

The 'Forgotten' Gender in the Fight Against Climate Change in Africa: How Climate Smart Agriculture is Empowering Women

Extreme weather events are growing in frequency and severity with an alarming impact on food security, biodiversity loss, and revealing gender inequalities.

LUSAKA, ZAMBIA, March 7, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- When it comes to climate change, Africa is so often the 'forgotten continent' for it receives less than 3% of global climate finance, however, 30 out of the 40 most climate-vulnerable countries in the world are in Africa. The continent has around 17% of the world's population but produces less than 4% of global emissions, and yet, extreme weather events are growing in both frequency and severity with an alarming impact on food security, biodiversity loss, and revealing gender inequalities.



"Look at my garden! Look at how beautiful it has grown. It has tomato, onion, cabbage, and rape. The way my family lives now is very different to before I know how to grow so many different vegetables in my small space."

With the poverty rate in rural Zambia at 78%, women and adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable due to lower human capital accumulation. Financial, social, and cultural barriers often mean that women do not have the same access as men. There is no exception when it comes to the harsh realities that climate change is having on the poorest regions across Africa. Women lack access to resources and funding as their work tends to fall under the informal economy and unpaid home duties. Especially in rural parts of Africa, boys take precedent over girls in the rights to education, based on beliefs that girls should assume the role of home-maker and manual labourer in the fields, and when coupled with early marriages and a high rate of teenage pregnancy, girls tend to miss out on the same opportunities given to boys, which creates a gap from an early age.

Access to education, health care facilities, and socio-economic initiatives are key to development,

however, they pale in comparison to food security. When a household is food insecure it is all-consuming. It impacts the family at the most basic level of a human's requirements to survive and makes anything beyond securing basic nutrition seem inconceivable. Chronic food insecurity and the pressure and trauma imposed by it transcends into all aspects of a family's life and creates barriers on a physical, mental, financial, and social level.

[Climate-Smart Agriculture](#) is key to addressing the issue of food insecurity in Africa.

Climate-Smart Agriculture is based on the interrelated principles of minimal soil disturbance, permanent soil covers with living or post-harvest crop residue cover, and crop diversification through rotation or intercropping. It helps farmers to maintain and boost yields and increase profits while reversing land degradation, protecting the environment, and responding to growing challenges of climate change. Minimal Tillage also enables a farmer to plant with the first heavy planting rains – a critical advantage. Every day a farmer is late planting she or he loses up to 1.8-2% of their end yield. This loss is not recoverable irrespective of the quality and volume of inputs used to nourish the crop.

Women are the primary producers and processors of food in Africa, but lack of access to land and inputs means that they achieve lower agricultural yields and experience greater insecurity of income than men, impacting a huge 70% of women across Africa. Yet, despite well over half of women in Africa being involved in the agriculture sector, the Index Report found that women farmers in Africa receive only 5% of agricultural extension services. Women run small agribusinesses in the informal sector but find it hard to invest and grow their businesses. In more remote areas, African women are often trapped in subsistence or near subsistence farming and spend long hours each day doing unpaid domestic chores, often helped by girls. These are the women and families who are in danger of being left behind and trapped in intergenerational poverty, whilst other parts of society reap the benefits of development.

Climate-Smart Agriculture minimizes tillage, follows the methods of crop rotation, and ultimately reduces time, labour, and the wear and tear of animals and machines substantially. From a purely output vs input standpoint, the most obvious and immediate result of Climate Smart Agriculture is an increased yield using less land. In the 2020/21 farming season maize grain yields improved to 4.9tons/ha against the baseline of 1.8tons/ha amongst the lead farmers that we are working with. Practicing this method of conservation farming also sees the longer-term benefits of improved soil nutrition and an increased soil organic pool.

Beyond the most immediate rewards, having to spend such substantially fewer hours on farming, yet producing a much higher yield (enough so that there is surplus to sell and trade) is changing lives. Especially those of women. Food security lifts the barriers put in place by chronic hunger while having a surplus of crops opens up a whole new area of trade and business opportunities. For labour-strapped households, the minimal tillage land preparation operation is spread over the post-harvest period up to those first heavy planting rains. This division of labour over the season is an important benefit for female-led households and or families who are

caring for sick and infant family members.

Training Lead [Female Farmers](#) in Climate Smart Agriculture allows women to join the modernization of agriculture in Africa.

By equipping women with the knowledge to farm smart it gives women the training and confidence to be decision-makers in cash crop agriculture. Empowering women gives them better resources and access to inputs and technologies, credit access, and revenue streams that give them greater opportunities to grow businesses, connect with supply chains, and eventually join the formal economy, accessing larger scale loans and business ventures. This creates a knock-on effect in terms of the value being placed on a girl's education, which according to UNICEF – when more girls remain in education there is a significant drop in teen pregnancies and early marriages – helping to break the inequalities which begin at childhood.

In an effort to address household food insecurity, BCP continues to support the Ministries of Labour and Agriculture and Communities across Rufunsa, Nyimba, Lusangazi, Mambwe, and Lumezi Districts to implement Climate-Smart Agriculture technologies. Together, we currently support 376 Lead Farmers and have a wider reach of 9,400 Follower Farmers. Of those 376, 70 are women.

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