

Climate change poses risk to gender equality

The deputy minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Makhotsa Sotyu, says the loss of biodiversity and its knock-on effect on livelihoods poses a risk to African women, leaving them even more vulnerable to the negative effects of gender inequality.



Source: [Pexels](#)

Addressing a side event on African Women Resilience in the Context of Climate Change during the Commission for the Status of Women (CSW66) in New York on Tuesday, Sotyu said climate change is causing massive livelihood losses and damages for African women, including through the loss of biodiversity, among others.

“South Africa agrees with many other African countries that advocate for a need to integrate gender perspectives into our design, funding, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes on climate change. We further agree on gender mainstreaming across sectors at all levels of government,” the deputy minister said.



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Impact of extreme weather events in Africa

On the one hand, she noted the recent devastating extreme weather events associated with flooding on the African continent, while on the other hand, drought is increasing food insecurity, and wildfires are destroying vast tracks of land.

“The threat of climate change-related events to agricultural production, food security and human settlements is a matter of grave concern for South Africa. The African rural farming communities of largely women will thus need to transform unsustainable production, consumption and land use patterns towards climate resilient agricultural practices,” the Deputy Minister said.

Reports tabled at the CSW show that human pressures will push one million species towards extinction in the coming years.

“If left unchecked, these interlinkages between climate change, biodiversity loss, desertification, land degradation, pollution and the Covid-19 pandemic could unleash devastating effects on humanity, especially for African women. The economic risks posed by climate change could widen the gender gap, including gender violence,” the deputy minister said.



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Projected global greenhouse gas emission increases indicate that the world will exceed the global target of limiting temperature increases to well below 2 degrees by the end of the century. For Africa, this means a world that is 4 to 6 degrees Celsius hotter. Furthermore, warming, ocean acidification and deoxygenating oceans as well as rising sea levels will particularly put pressure on many African coastal towns and local fishing communities.

“African countries are advocating for resources to implement climate action measures. This is because the burden of climate change falls heaviest on the most vulnerable sectors of society. Burden-shifting to developing countries and unilateral efforts to redefine and narrow eligibility for climate change support, as well as placing conditionality on support, are specific threats to gender rights in developing countries,” she said.

More needs to be done to empower women

The deputy minister said much more needs to be done to fully realise the empowerment of women and girls, particularly in developing countries.

“We recognise and appreciate the important roles that women and girls are playing as effective, powerful leaders and change-makers for climate adaptation and mitigation. They are involved in sustainability initiatives around the world, in their communities, and their participation and leadership results in more effective climate action.

“As stated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to empower women and girls to have a voice and be equal players in decision-making related to climate change and sustainability is essential for sustainable development. Without gender equality today, a sustainable equal future remains beyond our reach,” she said.