

CHAPTER 8

Gender and climate change in Mozambique

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MUGEDE (Women, Gender and Development) is a non-profit civil society organization, which was established in Mozambique in 2004. Its mission is to develop active citizenship for the preservation of environmental values, for rural development and the promotion of gender equality driven by justice, tolerance, solidarity and equity.

MUGEDE is based in Maputo, the capital of Mozambique, and it also operates in several other provinces of the country. Its activists are women and young adults who have received formal and informal environmental education.

Keeping Mozambique's vulnerability to climate change in mind, MUGEDE develops activities to educate civil society, especially women, in how to care for the environment to prevent and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Historically, Mozambique is the country most affected by natural disasters in Southern Africa. Mozambique's long coast is situated in one of the most active basins for tropical cyclones, the Southwest Indian Ocean. According to the EM-DAT International Disaster Database (www.preventionweb.net), more than 23 million Mozambicans were affected by natural calamities between 1980 and 2010.

Mozambique is especially vulnerable to climate change due to the fragility of some relevant sectors (i.e. agriculture, health, transportation) and the limited

human, institutional and financial ability to anticipate and respond, both directly and indirectly, to the effects of climate change.

This incapacity to adapt and respond to climate change was dramatically demonstrated during the floods of 2000. A succession of tropical storms that year caused the simultaneous flooding of the Limpopo, Incomati, Umbeluzi, Save, Buze and Pungoe rivers. More than 4.5 million people, a quarter of Mozambique's population, were affected and about 800 people died.

Since 1980 Mozambique has also faced eight major droughts, due to irregular and unpredictable precipitation. The rainy season may not begin when expected, resulting in erratic seed planting periods. The rains may be short and very intense, causing soil degradation and superficial drainage/runoff, or insufficient, causing crop failures.

In Mozambique, droughts are caused not only by a shortage of precipitation, but also by reduced water flows originating from dams in neighbouring countries. Mozambique is part of nine international hydrographic basins, so the whole country is vulnerable to both floods and droughts related to changes in water releases from upstream dams.

Eighty percent of Mozambique's population lives in rural areas and depends on agriculture for their survival. Approximately 70% of energy consumption in Mozambique is produced from biofuels. Approximately 18 million cubic metres of forest are destroyed annually for the production of firewood and charcoal. Even in the city of Maputo, firewood and charcoal are the major sources of energy for cooking and heating, especially in the informal or poorer neighbourhoods. These

fuels are in short supply.

Water supply, too, is problematic in the city, and only about 35 percent of Maputo's population has access to piped water (either in their house or via a public standpipe).

Because of their gendered work and household responsibilities for finding fuel and water, cooking, childcare, care of the sick, and cleaning, women are the catalyst for environmental intervention and consequently, for climate change adaptation.

The direct repercussions of drought, floods, cyclones and the HIV/AIDS epidemic affect women's lives and are closely related to climate change. For example, when food scarcity occurs (due to crop failure or death of livestock brought about by floods or drought), young girls may no longer be able to attend school, since they may need to spend more time on household responsibilities. Women's crucial role in household water management and gathering of firewood means they bear the brunt of climate change.

MUGEDE's Strategies for Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation

MUGEDE's work involves a wide range of community development and education activities related to climate change adaptation and awareness.

Through modest funding, MUGEDE has developed initiatives to promote environmental education in schools as well as in rural and urban communities. Slowly, one can start to notice a slight change in society's behaviour towards the environment. Mozambique is developing a national climate change strategy, including an action plan, with civil society consultation. In partnership with the non-

governmental organization OCPA (Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa -- Observatório de Políticas Culturais em África) and the Mozambican federal Environmental Action Coordination Ministry, MICOA (Ministério para a Coordenação da Acção Ambiental), MUGEDE organized an international conference on Woman and the Environment (“A Mulher e o Meio Ambiente”) in November 2010. The goal of this conference was to reflect on women’s role in times of climate change and to pave the way for women to minimize poverty and increase success.

MUGEDE has started a reforestation project for communities, which produce charcoal and firewood, especially where natural resources are vulnerable to climate change.

MUGEDE promotes sustainable use of local biodiversity in both rural and urban areas; carries out capacity-building related to the environment with a focus on climate change in local communities; promotes initiatives for the expansion of sustainable energy practices and use of adequate stoves by rural women; sensitizes and informs communities about the necessity to treat water and use it sparingly; encourages conservation of water in agriculture and rural communities; educates rural women on how to care for water during drought, when cholera and diarrhea are prevalent; teaches women about the risks associated with building their homes in areas that are vulnerable to drought and erosion; educates about the importance to use building materials that are more resistant to the effects of climate change; and helps residents to identify safe areas where they can take shelter in case of emergencies.

MUGEDE has a number of additional projects still in the proposal stage or awaiting funding, which also would help to strengthen Mozambican women's abilities to respond effectively to climate change.

A project on Gender and Food Sovereignty (Género e Soberania Alimentar) was also created for the purpose of reducing the effects of climate change in the lives of women, particularly residents of rural areas. This project's objective is to identify sustainable environmental practices of food production, accessible techniques of production and food conservation/preservation, with a focus on the use of more stable barns as well as the cultivation of highly nutritious crops which are resistant to drought, such as beans, sweet potato and corn.

Together with Gender Climate Change and Justice, a partner NGO, MUGEDE continues to apply for grants to fund its project to work with other organizations to equip women with better tools to prevent and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Climate change is one of humanity's biggest challenges. It threatens to perpetuate poverty and hardship and for this reason, men and women must work side by side with equal rights and opportunities in order to face this challenge.

Women must be involved in discussion forums related to the mitigation of the effects of climate change, since they have a key role in the use and management of natural resources, and are generally so gravely affected by climate change. We need more capacity-building initiatives in urban and rural communities with special emphasis on climate change prevention, mitigation and adaptation. The education of women will be the driving force to achieve positive results.