

Policy Briefing

Climate Change and Migration

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Building Climate Resilience Through Effective, Gender-Sensitive Migration Policy in the SADC Region

BERTHA CHIRORO

Executive summary

This policy briefing discusses the centrality of communicating climate change impacts through a people-centred approach that considers communities' wellbeing by linking climate change to poverty and a human rights-based, gender-responsive migration policy in SADC. It seeks to incorporate considerations of poverty reduction into migration policies. Thus, internal and external migration in search of sustainable livelihoods becomes an adaptation strategy that has an inbuilt development plan that enhances climate resilience. Local government engagement is critical in the regional forum in order to accommodate the migration-development nexus that harnesses eco-inclusive poverty reduction policies that enhance peacebuilding; natural resource management; water, energy and food security; and health and sanitation. When decision makers communicate about climate

change impacts, this should be imbedded in the language of local community initiatives and indigenous knowledge systems that build community resilience and the active participation of women in the Green Economy.

Introduction

Climate change is a threat to the right to safe and adequate water, food, health and housing. Poor communities – consisting mostly of women – face greater difficulty in adapting to changes in their livelihoods as they lack assets, safety nets and networks.¹ Gender inequality and women’s rights will be impacted negatively by climate-induced migration. Globally, by 2050 an estimated 150–200 million people will be displaced through extreme weather conditions such as droughts and rising sea levels.² In Southern Africa alone projections are at between 39 and 86 million by 2050.³ The poorest will be forced to move internally as well as to cross borders as a result of decreasing crop production and water shortages. Communities in the SADC region are already redefining their lives because of the negative impacts of climate change. The 2015–2016 drought had a significant impact on the region’s food production, resulting in a shortfall in regional maize production of 9.3 million tonnes; malnutrition of over half a million children; reductions in access to safe drinking water for 3.2 million children; and a negative impact on economic growth across the region.⁴

Internal migration and cross-border movements of people in the SADC region in search of sustainable livelihoods are increasing at an unprecedented level. There are benefits when migrants find work, food, and shelter, but there is also a range of developmental challenges. Migrant labourers are exposed to potentially exploitative conditions. Female migrants and children are more at risk of gender-based violence and many other forms of exploitation, especially in the agricultural and services sectors. Thus, a human rights approach in migration policy includes paying attention to gender equality.

Communicating climate change: A paradigm shift

Climate change impacts are regarded as ‘a multifaceted beast, a daunting and challenging

1 Lennart Olsson et al., ‘Livelihoods and Poverty’, in *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, eds. CB Field et al. (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 793–832, https://nmbu.brage.unit.no/nmbu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2387830/WGIIAR5-Chap13_FINAL.pdf?sequence=5.

2 Kanta Kumari Rigaud et al., *Groundswell: Preparing for Internal Climate Migration* (Washington DC: World Bank Group, 2018), 24, https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29461/wbg_Climate_Change_Final.pdf.

3 Rigaud et al., *Groundswell*.

4 Food and Agriculture Organization, *2015–2016 El Niño: Early Action and Response for Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition* (Report, FAO, August 2016), <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i6049e.pdf>.

endeavour',⁵ and thus require an interdisciplinary approach and the collection of gender-disaggregated data-driven knowledge that is more sensitive to the diverse world of human beings in urban and rural areas. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's findings continue to provide objective scientific information about climate change and its natural, socioeconomic and political impacts. These are deliberated on by activists and decision makers in order to develop climate policies and plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build communities' resilience and adaptive capacity.

Yet the cumulative knowledge provided by science alone has not spurred enough action. The scientists have done their part. It is important to give a voice and listen to vulnerable poor communities, allowing them to express their climate knowledge and needs, and put resources towards advocating for those needs. People's lived experiences at the local and regional level are what will lead to the uptake of actions and response measures by those who inhabit and govern their own environments. Communities can share the devastating impacts of climate change, but they can also share gender-just climate solutions and coping strategies, such as water conservation methods; climate-resilient agricultural practices; energy-efficient products; and indigenous knowledge. Linking climate change to people's personal lives and experiences is much more powerful and will allow communities to be more responsive to and prepared for the challenge. Different forms of communication media could be considered, such as community radio stations and storytelling. Climate change impacts can be framed in a more positive and empowering manner, where communities can realise opportunities for mitigation and adaptation that will inform transformative migration policies in the SADC region.

Need for a gender-responsive climate change policy in Southern Africa

African countries often have attractive climate change policies, but implementation remains a challenge. Policy deficits arise from poor institutional interplay and the negation of the interaction of gender within institutions.⁶ Migration is a politicised and sensitive topic, especially in Southern Africa. Most migration policies in the region are gender neutral or geared towards men. South Africa remains a continental migration hub, with women making up a growing number of migrants – a number that will continue to increase. Thus, establishing the appropriate connections between climate change and gender will enhance opportunities for problem solving and increase the efficiency and effectiveness of policymaking. Resource allocation mechanisms and institutional arrangements must be firmly gender responsive within the climate change realm.

5 Katrin Kleemann and Jeroen Oomen, eds., "Communicating the Climate: From Knowing Change to Changing Knowledge", *RCC Perspectives, Transformations in Environment and Society* 4 (2019): 15.

6 Anesu Makina and Theresa Moyo, "Institutional Considerations for Gender-Inclusive Climate Change Policy in sub-Saharan Africa", *Local Environment* 21, no. 10 (2016): 1185-1197, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13549839.2016.1189407>.

Millions of people continue to leave their homes because of climate-related disasters such as Cyclone Idai, which ravaged Southern Africa in March 2019, leaving an estimated 1 000 people dead and 400 000 homeless in Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. Internal and cross-border migration is expected to rise as a result of accelerated climate change, with unprecedented impacts on lives and livelihoods. This requires a pro-poor approach in terms of management and communication, in order to pre-empt the likelihood of displacement by redefining livelihoods, food production and social systems.

Migrants need to be informed about what they can expect when they migrate, so that they are prepared beforehand. Unregulated migration is a trigger of conflict, especially over scarce resources, but if migration were to be treated as an adaptation strategy the SADC region could reap its full co-benefits. SADC countries must navigate new challenges and a complex international development landscape that requires the balancing of economic, social and environmental pathways to development that link migration to development outcomes; investing in secondary cities; and integrating the informal economy into development plans.⁷ The challenge is the lack of coordination and communication of best practices and related policies that address climate-induced human movement patterns across borders and internally from the rural to the urban realm. Internal migration is also often overlooked.

Overview of migration policies in SADC

An overview of migration trends in Southern Africa shows that SADC lacks a coherent and systematic regional approach to migration and development that bridges the nexus between water, energy and food security.⁸ Bilateral agreements continue to dominate. Political instability, economic inequality between South Africa and its neighbours, drought and environmental degradation are some of the factors that have caused the region to experience an increased inflow of immigrants. Although illegal immigrants tend to be poorly paid and live in exploitative situations, crossing borders has become an important strategy for survival and combating poverty. This is a major challenge to a coherent regional climate change policy on migration. Efforts are piecemeal and partisan, and the ratification and implementation of protocols are lagging. The vastly different levels of economic development, as well as semi-skilled and unskilled migration towards South Africa, heighten tensions and xenophobia.⁹

The regional protocols relating to migration – the Draft Protocol on the Facilitation of Movement of Persons 2005, the Labour Migration Action Plan 2013–2015, the Labour Migration Action Plan 2016–2019, the Decent Work Programme 2013–2019, and the

7 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Perspectives on Global Development 2019: Rethinking Development Strategies*, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1787/persp_glob_dev-2019-en.

8 Asmita Parshotam, "Migration Trends in Southern Africa: Southern Africa's Attitude towards Migration" (South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg, 13 November 2018), <https://saiia.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SADC-migration.pdf>.

9 Parshotam, "Migration Trends in Southern Africa".

Regional Labour Migration Policy adopted in 2014 – have slowly helped to improve migration experiences, but with many efforts bordering on control and exclusion, migration is often viewed in negative terms as a brain drain rather than a brain gain. Thus, migration in the SADC region is seen as a threat by many, rather than an opportunity. This has led to the lack of harmonisation of migration policies. Tensions between the discourses on free movement and security threats remain pervasive. Furthermore, the SADC Protocol on Employment and Labour is ineffective, as growing youth unemployment and inadequate growth in economic activity and productivity increase migration challenges in the region. SADC needs to provide leadership and direction in support of pro-poor norms and regional governance mechanisms and practices, especially when faced with pandemics such as COVID-19.

The decision of the UK to opt out of the EU has revitalised the conventional argument that regional integration is only sustainable as long as it does not affect state autonomy. Therefore, regional efforts to advance values and norms for human development and poverty reduction programmes are not free of conflict, resistance or politics. While norms may not be concerned with specific regional geographical contexts, what matters is how regional organisations facilitate the mainstreaming of frameworks and protocols that respond to, and are congruent with, the national needs of members and societies. The SADC region has been successful in harmonising health policies to engage member states to commit to HIV/Aids policies where those challenges have been seen as major problems. For example, in 2003 SADC member states adopted the Maseru Declaration on the Fight Against HIV/Aids, the cornerstone of a regional health policy identifying vulnerable populations at increased risk of contracting HIV and showing higher risk behaviours, such as adolescent girls, street children, people with disabilities, migrants and mobile workers, and sex workers.¹⁰

The Migration Dialogue of Southern Africa has been trying to fill this gap by facilitating inter- state migration dialogue in an informal and non-binding setting. However, the complexity of increasing mixed migration flows and irregular migration remains a challenge. With economies in the SADC region being projected to grow slower than those in other regions on the continent, at 2.2% in 2019 and 2.8% in 2020, and with unemployment remaining a major challenge, the region is encouraged to reduce poverty, unemployment and inequality, and to deliver growth that is more inclusive and resilient by creating more jobs through tourism, agribusiness and climate-smart agriculture.¹¹

SADC is moving away from traditional market-based goals to embrace issues of welfare as pro-poor needs are being brought into the study of regional governance. SADC countries have included pro-poor commitments in their normative frameworks of cooperation and their governance structures, which is quite progressive. This is exemplified by their

10 Pia Riggirozzi, "Regional Integration and Welfare: Framing and Advocating Pro Poor Norms Through Southern Regionalisms", *New Political Economy* 22, no. 6 (2017): 661-675, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13563467.2017.1311847>.

11 See African Development Bank, *Southern Africa's Economic Outlook 2019*, Part 1, https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Publications/2019AEO/REO_2019_-_Southern_africa.pdf.

signing of the [Revised Protocol on Gender and Development](#), which provides for the empowerment of women, elimination of discrimination, and promotion of gender equality and equity through gender-responsive legislative policies, programmes and projects. The protocol captures emerging issues such as climate change and child marriage.

Cities should be active in gender-responsive migration policies

A prominent characteristic of urban poverty in SADC is the lack of durable housing and secure tenure among women, ethnic minorities, migrants and other disadvantaged groups. The forces driving working-age rural women to urban areas include the discrimination they face in terms of land ownership and inheritance, as well as the growing demand for female labour in the urban manufacturing sector.¹² Women also migrate to larger cities to avoid early and forced marriages and other forms of gender-based violence. The lack of viable income-generating activities in rural areas is another driving force in the decision to migrate to urban centres, often for jobs in private households as domestic workers and caregivers. Social and physical barriers tend to confine the new urban dwellers to a life of poverty, with a lack of basic services such as sanitation and substandard housing conditions, inadequate access to public services and insecure property rights. In South Africa informal settlements are skewed heavily, with 119 women for every 100 men.¹³ Furthermore, women living in informal settlements are being left behind across a range of wellbeing outcomes, from access to education and health services to opportunities for paid work. Lack of access to essential infrastructure restricts women in informal settlements from participating in income-generating activities, and most of the work in the informal sector tends to be low paid, temporary and exploitative.

Conclusion

Climate change and poverty interact with other political and socioeconomic disparities, resulting in the migration of people in search of sustainable livelihoods in the SADC region. The economic and political stability of the region depends on food, energy and water security, which should compel decision makers to create migration policy responses that deal with local realities to build resilience. Thus, an effective migration policy in SADC necessitates an integrated and coordinated poverty reduction approach that accommodates the migration–development nexus. Designing, implementing and communicating locally driven adaptation and mitigation measures and actions that are

12 Ginette Azcona et al., *Spotlight on SDG11: Harsh Realities: Marginalised Women in Cities of the Developing World, 2020*, UN Women and UN-HABITAT, 2020, <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/harsh-realities-marginalized-women-in-cities-of-the-developing-world-en.pdf?la=en&vs=747>.

13 Azcona et al., *Spotlight on SDG11*, 4.

gender responsive and uphold human rights, optimise community resilience to climate change and build food, energy and water security.

Recommendations

- Investing in further research on the causes of migration would help to put a human face to the growing development issue of people being forced to move to escape the long-term impacts of climate change and provide livelihood options that further gender equality and uphold human rights.
- In designing policies to lift up the urban poor, all stakeholders (mostly women) must be consulted so that resettlement mechanisms are designed for the long term to reflect the expressed needs of those impacted by climate change.
- A human rights-based and gender-responsive approach should be embedded in development planning to address environmental and climate change migration by linking human mobility and disaster risk reduction.
- Decision makers should use different media means of communicating climate change migration as an adaptation strategy rather than as a threat to communities. This will create an environment in which communities can share and exchange skills and best practices in agribusiness and climate-smart agricultural practices.

Author

Bertha Chiroro is a Project Coordinator for GenderCC-Southern Africa, an organisation that advocates for gender equality and climate justice..

Cover image

Mousaka Fernanda poses for a portrait in a village near Lubango in Angola on 15 February 2020. The Huila province in Angola was recently hit by a drought that dried up most water sources and devastated crops across the southern Africa region, where some 45 million people face hunger. The dry spell was followed by violent and erratic downpours that saturated the soil. (Osvaldo Silva / AFP via Getty Images)

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Jan Smuts House, East Campus, University of the Witwatersrand
PO Box 31596, Braamfontein 2017, Johannesburg, South Africa
Tel +27 (0)11 339-2021 · Fax +27 (0)11 339-2154
www.saiia.org.za · info@saiia.org.za