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An intersectional analysis of gender equality and climate change vulnerabilities capacities and policy gaps in sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

Gender disparities in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) heighten the vulnerability of the women and marginalised groups to climate variation because they rely on climate-sensitive livelihoods. However, systemic barriers and entrenched norms hinder their roles in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. This review paper explored how gender disparities intersect with climate change by examining vulnerabilities, the capacity of marginalised genders for adaptation and mitigation, and policy gaps hindering gender-responsive climate action in Sub-Saharan Africa. The paper methodically mapped studies on gender equality and climate change using the PRISMA-SCR methodological framework. The paper analysed twenty five (25) peer-reviewed articles published between (2016–2024) to explore intersections between gender disparities, climate impacts, and policies. Key findings indicate that compared to men, women experience heightened vulnerabilities. These gendered vulnerabilities to climate change in Sub-Saharan Africa are rooted in systemic exclusion, limited access to resources, insecure land tenure, cultural norms, and inadequate representation in decision-making processes. Despite these challenges, women play a crucial role in climate adaptation through their local knowledge, community initiatives, and innovative solutions, highlighting significant capacities that enhance climate resilience. However, critical policy gaps of lack of gender-responsive frameworks, absence of gender-disaggregated data, and limited capacity-building initiatives, which hinder effective climate action and inclusive climate action persist. Therefore, bridging these gaps through inclusive gender-sensitive policies is essential for fostering sustainable development and ensuring equitable climate resilience. Nevertheless, addressing these challenges requires coordinated global and regional efforts to mainstream gender in climate policies through targeted empowerment, inclusive governance, capacity-building, gender-inclusive and sensitive policies, and gender-disaggregated data collection.

Keywords: Capacities, climate change, gender equality, policy gaps, SSA, vulnerabilities

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