



# Seventh African Development Forum

*Acting on Climate Change for Sustainable  
Development in Africa*

## Climate Change and Human Development

*Issues Paper #3*

ADF VII • 10 - 15 October 2010 • United Nations Conference Centre • Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



African Union



African Development  
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## I. Overview

1. Although climate change can adversely impact, frustrate, deter, and reverse social and human development, it also holds the potential to foster and contribute positively. Climate change impacts, therefore, require improved governance, shared knowledge and good practices, an instilled culture of risk management and resilience and behaviour change fostered towards better use of global goods and natural resources within a green economic strategy.

2. There are a number of generic and specific issues related to climate change, and social and human development. The main thematic areas of interest are poverty, population, health and nutrition, education and employment, gender, and socially-vulnerable groups. The vulnerable groups encompass children, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities, and forcibly displaced persons (refugees, asylum seekers and internally-displaced persons (IDPs)).

## II. Issues at stake

### A. Climate change and vulnerability

3. The concept of vulnerability is important for understanding social and human development in a climate that is changing. Firstly, global warming and climate change are expected to increase human vulnerability as a result of a potential increase in the frequency and severity of weather events, long-term environmental degradation, and other effects of climate change. Secondly, vulnerability draws on the multiple dimensions of social and human deprivation as well as the dynamics, coping patterns and resilience of those directly affected. Thus, the climatic, social and human dimensions of vulnerability require complex solutions such as adaptation, mitigation, coping mechanisms, resilience-building, social cohesion, social harmony, and social integration. The solutions to the dimensions link and synergize the policies and actions on climate change, and on social and human development. In this regard, a human rights-based approach (HRBA) draws attention to the need for a deeper analysis to identify who will be affected by climate change-related effects and in what ways.

4. *Generic Issue:* Most countries in Africa are climatically and socially vulnerable. They lack the capacity to adapt to current and projected negative impacts of climate change. Also, they currently do not have the financial resources that would enable them to address their social problems. Economies and people in Africa are largely dependent on natural resources for their livelihood and survival. This high dependency increases the vulnerability of Africa to changes in climate. Primary actions for better protection of vulnerable groups include (a) greater investment in disaster risk reduction approaches linked to both climate-change adaptation measures and national development plans, and (b) strengthening the capacity of local actors in climate change issues, and empowering affected populations so that they have a strong role and voice in preparedness, response, and subsequent recovery and rehabilitation.

## **B. Poverty aggravated by a changing climate**

5. Climate variability and extreme events obstruct development, affect natural resources, damage agricultural productivity, cause water shortages, and threaten the health of millions in the developing world. Climate change thus increases not only costs of development, but also levels of poverty and inequity across the world. The effects of climate change on poverty are expected to be concentrated in tropical countries, and in every nation, the poor will be the most affected. Further, both the rise in sea levels and the occurrence of extreme events will likely destabilize affected populations and lead to large-scale migrations, social upheaval, and general human insecurity. Urgent action is essential, by both developed and developing nations, towards transformation of their economies in the direction of green energy and sustainable consumption.

6. Climatic impacts already affect the livelihoods of people and aggravate global poverty. Millions of poor across Africa derive their livelihoods from common property and natural resource-bases like land, water, fisheries, and forestry. Climate change is expected to affect these resources and their productivity, limiting options and potential of the poor in many ways. As such, climate change is a growing barrier to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Poverty will be exacerbated on the planet unless we can stop climate change and address its negative impacts.

## **C. Population**

7. Population dynamics are an integral part of development efforts, both as cause and effect. They add to the pressures placed to the environment in different ways. Population dynamics not only involve size and rate of growth, but also the changing distribution of population over space and its evolving composition over time. Population, environmental degradation and poverty are linked in the search for fuel-wood, food, water and other basic needs, making impoverished people unwitting agents of environmental change. Rapid growth of population, which exceeds both economic development and the development of infrastructure, aggravates pressure on renewable natural resources. This is a result of high- fertility rates. Fulfilling the unmet need for family planning will improve the health and well-being of women and families by ensuring their right to decide the size, timing and spacing of their children, while also slowing the growth of population, thereby reducing human vulnerability to climate change.

8. The magnitude of the effect of rising sea levels and more frequent and severe climate episodes will have an undeniable toll on densely populated areas. Additionally, climate change is already impacting on human migration on the continent, both within countries and across borders. It is essential to acknowledge the important role played by migration in development, so both sending and receiving areas maximize its benefits for development. Very-little attention has so far been given to understanding the linkage between environment, climate change and migration. A further analysis of the spatial distribution of the population and gender- differentiated impacts of population growth on the environment is critical in understanding climate change.

## **D. Health and the right to adequate food**

9. Besides environmental and economic damage, the ultimate impact of climate change represents a toll on our most precious resource, human lives and health. In this sense, human health and well-being is mentioned as one of the three main “adverse effects” of climate change in the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Indeed, climate change has critical health

implications. For example, small changes in temperatures and precipitation have the potential to increase the frequency of vector-borne diseases, including malaria, dengue and yellow fever epidemics, and waterborne diseases, such as diarrhea and typhoid fever. Furthermore, climate change is expected to increase human mobility, which could lead to the spread of communicable diseases, including HIV and AIDS.

10. Population health is already threatened by low access to poorly-funded health services. The situation is expected to be further exacerbated by climate and environmental degradation, where infrastructure runs the risk of being under/unmanageable, strained, or damaged during extreme climate events. As such, governments should be supported to increase essential expenditures to health within the MDG framework and also within regional commitments, such as the Abuja Declaration, which calls on African Governments to allocate 15 per cent of their national budgets to health. Addressing the impacts of climate change on population health will be the responsibility of the health sector. They will also need to be trained to respond to the health risks of climate change.

11. Climate change will result in loss of agricultural productivity and environmental degradation. Food insecurity threatens people's nutritional and health status, which are already the lowest in Africa compared to the rest of the world. According to the World Food Programme, the effects of climate change will increase the number of malnourished children by 24 million by 2050, with the biggest rise in the number of malnourished children predicted to be in sub-Saharan Africa. As gender discrimination in the allocation of food puts girls at greater risk than boys, particular attention must be paid to the gender-specific impact of climate change on the right to food.<sup>1</sup> The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food emphasized the added value of using a human rights-based approach in climate change mitigation and adaptation policies, in order to ensure that these are designed and implemented in ways that prioritize the needs of the most vulnerable groups, and that climate change does not further contribute to inequality and poverty.

## **E. Education and employment**

12. *Education:* Extra investment in education is needed to promote local adaptation and mitigation measures. In promoting awareness on the causes and consequences of climate change and thereby enabling African societies to implement context-specific remedies, education has a critical role. Low-level of educational coverage coupled with poor-quality and high numbers of illiteracy among African societies makes climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies and actions complex. Investment in education is instrumental in bringing a wide range and sustainable impact to the effects of climate change.

13. *Employment:* Implementation of adaptation and mitigation actions throughout the continent will offer better employment prospects for African youth and women. New-financing methods for projects such as adapted Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) and infrastructure renewal should provide long-term employment opportunities and improvement in living standards, in addition to the stimulus from economic takeoff. Empowered-African youth can come up with innovations beyond carbon-trading schemes for tackling climate change and engage better in the climate-change dialogue. In line with the 'Ouagadougou 2004 Plan Declaration' and 'Plan of Action on Employment Promotion and Poverty Alleviation', emphasis should be put on unleashing the huge potential of the informal and rural economies for job creation. Emphasis should also be put on the social economy, social protection, produc-

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1 BRIDGE (2008), Gender and climate change: mapping the linkages, p. 3.

tivity improvement for better jobs and labour market governance improvement (employment-policy planning, labour-market information system, public-employment services and labour administration).

## **F. Gender under a changing climate**

14. Over the past decade, the significance of gender issues has become more apparent through attempts to address intractable challenges as poverty, vulnerability and environmental resource degradation. Traditionally, African women have been the patrons of the environment in which they live. They have an intimate knowledge of the social and natural systems and are at the heart of their families' and communities' resource management and well-being, notably in rural areas. These adaptive capacities have undoubtedly been severely challenged by the high prevalence of poverty among women. Recent evidence shows that poverty is higher among women in Africa than other regions in the world, and is wide-spread among female headed households. This is partly explained by women's comparatively limited access to productive factors including land, technology and credit, as well as limited access to decision-making processes. Gender differences in property rights and in issues related to access to information and different cultural, social and economic roles for men and women, means that climate change is likely to affect them differently. The impact of climate change on women's lives varies between countries, regions and cultures, thus planning for mitigation and adaptation to climate change needs to consider each individual situation.

15. *Issue:* While women are severely affected by climate change, they are under-represented and insufficiently engaged in decision-making and peace processes and solutions. There are no references to gender in the UNFCCC. However, over the last few years the increasing portfolio of climate solutions is beginning to include gender-sensitive approaches and women's involvement. Gender concerns were raised in Bonn, June 2009, during UNFCCC negotiations. In addition some NGOs have more publicly championed gender justice, such as the international anti-poverty organization CARE and the Women's Environment and Development Organization.

## **G. Children and youth**

16. *Issue:* The majority of the population of Africa – children and youth- are excluded from climate change negotiations and programme activities. Social vulnerability and exclusion of youth is reflected in high unemployment rates exceeding 20 per cent in some countries. Gross enrollment ratios in tertiary education are very low, estimated at around 5 per cent compared to 17 per cent for developing countries and 25 per cent for the world. Very few youth from vulnerable groups, such as persons with disability, youth from poor households, youth living in rural, remote and marginalized areas, and youth orphans are able to access higher education and formal jobs, mainly due to lack of skills and resources to meet costs.

17. *Opportunity:* Empowering and enhancing young people's competencies by engaging them in gainful and productive-economic activities will have an overarching impact in ensuring the effectiveness of programmes designed to address climate-change effects. The impact of climate change on children and adolescents should be considered as an integral part of all international frameworks established to address global climate change.

18. The scope of climate change is such that the consequences threaten overall progress of societies toward eradicating poverty, and hence calls into question the future of today's young people. Much



progress has been made in recent years in vital areas for children. Climate change threatens these gains, and efforts to support the adaptation of vulnerable communities are of paramount importance. Children, adolescents and youth need to be cast as central agents of change in these dramatic transformations.

## **H. Ageing and disability**

19. In Africa the number of older persons and people with disabilities are increasing as a result of changing age structure, conflict, rapid urbanization and other forces. Both population groups share characteristics of high vulnerability, social exclusion, and low adaptive capacity to climate change. Therefore, they are at a great risk of both climate and social change, and suffering from negative impacts. Extreme weather events threaten the health of older persons, and persons with disabilities, making it more difficult to cope or to evacuate.

## **I. Forcibly displaced populations**

20. At the end of 2009, the total population of refugees, asylum seekers, Internally-Displaced Persons (IDPs), and stateless persons in Africa stood at 15 million (half of whom are women and children). As in other disadvantaged groups, they are also exposed to vulnerability and social exclusion, and have lesser-adaptive capacity to climate change. They are at greater risk of chronic stresses as forced displacement is associated with a range of health and social issues, including social isolation and mental disorders. In many cases, reduced socio-economic status and associated health problems prevail.

## **III. Conclusion**

21. Debate and policy dialogue on climate change is overwhelmingly dominated by economic, technical and environmental considerations. Social and human development issues are provided with limited space and attention in climate change negotiations and in adaptation and mitigation measures. Further, Africa is the continent most vulnerable to the detrimental impacts of climate change, which are predicted to fall disproportionately upon the poor and exacerbate inequities in health status, education, labour-force participation, and access to adequate food, clean water, and other resources.

22. Developing coping mechanisms to address and avert projected climate impacts is heavily dependent on community actions. In the face of climate change, countries and communities must be enabled and empowered to manage greater shocks and fluctuations. Communities in Africa are vastly dependent on natural resources and highly differentiated in terms of access to resources. These differences are most significant to the vulnerability and adaptive capacity of particular groups. It is very important that the climate-change debate be widened to include the full participation of vulnerable, disadvantaged and marginalized groups in the local, national and international governance forums.

## **IV. Key questions**

### **A. Green benefits for all**

23. While development of Africa through a green economy should have significant benefits for many currently disadvantaged groups such as some of the rural poor, will it be enough to offset the increased risks of life in a more hostile climate? Is greater equity and inclusion in a transformed global society more than a pipe dream?

### **B. Women and UNFCCC**

24. Do global climate change negotiations and legal instruments (Protocols and Treaties) reflect the different circumstances of men and women and how climate change may impact them? How can the capacity of women to cope with climate change induced challenges at local, national and regional levels best be developed and strengthened?

### **C. Scaling up**

25. How can we ensure that all in a society – including women, youth and socially-vulnerable groups - are properly consulted in elaborating priorities and participate in creating sustainable societies? Many development NGOs will welcome the prospect of a green Africa in a more equitable world, but how can their many efforts be harmonized for optimal use?

### **D. Adaptation**

26. How can adaptation programmes be best designed to help meet the health, education and employment needs of all communities? How much are health services able to respond to current and projected climate and weather impacts as they potentially increase the prevalence of diseases?

### **E. Children and youth**

27. How can the appropriate cultural values for a sustainable world be instilled in the next generation? How can we engage the innovative energies of youth in the process of adaptation, constructively combating the impacts of climate change?

### **F. Are there other on-going programmes and initiatives that might benefit from strengthening?**

28. The Africa Women's Protocol and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Gender Strengthening Programme for Eastern and Southern Africa.