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A Vindication for African Women in the Adaptation and Mitigation Policy-Making Process

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Charting a Sustainable Development Goal-compliant future meeting the objectives of the Paris Agreement, hinges on the meaningful inclusion of women leadership in charting adaptation and mitigation strategies. Successful delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly the following, Climate Action, Gender Equality, No Poverty, Peace & Justice and Strong Institutions will remain fragmented without efficient gender-responsive measures. Re-centering the role of women in the policy-making space is critical as new research evinces new insights for practitioners and academics alike to closely re-examine the climate-gender nexus. On the African continent, women bear the brunt of climate-ripple effects. Gender-based asymmetries of power remain salient in asset control and traditional adaptation and responsive strategies alike. Limited access to financial capital, educational resources, land management and household decision-making severely constrains women and girls' resilience capacity. These barriers jeopardize women's cardinal contributions as guarantors of traditional ecological stewardship and 'custodians of Indigenous Knowledge.'

Addressing the climate-gender nexus is gaining momentum regionally. The African Negotiator Group's engagement with the United Nations's Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Lima Work Program on Gender (LPGW) signals political will from African decision makers to deliver on gender action. Increasingly, environmental justice and gender equality are taking up space as is the case with the budding Gender Action Plan (GAP) discussed at the ongoing Subsidiary Bodies 62nd Session in Bonn. However, the gender action 'ambition cycle' risks stalling if the flurry of roadmaps, blueprints and action plans aren't implemented.

Gender responsive measures must be substantial, a step away from performative virtue signaling, and not fall prey to pink and green washing. Regionally, the way forward is two-fold. Firstly, investing in continental agency-centered strategy to build capacity for female policy makers to lead on the adaptation and mitigation portfolios. Think youth negotiators program, early-career mentoring initiatives with the African Group of Negotiators Experts Support (AGNES) group, unlocking internship opportunities with national environmental ministries and upscaling female leadership in leading negotiations. The second pillar is disbursing funds through regional institutions such as the African Union (AU), and the African Development Program (AfDB) for research, collecting data, and popularizing study findings on the climate-gender nexus feeding in program design and implementation of gender-aware ecosystem-based adaptation.

To better understand the workings of the African policy ecosystem on gender particularly, it is necessary to overview hallmarks of gender climate action. These include but are not limited to the Lima Work Program, SDG 5, the AU's sixth item of its Agenda 2063, and the outcomes of COP20 & 21. Established in 2014 with the goal to weave in gender considerations into the workings of multilateral UNFCCC-negotiations, it is central to the annual conduct of the Conference of Parties meetings (COPs). The LWPG is the flagship outcome of COP20 with decision (18/CP.20). The LWPG sets a precedent for institutionalized efforts to tackle the climate-gender nexus. It scales up implementation, and is subject to improvement as the launch of the new Gender Action Plan, hopes to address worries of gender-blind decision making. At the SB62, ongoing workshops are taking place to launch the GAP at COP30. The successful extension of the LWPG at COP29 is a positive signal from parties for gender-sound UNFCCC processes. Alongside the UNFCCC, regional bodies such as the African Union are devising gender

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positive provisions, namely through Agenda 2063.

Agenda 2063 by the AU is a strategic blueprint for collective action and multi-sectoral efforts to uplift African livelihoods. It includes seven aspirations and twenty goals. Presented at the African Union Summit in February 2024, Agenda 2063's roll out plan is five-legged, each implementation phase running for a decade. Commonly referred to as the First Ten Year Implementation (FTYIP), the initial roll out phase launched in 2014, and resumed in 2023. This Pan-African roadmap signals an institutionalized move towards embedding gender in African policy. For observers, a close read of Agenda 2063 implies that full-fledged fulfillment of sustainable development and prosperity are contingent on the comprehensive and intersectional promises of Aspiration six. Building upon the SDGs, Aspiration Six and Seventeen work in tandem with SDG 5, Gender Equality.

Item six defends a people-centered approach for development. It enumerates gender equality as its first objective. It reads, 'Full gender equality in all spheres of life, strengthening the role of Africa's women through ensuring gender equality and parity in all spheres of life (political, economic and social); eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.' In contrast to the Agenda's ambitious gender action strategy, assessments reveal low-levels of implementation progress, with as little as ten countries delivering over fifty percent of their objectives. In figures, the piecemeal fulfillment of Agenda 2063 is all the more obvious, with mere 23.8% fulfillment of the goals in 2022.

To leapfrog the normative stalling of gender action and optimize engagement of the climate-gender nexus, responsive measures should effectively cascade down from the macro and meso policy scale to the micro-locally bound community level. By shepherding the way forward, the AU, in close collaboration with the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) can engineer timely response measures to course-correct, and boost gender-sound policy implementation via a two-fold strategy. Response measures are understood as policy actions by member states – signatories of both the 1992 Rio Convention and the latter 2015 Paris Agreement- materializing in work programs, national blueprints, and/or long-term strategies to deliver a net-zero future for all. These are additions to the UNFCCC-mandated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) release.

Firstly, by building a synergy between substantive leadership and action. Women's visibility and lead in the adaptation and mitigation portfolios should mirror the implementation of well-informed, strategic, timely and effective policies on the ground. In the UNFCCC, contexts, the AU and the AGN can maximize their capacity-building efforts to ensure a pipeline for women's professional and academic training to substantively lead on the adaptation and mitigation portfolios that are most relevant for women's livelihoods in the continent.

Encouraging, mobilizing and training technical experts fluent in the gendered impacts of climate-ripple effects is key. It is achievable by encouraging track specialization in climate finance and legal literacy of certain articles such as Article 7.1 and Article 6.2, respectively delineating adaptation and mitigation provisions. It is a powerful accelerator for an organic integration of the climate-gender in draft text and amendments at the COPs. Additionally, building expertise at the crux of thematic and dimensions targets of the UAE Framework on Global Climate Resilience is another venue for inputs to the gender-climate nexus. Laser-focus interventions by the AGN accounting for gender action in the elaboration of the assessment, planning, implementation and monitoring, evaluation and learning of the UAE Consensus is another option for harboring gender-conscious policies. If such course of action is taking place, it will become a precedent that may positively influence the ongoing negotiations of the Baku Adaptation Plan, and add a much-needed gender angle to the work on indicators.

Though ripe with opportunities to tackle the gender-climate nexus, the UNFCCC ecosystem isn't the only arena to do so. AU states have ample opportunities to act locally and integrate the interlocking of gender action to climate issues via academic research, collection of new data and the institutionalization of gender-aware ecosystem-based adaptation. Particularly relevant to agricultural and agri-food settings, a group-based approach to ecosystem-based adaptation, implies gender considerations as it contextualizes context-dependent climate vulnerabilities.

Group-based approaches factor the institutional makeup of given communities to adapt, their varying social capitals, 'and the ability of community members to work collectively, and their ability to access resources and information from

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higher-level institutions such as government agencies and nongovernmental agencies.’ Integrating these considerations in adaptive capacity means designing size-fit early-warning systems and tailored adaptive measures responding to a particular community’s challenges with the right analysis and subsequent answer to its gender-climate nexus realities. Note that the group-rights based approach is multilayered as it accounts for numerous variables, including but not exclusive to, group and community specifics, organizational structure and institutional ties – philanthropy funding, public-private partnerships.

Exploring response measures to the climate-genders nexus in the African context is a useful exercise to optimize solutions to the extreme weather events of Africans, particularly women and girls. These gender responsive measures and best practices outlined in the previous paragraph are borne out of immersive experiences in the international climate negotiation fora and in-the field eye-testimonies of climate-stricken communities. These recommendations are by no means exhaustive, rather they provide a template, and a food for thought exercise for research, practitioners and policy makers alike to ramp up their efforts in collaborating cross-sectorally to deliver an adequate response to the demands of the gender-climate nexus in the African continent. If the African Union and AGN are successful in solving this riddle: delivering a contextualized policy response for each national context while maintaining a cogent, coordinated and coherent AU-wide action plan, a gender-sound, climate-resilient future will be on the horizon.

About the author:

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