

POLICY BRIEF 2

ECOFEMINIST APPROACH

Why Government of Uganda needs to urgently adopt the ecofeminist approach to arrest the looming climate crisis

“Women are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts such as droughts, floods, and other extreme weather events. They also have a critical role in combatting climate change, but need to be better represented at all levels of decision making. Empowering women will be a significant factor in meeting the climate challenge.”

Former UNFCCC Executive Secretary, Christina Figueres

Emergence of climate change

Climate change is already a reality and it is occurring earlier and faster than expected. In response, Government of Uganda (GoU) has put in place various policies, plans, strategies and other interventions to combat it. Unfortunately, the approaches used to design and deliver interventions have not achieved much of their stated goals. A recent study by the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) and three Coalition partners, demonstrates that there is a more appropriate approach that addresses the climate crisis – ecofeminism. The ecofeminist approach is premised on the reality that Climate change disproportionately affects the most vulnerable social groups, more especially the women and girls. Accordingly, women and girls are not merely victims of climate change: they are also the most important and strategic agents of change and possess solutions to the looming climate crisis.

Climate change situation in Uganda

In Uganda, about 85% of women depend on the use of land for livelihood and food

production for their families.¹ 75% of women are smallholder farmers dependent on rain-fed agriculture and climate-sensitive resources. Given the gendered nature of poverty², and the various disparities caused by systemic power imbalances, climate change effects are bound to continue causing a bigger crisis for women. Changes in temperature, several floods, droughts and variations in the weather continue to increase women's economic vulnerability by causing delays or significantly declining agricultural produce, and increasing difficulties to access water and food, among others.

A study was conducted to strengthen the knowledge and evidence-base for and with affected women in Uganda to be used by stakeholders to enhance the women movement to advance the case of climate justice. It focused on the current context and analysis of the existence and impact of climate change in Uganda connected to women's emergence, action and achievements of the eco-feminist movement. It also, touched on the gender sensitive mitigation plans for

¹ [Impact of Extractives on Land, Environment and Women's rights in East Africa, Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action](#), June 2018.

² [Understanding poverty from a gender perspective](#), Women and Development Unit, June 2004.

women; an exploration of livelihood alternatives and consideration of opportunities for the eco-feminist movement to influence Ugandan government policy and practice.

The ecofeminist approach:

A feminist approach to climate justice

Bringing feminist lenses to the interrogation of the intersection of gender justice and environmental justice is necessary to underscore the differences in access to the benefits of extractives. Feminist Theory creates knowledge on women's bodies and subverts historically male epistemological standpoints on this (Kisitu and Siwila, 2016). Classical philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, whose writings remain influential in academia today, gave women inferior statuses while positioning male bodies as depositories of superior souls, which were supposedly better positioned for leadership, state protection, and knowledge (Buchan, 1999). Thus, women have long been excluded from leadership and decision making.

Ecofeminism embraces intersectional analysis to understand the diverse experiences of women — including those who have experienced sexism, classism, racism, ageism, ableism, and homophobia. Without an intersectional analysis, we are blind to the multiple exclusions that most women experience. Intersectional analysis enables ecofeminists to explore the varied and complex ways that environmental devastation impacts women.

Findings:

a) Women and girls are the most vulnerable social group to impacts of climate change:

Broadly speaking, climate change compounds the challenges for those already marginalized and dealing with several inequalities - inequalities bred by race and ethnicity, class, disability, gender and sexuality exist on a spectrum and intersect, influencing access to power and resources.

Climate change disproportionately affects the most vulnerable social groups, i.e., women and girls in several ways:

- a) The roles and tasks that they are assigned (taking care of the land, carrying water, caring for children and the family);
- b) The discrimination (restricted access to resources and to education);
- c) The risk of violence and sexual assaults also increase for women and girls during displacement caused by extreme climate events;
- d) Disastrous consequences on women and girls' health (food insecurity, exhaustion, heat, waterborne diseases);
- e) Women and girls' safety, their rights, and their economic situation (lost harvest, higher food costs, forced to buy water, less time for a job).
- f) Generally, women already marginalized by historical and current inequalities remain disproportionately affected by both rapid and slow-onset climate changes.

b) Climate change is a structural issue:

- a) Climate change is not a matter of individual behaviour or natural occurrence but is deeply rooted in systemic and interconnected social, economic, and political structures;
- b) Climate change is a result of the way societies are organised, how economies

function, and the distribution of power and resources;

- c) The climate crisis is not as a single-issue crisis, but rather the intersection of many different mechanisms;
- d) The climate crisis simply exacerbates existing inequalities and those already marginalized end up bearing the biggest brunt of it;
- e) In Uganda, majority of women continue to be excluded from political, policy and decision-making roles; and in instances where they are included, systemic hinderances related to power and control continue to prevail -this leads to lack of voices for the climate change most impacted communities;
- f) Various studies¹⁵ point to the direct link between the under-representation of women in decision- making bodies and the lack of knowledge of greenhouse gas reduction mechanisms.
- g) Presently, decisions and resolutions made and passed, do not take into account the communities' different contexts, lifestyles and challenges - these decisions do not create environmentally sustainable solutions for all;
- h) The current climate crisis is also strongly connected to the current economic systems of extractives, over consumption and emphasis on economic growth continue to play a significant role in driving climate change.;
- i) These cultural norms and values that prioritise consumerism, individualism, and exploitation of nature contribute to unsustainable behaviours and resource depletion.

C) Women are the most effective agents of change:

The environmental knowledge of indigenous

women in particular has been undervalued and could make a significant contribution to climate change research and policies.

- Women are not merely victims of climate change: they are also important agents of change;
- Women, and indigenous women in particular, often live in synergy with their environment, have a thorough knowledge of it, and play a leading role in defending, preserving and protecting it.
- Indigenous peoples have in-depth knowledge of the territories that have been the source of their livelihoods for generations.
- Indigenous women who use forest area for subsistence, for example, generate specific and valuable knowledge through their daily practices as seed, fuel, and food collectors.
- Indigenous knowledge is on a much finer spatial and temporal scale than science, and includes understandings of how to cope with and adapt to environmental variability and trends.
- A women's movement in Uganda though still nascent has been able to speak up and resist the unsustainable activities that take place on their land without the free and prior informed consent of the communities.
- The movement emphasizes addressing the structural constraints to mitigating and undoing the long-term effects of climate change - addressing cultural paradigms to foster more sustainable ways of living.

Implications of not adopting the ecofeminist approach:

- a) If the structural constraints are not addressed and women remain disproportionately responsible for tasks like water and food collection, child rearing, etc., it will increase the risks of gender-based violence and heightened insecurity during displacement or when accessing relief resources. continued to exacerbate violence in homes, with women being made to carry and face the consequences of poor crop yields, sick and malnourished children, etc. - as if they were their own creations
- b) If the current social and other dynamics that persist, and women's ability to own and control land in Uganda remains constrained, and yet land remains a core asset tied to power, access, and ability to self-sustain, women's labour and contributions to the sector continues to be the most notable, it will strain food provision, access to sustainable and clean energy and potable water and increased agricultural workload - whose lasting effects are food scarcity and malnutrition.
- c) If climate change is not addressed, the rising temperatures and unpredictable rainfall will contribute to water crises, declining soil productivity, livestock losses, and ultimately a loss of livelihoods, all which are contributing to the forced migration of people. Additionally, conflicts over land and resources are evidenced as commonalities when this happened, which again, exacerbates poverty. The report also concluded that women, children, and people with disabilities are most affected with women facing

specific risks during displacement, including an increased risk of gender-based violence, exploitation, and lack of access to resources and services.

- d) If gender norms continue to restrict women's access to resources, education, and decision-making processes, climate change and its effects will further limit their access to information, resources, and participation in climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, hindering their ability to influence policies that directly impact their lives. Girls are more likely to drop out of school, and women who already work in sectors highly susceptible to climate change, face related disruptions in these sectors can result in income loss and economic marginalization for women.

Recommendations: Call to Action

1. Government should adopt the ecofeminist approach to address issues of climate change impacts.
 - a) It should recognize the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities, including women, indigenous peoples, and marginalized groups.
 - b) Adopt solutions that prioritize the needs and voices of the most vulnerable, marginalised and neglected communities in climate policies and actions.
 - c) Climate change solutions should take into account the specific needs and knowledge of local communities - These solutions respect indigenous and traditional ecological practices.

- d) Prioritizing conservation and protection of biodiversity can enhance ecosystem resilience and mitigate climate change impacts.

2. Government should address itself to climate change impacts as a structural issue:

Policy makers and researchers should address the structural causes of the climate crisis, quickly -this includes addressing how gender, sex, class and age are weaponized in ways that have created these great imbalances.

- Government should address the deeply rooted in systemic and interconnected social, economic, and political structures that exacerbate climate change impacts and these include; women continued exclusion from political, policy and decision-making roles; and in instances where they are included, systemic hinderances related to power and control; underrepresentation, etc.
- Reduce the structural inequalities between genders (access to resources, land, education, etc.) and defend women's rights in order to enable women and girls to better cope with the impacts of climate change and prepare for potential natural disasters.
- Promote climate justice by improving the way communities are organised, how economies function, and the distribution of power and resources;
- Practical and implementable solutions such as increasing women's representation and ability to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes related to climate change.
- Focus too should be placed on supporting sustainable livelihoods for women and local communities to help reduce

pressures on natural resources and promote climate resilience.

- Put in place interventions that recognise the climate crisis as an intersection of many different mechanisms;
- Policy makers should recognize the intrinsic value of nature and the interconnectedness of all living beings and focus on prompting this way of being. Encouraging mindful consumption and sustainable production practices that decrease greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation is essential to the need to undo the lasting effects of this extractive system.

3. Government should recognise and support women as lead agents of addressing climate change impacts:

This implies enhanced women roles as stewards of natural resources, and ensuring their active participation in decision-making related to climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.

- a) Support more effectively the leadership of women, and indigenous women in particular, in the areas of climate change adaptation and mitigation through gender mainstreaming across climate finance plans.
- b) In recognition of the deep environmental knowledge of women, and indigenous women in particular, ensure and support their effective participation in decision-making bodies for the development and implementation of policies on climate change at the international, national and local levels.
- c) Identify clear indicators and track progress on the integration of a gender and intersectional perspective into all

policies and programs related to climate change, taking into account the differential impact of the latter on women, and indigenous women in particular, their rights, and their livelihoods.

- d) Support grassroots activism and community organizing and women's environmental and climate activism as a pivotal role in driving positive change - support. policy reforms that integrate gender and environmental considerations.
- e) Adopt gender-responsive climate policies that prioritize the well-being of people and the planet are essential for addressing climate change effectively.

Further information (links, references):

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