



Building the Foundation for a National Approach to Climate  
Change Adaptation in Namibia



# Africa Adaptation Project

## Namibia

### CCA Ambassadors Themes

#### 11: Gender and climate change





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## 1. Introduction

Although climate change will affect everybody, its impacts will be distributed differently among regions, generations, income groups, occupations and genders. The hardest hit will be the rural poor, especially poor women. In this text, we will learn why this is the case and what we can do about it.

This text provides basic information on:

1. [Rationale: Why are women and men affected differently?](#)
2. [Some of the potential threats of climate change to women](#)
3. [A Namibian case study on gender and climate change](#)
4. [What does this mean for policy making and programme activities?](#)
5. [Relevant further reading](#)

## 2. Rationale: Why are women and men affected differently?

Climate change will affect men and women differently because men and women play different roles and have different responsibilities in our societies. These roles and responsibilities as society sees them are known as *gender*.

Unlike a person's *sex*, gender defined specifically by biological and physiological characteristics. Instead, gender is constructed through social interaction in the course of generations. Each society or culture has come to define what is expected or appropriate for men and women: How should a man/woman behave? What should a man/woman look like? Which activities belong to men, which to women, and which activities are appropriate for both? What is the woman's responsibility in a household and what is the man's responsibility? Who holds the power over various decisions that must be taken in a household? Who holds the power over resources? Who inherits who or what? Gender roles and equality change over time, especially as new influences come along, but in general they take a very long time to be formed, and changed.

Because gender roles have for long influenced who does what, where and how – and more importantly, who has the power to make decisions and access resources – they have made a strong impact on the economic standing of men and women and the power relationship between the two. They also affect the possibilities which are open to men and women, thereby further reinforcing the status quo.



Each one of us can easily name several gender differences in our own society. Some of them have a bearing to how women and men relate to the environment to make their living. If there are gender differences in this relationship, it logically follows that phenomena such as climate change will have different impacts on men and women. These are also known as *gender differentiated impacts* or *gendered impacts*.

It is extremely important to understand gender differentiated impacts in order to be able to formulate an effective and sustainable response to climate change. However, this is a relatively new area of research and action in global and local climate change work.

### 3. Some of the potential threats of climate change to women

Gender roles and relationships do differ from society to society, and generally women are more affected by climate change due to their roles in society. However, it is possible to point out some similarities in societies that are similar to ours. Some of the gender roles that see women more affected than men by climate change include:

- Women have limited access to resources and decision-making processes;
- Women's mobility is limited;
- Women carry the major responsibility for household water supply and energy for cooking and heating, as well as for food security.

The table below illustrates how some of the predicted climate change threats would affect women and their defined roles in Namibia.

Predicted climate change threats	Gender implications
Agricultural productivity decline (both for survival and commercial use)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women who rely on domestic species of plants and animals for food security of their families will have less food.</li> </ul>
Greater food security risks.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction, mobilization, or extinction of marine species used by women for household consumption or for productive activities.</li> </ul>
Increasing difficulty accessing safe water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in women's workload due to decline in availability of water and other resources.</li> </ul>
More time for agricultural production and subsistence activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally, girls and women are responsible for the collection of water and fire wood. If the time they invest in these tasks increases, their capacity to e.g. attend school is at risk.</li> </ul>
Forced relocation due to environmental changes (environmental migration)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Migration of populations, given extreme changes and disasters, could interrupt and limit the opportunities for education and an increased work load for woman and children due to lack of man power as result of migration.</li> </ul>



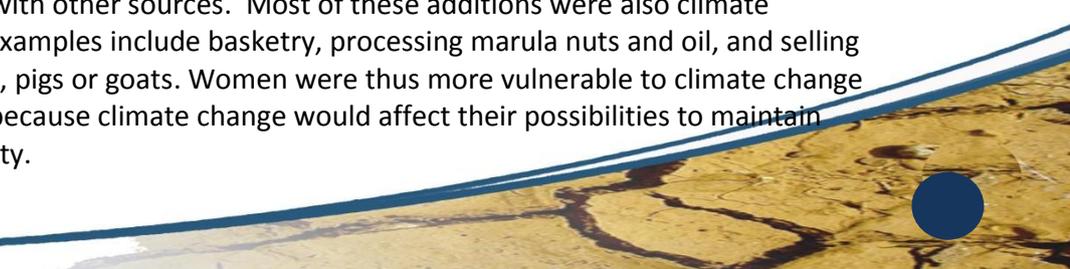
Quantity and quality of natural resources changes, reducing productivity of ecosystems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adaptation measures related to anti-desertification are often labour-intensive and women often face increasing expectations to contribute unpaid household and community labour to soil and water conservation efforts.</li> </ul>
Species extinction, changes in species composition, disruption of symbiotic relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Without secure access to and control over natural resources (land, water, livestock, trees), women are less likely to be able to cope with climate change impacts.</li> </ul>
Permanent changes in temperature, increased likelihood of floods, droughts and rising sea levels.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Decrease in forest resources used by women.</li> <li>Women often rely on a range of crop varieties (agro-biodiversity) to accommodate climatic variability, but permanent temperature change will reduce agro-biodiversity and traditional medicine options.</li> </ul>
Aggravated risk of contracting serious illnesses from environmental effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase in women's workload due to their role as primary carers in the family</li> <li>Loss of medicinal plants used by women.</li> </ul>

#### 4. Namibian case study on gender and climate change

Research focusing on the gender aspect of climate change is a relatively new area. In Namibia, one such study was completed in 2010. This study, conducted by Margaret Angula and commissioned by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, is a case study focusing on two rural settlements, Epyeshona village in the Oshana Region and Daures constituency in the Erongo Region. Using gender analysis as her method, Angula concentrated on the collection and examination of information about the different roles of women and men, the relationship and inequalities between them, their different experiences, capacities, needs, constraints, rights issues and priorities.

Some of the key findings of the study include:

- Gender differentiated impacts of climate change can be expected. However, these will vary from community to community, depending on the environmental setting.
  - In the Epyeshona community, which practices subsistence crop and livestock farming as the main source of livelihood, the women interacted with the environment more than the men. They were expected to maintain food security in the household, and they usually did this by complementing the main source of livelihood with other sources. Most of these additions were also climate sensitive. Examples include basketry, processing marula nuts and oil, and selling of chickens, pigs or goats. Women were thus more vulnerable to climate change than men because climate change would affect their possibilities to maintain food security.





- In Daures, where livestock rearing is the main source of livelihood, the men interacted with the environment more than the women did. Food security was in their hands, while the women were responsible for other household chores. In an environmental setting like this, women would still be negatively affected by climate change as most of the household chores, such as collection of water and fuel wood, are negatively impacted by climate change.
- In general men are better prepared for climatic events than women due to their better socio-economic situation. Women lack technical skills to participate in formal employment and are therefore engaging in informal economic activities. Income-generating capacities between men and women also differ.
- Changes in gender relations might be taking place in rural areas due to equal education and employment opportunities awarded to women and men. Women in the age group of 30-59 displayed signs of women's empowerment to participate in decision-making at local-level organisations, such as various committees, and economic activities.

## 5. What does this mean for policy making and programme activities?

There are important gender perspectives in all aspects of climate change. These must be taken into consideration if we want to develop an effective and sustainable response to climate change. In the following section, we take a brief look at how gender perspectives could be taken into consideration in the two main components of climate change response, *mitigation* and *adaptation*.

*Mitigation* refers to interventions that either reduce the sources of greenhouse gases or remove greenhouse gases from the atmosphere. When developing mitigation policies and, we must take into account the gender inequalities, which can be found in access to resources, such as capital, natural resources, credit, extension services, information and technology.

*Adaptation* refers to interventions that aim to help people and environment to adjust to and cope with the impacts of climate change. When developing adaptation activities, we must systematically and effectively address gender-specific impacts of climate change in several key areas. These areas are: energy, water, food security, agriculture and fisheries, biodiversity and ecosystem services, health, industry, human settlements, disaster management, and conflict and security.

Some concrete actions with regard to both mitigation and adaptation include:

1) **Collect more data:** We need more gender disaggregated data and research to form a solid base for our climate change response. This is one of the main recommendations in Angola's study introduced above.

2) **Involve women as agents of change:** Women are not only victims of climate change, but also effective agents of change in relation to both mitigation and adaptation. Women have a strong body of knowledge and expertise that can be used in climate change mitigation, disaster reduction and adaptation strategies. Women's responsibilities in households and communities as stewards of



natural resources has positioned them well for livelihood strategies adapted to changing environments.

3) **Empower women in policy-making processes:** Women are still vulnerable. For instance they are not typically empowered in policy making processes. In turn, this has impacts on their operational capacity and ability. We need to find ways in which adaptation activities could target and build on women's ability to adapt, and at the same time strengthen their resilience to climate change.

## 6. Relevant further reading

### Studies

- **DFID (2008): *Gender and climate change: mapping the linkages. A scoping study on knowledge and gaps*:** The paper pulls together available information resources to inform and strengthen future research on, and interventions into, gender and climate change and also it established the linkages between climate change and gender:  
[http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/Climate\\_Change\\_DFID.pdf](http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/Climate_Change_DFID.pdf)
- **FAO (2007): *People-centered climate change adaptation: Integrating gender issues*:** This two page briefing paper provides an overview of concepts and practical guidelines for implementing gender sensitive responses to climate change in the context of the livelihoods approach: [http://www.preventionweb.net/files/2706\\_Brochure.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/2706_Brochure.pdf)
- **Heinrich Boll Stiftung (2010): *Namibian case study on: Gender and climate change*:** Based on gender analysis, the study covers two villages in different climate settings. Available in full and as a summary: <http://www.boell.org.za/web/107-526.html>

### Websites

- **ELDIS: Climate Change and Gender:** The website provides more resources on climate change and gender: <http://www.eldis.org/go/topics/resource-guides/climate-change/gender/gender-and-climate-change>
- **The Global Development Research Centre (GDRC):** The website provides information related to gender and environment: <http://www.gdrc.org/gender/gender-envi.html>
- **The United Nations Environment Programme:** The website provides information related to gender and climate change: [http://www.unep.org/gender\\_env/](http://www.unep.org/gender_env/)



