



“Not Without Us”

Personal Stories
from Frontline Victims
of Climate Change
Impacts



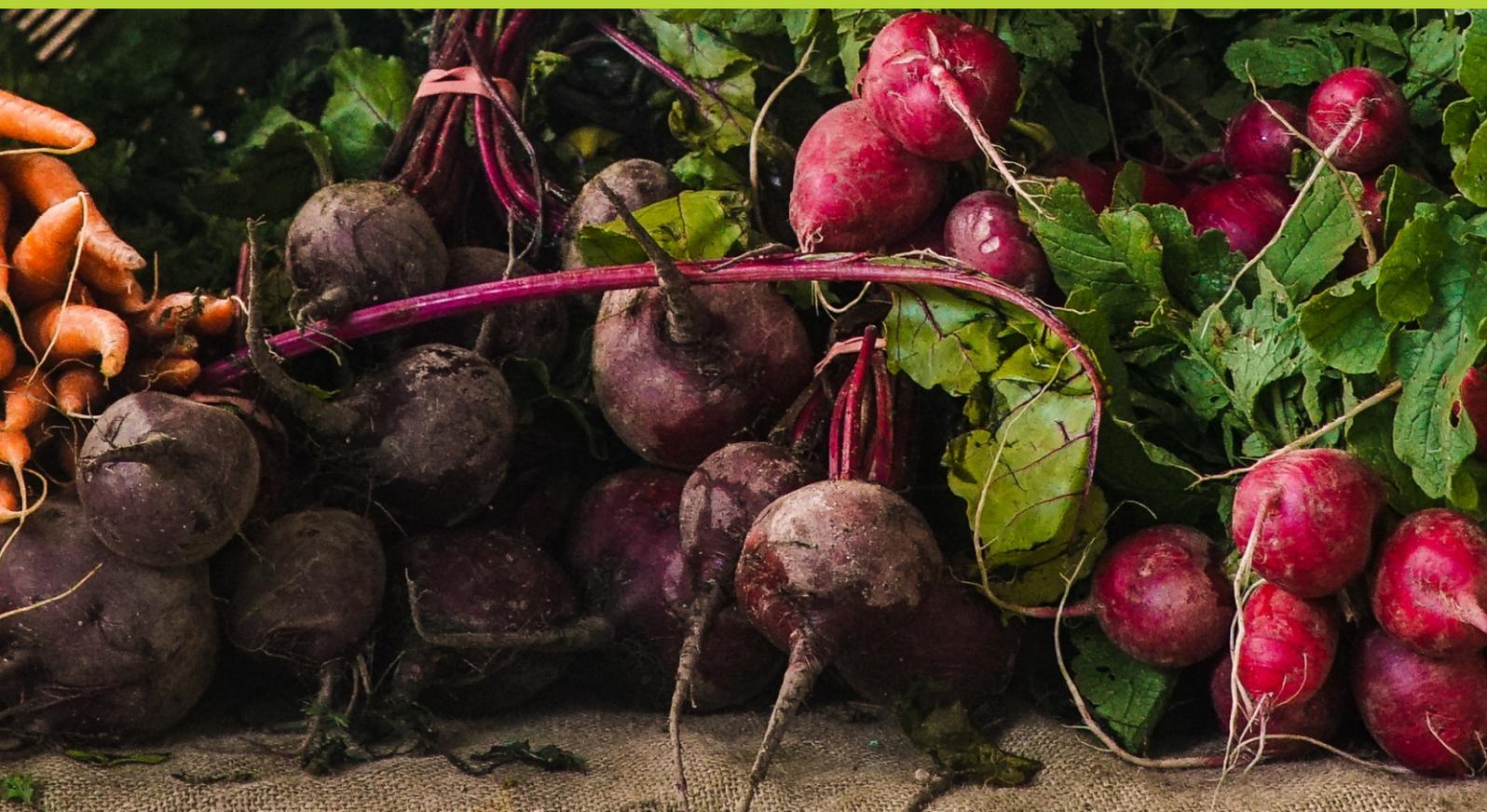
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Introduction

"Climate Justice and Gender Justice in International Climate Politics - Not without us" Project was launched in 2017 to promote the integration of gender justice in international climate politics and within the global climate justice movement.

Selected activists and gender experts from environmental groups and women's organisations, primarily from the Global South, are supported in their attempts to connect local struggles for climate and gender justice with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process, enabling networking with other actors.

The publication is on local personal stories of two women who are on the frontline of climate impacts and are also activists in the social justice movement. The women are both from peri-urban areas of SOWETO township in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Climate change is one of the most important societal issues currently facing the world. Recent weather events across South Africa have sparked popular interest in understanding the role of global warming in driving extreme weather. These events are part of a new pattern of more extreme weather across the globe, shaped in part by human-induced climate change. As the climate has warmed, some types of extreme weather have become more frequent and severe in recent times, with increases in deadly and devastating floods, extreme heat and droughts. Heat waves are longer and hotter, heavy rains and floods are more frequent. Climate change has shifted the odds and changed the natural limits.

There is a direct relationship between gender and climate change. On the one hand, women are disproportionately vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which could in turn, exacerbate existing gender disparities. On the other hand, women have unique knowledge and skills that can help make the response to climate change more effective and sustainable. Women commonly face higher risks and greater burdens from the impacts of climate change in situations of poverty, and the majority of the world's poor are women. Women's unequal participation in decision-making processes and labour markets compound inequalities and often prevent women from fully contributing to climate-related planning, policy making and implementation. Yet, women can and do play a critical role in response to climate change due to their local knowledge and leadership in e.g. sustainable resource management and /or leading sustainable practices at the household and community level, as attested by the personal stories of the two women featured in this booklet.

The impacts of climate change are different for women and men, with women likely to bear the greater burden in situations of poverty. Women's voices must be heard, and their priorities supported as part of climate justice. The tendency to ignore women and girls' perspectives means losing out on ideas, visions and potential effective climate change interventions that are gender sensitive and responsive. In turn, this weakens democracy, undermines women and girls' rights and limits their options to become agents of change. Integrating gender equality principles into climate action in South Africa requires profound systemic change involving gender mainstreaming and transformation of unequal gender relations and societal structures. It is necessary to put in place strategies and action plans that address structural barriers to gender equality in climate change policies and actions. Such barriers include patriarchal social norms and discriminatory laws and customs that disempower women and exclude them from meaningful participation in and contributing equally to climate change solutions. States should provide social and economic support to financially vulnerable women, to ensure equal opportunities before the law.



“Climate Change is real; we need to come together with real solutions to adapt. Climate Change is even destroying our culture. There is also a need for a combined workshop with men and women to discuss our different issues and impacts from climate change to understand our differentiated needs, feelings and impacts.”

Ms Zodwa Rannyadi

Community Organization: Soweto Cultural Senior Citizens

Member of Women in Energy & Climate Change Forum under the auspices of Earthlife Africa.

Ms Zodwa Rannyadi is married with 3 children, she calls herself a social activist, lives in Diepkloof zone 1, Soweto, a peri-urban area township to be precise. Zodwa was drawn into activism after witnessing so many social injustices in her township like unlawful house evictions, water & electricity cuts and prepaid meters of electricity and water imposed on the community by local authorities. Zodwa and some women in her community started a community organization to address all the social ills hindering progress in their lives, through that organization she became a member of the Women in Energy and Climate Change Forum. Within this forum Zodwa learned a lot about the country's constitution, citizen's rights, women's rights, policies pertaining to the issues they are trying to address at community level.

Zodwa is a champion of a community/school project called Sustainable Energy & Livelihoods (SELP) which was EU funded, co-funded by Oxfam GB and coordinated by Earthlife Africa and GenderCC S.A. The project is self-running from the school premises where from the school, community and women's groups benefit. The objective is to address energy crises in terms of access and efficiency, food sovereignty, water harvesting and waste recycling as means of adapting and mitigating climate change impacts. The four-pronged-pillars of the project involves installation of solar panels at the school, biogas digester, water harvesting tank and establishing food gardens. Zodwa was trained in all these areas to train others. The training Zodwa received helped her to understand climate change and of its impacts better and she has gained confidence in the subject as a woman. She is now training school children, parents, women and community organizations on how to build resilience in this era of climate change catastrophe. Zodwa is also able to raise the voices of other women in her community during parliamentary and public hearings, the public consultation meetings with the various government levels. She is also working closely with the ward councilor in her area on environmental issues.



“Ignorance is in abundance in general and is a major challenge for progress and development, particularly from the government to bring about change and capacitate women. If the government can use the same amount of effort and enthusiasm they use during elections to address climate change, environmental degradation, protect the ecosystem and eradicate inequalities especially gender related, there would be much progress in addressing climate change in the country.”

Ms Nompumelelo Madubane

Community Organization: Bonkgono Community Project (NPO)

Member of Women in Energy & Climate Change Forum under the auspices of Earthlife, Africa.

Nompumelelo, affectionately known as Mpumi, is a single mother of 5, she lost her first husband of two children and the second husband of her last 3 children at a very young age. The second husband passed on while she was 6 months pregnant with her last child, who is now 6 years old. Mpumi lives in a Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) house, introduced by government after 1994 elections through a socio-economic policy framework. When the untimely death of her husband occurred, they were renting a house and after his death and the birth of her fifth child, she could no longer afford the rental. She went to live with family members with her 5 children. She subsequently lost her job and was forced to go and appeal for help from her late husband family. A brother to the husband helped her to obtain the RDP house and that was the best he could do for them. Life has been a constant struggle for Mpumi and her children, she was in and out of jobs. Through the mercy of God, she managed to get her two elder sons through to school including tertiary, sadly, they had to join the masses of unemployed South Africans, mostly youth. Mpumi has been hustling to survive ever since and through her passion to serve others, she joined a Non-Governmental Organisation called “Home of Hope”, a home based health care Organisation that took care of orphans and vulnerable children, the sick, elderly, provided support for women and youth groups, counselling and soup kitchen. Through the Home of Hope organization, she joined Women in Energy and Climate Change Forum where she learned more about environmental issues, women's rights, constitution and gender and climate change issues.

Unfortunately, due to lack of funding, the organization Mpumi was working for closed, despite the demise, Mpumi continued to do community work voluntarily and shared information she learned from workshops and trainings from Earthlife Africa and their networks. She later joined a group of elderly men and women, called Bonkgono community project, who are engaged in community gardens, artwork and body exercises to keep fit, healthy and strong. She introduced to the group tips on organic farming and discussions around environment, climate change, water, energy and food security issues for households and the community at large. She is now an active young member of the group and represents the community at local government meetings, solving problems and challenges faced by the community, she also runs workshops and present community concerns to the local government's Integrated Development Plan.



Women and Agriculture

Climate change poses a lot of challenges for agriculture e.g. drought, is a major problem currently for small scale farmers, the soil is hard and very dry, farmers cannot plant, and this means there will be no harvesting this coming December. For most women whose livelihood is dependent on farming, it means no fresh and nutritious food for their families, no income and no preparation for school uniform and textbooks for their children early next year, let alone the festive celebration. Zodwa feels that coal mining in the country is the main cause for environmental degradation and the destruction of the ecosystem. Since the main source of energy in the country is coal, people living next to coal mines areas get very sick, they cannot even utilize their natural resources like water, air and soil as they are contaminated with acid mine drainage and other chemicals. Again, in these areas women and children are at the forefront of these impacts. Women travel long distances with their children to get health services and to get food because the land available to them is now unproductive. She says, this is destroying the spirit of “Ubuntu - Humanity” in the community as people no longer visit each other, they can no longer afford to offer a cup of tea, which is unheard of in the African culture. Zodwa claims, Climate Change is even destroying our culture and women in agriculture should be empowered so that they are able to participate in policy and decision making about their livelihoods and future.

Zodwa and Mpumi feel that empowered women farmers can bring a lot of benefits to their communities e.g. sharing of knowledge, raise awareness on climate change and how women are mostly affected and at stake, since most women in their areas of habitat are single, unemployed mothers who make a living out of selling vegetables. Besides working on their gardens for survival, they are also faced with the burden of care work e.g. household chores, tending the sick and looking after the children. Mpumi is now able to share and teach her children and community about the gendered impacts of climate change moreover that she has 4 boys and 1 girl. Zodwa is also able to share the same with the community she trains, her children and husband to share with household and family chores to lessen the burden exacerbated by climate impacts. Change of mindset in their communities is a big challenge for them especially when it comes to understanding gender issues and acknowledge the differentiated impacts and change of lifestyles. Mpumi with her knowledge and training received was able to approach their councilor about their non-profit organization to utilize the available land for farming purposes. Most women under the two women's leadership and championship have started small gardens in their yards, they are also able to come together and help each other with other care related work and counsel each other.



This is minimal effort they can use to make best of the situation however they are still facing major challenges when it comes to participating in policy & decision making, access to land rights, credit and market value chain.

Local women farmers can play a vital role in the promotion of Climate Resilience practices in agriculture if they are empowered enough. They need training and resources as they believe in action, women need to be given better roles and not be undermined, they need to be respected and given an opportunity in the current male dominated positions. There seems to be no political will from authorities to help small scale farmers especially women. This is compounded by greed and corruption within the system.

There is no support mechanism for small scale women farmers as compared to their male counterparts, however they encourage each other as women in cooperatives to take up farming even though it is difficult in urban areas without land, so that they can make decisions about their livelihoods and future. They seldom get a supply of seeds from the local government and whenever they get it, the seeds are chemically treated, which they do not like using as they undermine good nutrition for their families. They prefer untreated organic seeds which is another challenge to obtain. Even access to market and the value chain is a huge challenge for women farmers. They are limited to sitting in the street corners to sell their produce, they must work twice as hard for them to get the same recognition as men in this industry. In Orange Farm, where Mpumi lives, there is a shopping Mall, she feels if women can be allowed to sell their produce to the supermarkets in the Mall, that would grow their businesses but it is even difficult to negotiate that, there is always gate keepers and bureaucracy.

These women have ambition, Mpumi's dream is to get funding and install solar panels to the households of her Non-Profit Organization members, build communal biogas digesters so that people can experience and understand clean and safe energy.



Some of the challenges faced by Zodwa and Mpumi in this field are that, farming in an urban setting is always looked down upon, people do not want to dirty their hands. But when it is harvesting time they want to benefit. Their main challenge is that they are involved in communal gardens in the community or at a school premises. Few are there to do the spade work but when it is harvesting time there is more people who wants to benefit, some even steal, not only the crops but working equipment as well. There are no safeguards and security for women even at this small scale. Sadly, it is women who are hustling to get by, targeted by power of male dominated criminality and corruption.

They thrive for land ownership and safe space to lock up their garden tools. This is a huge limitation to their growth in business and sustaining livelihoods. At this stage they can only engage in subsistence farming for self-consumption. When they try to advocate for support systems and financial connections, there is always political interference, they are taken from pillar to post when seeking assistance from the government.

Zodwa and Mpumi are very active in their local ward council meetings but their participation is always met with lots of frustrations as they have no power to make decisions and nobody listens. In Mpumi's area, there is an organization that is supposed to help people and connect farmers to the department of agriculture but her interaction with the organization has not yielded any fruits because of politics. They sometimes go and appeal for help at a local community radio station, still nobody is taking them seriously. On the other hand, Zodwa says her cooperative gets limited support from Non-Governmental Organizations like GenderCC SA in terms of trainings for more skills in productive agriculture and entrepreneurship. However, without resources, access to land and credit, it is difficult for her to utilize knowledge gained to its full potential.

Vulnerability & Capacity Assessment

The effectiveness of their local initiatives is shown through practicing what they have learned in workshops and trainings they have attended. Also, in sharing the skills and knowledge with other community members and members of their cooperatives. Zodwa and Mpumi feel knowledge is power, sharing and exchange of traditional and indigenous knowledge is even more powerful. They engage in exchange visits with other cooperatives from other provinces and regions and learn new skills from one another and share drought resistance seeds preserved from indigenous knowledge. The environment is now more respected and protected by the community, they have established a good relationship with local schools to use the land in schools for farming, teach school children on good farming practices and about taking care of the environment. This helps to keep schools clean and provide nutritious food to their families and to the school feeding scheme.

In mapping the impacts of community upliftment and empowerment, the two women assert that curiosity has been raised amongst families and community members on what is happening around them. There is basis of knowledge about their rights and a portal of information amongst community leaders and those enlightened women on pertinent issues affecting the community. The Community also knows more now about the effects of illegal dumping and understands the need to move to renewable energy resources. They prefer organic farming and do their own composting; most household owns a food garden now to produce their own food and that has promoted self-sustenance amongst the community. The food gardens project has brought the community together and they are now able to address community issues together while working in the gardens.

When it comes to general public awareness and involvement of business and industries in helping with climate change mitigation and adaptation, Zodwa and Mpumi feel that through their experience and engagement with other stakeholders, industries and government do not have genuine interest in the environmental degradation because profit is their main goal from the mechanisms they are applying which are destroying the planet. They should instead provide funding to address inequalities that have ravaged the society and invest in development projects. Small businesses and communities should start practicing divestment when it comes to environmentally destructive businesses. The government has good policies on protecting the environment but practically there is no positive action. Financial institutions like banks which generate their profits from majority of the poor, send false messages about going green, while at the same time they fund coal initiatives in the country.

The stark contrast between the profit-driven, biodiversity destroying, carbon intensive and toxic agribusiness and the efforts of women to provide healthy and safe food for their communities is demotivating for small scale women farmers. They are helpless as they cannot compete with these huge industries, however they have taken a firm stand as local women to come together, empower and support each other, speak in one voice against these atrocities. Mpumi adds that, if the government can use the same amount of effort and enthusiasm they use during elections to address climate change, environmental degradation, protect the ecosystem and eradicate inequalities especially gender related, there would be much progress in addressing climate change in the country. The public is not aware that these large-scale agribusinesses are destroying the environment. Due to lack of meaningful employment, people take any job available not realizing that they are adding to the environmental degradation. In the mean-time, women's efforts at local level go unnoticed, devalued, undermined and not supported, therefore some women lose hope. She also feel that the government is just talking about climate because they are part of the international agreements. There is no implementing at local level, they are not walking their talk and business is only motivated by profits, having no interest in preserving & protecting the environment.

Concluding Remarks

In addressing women's rights and gender inequalities in the country, small scale women farmers should come together and fight against their rights being commercialized and violated. Women should boycott such initiatives as they are very common and confusing masses. Business practices that do not advance women's interest should be questioned and ultimately eradicated. In many instances, women are still used as a front, men are still making decision on their behalf. There is a serious need for the system to change and accommodate women, the government's Department of Women, Children & People with disabilities should play their role too, to work in favour of women's needs. Zodwa concluded by saying, we need each other as men and women and need to build good relations, it is important to share and empower each other (men and women). There is a need for a combined workshop with men and women to discuss the different issues and impacts from climate change and understand the differentiated needs, feelings and impacts from a gendered perspective.

Recommendations

Based on the stories from the two women, the problems women face on the climate crises are systemic and that fundamental societal change is needed. Here are some ideas on how to start addressing the exposed problems:

For economic empowerment, partnership must be created with financial institutions and other non-bank partners to inform the development of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and loan products (funding small, medium-sized enterprises) specifically geared towards the needs of women-owned SME's. Design unique programmes for women's economic empowerment, with a core focus on intersectionality, leadership and the status of women in their different communities. Promote transformative women's leadership to assure the sustained empowerment of women through recognition of their commitments, vision and courage to act. Consider grass roots movements as a unique "pool of women leaders" with capacity to transform, adjust, unite, produce new values, strike, demand accountability, build bridges and create long-term partnership.

Address gender equality and harmful forms of masculinities from a life-cycle approach with a wide range of individuals, parents, community and institutions (education, religious institutions, governments, businesses, etc.). Encourage men to take leadership in addressing levels of political violence against women. Promote inclusive education that does not promote gender roles but have an encompassing curriculum which will expose boys and girls to basic human rights including gender equality.

A transition in agricultural practices is needed in order to face issues connected to climate emergency and sustainable practices that have been already developed by local communities all over the globe.



Disclaimer

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