

Maho Voatsagnonbe, standing on the family cassava plantation field in the drought-stricken south of Madagascar. The drought and the sandstorm Tiomena are killing her cassava plantation. January 2021 @ UNICEF



WORKING WITH WOMEN AND GIRLS TO CENTRE GENDER EQUALITY IN CLIMATE RESILIENCE

An Advocacy Brief from Eastern and Southern Africa ahead of the 66th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW)



As the 66th Commission on the Status of Women is about to start, we are joining our efforts to alert on the effects of disasters and climate change on Eastern and Southern Africa, and especially the disproportionate and devastating negative impacts they have on women and girls across the region. We also want to shed light on the critical work led by women and girls' organizations as first responders and amplify their voices to call for bolder action and climate justice.



Impact of Climate-related Disasters on Women and Girls in Eastern and Southern Africa

The magnitude, severity, and frequency of climate-related disasters (droughts, cyclones, floods, locusts) are increasing in the region, exacerbated by disease outbreaks (such as Ebola or COVID-19), conflicts and protracted crisis leading to loss of life, forced displacement, destruction of livelihoods, houses, and infrastructures. Rapid unplanned urbanization, construction on wetland areas, land degradation and deforestation are also amplifying the risks posed by such disasters.



- ➔ Gender inequality, including persisting gender discriminatory norms, expose women and girls to higher risks of mortality and gender-based violence (GBV) in disaster and post-disaster situations.
- ➔ Limited access to timely information and adequate resources often prevents women and girls from anticipating, responding, and recovering from those disasters.
- ➔ Many women in the region are working in the informal sector and/or as primary caregivers, they earn less and have no social safety nets.

A young girl crosses floodwaters in Gatumba in Burundi. In early 2021, more than 1,500 people were internally displaced in the region due to rising floodwaters during the previous year. @UNICEF/UN0436094/Karel Pronslou

In a region where **19 million people are already severely food insecure**, acute malnutrition including risk of famine, is one of the major consequences the region is facing. Over 1.1 million people in Madagascar are coping with severe hunger, while the country has been hit by Storm Dumako, cyclone Batsirai and tropical storm Ana in the first few months of this year. **The Horn of Africa is enduring severe drought** while Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia are also being invaded by enormous swarms of desert locusts in the worst desert locust infestation in decades. Malawi, Mozambique, South Sudan and Zimbabwe are forced to respond to cyclical floods which impact food production and drinking water supply.

Under such circumstances:

- Women and girls are forced to travel further away from their home for longer hours to bring back water, food, and firewood to their families.
- Women and girls are often eating smaller portions, less diverse and nutritious food or skipping a meal for the benefit of their children or spouse.
- Risks of GBV including sexual violence, exploitation and abuse and intimate partner violence (IPV) are becoming even more acute due to climate related disasters like droughts, widespread food insecurity and subsequent displacement.
- Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable with child marriage and other harmful practices on the rise as families adopt negative coping mechanisms for survival



Frequent disasters and extreme poverty in Southern Madagascar have created a cyclical humanitarian crisis. Women are identified as a particularly vulnerable group.”

Lt Colonel FALY

Madagascar Bureau National de Gestion des Risques et Catastrophes, Africa DRR Platform, November 2021



Mary is from South Sudan, mother of five. She smiles as she stands in front of a newly cultivated garden, done collectively with women in her village in Panameth, Aweil Centre. Mary is one of 30,000 people who received nutritionally rich seeds and farming implements from the Red Cross in May 2018. As a lead farmer, she is also trained in modern farming practices by the Red Cross and the Ministry of Agriculture, taking what she has learned to train others in her community.

What have we learned? What do we know?

We have learned that **transformative leadership** in the mitigation of disasters will not be realized **without gender responsive laws and policies, budgets**, coordination mechanisms and better information management systems.



As per an [analysis](#) conducted by UNICEF and the IFRC with 10 countries in the region, **1 out of 3 national disaster risk management (DRM) legal and policy frameworks do not include any considerations related to gender and 80% of those frameworks do not integrate any action to mitigate risks of GBV**. In addition, significant gaps continue to exist in the collection, use, analysis and reporting of sex, age and disability disaggregated data which hinders the development of evidence-based action and policies and climate smart programming.

However, **we are also witnessing the growth in leadership of women as first responders** to disasters and their knowledge in community resilience. Women and girls in Eastern and Southern Africa are Climate Advocates, Green Energy champions, and Innovators. In Burundi, adolescent girls are making environment-friendly cooking fuel out of agricultural waste. In Ethiopia, Kenya and South Sudan, women are certified solar power technicians.

Finally, we are encouraged to see Governments and Regional Bodies stepping up. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) established a Gender in Resilience network to support integration of Gender in its Drought Disaster Resilience and Sustainability Initiative (IDDRSI) framework, and the East African Community (EAC) set up a working group for its Government Members on GBV prevention and response.



Whether there is project or not, whether there is funding or not, women's rights organizations are responding. They have gained expertise. Our role is to build on that expertise and to support them."

Sally Ncube,
Coordinator of the Women's Coalition of
Zimbabwe



Call to action

Calling Governments in Eastern and Southern Africa Region to:

- **Develop gender-responsive Disaster Risk Management (DRM) legal and policy frameworks** that integrate GBV risk reduction, prevention, and response, through participatory processes with women and girls' organizations, the inclusion of clear indicators, and the systematic collection, analysis and use of sex, age, and disability disaggregated data (including to report on the Sendai Framework Monitor and the AU Programme of Action (Phase II: 2021-2025) to Implement the Sendai Framework.
- **Implement the Nairobi Declaration** adopted in November 2021 during the Africa DRR Platform and allocate dedicated budget and mobilize innovative financing to include Gender in DRM.
- **Foster and institutionalize stronger and systematic collaboration and coordination** between national DRM institutions, Ministries of Gender and national women and girls' organizations.
- **Invest in subnational gender responsive DRM** to better engage local women and girls' organizations and influence local budget allocations.

Calling all Member States and Donors to:

- **Participate in the Africa Risk Capacity's innovative risk pooling mechanism**, for the implementation of gender responsive and inclusive disaster risk reduction strategies and programme, in coherence with climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, combating desertification and with Great Green Wall initiative.
- **Map women and girls' organizations as part of any preparedness efforts**, audit their capacity, design, and fund appropriate empowerment interventions to strengthen their networks, enable their participation to decision-making processes and their ability to receive increased financial resources.
- **Ensure disaster preparedness plans and early warning systems are gender responsive and informed by the indigenous knowledge of women, including from those with disabilities** to ensure information reaches women in a language and in forms they understand and use.
- **Increase the number of women in leadership and decision-making in disaster risk reduction and climate action** by promoting and nurturing the leadership of diverse women and girls (across generations, sociocultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds) and of their organizations, networks and movements through mentorship and capacity development programme initiatives.
- **Prioritize and fund services for prevention, mitigation, and response to GBV as well as sexual and reproductive health at all times**, including and in priority during disasters and humanitarian crisis.
- **Ensure that security sector personnel involved in responding to disasters are trained** on gender-based violence prevention and response including protection from sexual exploitation and abuse.



Millions of African women are facing climate change and natural disasters effects. The women who face these problems also have the solutions and I invite our respective countries to have consultation with the concerned parties. This is their reality, and they are surviving these effects every day, therefore their inputs are incredibly valid.”



**President of Ethiopia, Her Excellency
Sahle-Work Zewde during Africa Pre-66th
CSW event, February 2022.**

If you want to know more,
please see:

- [UNICEF-IFRC analysis of gender integration in national and regional disaster risk management frameworks in Eastern and Southern Africa](#)
- [African Gender and Disaster Risk Management Platform](#)

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