

GENDER, CLIMATE, AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY IN TANZANIA AND BEYOND

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Gender, Climate, and Economic Opportunity in Tanzania and Beyond

Climate change is one of the biggest challenges of the twenty-first century, but its effects are not felt equally everywhere. In Tanzania and other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, climate shocks like droughts, floods, and deforestation make existing gender inequalities worse. Women, who often collect water, manage household energy, and farm for their families, face heavier burdens when resources are scarce. Men, on the other hand, usually have more freedom to move and better access to land, credit, and paid work, which helps them adapt more easily. Because of this division of roles, climate change is not just an environmental problem but also a social and economic one.

The main worry is that climate change could make gender inequality worse, limiting women's chances to earn a living and slowing national progress. While women still have little say in climate decisions, Tanzania's National Strategy for Mainstreaming Gender in Climate Change highlights the need to see both men and women as important agents of change (IUCN, 2013) (1). Recent studies show that gaps in access to energy, credit, and land stop women from fully helping with economic growth and climate resilience (GEPC, 2024) (2). If these gaps remain, climate change will keep making poverty and marginalization worse.

This essay argues that climate change does not affect everyone equally. Women are hit harder because of their social roles, limited access to resources, and existing inequalities. These differences shape economic opportunities for men and women in different ways, making inequality worse. However, climate action that includes everyone can help turn vulnerability into resilience and empowerment, opening up more economic opportunities in Tanzania and elsewhere. To make this happen, there needs to be fair policies, better education, more access to renewable energy, and greater involvement of women in decision-making.

Climate Impacts on Gender

Social roles and access to resources shape how climate change affects people, leading to unequal burdens for men and women. In Tanzania, women are more likely to live in rural areas, rely on natural resources for their income, and take care of household energy, food, and water. This makes them especially vulnerable to problems like deforestation, floods, and droughts.

Resource Scarcity: Women usually collect water and provide energy for their households. When droughts or unpredictable rain happen, they have to travel farther to get water, leaving them with less time for school or earning money. Relying on firewood and facing deforestation also limits their chances for modern jobs and increases health risks from smoke. Men, by comparison, often

own land and livestock, which gives them more freedom to move and adapt when resources are limited (3, 4).

Health Risks: Women and girls are more affected by climate disasters that harm sanitation and healthcare. Droughts make malnutrition worse, and floods lead to more waterborne diseases. When medical facilities are disrupted, pregnant women become even more vulnerable. The Gender and Climate Change Tanzania Coalition points out that leaving women out of climate policy-making increases their health risks, so national strategies often do not meet their needs (5).

Economic Vulnerability: When farming becomes less productive, men often move to cities to find paid work, while women are left to manage households in tougher conditions. This pattern increases rural poverty among women by adding to their unpaid work. Even though women are key to subsistence farming, they often cannot get credit, own land, or use climate-smart tools, so their harvests drop when the climate changes. Men's ability to move and control resources lets them find other ways to earn money, making the economic gap wider (3,4).

Intersection of Climate and Gender Inequality: These effects show that climate change makes existing inequalities worse. It is not just about biology—social systems that limit women's access to resources and decision-making put them at greater risk of resource shortages, health problems, and economic hardship. Without focused action, climate change will keep causing poverty and marginalization, making it harder for Tanzania to reach its development goals.

Gendered Economic Opportunities

Climate change strongly affects economic opportunities, and these effects are different for men and women. In Tanzania, women mostly work in farming and informal trade, which are very sensitive to changes in the climate. Men, on the other hand, often have better access to property, money, and paid jobs, so they can earn money in different ways and reduce their risks. This gap increases economic inequality and holds back women's empowerment.

Agriculture and Land Ownership: Women do most of the subsistence farming in Tanzania and grow up to 80% of food crops. Still, they rarely own land or have secure rights to it. When the climate changes, harvests drop, which puts women's income and food security at risk. Men, who are more likely to own land, can get loans and invest in things like irrigation or better seeds. Because of this, women's economic opportunities are less stable and more affected by climate shocks (6).

Employment and Informal Sector Vulnerability: Women are more likely to work in informal jobs like petty trade, food processing, and small services. These jobs are very vulnerable to climate change, with supply problems and less demand during droughts or floods. Men, by contrast, are more likely to get paid work in construction, transport, or mining, which gives them steadier income. This difference makes women more economically vulnerable and limits their chances to move up (2).

Migration and Urbanization: When climate shocks happen, men often move to cities to find paid work, while women stay in rural areas and depend on subsistence farming. This pattern makes economic differences worse, as men get new opportunities and women take on more household work without pay. These trends lead to more rural poverty among women and fewer chances for them to improve their economic situation (1).

Intersection of Climate and Economic Inequality: The way economic opportunities are shared shows how climate change adds to gender inequality. Women's limited access to land, money, and paid work makes it harder for them to adapt, while men's advantages help them manage risks and find new ways to earn. Without focused action, climate change will keep making these inequalities worse and slow down Tanzania's goals for inclusive growth and sustainable development.

Case of Tanzania

Tanzania shows how climate change and gender stereotypes affect economic opportunities. The country often faces droughts, floods, and unpredictable rainfall, which directly affect farming, water, and energy. These problems do not affect everyone equally. Women, especially in rural areas, carry a heavier burden because of their social roles and limited resources.

Water Scarcity and Household Burdens: In places like Kilosa and Kisarawe, women are mainly in charge of collecting water. When droughts and irregular rainfall happen, they have to travel farther to find water. This leaves them with less time for school, work, or community activities. The extra unpaid work makes women more vulnerable and keeps them in poverty. When water is especially scarce, men often take over water infrastructure or move to cities, which adds even more to women's responsibilities (7,8).

Energy Dependence and Health Risks: In rural areas, most people use firewood and charcoal for cooking. Because of deforestation from climate change and more people, it is harder to find fuel. Women spend a lot of time gathering firewood, which puts them at risk for physical strain

and health problems from smoke. Without clean cooking technology, women have fewer chances for modern jobs or starting businesses. Men often control and profit from charcoal production, while women face the health and labor challenges (7).

Agricultural Shocks and Economic Inequality: More than two-thirds of people in Tanzania work in agriculture, and women are the main subsistence farmers. Droughts and floods lower crop yields, which hurts women's income and food security. Women farmers often do not own land or have access to money and new farming tools, so they cannot adapt easily. Men, on the other hand, are more likely to own land and get financial help, which lets them grow cash crops or find jobs in cities. This increases the income gap (9).

Legal and Policy Gaps: Tanzania has gender-sensitive climate policies, but putting them into practice is slow. Women do not have much say in climate decisions, and the laws often do not fix deeper problems with land and resources. Experts say that stronger gender-focused climate laws and policies are needed to see women as leaders of change, not just as victims (9).

Implications for Empowerment: Tanzania's experience shows that climate change makes gender inequalities worse. Women are more affected by water shortages, energy problems, and farming shocks, which limits their economic chances. Men, who have more advantages, can adapt and find new opportunities more easily. If there are no targeted actions, like giving women better access to land, money, clean energy, and decision-making, climate change will make these inequalities even deeper and hurt Tanzania's progress.

Possible Solutions

To solve the linked problems of gender, climate, and economic opportunity, Tanzania needs clear and inclusive strategies. Solutions should address both the effects of climate change and the barriers that hold women back. Some interventions have already shown good results.

Inclusive Climate Policies: It is important to make sure women have equal access to land, credit, and farming supplies. Studies show that women farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa produce less than men, mostly because they do not have the same resources, not because of skill differences (FAO 2011). Tanzania's Land Act and Village Land Act support gender equality, but they are not fully enforced. Better enforcement and adding gender issues to climate policies will help women benefit from programs that build resilience (URT, 2013) (1,6).

Education and Training: Teaching women climate-smart farming skills and offering business opportunities helps reduce their vulnerability. Programs such as CARE Tanzania's Farmer Field Schools show that when women join training, crop yields and family income go up (CARE, 2019). Expanding these programs across the country would help women adapt better and become more financially independent (2).

Renewable Energy Access: Giving more people access to clean cooking tools and solar energy lowers women's workloads and health risks. The Tanzania Renewable Energy Association says that solar systems help women be more productive because they spend less time collecting fuel (TAREA, 2020). Making renewable energy more available can help both the climate and gender equality (2).

Community Participation: When women take part in climate decisions at local and national levels, policies are more likely to meet everyone's needs. In Dodoma, gender-responsive climate committees show that women's involvement leads to fairer sharing of resources (IUCN, 2013) (6). Setting quotas for women in climate leadership would make these groups even more inclusive.

Social Protection Programs; Safety nets like cash transfers and micro-insurance can help protect families from climate shocks. Studies show that households led by women benefit a lot from these programs because they make income more stable and reduce the need for risky work (World Bank, 2022). Growing these programs in Tanzania would help women who are most affected by climate change become more resilient (5,9).

Generally, the way gender, climate, and economic opportunity connect in Tanzania shows that climate change is not just about the environment. It is also a social and economic problem that makes existing inequalities worse. Women, who are key in farming, energy, and water collection, face bigger challenges during climate shocks. Men often have more freedom, own land, and can find paid work more easily. These differences keep inequality in place and make it harder for women to gain power, which hurts the country's development goals.

Still, climate change can be an opportunity. By making gender equality part of climate action, Tanzania can turn vulnerability into strength. Inclusive policies, education, better access to renewable energy, women's involvement in decisions, and social protection programs all help people adapt and grow economically. Closing gender gaps in climate response is key for lasting progress. When women are empowered as leaders, Tanzania and other countries can build stronger communities, create more jobs, and move toward a fair and sustainable future.

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List of Abbreviations

- **IUCN** – International Union for Conservation of Nature
- **GEPC** – Gender and Energy Policy Centre
- **GCCTC** – Gender and Climate Change Tanzania Coalition
- **FAO** – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- **URT** – United Republic of Tanzania
- **TAREA** – Tanzania Renewable Energy Association
- **CARE** – Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
- **NDCs** – Nationally Determined Contributions
- **WB** – World Bank