

Talking Points for Strengthening the Role of Women in Climate Information Services

Thokozile Ruzvidzo

Director

Gender Poverty and Social Policy Division

My insights into this topic will raise questions more than provide answers. This I hope can help us as we reflect on how to **improve** and strengthen the role of women in Women in Climate Information Services. The arguments I make will be made from a context of the current architecture of gender equality and women's empowerment in Africa broadly and specifically on the role of women in climate change. In particular, what is the status of women and girls' vis a vis access to climate-sector resources? Is there equality in their access to and control over land and other productive resources? **Land is a critical resource in the climate-related sectors.** Is there sufficiency in legislation to empower women? Is there dynamism in policy environment to ensure that women play a meaningful, life-changing role in climate change sectors like agriculture, energy, water and sanitation? Most importantly, is there an incentive for them to want to be involved in climate change mitigation and adaptation initiatives? Is there equality and empowerment of women in climate-smart agriculture? **IS THERE GENDER JUSTICE IN CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSE?** The answer would be that; over the past 25 years, since the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was endorsed as a guiding document for implementation of commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment, **progress for achieving all the critical areas of concern has been sluggish, uneven and needs to be supported with aggressive measures, deeper commitment and target base action.** On the topic at hand of strengthening women in CIS engagement, the gender imbalance and the unfavourable policy landscape should be borne in mind. Nonetheless, Information is

power, it enables one to make informed decisions. My take is that Climate Information Services (CIS), which entails packaging and dissemination of climate information to specific users should deliver services to women with the realities that I have just expounded. (2 minutes)

- **Allow me to look at the CIS value-chain** so that I can suggest how women's engagement to CIS can be strengthened. CIS involves collating, analysis, packaging and distributing information and climate data on rainfall, wind, soil moisture, ocean conditions and extreme weather indicator so that farmers can plan and plant their crops armed with accurate information. Noting that CIS is tailored to meet the needs of users, how is this done? The Regional Climate Outlook Forums architecture were established to deliver user-relevant climate information through a digital platform where there is a discussion on the climate information required to produce the products or data.
- **However, Delivery of CIS relies heavily on e-infrastructure or ICT accessibility.** Mobile Gender Gap Report (2019) points to recent growth in the mobile industry globally, leading to moderate increase to digital inclusion. The good news is that according to this report, approximately 1.7 billion women (80% of women) in low and middle income countries now own a mobile phone. This represents an increase of 250 million women since 2014. The same report shows that out of this figure, 48% of women use **mobile internet** which translates to just over a billion users. Mobile phone is increasingly becoming a means of internet access particularly for women and consequently becoming a powerful tool for delivering life-enhancing information services and opportunities. **This is an opportunity for women end-users who can access CIS.** On a down side, despite this increase in mobile internet awareness, in most markets, it remains lower for

women than it is for men. Sadly, women are 10% less likely than men to own a mobile phone translating to 197 million fewer women than men owning a mobile phone. Further, 313 million fewer women than men use the internet representing a gender gap of 23%. When women own a mobile phone, they use smaller range of mobile services and spend on average 17% less than men on the same mobile services.

- While mobile phone ownership and mobile internet use have increased significantly among women, there is still a persistent gender gap. Women's lower levels of mobile ownership and use not only reflect existing gender inequalities, but also threaten to compound them. If the mobile gender gap is not addressed, women risk being left behind as societies and economies digitise. Closing the mobile gender gap also represents a significant commercial and economic opportunity. Affordability, literacy and digital skills, a perceived lack of relevance, and safety and security concerns are the most important barriers and need to be addressed if CIS engagement with women is to be achieved.
- In responding to how best women's engagement can be strengthened, the question would be, who are the women at the receiving end to climate services? Are we talking about the same women who are struggling to access and control land for meaningful productivity? The reality is that land, water, energy and environment laws and policies are not gender responsive. Are we talking about the same women who are facing time poverty because 80% of their time is spend on non-market activities? Do women have the economic resources to put the information to good use as we know the economic growth in Africa has not yet translated into inclusive wealth for women.

- In conclusion, there is a lot more that needs to be done to ensure that women effectively access climate information services and put it to good use where climate change mitigation, adaptation and smart agriculture becomes inclusive and beneficial. There is need for dynamism in legislation, climate-sector policy to ensure financial inclusion and well-rounded empowerment of women in the social, environmental and political spaces.
