

LOSS AND DAMAGE IMPACTS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN RWANDA

This input provides answers to questions 1 and 5 from the questionnaire. It begins with a short summary of Kvinna till Kvinna and explanation of the research utilised in the questionnaire questions.

ABOUT KVINNA TILL KVINNA

The Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation is a Swedish non-profit organisation, working for women's rights in conflict-affected regions. Due to existing inequalities and traditional norms, women and girls face greater risks of human rights violations in connection to conflict. Kvinna till Kvinna works with local women's rights organisations with different key areas for the promotion of women's rights – to prevent gender-based violence (GBV), improve sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), enhance women's economic empowerment, and increase women's meaningful political participation.

While doing so, Kvinna till Kvinna adopts a climate-sensitive approach, recognising the disproportionate consequences of the climate crisis on the livelihood and security of women. The severe effects of climate change are over-represented in conflict-affected countries, due to geographic location,¹ and can be seen as a driver of conflict. Promoting climate and social justice, while minimising the environmental footprint, is crucial in the work Kvinna till Kvinna carries out with its partner organisations.²

GENDER, WOMEN'S RIGHTS, ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN RWANDA

In 2021, Kvinna till Kvinna carried out a study on the intersection of gender, women's rights and climate change in Rwanda, of which the findings will be presented below to address the impacts of loss and damage on women's rights.³ Interviews were conducted with 320 participants (of which 18% were male) across 10 districts in Rwanda, with questions regarding knowledge and experience about climate change and how to address climate change effects. The mix of primary and secondary data, extracted with a feminist perspective, resulted in a compilation of climate-related experiences, challenges, drivers and recommendations.⁴

Many countries in Africa already experience losses and damages, that will only continue to escalate in step with global warming.⁵ For Rwanda, land scarcity, soil

¹ *How Climate Change Fuels Deadly Conflict* by International Crisis Group. Accessed through: [How Climate Change Fuels Deadly Conflict | International Crisis Group](#)

² *Global Strategy 2023-2028: A push for lasting peace* by Kvinna till Kvinna, page 7 and 18. Accessed through: [The-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Foundation-global-strategy-2023-2028-A-push-for-lasting-peace.pdf \(kvinnatillkvinna.org\)](#) (Hereon after referred to as 'Kvinna till Kvinna Global Strategy')

³ *Gender, Women's Rights, Environment And Climate Change In Rwanda* by Kvinna till Kvinna, 2021. Accessed through: <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Womens-Rights-Gender-ECC-Kvinna-till-Kvinna-Rwanda-2021.pdf> (Hereon after referred to as 'ECC in Rwanda Report')

⁴ *ECC in Rwanda Report*, page 12; Table on page 15; See also Annex 2 and 3 for questionnaire form.

⁵ *Loss and damage: A moral imperative to act* by Adelle Thomas, United Nations Climate Action. Accessed through: [Loss and damage: A moral imperative to act | United Nations](#)

erosion and extreme weather such as droughts and floods are the most common effects of climate change. The increase of natural hazards affects food and water security and has led to increased mortality and property damage. In 2018-2019, the Rwanda Ministry in charge of Emergency Management reported almost 400 deaths and over 20.000 houses destroyed, due to climate change induced natural disasters.⁶

Rwanda has adopted a range of climate-related policies and strategies and is working actively against climate change. However, there is a lack of gender-responsiveness and recognition of the gendered aspect of climate change.⁷ In situations of crisis, such as climate change, pre-existing gender inequalities are exacerbated. Traditional and cultural norms that benefit men have a negative effect on women's access to health, safety, and livelihood.⁸ When access to resources decreases, generating water and food insecurity, women risk being excluded from engaging in society and forced to spend more time doing unpaid household work. Climate change further affects ongoing conflicts and increases the risk of new conflicts arising, putting women and girls at risk of increased cases of GBV and a heightened threat to their access to SRHR.⁹ The fact that women and girls face greater risks and impacts related to environmental degradation than men and boys do, and the absence of the issue being addressed, is what initiated the study.¹⁰

Regardless of how climate-related data is collected, there is a need to recognise gender data as an essential tool to carry out gender-responsive climate action. There is a lack of sex-disaggregated data for climate disasters, which decreases the chances of correctly directing funding towards women and other vulnerable groups. As women's perspectives historically have been overlooked, gender data can help address inequalities exacerbated by climate change and lead to inclusive solutions and improved climate resilience.¹¹

QUESTION 1.

Please describe through concrete examples and stories the impacts of loss and damage from the adverse effects of climate change on the full enjoyment of human rights in your country.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS (SRHR)

Unpredictable weather conditions that enhance women and girls' socio-economic vulnerabilities also affects access to SRHR. The study found that as climate change affects harvest and food security, some women are retreating to family planning methods to keep their families small. Although due to traditional norms, the use of contraceptives is not widely accepted and thus must be kept secret, which in some

⁶ *ECC in Rwanda Report*, page 17.

⁷ *Ibid*, pages 19–20.

⁸ *General Recommendation No. 37 on Gender-Related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction in the Context of Climate Change, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* by CEDAW, 2018, page 2. Accessed through: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N18/068/98/PDF/N1806898.pdf?OpenElement>

⁹ *Kvinna till Kvinna Global Strategy*, page 7.

¹⁰ *ECC in Rwanda Report*, page 7.

¹¹ *Gender Data Must Be the Bedrock of Climate Justice* by GEDA. Accessed through: [Bedrock-of-Climate-Justice-Brief-Final-221104.pdf \(data2x.org\)](https://www.geda.org/bedrock-of-climate-justice-brief-final-221104.pdf)

cases has led to increased cases of domestic violence when the husbands find out.¹²

Rwandan women have reported an increase in sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as a common effect on SRHR. As a result of migration to urban areas to find jobs, many men engage in temporary, unsafe, sexual relations before returning home to their wives. For women-led households, when access to resources becomes scarcer, some are left with no other option than to exchange sex for money to survive, which also heightens the risk of STIs.¹³

Participants of the study reported having to prioritise expenses when climate change affects livelihood, leaving many not being able to pay their health insurance (Mutuelle de Santé). Access to health services such as family planning is therefore unavailable and monthly sanitary products become a non-priority, both having a direct effect on the full enjoyment of SRHR.¹⁴

The rise of family conflicts and frustrations following weather related insecurities, is further linked to SRHR. Unwanted pregnancies because of sexual gender-based violence is one example, another being the increased risk for teenage pregnancies when families marry off their daughters to have one less mouth to feed.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

The study found a strong linkage between climate change and GBV in Rwanda. In combination with existing gender norms and household power dynamics, strained livelihood becomes a driver of conflict, especially when it comes to inheritance and land rights. Our research shows that a side-effect of family conflicts is the increase in physical, sexual, economic, and emotional violence against women and girls.¹⁵ Many women elaborated on their gendered experiences actualised by crop losses and natural hazards, being¹⁶:

- Young girls are forced to work at an early age to contribute to family income, thus forced to drop out of school.
- Climate anxiety leads to a decrease in women's sex drive, which in turn results in disputes, physical and sexual abuse, as well as men's increased alcohol consumption.
- Men in male headed households are usually in control of the limited family resources, and sometimes prioritising alcohol over essential needs to cope with the environmental degradation.
- Heightened risk of sexual gender-based violence and reported cases of rape, when women travel long distances to collect firewood or spend more time collecting water due to droughts.¹⁷

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Floods, erosion and droughts have major effects on the agricultural sector, which is a sector where 86% are women small holder farmers. Ninety-one percent of the study's respondents agreed that limited livelihood affects their ability to adapt to

¹² ECC in Rwanda Report, page 7.

¹³ Ibid, page 37.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, page 7.

¹⁶ Ibid, page 36.

¹⁷ Ibid, page 7.

climate change and thus reduces their resilience. Some women report facing unrealistic expectations to provide for their families when small-scale farming becomes untenable, while others report a restriction on economic freedom as their dependence on men increases.¹⁸

Additionally, women are traditionally the family's caregivers and carry out two and a half times more unpaid care work than men. The research found many reports of men abandoning their wives to migrate to other districts to find better economic opportunities. The possibility to migrate is however a male privilege, as women are the ones who tend to stay and take care of the children and elderly.¹⁹

Apart from care work, collecting water and firewood is also a task that usually falls on women and girls. The unequal access to timesaving and climate-resilient solutions, such as piped water, further restrains women's economic empowerment and participation in society.²⁰ When droughts strike and natural hazards occur, water collecting becomes tedious as women are forced to walk longer distances – time that could be spent on education and paid labour work.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Research and evidence show that investment in women's empowerment, through policies and strategies, has a positive effect on climate change management as women are seen as key stakeholders when it comes to climate change-related issues.²¹ Studies also show that countries are more likely to be involved in environmental agreements when more women are represented in the legislative bodies.²² The study shows that the Rwandan government's strategies are not specifically targeting the unique needs of women and girls, even if the evidence for climate change effects being gendered is strong. Women and girls are not guaranteed meaningful participation in decision-making and planning processes and many women report that they are not being heard and are left out of climate action discussions.²³ Consequently, women are significantly less informed and less aware of the risks of climate change as well as adaptation and mitigation mechanisms.²⁴

CONCLUSION

For women and girls in Rwanda, existing socio-economic and structural vulnerabilities are aggravated by loss and damages impacts. Women not only face disproportionate effects related to their health and resilience, but they are also not given the possibility to seek better economic opportunities or contribute to important decisions regarding climate action. Being expected to carry out tasks traditionally born by women, they are excluded from society (and bound to do household and care work) and forced to deprioritise education. The many frustrations following unpredictable weather and climate change impacts are putting women at higher risk

¹⁸ *ECC in Rwanda Report*, page 7.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, page 35.

²⁰ *Ibid*, page 36.

²¹ *Ibid*, page 11 via Randolph, J., (2004). *Environmental Land Use Planning and Management*. Washington D.C.: Island Press.

²² *Ibid*, page 12 via Norgaard, K. & York, R. (2005). *Gender Equality and State Environmentalism*. In *Gender and Society*. Volume 19, Issue 4. August. Sage Journals

²³ *Ibid*, page 8.

²⁴ *Ibid*, page 12; *Exploring pathways for gender-responsive climate services in Rwanda* by Gloriose Nsengiyumva, Desire M. Kagabo and Tatiana Gumucio. Accessed through: [CCAFS Poster Gender Summit 2018 RCSA \(cqiar.org\)](https://www.ccafs.org/summit2018/rcsa/cqiar.org)

of GBV. As a participant in the study from Bugsera said: “Things have really changed, and you cannot know whether it is going to rain or not, and when you do not get good harvest women are the ones to blame”.²⁵ Adding the lack of recognition of the gender, conflict and climate change-nexus in policies, laws and the global climate agenda, there is a need to address the gendered effects of climate change on an international, regional, national and local level.

QUESTION 5.

Please provide specific recommendations, if possible, on how to address the critical challenges that have been identified.

FOR ORGANISATIONS

- **Develop guiding principles and action plans for climate change action** on an organisational level, using tools from development agencies and other actors.
- **Increase networking on different levels with different actors** in the intersection of climate change and gender equality (e.g. women’s rights organisations, civil society, private sector and governmental agencies).
- **Engage in climate change advocacy work** that is gender-responsive, specifically targeting the needs of right holders as revealed in this paper.

FOR GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

- **Develop a sector-based systematic documentation** on the disproportionate effects of climate change on women’s rights, establishing the different needs of women, girls, men, and boys, to better inform decision-making when it comes to climate action and urbanisation.
- **Include and target women small-holder farmers** in modern agriculture practices and technological advancements/initiatives.
- **Promote gender-mainstreaming for all institutions** focusing on climate change, in all their strategies and action plans.
- **Adopt a feminist perspective in all climate-related actions**, to ensure a green transition that is just.

FOR ALL RELEVANT ACTORS

- **Increase investment in women**, especially small holder farmers – through technical and financial support (directed at organisations, cooperatives), to improve sustainability and resilience against climate change.
- **Advocate for climate-related policies, laws and strategies** on different levels that also incorporate gender equality.
- **Develop Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials** on climate change and adaptation that are user-friendly and locally established, especially in rural areas where education is low.
- **Drastically increase climate and biodiversity finance** - in the form of grants, not loans, and in addition to ODA commitments. The finance must apply a rights-based perspective and adopt principles of locally led adaptation.
- **Ensure that funding reaches communities that are the most affected by the climate crisis**, not least small-scale farmers, fisheries and women-dominated sectors.

²⁵ *ECC in Rwanda Report*, page 34.