



Tropentag, September 20-22, 2023, hybrid conference
“Competing pathways for equitable food systems transformation:
Trade-offs and synergies”

Gender and climate change adaptation in refugee hosting landscapes in the arid tropics of Eastern Africa

RUTH MENDUM¹, ANDREW ADAM-BRADFORD², SOLOMIE GEBREZGABHER³, JAMES KINYUA
GITAU⁴, DESTA WOLDETSADIK⁵, MARY NJENGA⁶

¹*Mendum Consulting, Penn State University (retired), Gender Equity through Agricultural Research and Education Initiative (GEARE), Ag Sciences Global, College of Agricultural Sciences, United States*

²*Oxford Brookes University, Center for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP), United Kingdom*

³*International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Ghana*

⁴*World Agroforestry (ICRAF), Kenya*

⁵*Wollo University, Dept. of Soil and Water Resources Management, Ethiopia*

⁶*CIFOR-ICRAF, Climate Change, Energy and Low-Carbon Development Theme and Refugee-Hosting Engagement Landscape Programme, Kenya*

Abstract

In East Africa, the majority of refugees and even host community members are adult women and children, with both groups being settled in arid drylands. In the case of refugees, men have been killed, or are staying home to participate in unrest or to protect property in country. In host communities, adult men who are able to seek work in cities, leave to earn more, some never to return. As a result of these demographic realities, the remaining adult women have high care work burdens, caring for children. These responsibilities are not just a matter of physical resources, but also critically time poverty. Gender sensitive protection is also a critical issue. Women and children need to be able to participate without encountering gender-based violence and abuse.

Burdens for both refugees and host community members include past trauma, varying levels of literacy, cultural diversity that is poorly understood, and linguistic diversity. Refugees can stay in camps for years and thus the psychological benefit of skill building to support households most pressing needs. Host community members receive little or no individual support offered to refugees and thus can be more food insecure than the newcomers, hence the necessity of incorporating a social cohesion approach.

The reality of refugee accommodation in environmentally fragile tropical drylands means that camps are considered an ecological burden. This presentation reframes refugees and impoverished host community members, especially young women, as agents of climate change adaptation. Teaching interested refugee and host communities to cultivate small home gardens irrigated with greywater, plant fruit and shade trees in their compounds, make briquettes from charcoal dust and soil, and build more efficient stoves from local clay, reduces the impact of dense settlements on fragile landscapes. In the process, newcomers and former livestock herders displaced by drought are transformed from a social justice and ecological challenge to active restoration participants.

Keywords: Arid tropics, climate change adaptation, cooking energy, food, gender, refugees

Contact Address: Ruth Mendum, Mendum Consulting, Penn State University (retired), Gender Equity through Agricultural Research and Education Initiative (GEARE), Ag Sciences Global, College of Agricultural Sciences, 728 Tussey Lane, 16801 State College, United States, e-mail: ruth.mendum@gmail.com