

Seventh African development Forum (ADF VII) Pre-event

United Nations Regional Consultation Mechanism (RCM) Social and Human Development Cluster meeting on Climate Change and Population, Health, Gender and Youth

Climate change through the lens of vulnerability and human rights

Concept Note

I. Background and justification

A. Introduction

While many African countries have made significant progress in human and social development during the past years, many challenges remain as the region suffers disproportionately from poverty, deprivation and inequality. Climate change is one of these challenges and threatens the progress thus far achieved towards eradicating poverty and inequality on the continent. Extreme climate events have become common across Africa, exacting a heavy price in loss of life, infrastructure and productive assets. The poorest and most excluded segments of society are arguably those with the lowest capacity to respond to climate change, and they are frequently neglected in and excluded from the discussions on strategies for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The least progress in human and social development in Africa has been achieved in the realm of health, where high rates of morbidity and mortality from infectious diseases and other preventable causes of death such as maternal mortality prevail in the region. Morbidity and mortality, however, are just two components of population size and composition in Africa. The region is home to a relatively sparsely settled and highly mobile population, which is increasingly urbanized. Relatively high fertility rates have contributed to continuing rapid population growth, as well as a predominantly youthful population: approximately 70 percent of the region's population is composed of children and youth under 25 years of age.

Furthermore, while efforts aimed at reversing trends in gender inequality have gained momentum on several fronts, the gains have not been sufficient to improve the situation of women and bridge the gap between men and women in all spheres of life. Numerous challenges remain unaddressed, including women's limited access to productive resources such as land, water, energy, and credit; means of communication; education and training; the gendered and social costs of maternal and child health; high maternal mortality rates; HIV and AIDS; increasing violence and the continued escalation of rape and other human rights abuses (ECA, *African Women's Report 2009*).

Within this context, the adverse effect of changing climate patterns and extreme weather events on African individuals and communities is irrefutable. Wide-spread poverty, weak and fragmented health systems, and poor infrastructure, including roads and electricity,

all make Africans more vulnerable to the negative effects of climate change. Strategies to respond to climatic change depend on resource availability and the ability to adopt new and innovative technologies, as well as changes in values regarding life goals and aspirations. Development policies, programmes and strategies that simultaneously reduce poverty, build resilience and capacity, and enhance human and social development using a human rights approach, are essential anchors to ensure sustainable and equitable development in Africa in the face of climate change.

Notwithstanding the linkages with climate change, social and human development issues are provided limited space and attention in climate negotiations, and adaptation and mitigation measures. Additionally, various solutions proposed to mitigate climate change have negatively impacted the poor, such as the large-scale development of biofuel, which leads to competition for scarce land and water resources (FAO, as cited in WEN briefing, “Why women and climate change?”).

B. The Seventh African Development Forum

The African Development Forum is an initiative led by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Development Bank (AfDB) to address Africa’s challenges of development and to establish a consensual African-driven development agenda. From a people-centered livelihood and sustainable development perspective, the Seventh African Development Forum (ADF VII) will focus on “Acting on Climate Change for Sustainable Development in Africa.” ADF VII is aimed at providing a multi-stakeholder platform to discuss and build consensus on the above imperatives.

Climate change is one of the most challenging threats to sustainable development in Africa. However, both the debate and the policy dialogue on global warming and climate change are overwhelmingly dominated by economic, technical and environmental considerations. As such, social and human development considerations must be mainstreamed in climate change and development policies, especially in Africa. Four areas of human and social development that need priority action with regards to climate change—population, health, gender and youth—are detailed below

Population

Africa’s population is characterized as fast growing, youthful and increasingly urbanized. The region’s population is growing at an annual rate of more than two percent—nearly twice the global average—and the continent is also expected to sustain the highest rates of urbanization for several decades. Demographic forces will therefore lead to direct and indirect exposure to climate impacts for a large number of children and young people, many living in urban informal settlements. They will exert pressure on the provision of safe water, food, education and health services in the context of a changing productive landscape reflecting new climatic and resource realities.

Urbanization in Africa is mainly driven by extreme poverty, environmental degradation and limited access to natural resources such as land. Cities in Africa are not ready to accommodate this high influx of population. As a result, such migration often leads to urban slums. This situation, in turn, exposes the urban population to health risks (particularly infectious diseases), unemployment and underemployment, and therefore threatens security. Insufficient urban infrastructure, coupled with lacking social services and little opportunity for economic activity, increases the vulnerability of the urban population to climate change. Projected rising sea levels and more frequent severe climate episodes will likely negatively impact densely-populated areas. Gradual environmental degradation has already affected agricultural production systems in many regions of the African continent. This phenomenon will certainly aggravate rural-urban migration.

It should be noted that migration has always been an integral part of the interactions of humans with their environment. Climate change is becoming a driving factor of this process on the continent, both within countries and across borders. For example, the semi-arid areas of the Sahel, the Kalahari, and the Karoo historically have supported nomadic societies that migrate in response to annual and seasonal rainfall variations. Although migration is often considered as a survival strategy in times of extreme weather events, it is key to acknowledge the important role played by migration in development, and consider its benefits as a mitigation scheme. African governments have not given priority to addressing both the gains and the challenges that this type of migration poses to social and economic development.

Health

The majority of the burden of disease in Africa is attributable to infectious disease, although some advances have been made. Regardless, HIV, tuberculosis and malaria are three leading causes of death that claim millions of lives in Africa every year. These diseases and poverty go hand in hand. Weak health infrastructure and poorly-financed health care systems as indicated through poor access and utilization of health care, hamper the delivery of quality health care in Africa. Persistent gender inequality, illiteracy and cultural practices impose greater variation in the use of existing services by women and girls. Subsequently, Africa has the highest maternal and child mortality rates worldwide. Several studies demonstrate that Africa is least likely to attain the health-related MDG targets.

The challenge in Africa is multi-faceted. Massive poverty, persistent gender inequality, illiteracy, rapid population growth and culture have aggravated the existing health problems in Africa. An African woman has one in 16 chance of dying due to pregnancy and childbirth-related complications. Africa is a continent where two out of five people are living on less than \$US 2 per day. Although education enrolment has increased, the quality of education and the gender gap still demands much work. These and other factors have kept most Africans from benefitting from the existing health services. These background vulnerabilities create the conditions for increasing the risk of HIV infection and can be directly or indirectly influenced by climate factors. Climate change can create

conditions that are conducive to the development of diseases, including in the case of HIV and AIDS, forcing people to increase their mobility or engage in risky behaviours for survival which they would otherwise have not engaged in (UNDP, FAO, “Climate and HIV/AIDS: A hotspot analysis for Early Warning Rapid Response Systems”).

Changing climate patterns are likely to bring about a host of health-related challenges, not limited to the increase in the burden of infectious disease, which is already the leading cause of death in the region. Climate change increases the risks of infection from diseases such as malaria and dengue, and also can lead to an increase in heat-related deaths and respiratory infections. It is clear that the already weakened health system cannot withstand the additional burden caused by global warming and climate change. All the early warning reports show that Africa will be the most vulnerable region unless important and timely measures are taken to strengthen its infrastructure, including a health system that fulfils minimum standards.

Gender

Gender has often not been adequately addressed in the debate on climate change and yet its significance has become more apparent over the past decade with the involvement of issues such as poverty, vulnerability and environmental resource management in climate change. Nor have the gendered dimensions of climate change been sufficiently explored and addressed.

Women and girls are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of climate change and environmental degradation due to their increased social vulnerability, as evidenced by unequal social roles and social standing. Climate change presents a threat to water and fuel sources, resulting in increased work for women and girls. Besides, decreased food productivity and increased food prices also pose a threat to women, who more frequently head poor households. Women and girls are also much more devastated by natural disasters than men. One researcher concludes that women are 14 times more likely than men to die in a natural disaster such as a tsunami. Experts predict climate change will only exacerbate such inequities. Therefore, in considering gender and climate change, it is important to identify the different roles and responsibilities of women and men in terms of their levels of vulnerability and differentiated coping patterns. In addition, the impact on women’s lives varies between countries, regions and cultures, so all planning for mitigation and adaptation to climate change needs to take a close look at each individual and concrete situation.

In general, gender aspects are poorly addressed in international, regional and national climate change debate. This is due to the scant consideration given to the socio-economic dimensions and the lack of gender awareness of those who spearhead and shape the debate, thus leading to a strong bias in the content of the debate and outcome instruments, recommendations and strategies such as the Kyoto Protocol. The challenge is even greater for Africa, and African policy makers must realize that women are a largely untapped resource that should be involved and used effectively to combat climate change and its repercussions. More importantly, the debate should be widened to include various

stakeholders and expanded to elicit the full participation of vulnerable and marginalized groups who bear the brunt of environmental degradation. While climate change affects all, individual, family and community responses and adaptation strategies will be different. Therefore, policies and programmes meant to shore up the adaptation process to climate change must be tailored to individual needs and contexts.

The gendered dimensions of climate change and human development have not been sufficiently explored and addressed. As stated earlier, African policy makers must realize that women are a largely untapped resource that must be used to effectively and justly combat climate change.

Youth

The youthful age structure of the African population must be considered within the context of climate change, given that children and youth are particularly vulnerable to long-term effects of climate change and extreme climate episodes. 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, including malnutrition, safe water, disease and child survival. Climate change threatens these gains, and efforts to support the adaptation of vulnerable communities are of paramount importance. Interventions to support disaster risk reduction, sustainable livelihoods and community resilience will be critical, and adolescents need to be cast as central agents of change for securing dramatic transformation.

Children born during droughts are more likely to be malnourished or have their growth stunted. In Ethiopia and Kenya respectively, children aged five and under were 36 and 50 percent more likely to be malnourished and in Niger children aged two or younger were 72 percent more likely to be stunted if born during a drought. In addition, children under the age of five are particularly susceptible to infection of vector-borne diseases, whose prevalence may increase due to climate change.

In conflicts and natural disasters around the world, children and young people, at a crucial stage of their development, are faced with profound challenges. Emergencies often steal their adolescence and force them to undertake adult responsibilities. The structures and institutions that should guarantee their secure, peaceful development – schools, family, community and health centres – have often broken down, leaving them with little, if any, support. Access to basic sexual and reproductive health services, including information on sexually-transmitted infections and HIV, is often lacking (UNFPA, “Supply Security in Times of Crisis”).

The deterioration of the natural environment is one of the principal concerns of young people worldwide as it has direct implications for their current and future well-being. Sustainable development has become a key element in the programmes of youth organizations throughout the world. While every segment of society is responsible for maintaining the environmental integrity of the community, young people have a special

interest in maintaining a healthy environment because they will be the ones to inherit it. The best prospect for the environment in Africa is an empowered youth. The engagement of children and young people is essential to such a community-based shift in development, as they are the bearers of future responsibility. Children and the youth have the right to participate in government fora, to share their experiences with world leaders, and engage in local-level adaptation initiatives in accordance with their right to participate under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) as well as the African Youth Charter (AYC).

In summary, climate change affects and interacts with several dimensions of human and social development, resulting in differentiated vulnerability to climate change. While climate change affects all, individual, family and community responses and adaptation strategies will be different, and policies and programmes meant to aid in the adaptation to climate change need to be tailored to individual needs and contexts. **The ADF VII pre-event on Climate Change and Population, Health and Gender will provide a forum for discussion and deliberation on these four specific issues of human and social development, in order to strengthen their presence in the outcomes of the ADF VII main event.**

The African Centre on Gender and Social Development (ACGSD), as the secretariat of the United Nations Regional Coordination Mechanism Social and Human Development Cluster, is the lead organizer of the event. Other Social and Human Development Cluster members, including OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNIFEM, are providing significant technical and financial support.

II. Objectives

A. Overall objective

The overall objective of the pre-event is to provide a space for discussion and deliberation on four topics of human and social development that are intrinsically linked to climate change—population, health, gender and youth.

B. Specific objectives

More specifically, the ADF VII pre-event on population, health, gender and youth will accomplish the following:

- Create a broader understanding of the centrality of human and social development to climate change discussions and actions;
- Identify strategic issues and formulate key messages on social development aspects of climate change to contribute to the discussion during the break-out session;

- Contribute to the development of a framework through which the poor, socially excluded and vulnerable groups participate in its elaboration, and benefit from adaptation processes rather than be excluded ; and
- Disseminate key messages on climate change and human and social development, by:
 - Highlighting the specific vulnerabilities of socially excluded groups to the impacts of climate change;
 - Stressing the need to incorporate the social dimension of human development to climate adaptation discussions and strategies;
 - Emphasizing the urgency of reaching the most vulnerable communities in adaptation strategies;
 - Making the case for resilience building; and
 - Underlining the necessity of a human rights approach in dialogue and action on climate change
- Inform and influence the main **ADF -VII** as per the key recommendations of the Pre-ADF.

IV. Expected Outputs

The expected outputs of the ADF pre-event will include:

- A broader understanding of the centrality of human and social development to climate change in the African context, created with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in preparation to ADF-VII;
- Formulated key issues and messages on social development aspects of climate change to contribute to the discussion during the Parallel Focus Break-out Session 2.1 on Climate Change and Human Development;
- Systematically integrated human and social development, more specifically population, health, gender and youth, in the framework on climate change for sustainable development in Africa, to be adopted at the ADF-VII, and
- The development and dissemination of key issues and messages on climate change and human and social development, including the specific vulnerabilities of excluded groups.

V. Format

The pre-event will be a two-day event held on Monday, October 11 and Tuesday, 12 October 2010 at the United Nations Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The conference will be held with simultaneous English-French/French-English interpretation. Some 75 to 100 participants are expected.