



Climate Change Impact on Women Entrepreneurs Through Mapping Vulnerabilities

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Letter from the Founder



“Feminist action research helps unpack the knowledge and realities of women and girls. It must be turned into action that enables communities to lead solutions to the climate crisis.”

**Chido
Nyaruwata**

Founder and
Director

As the Founder of Flames and Lilies Climate Initiative (FLCI), I am proud to share this youth-led research emerging from our commitment to building girls’ and young women’s (ages 13–35) climate literacy, leadership, and confidence.

Between July and October 2024, FLCI conducted climate and disaster risk education workshops with adolescent girls and young women in Harare, Epworth, and Bindura. Through feminist participatory action research, participants identified gendered climate risks shaping their communities and livelihoods.

This report draws on the work of a youth researcher who documented the experiences of three urban women farmers navigating an El Niño–induced drought amid limited access to capital and restrictive urban bylaws. While grounded in urban contexts, the findings speak to wider challenges and opportunities facing women farmers across Zimbabwe.

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Introduction

Climate change is a defining global challenge of our time, with far-reaching effects that touch every aspect of human life. Among the populations most affected are women entrepreneurs, who often face unique vulnerabilities exacerbated by the intersection of environmental, social, and economic pressures.

In many regions, women-led businesses serve as critical drivers of local economies and community well-being. Yet, their resilience is often tested by disproportionate exposure to climate-related risks such as resource scarcity, extreme weather events, and shifting market dynamics.

This report explores the multifaceted impact of climate change on women entrepreneurs by mapping vulnerabilities across different contexts. It examines the structural challenges—such as limited access to resources, financing, and social safety nets—that heighten their exposure to climate risks. Additionally, it highlights opportunities to build resilience through innovation, sustainable practices, and gender-sensitive policy interventions.

By shedding light on these issues, this report aims to provide actionable insights for policymakers, development practitioners, and the private sector to foster inclusive strategies that empower women entrepreneurs to thrive in the face of climate challenges. Through targeted support, women entrepreneurs can transition from being disproportionately vulnerable to becoming pivotal agents of climate adaptation and sustainability.

Problem Statement

Women and girls in metropolitan areas like Harare, Zimbabwe, are disproportionately impacted by climate change, which presents serious difficulties to vulnerable people globally. Women entrepreneurs face particular vulnerabilities stemming from socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental issues as the city grapples with the effects of rising temperatures, unpredictable rainfall, and resource scarcity.

These issues are especially severe for women and girls, who often work in resource-dependent industries or informal economies, making them more vulnerable to disruptions caused by climate-related phenomena such as water scarcity and extreme weather.

These vulnerabilities are made worse in Harare by structural obstacles like discriminatory laws, a lack of support systems, and restricted access to funding. Traditional gender stereotypes, fewer educational possibilities, and a lack of mentorship in male-dominated industries are further barriers for girls and young women who want to pursue entrepreneurial careers. These interrelated issues draw attention to a crucial knowledge vacuum about how inequality is made worse by climate change in African urban settings.

Literature Review



The relationship between gender and climate change has gained attention in recent years, especially when studying how environmental pressures disproportionately impact women in entrepreneurial roles. Due to institutional injustices and socioeconomic constraints, women entrepreneurs' enterprises are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change, despite their critical role in economic development and community resilience.

The vulnerabilities, adaptation measures, and policy gaps affecting women entrepreneurs are highlighted in this review of the research, which summarizes important studies in the topic. (Alston, 2013) reveal that traditional gender roles in many societies restrict women's participation in decision-making processes, reducing their capacity to respond effectively to climate challenges. Moreover, women-led businesses, particularly in agriculture and small-scale industries, are highly dependent on natural resources, making them susceptible to climate-related disruptions such as droughts, floods, and resource scarcity (UN Women, 2021).

In sub-Saharan Africa, Khosla et al. (2018) observed that women entrepreneurs face compounded challenges from environmental degradation and socio-economic barriers, such as discriminatory land ownership laws and limited access to capital. Djoudi et al. (2024) argue that women are more vulnerable to climate change than men as they have low socioeconomic skills, inadequate access to assets and social isolation. This shows evidently that women need financial support in every aspect, especially in their businesses. Djoudi et al. (2024) continue to say that if women are empowered, they can contribute significantly to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Despite these weaknesses, female entrepreneurs have shown incredible adaptability to climatic difficulties. The Global Gender and Climate Alliance (2017) found that women are more likely to embrace resource-efficient technologies and renewable energy sources, as well as other sustainable business practices.

Literature Review



Programmes such as the Women Entrepreneurs for Green Economy (WEGE) programme, for example, have demonstrated how creative business practices by women-led companies may support economic empowerment and environmental sustainability. However, adaptive strategies often rely on external support, such as access to training, technology, and financing. Carr, Thompson, 2014 highlights the importance of integrating gender considerations into climate adaptation programs to enhance the resilience of women entrepreneurs.

Theoretical Framework

This research adopted the Ecofeminism approach. Theoretically, ecofeminism examines the links between patriarchal institutions' exploitation of nature and the subjugation of women. Ecofeminism is based on the notion that the same socio-political and cultural systems that put dominance, control, and profit ahead of sustainability and equity are also responsible for environmental degradation and women's marginalisation. In this research, ecofeminism serves as a critical framework for analysing how women entrepreneurs in Harare are disproportionately impacted by climate change.

Women rely heavily on natural resources for their businesses. Such as water for urban agriculture, materials for crafts, and energy for small-scale enterprises, making them more susceptible to environmental degradation. Furthermore, ecofeminism emphasises that, despite these challenges, women possess unique knowledge and skills related to sustainable practices. This expertise can be harnessed to enhance resilience and adaptation in the face of climate challenges.

Relevance of Ecofeminism

Ecofeminism highlights structural inequalities in society. Ecofeminism explores how gendered power dynamics limit women's access to resources like land ownership, financial credit, and climate-resilient technologies. This perspective is essential for understanding the systemic challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Harare.

Furthermore, this framework also focuses on championing women's roles in sustainable development. Women play a crucial role as custodians of traditional knowledge and sustainable practices, especially in urban agriculture and resource-efficient businesses. Ecofeminism highlights the significance of promoting these practices to tackle urban climate challenges in Harare.

Feminist Perspective

Methodology

This study used a youth-led, feminist participatory approach to understand how climate-related water shortages affect young women's livelihoods. The methodology prioritised the leadership, voices, and lived experiences of young women, positioning them not just as research participants but as active contributors to knowledge creation and solutions.

The research was guided by Feminist Participatory Action Research (FPAR), which centres gender justice, collective reflection, and action. Through this approach, young women were engaged as equal partners in the research process, creating space for shared learning, trust, and community ownership. FPAR also allowed the study to explore how gender, economic inequality, and environmental degradation intersect in shaping young women's experiences.

A youth-led framework was central to the research design and implementation. The study focused on young women aged 18–35 who are actively involved in small-scale enterprises and community development. Engagement with community leaders complemented youth participation and helped ground the findings in local realities.

The research focused on young women involved in small-scale and informal livelihood activities, including backyard farming, horticulture, market gardening, jam production, and vending. These activities are highly dependent on water and are increasingly threatened by climate-induced water scarcity.

Feminist Perspective

Methodology

Data Collection and Ethics

The study used qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and visual documentation. Interviews allowed young women to share their experiences, challenges, and coping strategies in their own words, while photography was used to document the visible impacts of water shortages on their businesses and daily work.

Ethical practice was prioritised throughout the research. All participants provided informed consent, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. The research process was designed to be safe, respectful, and empowering for participants.

Findings

This study drew on one-on-one interviews and visual documentation with young women engaged in vending, backyard and large-scale gardening, horticulture, and sanitation-related enterprises. The findings highlight how climate change is directly undermining young women's livelihoods.

Climate Change and Economic Instability

Young women entrepreneurs reported declining incomes due to climate-related challenges such as drought, extreme heat, excess sunlight, and strong winds. In agriculture-based businesses, extreme temperatures led to crop loss, reduced yields, and lower sales. For example, horticulture producers reported plant deaths caused by excessive heat, while vendors experienced higher food spoilage due to rising temperatures.

Water scarcity emerged as a major challenge, particularly for women-led sanitation and hygiene initiatives that rely heavily on consistent water access. Frequent water cuts limited production capacity and increased operating costs, forcing some businesses to scale down.

Overall, the findings show that climate change is intensifying economic insecurity for young women in informal and small-scale enterprises, underscoring the urgent need for youth- and gender-responsive climate resilience support.



Strawberries



Tumeric

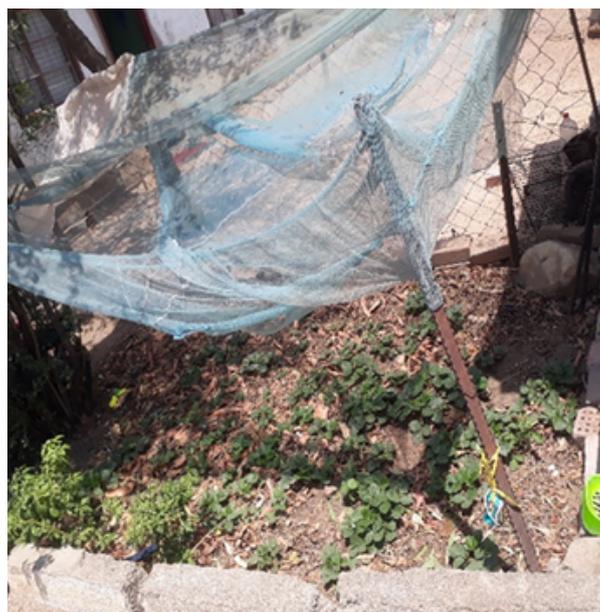
Findings

Social and Cultural Vulnerability

Most women lacked access to climate information. To my surprise, some did not even know that what is currently happening is a result of climate change. There is also inadequate support from the government.

Mitigation and Adaptation

While some women had no hope, others have now come up with strategies to prevent products from dying. They are now creating shades for their plants and have made use of used plastic bottles to store water. They use their stored water for watering their plants. They have also shifted to drought-resistant plants.



Recommendations

Climate change poses significant challenges to women entrepreneurs worldwide, threatening their livelihoods, businesses and communities. To address these impacts, it is important to implement targeted social changes that support women's resilience and adaptation.

Action for Social Change



1. Provide access to climate information, early warning systems, weather insurance and advertising on social media.

2. Offer financial support such as microfinance and green financing



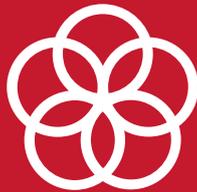
3. Foster women-led cooperatives and community-based climate adaptation projects

Suggestions for future research



How to develop climate-resilient business models.

Exploring women-led climate adaptation initiatives



How to support women-led projects and partner with other stakeholders.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigates the impact of climate change on women entrepreneurs, highlighting vulnerabilities, resilience strategies and solutions. Through interviews with women entrepreneurs, the research revealed significant economic, social and cultural challenges. Climate change affects young women threatening their livelihoods and businesses.

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Acknowledgements

Flames and Lilies Climate Initiative (FLCI) is a youth-focused climate organisation that builds girls' and young women's climate literacy, leadership and confidence. We work with girls and young women aged 13-35 in urban, peri-urban and rural areas to ignite the fire within them to take climate action and disaster management in their communities. FLCI operates at the intersection of climate justice and gender equality, fostering feminist climate leadership in Zimbabwe and across Africa.

FLCI would like to thank the UMI Fund and the Social Change Nest for funding the first stage of Girl Led Disaster Risk Reduction: Securing Sustainable Future. The microgrant enabled us to train 105 girls and young women from different communities in Harare, Bindura and Epworth. We produced 4 youth-led research reports, contributing to feminist literature on climate change and action in Zimbabwe.

We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to contribute to climate action and gender equality.

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