



POSITION PAPER ON THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN RESPECT TO INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION.

Climate Change and Indigenous Knowledge: An Indigenous Women’s Perspective with Focus on Kenya Background.

Climate change has adverse effects on whole communities, destroying their survival safety nets, and threatening their livelihoods. Indigenous people depend on biodiversity, weather patterns, and indigenous knowledge, and continue to feel the effects of climate change much more than other people.

Indigenous women play critical roles in caring for their families and communities and generally the environment. Unfortunately, gender gaps do not allow them to be part of the processes that aim at combating the effects of climate change, and that needs to change if mitigation

Effects of Climate Change on the roles of Indigenous women:

- Women and girls are the collectors of firewood, the main source of fuel, for domestic use. Forest degradation due to deforestation means that biodiversity is vastly reduced and women and girls can no longer access firewood conveniently. In some indigenous communities, women are responsible for building houses, sourcing the wooden materials from the forests.

They therefore have to walk longer distances, taking up more valuable time which would have been used for productive economic activities, or for school for the girls. This also puts them at risk of assault and sexual harassment due to longer distances from home, and in danger from wildlife. Their health is also put at risk, from occasional injuries caused by carrying heavy loads for long distances.

- Additionally, indigenous women collect medicinal plants especially for childhood illnesses, and for ceremonial purposes. As forests continue to disappear, the women are forced to walk longer distances to access these plants.

- Indigenous women are responsible for fetching water for domestic use and for their livestock. Water sources are reduced significantly due to biodiversity destruction as a result of climate change.

This means that they have to walk longer distances in search of water, with their livestock too, spending more time that would have been used more productively, and also reducing productivity and quality and quantity of livestock production.

Climate change has adverse effects on indigenous women’s social and economic environment. As they perform their roles, they tend to use up more time due to the change in their environment. They are thus left with little time to perform economically viable activities that could help secure household level livelihoods.

- Indigenous women are faced with more social challenges as they perform their roles. They are exposed to health risks and the risk of harassment and or assault as they move farther away in search of firewood, medicinal plants and water.

As girls are more likely to help, they are likely to spend less time at school, leading to drop high dropout rates, thus continuing the cycle of disempowerment and poverty.-



Mbororo Pastoralist Women group showcasing their Dairy products to buyers – Douala Cameroon



Old Maasai women exchange ideas on adaptation

Indigenous Women's knowledge And Adaptation:

Traditional knowledge is an age old mechanism that has been used by indigenous people as a survival tool in their day to day lives.

Most indigenous people are disadvantaged when it comes to access to social amenities which include education, health care, and water and sanitation. Their traditional knowledge involves everything from mastering weather patterns, identifying and using plants for ceremonies and illnesses, conserving pasture and water for livestock for drier seasons and conserving forests.

Climate change has impacted negatively on traditional knowledge, and indigenous women have been forced to adapt in different ways, due to the change in their environment.

- As wood fuel collectors, women know what specific trees to cut, what branches to cut and or leave out, and ensure that they regenerate for future use. They also know the medicinal plants that are disappearing from the forests. This then means that women are critical in conserving forests and would know when and if forest cover is being lost, and what species of trees are declining.
- As they take care of their livestock, indigenous women have knowledge on when there is drought due to changes in weather patterns, as the colour of pasture also changes, livestock milk production goes down, the texture of the dung changes, and the changes in calving seasons. This means that any inconsistency in these patterns is as a result of climate change.
- As domestic water collectors, indigenous women know when water levels go down in rivers, and when rivers dry out, as they have to walk longer either with the livestock or for water for domestic use. They can also tell when the seasons are interrupted and when there is a significant reduction in water flow.
- As primary caregivers, indigenous women are the first to know when children get new infections, some which are waterborne, due to lack of clean drinking water as water sources dry out, due to the change in rainfall patterns and or shortened ones.

Indigenous women are resilient and are able to use their traditional knowledge to adapt to the effects of climate change. Some indigenous women have developed coping mechanisms for their new environment, which has greatly changed due to climate change.

A good example of these would be from the Mbororo pastoralist women in Cameroon, who now use powdered milk and other ingredients to make yoghurt for sale.

They have opted for this because their cattle can no longer produce enough milk for this economic activity, and also because they can no longer depend on milk sales to secure their household food security. Their livelihoods and those of their families are threatened, so they need alternative income in order to survive.

Looking ahead:

Gender mainstreaming involves engaging both men and women and ensuring that their experiences and concerns are an integral part of policies, processes and programs, which impact their lives. However, for indigenous people, it means ensuring that women are at the center of the decision making process on all issues that affect them.

Indigenous women need to fully participate in decision making on policies, processes and programs that are put in place for mitigation and adaptation of climate change. This can be done by empowering them through capacity building programs which recognize and appreciate the critical role they play, and recognizing their knowledge and positive contribution.



Locally processed dairy products by Mbororo Pastoralist Women



Maasai women engaged in craftwork