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Cyclone Idai an opportunity to combat climate change through empowering women

Cyclone Idai has awakened focus on climate change and calls for innovative ways to ameliorate the effects of such disasters on vulnerable groups, which are likely to find it difficult to cope especially women.

Women are exposed to various challenges during disasters such as Cyclone Idai due to the fact that their social, political and economic standing is generally lower compared to that of men.

Climate change refers to the shift in global weather conditions accelerated by human activities, which result in an increase or decrease in global temperatures, triggering natural disasters such as heat waves, floods, cyclones and droughts. Cyclone Idai bears testimony that climate change is a reality. When torrential rains hit the western parts of the country especially Chipinge and Chimanimani from 15th to 16th March 2019, flood waters flattened communities, landslides and rockfalls swept homesteads down leaving a trail of destruction.

Most women affected by Cyclone Idai are likely to have suffered unique problems. The national broadcaster (ZBC TV) reported on 10th April 2019 that women received sanitary pads from well-wishers after resorting to desperate and unhygienic methods such as leaves. Considering that the intervention comes weeks after the disaster struck and the victims of the cyclone lost their possessions to the waters, there is no way women affected could afford sanitary wear. This goes to prove that women suffer disproportionately during disasters as compared to their male counterparts.

Policies such as Millenium Development Goal (MDG) 3 promote gender equality and women empowerment, an opportunity provided for them to increase resilience in climate change induced disasters. Women are disadvantaged in that mostly they are poorer, receive less education and are not as involved in [decision making at national, local and household levels](#). Climate change experts advocate for the integration of a gendered perspective into climate change issues centred on full participation of women in [ownership and management of natural resources](#).

Climate Change and Resilience Information Centre (CARE) produced a report on Saanini village located in East Mamprusi district Northern Ghana where women take part in agricultural activities on the basis of equality with men. Although headship and ownership of resources are dominated by men the report suggests that women play an important role in the [processing and selling of agricultural produce](#). Saamini women grow drought resistant crops, practice environmentally friendly farming methods and are able to send their children to school courtesy of local civil society organisations that educated and financed them.

Cable News Network (CNN) on February 8, 2019, reported that Nanbet Magdalene stopped cooking on a wood stove and using a kerosene lamp for lighting after Solar Sister (social enterprise operating in Nigeria and Tanzania) trained her and other women on how to use and sell renewable energy sources such as solar lamps and clean cooking stoves. This project does not only empower women but mitigates the adverse effects of climate change through [the use of greener sources of energy](#).

The Herald (10/04/19) reported that about 344 people died and property worth billions of [dollars was lost to the catastrophe](#). It is not clear yet how many women died, however, what is clear is that the impact of this will be felt for years to come. In such disasters, women are likely to perish as compared to their male counterparts. Gender differences serve to exacerbate the [gender disparities that exist in society](#). A 2016 UNDP report on Gender and Climate Change observed that climate change affects men and women differently, largely due to their gender-differentiated roles, powers and responsibilities. According to the report on gender, the 2004 Tsunami affected 70% of women because they were mostly caught up indoors while men were engaged in outdoor activities. In this regard, the call to promote gender equality and empower women is a justifiable cause, since it fights the disproportionate suffering of women in the face of climate change. Sustainable Development goal number 5, and the 2013 constitution of Zimbabwe speak to the need for gender equality it, therefore becomes a right for women. Women are not only affected by problems associated with climate change but they part of the solution, the roadmap to sustainable development leaves no women behind.

In this context, women empowerment becomes part of the solution to disaster management. When women become economically, socially and politically empowered they become better placed in solving disasters. This explains why all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals have gender equality as the foundation.

Women have to be empowered if we are to achieve sustainable solutions to the problems of climate change. Gender equality is not only a right it is a means to solving the climate change problems that challenge the world.

This opinion piece was written by Raynold Musekiwa, a Communications Intern at Research and Advocacy Unit.