



Climate change, migration and gender: seeking solutions

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Women's empowerment and gender equality are fundamental for effective, efficient and sustainable climate mitigation and adaptation. Despite being powerful stakeholders and change agents, women are often not included in climate policies that apply gender-neutral approaches, deepen inequality and hamper effective climate action. Climate change adaptation must increase gender-responsive funding and interventions that include mobility considerations.

Key findings

- Climate change exposes underlying discrimination and inequality. Gender inequalities and gendered roles mean that climate change disproportionately impacts women.
- Politically, socially and economically marginalised people are more vulnerable to climate impacts because they are less likely to access the financial and social assets needed to cope.
- Women and girls spend almost 200 million hours collecting water daily. In water-scarce situations, they must travel further. This restricts access to education, livelihoods and safety.
- Involving women in all decision-making phases
 from project design to implementation and
 evaluation leads to more informed, sustainable
 and equitable decisions.
- Women are responsible for 80% of food production in Sub-Saharan Africa but rarely own

- the land they work. This excludes them from scaling up farming or accessing credit or services.
- Behavioural restrictions, religious, cultural and gender norms and family responsibilities limit women's ability to make independent migration decisions.
- Gender-responsive climate finance in Africa from public funding has increased from an average of US\$80 million in 2010 to US\$1.6 billion in 2019. However, most still failed to consider gender.
- Climate funds' lack of universal gender accounting and reporting standards makes it difficult to accurately track and evaluate gender-responsive financing.
- Climate adaptation funding is insufficient and existing mechanisms do not explicitly reference climate-linked mobility.

Recommendations

Donors and international climate funds:

- Increase the quantity and quality of genderresponsive financing that includes mobility, flexible and innovative financial tools that are easier for women and vulnerable communities to access.
- Integrate gender responsiveness into all project design and implementation stages. These should include equity targets to reach marginalised gender groups.
- Improve access to green technologies, green livelihoods, green infrastructure and water infrastructure to help avert and minimise forced displacement of women.

Climate change decision makers:

Improve access to small-scale loans for women and other vulnerable groups.

- Examine the gender balance in decisionmaking bodies. Women should be sought as key stakeholders with different, enriching perspectives that will improve interventions', efficiency and sustainability.
- Understand women's empowerment as fundamental to ensuring effective and sustainable climate mitigation and adaptation. Gender-neutral approaches ignore important factors and deepen inequalities.
- Improve access to small-scale loans for women and other vulnerable groups.

Research organisations and national governments:

- Increase data and analysis on the gendered dimensions of climate change and mobility and their intersectional impacts on women.
- Improve gender considerations in national plans.

Introduction

Despite contributing only 3% of historic global carbon emissions, Africa bears a disproportionately high share of the impacts of climate change. According to the 2022 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, it has already experienced biodiversity loss, water shortages, reduced food production, loss of lives and reduced economic growth.¹ Climate change is increasing the frequency, intensity, duration and locations of slow- and sudden-onset impacts. Over the coming decades, these will pose some of the greatest threats to people, development and ecosystems.²

Gender inequality makes marginalised gender groups, including women and lesbians, gay people, bisexual people, transgender people, queer or questioning people, and others (LGBTQ+) more vulnerable to climate change. While climate change impacts all of humanity, it does not do so uniformly. The poorest and most marginalised groups bear a disproportionate cost. Climate change is a fragility amplifier. It intersects with socioeconomic and other stressors and exacerbates existing vulnerabilities.³

The impact of climate change is forcing 26 million people into poverty each year.⁴ Politically, socially and economically marginalised people are more vulnerable to climate impacts because they are less likely to have access to the financial and social assets needed to cope. These include land tenure, access to social and legal services, political participation, paid livelihoods, governance and infrastructure. More than 60% of all employed women in Sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture, yet they rarely own the land.⁵

Climate change is also emerging as a leading migration driver in Africa. It is disrupting rural and urban livelihoods and systems and increasingly contributing directly and indirectly to displacement and migration within countries and across borders. Migration and displacement will intensify in rural, urban and coastal systems and disrupt existing migration patterns and routes.

People's capacities to anticipate, cope and recover from climate hazards play a central role in determining migration and displacement. Climate change is more likely to trigger forced migration or forced immobility, where people are more vulnerable and less able to adapt.

Migration is often framed as a failure to adapt but is, in fact, an important adaptation strategy against climate impacts. Gender inequality reduces women's ability to choose voluntary migration as an empowering adaptation measure that improves their development prospects.

This policy brief applies the term climate-linked mobility. It includes three types of human mobility as identified by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC):⁷

- Displacement predominantly forced movements, usually short-term and within a country
- Migration voluntary movements that can be internal or across borders, short-term, temporary or permanent
- Planned relocation assisted movements, usually by a state, to protect people from risks or adverse impacts

More than 60% of all employed women in Sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture, yet they rarely own the land

The distinction between these mobility types is not always clear. Climate-linked mobility is a particularly complex topic that covers an extremely broad and wide-reaching range of multifaceted and interlinked factors.

This policy brief explores climate change, mobility and gender. While it's important to regard all genders, this report compares only men and women in statistics, and not other genders because of available data and analyses.

Climate change and gender, climate change and mobility, and gender and mobility are each under-studied and under-addressed in their own right. Combined, the intersectional impacts severely affect marginalised groups and reduce their abilities to adapt to climate change. While there is progress in including more gender and mobility considerations in climate change policies and practices, significantly more action is needed.

People of all genders are powerful stakeholders in developing and implementing climate change solutions – meaningful climate action cannot occur without considering gender equality. More action is needed to increase gendered data, involve more women in decision-making and project-design roles, and increase access to gendered finance that includes mobility considerations.

Gender and climate change

Climate change exposes underlying discrimination and unequal access to resources. Climate change impacts disproportionately affect women due primarily to existing gender inequalities and gender roles and responsibilities.⁸ In a negative feedback loop, climate change impacts, in turn, aggravate gender inequalities and increase the gender gap.⁹

Gender inequality causes more women to be poorer, have less education and more health risks. ¹⁰ In low-income countries, labour markets are heavily gender-segregated and women are employed primarily in low-paying and insecure occupations. ¹¹ Women carry a disproportionate unpaid work burden in households and communities and rely more on natural resources and climate-sensitive sectors for their livelihoods.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women are responsible for 80% of food production. ¹² Despite playing essential roles in agriculture, aquaculture and other livelihood activities, women and girls often have less access to resilience measures such as land tenure, ownership of productive assets, social protections and technology. ¹³

Women carry a disproportionate unpaid work burden in households and communities and rely more on natural resources and climate-sensitive sectors

Climate change impacts increase household burdens, threaten economic opportunities and increase health risks for women.¹⁴ They have to travel further or work harder to find firewood, water or plant crops, which can often expose them to risks, including violent attacks. Time spent on these activities reduces time spent on adaptation strategies.

In disaster situations, women have higher mortality, injury and illness rates due to their limited and reduced mobility and their role in taking care of and looking after the health of family members.¹⁵

Water scarcity is a primary factor driving climate mobility and immobility in Africa. Water scarcity is defined as the physical or economic lack of water resources to meet the demands of a population. Physical water scarcity occurs where natural water resources are over-exploited, and economic water scarcity occurs where there is insufficient investment in and maintenance of water distribution systems and infrastructures.

Approximately 250 million Africans live under extreme water stress.¹⁷ These numbers are projected to increase with population growth combined with rising temperatures, longer and recurrent drought periods and diminished river flows.¹⁸ Water deficits account for 10% of the global rise in migration. Water scarcity pushes more migration and displacement than flooding – droughts have five times more impact on migration than flooding.¹⁹



Water scarcity disproportionately affects women because water access forms a core element of daily activities and household labour, including cooking, washing, and caring for the ill, children and elderly.

Globally, women and girls spend almost 200 million hours collecting water daily.²⁰ In water-scarce situations, girls and women have to travel further to find it. This restricts their access to education, livelihoods and safety and exposes them to increased risks of violence. Women and girls are sometimes exposed to sexual violence while walking long distances to fetch water.²¹ Travelling longer distances increases exposure to contamination – even water from safe sources stored appropriately is at heightened risk of health threats.

In disaster situations, women have higher mortality and injury rates due to their limited mobility and role in taking care of family members

Gender and mobility

Migration can be an effective adaptation measure and empower women towards economic and skills development. It can increase autonomy, mastery, remittances and social standing and disrupt gender norms and inequality.²²

Migration offers options for women and families facing climate threats. It enables people who rely on climate-vulnerable livelihoods to diversify their income and spread the risk in households by seeking alternatives. Financial and social remittances from family members can help women adapt to climate impacts.

Women often migrate to areas with more gender equality. Migration often leads to improved autonomy and new skills for migrants for a growing number of women.²³ More women are making migration decisions and migrating independently for work, education or to meet the needs of their families. The number of female international migrants in Africa increased from 6.2 million in 1990 to 10.5 million in 2020.²⁴

Migration is a gendered process. Gender is a central factor that shapes the cause and consequences at each migration phase – pre-departure, transit, arrival, stay and return.

Because of gender inequalities, women have less autonomy in making decisions, including migration choices.²⁵ Behavioural restrictions, gender norms and family responsibilities limit their ability to make independent decisions. They also have less access to resources, information and opportunities than men to help inform and enable these decisions.²⁶

While migration is a critical adaptation strategy that often improves gender equality, it can also deepen inequalities and expose women to new risks and vulnerabilities. Women have greater exposure to multiple dangers along the



FEMALE MIGRANTS IN AFRICA ROSE FROM 6.2 MILLION TO 10.5 MILLION BETWEEN 1990 AND 2020 migration pathways, particularly in forced displacement situations.²⁷ They are at risk of abuse, discrimination, exploitation, gender-based violence and trafficking, and carry more family and reproductive burdens.

At the destination, they often face gender discrimination and barriers. They are less likely to be employed and more likely to experience disparate 'deskilling' and are forced to work in roles that are below their skills and training. Women migrants are concentrated in unregulated, unskilled, and undervalued sectors. ²⁸

Gender factors into remittance patterns. This includes the amounts, frequency, means, recipients and use of remittances. Evidence shows that women send a larger proportion of their income more regularly and over longer periods than their male counterparts.²⁹

Women have developed innovative solutions such as drought-resistant seeds and better soil management

Rapid urbanisation will be the most significant climate-linked mobility outcome. The World Bank's Groundswell Part I report predicts that two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities by 2050.³⁰ This is occurring in a context where Sub-Saharan Africa is already the fastest urbanising region in the world. From 1960 to 2018 the percentage of people living in urban areas in Africa grew from 15% to 43% and is expected to pass 50% by 2030.³¹

Urbanisation can positively shift women's empowerment and gender equality. It provides greater access to economic, social and political opportunities and a broader range of services. However, women also face added risks and unequal access to work, housing, health and education compared to men in cities.³²

In family situations, men are most likely to migrate to seek income opportunities and leave women behind carrying household and family burdens.³³ Women are at a higher risk of involuntary immobility, being left behind and trapped while caring for households and children.

The most vulnerable people are at the highest risk of involuntary immobility. Poor families and individuals who depend on agriculture, aquaculture or other vulnerable

livelihoods face diminishing returns from their crops. This erodes the human, financial and social capital required to migrate, making them less mobile.³⁴ As the impacts worsen over time, poor families' resources are likely to deplete even further. This dangerous cycle leaves people more exposed to hazards, with fewer adaptation options and eroded migration capabilities. They get left behind in the 'poverty trap'.³⁵

The least mobile populations in a community are often the most vulnerable. Young, able-bodied working-age people are the first to move. Due to financial and social limitations, vulnerable populations, including the elderly, low-skilled women, children, and people with disabilities and trapped, live in communities with fewer people available to help care for them.

Climate action: gender and mobility

Because they bear the brunt of climate impacts, women and girls are often at the forefront of developing effective adaptation strategies. They contribute different capabilities and responses to men based on their knowledge and experiences. Women across Africa play a central role in community resilience building and tend to extend their networks and resources to larger groups to benefit. Women have emerged as leaders in developing innovative solutions such as drought-resistant seeds and better soil management, or leading reforestation and restoration efforts. They women across Africa play a central role in community resilience building and tend to extend their networks and resources to larger groups to benefit. Women have emerged as leaders in developing innovative solutions such as drought-resistant seeds and better soil management, or leading reforestation and restoration efforts.

Despite accounting for 80% of food production in Sub-Saharan Africa, women rarely own the land where they work.³⁸ They typically access the land through male relatives and are labelled as labourers. Land rights significantly reduce the risk of displacement and increase crop productivity. Landowners are more likely to invest in improvement and have better access to credit.

Lack of land tenure often excludes women from scaling up their farming production, and accessing the credit or services needed to invest in technology or resilience measures. A lack of gender-responsive policies and finance exacerbates gender inequalities.

There is growing recognition that gender equality and gender-responsive funding are necessary for effective, efficient and sustainable climate action. A growing body of research demonstrates that gender equality plays a pivotal role in conflict, development and governance.

Research shows that peacekeeping projects that involve women are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years.³⁹ Involving women in all decision-making phases – from project design to implementation and evaluation – leads to more informed, sustainable and equitable decisions.

Despite being disproportionately affected by the issues, women remain underrepresented or excluded throughout the decision-making process. Since 2010, the UNFCCC has acknowledged the need for gender balance in governing bodies. The 2015 Paris Agreement mandates gender-responsive adaptation and capacity-building efforts. Despite this recognition, progress has been slow. As of 2020, less than half of the 15 constituted bodies under the UNFCCC had demonstrated any progress towards integrating a gender perspective in the processes and work.⁴⁰

A 2022 report by Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung found that:41

Overall, faster progress on gender integration efforts in the Convention and its work remain hampered by a lack of dedicated funding and sufficient gender expertise throughout the UNFCCC Secretariat and Convention bodies as well as slow behavioural change among Parties.

Research shows that peacekeeping projects that involve women are 35% more likely to last at least 15 years

Gender dimensions to date have also been limited to a binary focus that considers only men and women and does not account for non-binary gender identities or the many ways that gender intersects with other factors such as race, ability, age or religion.⁴²

A cornerstone of the 2015 Paris Agreement was that rich countries – which have attained their wealth from exploiting natural resources and fossil fuels – should direct funds to less-developed countries to help them mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. Many people in these countries resent wealthy countries for trying to prescribe what they do with their resources.

Despite these promises, Africa has some of the lowest per capita climate inflows in the world.⁴³ Only 3% reaches Sub-Saharan Africa annually.⁴⁴ According to the African Development Bank, Africa is owed almost 10 times the global climate finance it received between 2016 and 2019.⁴⁵ Finance flows targeting adaptation in Africa are billions of \$US less than the lowest adaptation cost estimates.

Recognition of the importance of gender-responsive climate finance has grown significantly over the past decade.⁴⁶ Most multilateral climate funds started out as gender-blind but now have gender policies and plans, and gender-responsive climate finance that targets gender inequalities is growing.

80%

OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA'S
FOOD IS PRODUCED BY
WOMEN, YET THEY HAVE
LIMITED ACCESS TO LAND
TENURE AND OWNERSHIP

Climate change Adaptation and Climate change Total climate adaptation mitigation mitigation change action \$ billions 10 2010 2012 2016 2014 2018 2019 Note: Gender-responsive climate finance refers to climate finance that targets gender equality as a principal or secondary, though significant, policy objective of climate finance activities. Data are in constant 2019 US dollars. Source: Staff calculations based on OECD (n.d.a).

Chart 1: Growth and breakdown in gender-responsive finance between 2010 and 2019

Source: African Development Bank, African Economic Outlook (2022)⁴⁸

However, the quantity and quality of gender-responsive climate finance directed towards Africa is insufficient.

Gender-responsive climate finance that targets gender inequalities in Africa has increased from an average of US\$80 million in 2010 to US\$1.6 billion in 2019.⁴⁷ Despite this increase, more than three-quarters of total climate development finance in Africa throughout the decade failed to consider gender.

In addition to a lack of gender-responsive funding, existing financial tools are not ideal for marginalised groups needing to implement climate adaptation measures. Most climate financing (74%) is provided as loans and other non-grant instruments that must be repaid, including for least-developed countries. Grants, concessional finance, insurance and forecast-based financing are more appropriate for fast and

flexible disbursement and are inaccessible to many vulnerable groups.

There is also a lack of uniform reporting and tracking mechanisms for the gender-responsiveness of climate funds. Climate funds do not have universal accounting and reporting standards, particularly concerning gender. This makes it extremely difficult to track and evaluate gender-responsive financing accurately. The existing markers rely overly on self-reporting instead of uniform criteria, lack transparency, and allow different interpretations and over-reporting of what counts towards addressing gender equality.⁵⁰

A 2020 Oxfam report that looked at Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development funding marked for gender equality found that only one-third identified gender equality as an important but not

principal objective, and only 1.5% identified gender as a principal objective. It further found that it was equally or more difficult to determine how much was being spent at the local level because tracking for this was even worse than for gender. With the data they could access, they concluded that far too little finance was spent at the local level.⁵¹ Community engagement with local and civil society leaders has proved helpful in improving the tracking and effectiveness of climate finance.⁵²

Climate adaptation funding targeted at mobility interventions is also needed. Existing finance mechanisms and agreements do not explicitly reference climate-linked mobility.⁵³

According to the International Organization for Migration, environment and climate change mobility solutions fall under broad mobility management that seeks to avert, minimise and address displacement:⁵⁴

- Avert adopt measures to reduce or avoid the risk of forced or unmanaged migration. These include disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and mitigation, resilience building and community stabilisation.
- Minimise measures to facilitate safe, orderly and regular migration as an adaption strategy and reduce the number of forced displacements.
 Measures may include: building alternative livelihoods, ensuring migration pathways or planned relocations as a last resort.
- Address prepare for and respond to displacement when it happens.
 Measures include ensuring assistance and protection for people on the move, durable solutions, contingency planning and humanitarian relief aid.

As food producers, caregivers, community leaders and stewards of natural resources, women are already innovating and adapting to climate impacts

Funding to avert, minimise and address climate mobility is severely insufficient. ⁵⁵ Climate-linked mobility is a new programme area, even compared to climate adaptation financing, which is not even two decades old. To date, most financing has come through migration allotments from humanitarian, development and home affairs types of funding from various donors, states, international and non-governmental organisations and the private sector. ⁵⁶

Vulnerability is not factored in when determining where funds have historically gone. ⁵⁷ Countries where donors already have a presence, strong institutional capacities, and perceived ability to implement projects successfully tend to receive the most funding. ⁵⁸ Investors seek environments that are sufficiently predictable to measure and generate a return on investment. They are also reluctant to invest in countries with poor policy, institutional and market environments.



BETWEEN 2010 - 2019 THREE-QUARTERS OF AFRICA'S TOTAL CLIMATE FINANCING FAILED TO ACCOUNT FOR GENDER Even when climate-vulnerable countries receive adequate adaptation funding, it doesn't necessarily reach vulnerable communities. Proportionately less funding goes to the areas of highest need, with the poorest communities receiving the least.⁵⁹

Conclusion

To be effective, efficient and sustainable, gender equality must be at the forefront of climate action. Failure to adequately include gender equality in policies, interventions and financing will prove detrimental to urgently needed climate mitigation and adaptation efforts. Women and men experience climate change impacts differently. Gender-neutral approaches ignore and exacerbate gender inequalities and undercut women's contributions as powerful stakeholders and change agents.

As food producers, family caregivers, community leaders and stewards of natural resources, women are already innovating and adapting to make themselves, their families and communities more resilient to climate impacts.

Some of these measures include mobility solutions. Migration has inherent development properties. Orderly, voluntary and well-managed migration is an important adaptation strategy for women and vulnerable groups with positive development outcomes. It can empower women and communities to enhance coping skills, better respond to climate-related impacts, and reduce inequalities. Women should be active agents in developing mobility solutions that build on their capabilities, knowledge and perspectives.

Mobility solutions should harness the development potential of migration, protect women and children while they move and provide them with access to skills and reduce their exposure to climate risks. In cases where women do not want to move, adaptation projects should protect them and ensure their circumstances are not exposing them to added vulnerabilities.

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