghari and Paris, 2013).

This paper in spite of delving into the impacts of climate change to differentiated gender, as already indicated, will be biased on women. This is

because the women are the most vulnerable to the extremes of climate change because of dependence on natural resources for their livelihoods. That is, they depend on water, food, wood fuel for cooking and land. However, this study would also relate in brief how men are affected by the impacts of climate change. This paper, therefore, will inquire into in brief at the impacts of climate change on different gender with particular interest in the following areas: food production, land, access to water, social fabric, health, economic impacts. This would be succeeded by a brief critique and recommendations of the ways forward.

A Thematic Approach to the Impact of Climate Change on Women

This section would relate the impact of climate change on women by focusing on particular areas of concern.

1. Food Production

Agriculture is the backbone of the livelihoods of most Kenyans as they depend mostly on it for food production. Research has shown that 80% of Kenya's GDP is from agriculture and 67% of employment to the population (Trocaire, 2014). In the same vein Kenya's 85% of the land is ASAL and is dependent on short rain season for agricultural production (GOK, 2013). With cc and variability food production is a challenge and most of the households are vulnerable to food insecurity.

This, therefore, means that the extreme effects of climate change have far reaching negative impacts on the already precarious food security situation for both the crop cultivators and pastoralists (Brian and Wakhungu, 2013). The most affected are women, for they play according to UNDP (2009) a pivotal role especially on NRM and the agricultural production and other reproductive activities. They go to the farm, cook and have to take care of their children as the men most of the time migrate to town in search of menial labour.

On the other hand the climate change is expected to increase agricultural pests and diseases particularly ticks and tick borne diseases (IPCC 2014, b). This, therefore, means that most of the households might lose their livestock that they depend very much on as assets. The tick and tick-borne diseases will specifically exacerbate the growing food insecurity especially in ASALs (Ifejika , 2010). In this way, the households in the ASAL and especially those that are headed by female will face difficulties as they always depend on the sale of livestock for survival during drought. When

this happens, men and boys would most likely migrate to urban areas. This would obviously have far reaching consequences on both the urban areas where they are migrating to and the rural areas where they would be migrating from.

2. Access to Land

Across Africa, women grow most of the food eaten but rarely have access or rights to lands in their own names. This is because access to land in most households remains a preserve of men. Statistics has it that women contribute 70% of food production in Africa; they contribute nearly half of all farm labour and 80-90% of all food processing, storage, transport as well as hoeing and weeding in Africa (Kimani 2018). Most of the food production requires land. Due to lack of access to land, women, therefore, suffer most from the impacts of climate change. With lack of access to land they will not produce food. And if the women do not produce food, it would be very difficult for them to feed their homes. This becomes even a greater challenge to female headed households and women who have HIV AIDs, having the challenge of caring for themselves and their families.

3. Access to Water

Research has found out that rising temperatures, associated increases in evaporation losses and changes in rainfall, together with increases in the frequency and magnitude of extreme events are expected to impact negatively on the water sources in eastern Africa (IPCC, 2014b). In ASALs (Arid and semi arid lands) water is a precious commodity. However, in the recent past, many and especially women have been forced to make long journeys in search of this commodity. This is because the rivers dry and they always depend on rainfall (Cinner, et al, 2012). Extreme climate change events have already changed the water cycle that has affected water availability and runoff and thus affect the recharge of rivers (Trocaire, 2014). Women, therefore, are most affected, they take long hours to fetch water and this affects their production. This, therefore, means that they have to trek long distances and take a lot of time in search of water and wood and less time will be used in the income generating activities, food production and preparation (ADB, 2011).

4. Social fabric

This refers to the unity in African families. During times of drought there is always rural- urban exodus. Men leave for the cities to search for ways to sustain their families. As they do this, women are left vulnerable and

sometimes they do not send money (remittance) to their women back at home. Hence making them dependent on food Aid (UK met office, 2014). The women are also left behind and this escalates the spread of HIV/AIDS which they get from their husbands or from elsewhere. The work for the women increases as they have to look after the children and the elderly. In agro-pastoral areas, there is always conflict over resources. The pastoralists move with their animals to far places in search of pasture and water and return to their villages afterwards (Huho, et al, 2011). This migration has led to death as communities fight for resources and increased school drop out with school going children migrating with their families in search of food, water and pasture for their livestock.

5. Health

Climate change also impacts on the health of different gender. The most affected are the women. They are always vulnerable to diseases (water borne). They also bear the brunt of taking care of their sick children suffering from the water borne diseases. Research shows that in East Africa, malaria epidemic are likely to increase due to rising temperatures (Trocaire, 2014). Children will suffer from malnutrition and hence stunted growth. The diseases suffered by children have very strong consequences on women who have the responsibility to care for them. This is even worse in cases where the mother or woman is sick as well. Combining care for the sick and provision for the sick's welfare is a burden that hits hard at women.

6. Economic Impacts

Climate change will reduce agricultural production and out puts linked to agriculture. This therefore means the extreme events of climate change will render many people poor as a result of impacts on agriculture is likely to increase. The women suffer most as they are the producers in the line of agriculture. As this happens, the market prices normally skyrocket and purchasing food becomes difficult for the women. In the areas where there are floods, macroeconomic costs and reductions in economic growth are always incurred as the houses and other household assets are lost during the flood times. Diseases like cholera and dysentery also affect women and children. In addition to this, other economic costs of climate change impacts include: health burdens, energy demand, infrastructure, water resource, agriculture and lose of ecosystem.

Conclusion

A cursory glance reveals that climate change and gender are both cross-cutting themes, they overlap within various sectors, including forests, water, energy, and urban development, and across mitigation, adaptation, and resilience efforts. This work has studied the relationship between climate change and gender, with special consideration for the women fold in relation to the concrete issues of access to land, disease, social fabric, economy, access to water, etc. However, it is obvious that gender issues on climate change are rarely addressed as debates focus on adaptation, mitigation and reduction of the Green House Gases emissions. Climate change affects gender differently. There is, therefore, a need for involvement of women in both the mitigation and adaptation strategies. This is so because, they are the ones affected and as such they have the knowledge and expertise on coping strategies. Unless this is given attention, the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals might be reversed as there is a very strong link between these goals in relation to women and climate change. Thus, an effort towards the protection of women in relation to the issues emerging from climate change is itself an effort towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recommendations

In view of the above problems as regards the consequences of climate change on women, the following recommendations have been put forward:

1. The impact of climate change on gender can be addressed by involving all (men and women) in all matters concerning climate change. This can be achieved by looking on roles and coping strategies.
2. There is need for the mainstreaming of climate change issues in all programs that aim to develop the capacity of the vulnerable as far as adaptation and mitigation to climate change impacts are concerned.
3. There is the need for state and non-state members and stakeholders to improve policy across sectors and strengthen implementation frameworks that realize gender equality and climate change commitments, in tandem.
4. Gender-responsive action on climate change is, among other things, crucial to meeting the SDGs. There is, therefore, the need for nations

to work towards the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. There is the need to identify and fill knowledge gaps on gender and climate change for many years.
6. There is need for the government to strengthen her partnership with Women Organizations and International partners who have interest in women related issues. Such partnerships would increase effectiveness of government's effort in this direction.
7. There is need for the training and building the capacity of women and women's organizations on the linkages between gender and climate change. This is done through a series of workshop trainings with local women identified as leaders in their communities, and also with women's advocacy organizations that support their rights and development, not only in the environmental sector but across sectors to increase their knowledge on these issues.
8. Women should be well represented in all the discussions and policy development and their capacity built on new agricultural technology.

References

- African Development Bank (ADB): Climate change, Gender and development in Africa. Vol 1. Issue 1 November, 2011.
- Brian, T. V., Wakhungu, J. (2013) Managing Climate Change Risks for Sustainable for sustainable food security in Kenya: Prospects and Options. *International Journal*
- Cinner, J. E. et al (2012) Vulnerability of coastal communities to key impacts of climate change n coral reef fisheries. *Global Environmental Change*, 22, 12-20.
- GoK, (2013) National Climate Change Adaptation Plan. Nairobi, Kenya: Ministry of Environment and mineral Resources.
- Huho, J. et al (2011) Living with Drought: the Case study of the Maasai Pastoralists of Northern Kenya.
- Ifejika, S. C. (2011), Promoting Gender Equality in responses to Climate Change: The Case of Kenya. Germany: Germany Development Institute

- IPCC (2014b), *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Part B. Regional Aspects*. [https://www.ipcc.ch › site › assets › uploads › 2018/03 › ar4-wg2-intro](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/ar4-wg2-intro)
- IPCC (2007), *Climate Change Adaptation and Vulnerability*. [https://www.ipcc.ch › site › assets › uploads › 2018/03 › ar4-wg2-intro](https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/03/ar4-wg2-intro)
- IUCN (2018). Gender and Climate Change. Retrieved November 2018 from <https://www.iucn.org/theme/gender/our-work/gender-and-climate-change>
- Kimani, M. (2018). *Women struggle to secure land rights: Hard fight for access and decision-making power*. African Renewal, United Nations.
- UK Met Office (2011), *Climate: Observations, Projections and Impacts, Kenya*.
- UNDP (2009), *Gender and Climate Change Impact and Adaptation: Workshop Highlights*
- Trocaire (2014), *Feeling the Heat: how Climate Change is driving extreme weather in the developing world*