



COMMITTEE: NATIONAL GUIDANCE AND GENDER MATTERS

FOCUS: GENDER RESPONSIVENESS IN CLIMATE
CHANGE POLICY FRAMEWORKS IN ZAMBIA.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

Caritas Zambia, is a Faith Based Institution anchored under the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB), whose commitment is centered around advancing the Social Ministry of the Catholic Church. Our mission embodies integral evangelization, which encompasses the spiritual and physical well-being of individuals. This approach aligns with the universal response of the Catholic Church, where Caritas and Justice and Peace serve as integral components wherever the Church operates.

Inspired by the Second Vatican Council's teachings, particularly articulated in "Gaudium et Spes" (1965), Caritas Zambia recognizes the struggles and aspirations of all people, especially those marginalized or the poor, as central to its evangelizing mission. The Church's dedication to social justice was emphasized by the Synod of Bishops in 1971, underscores the transformative role of advocating for improved Social Justice and strengthening the participation of these vulnerable groups in decision platforms or opportunities.

In the spirit of strengthened collaboration with other likeminded actors, Caritas Zambia emphasises the integrated work of **Development, Justice, and Peace**. The establishment of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development by the Vatican in 2016 further exemplifies this synergy, consolidating various Pontifical Councils to address justice, peace, migration, health, and charitable initiatives. Further Caritas Zambia is affiliated with Caritas Internationalis (CI) and Caritas Africa (CA) who play a significant role in providing technical support in the operation of the organization, including policy guidance and financial mobilization among others.

Therefore, our work with the vulnerable and marginalised in society can not be over emphasised especially in a society marred with deepening inequalities between the rich and the poor, men and women etc. Caritas Zambia recalls the story of the **Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46)** and instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. As such, Caritas Zambia and indeed the Catholic Church does not believe in **Charles Dewan's theory** of survival of the fittest, it believes in a society that takes care of the vulnerable and distribution of resources equally.

1.1. Institutional Outlay

Caritas Zambia being a department of ZCCB is directly overseen by the appointed Bishop Director who is a Bishop and a member of ZCCB. The day-to-day management and operation of Caritas Zambia is done through the office of the Caritas Zambia Executive Director who is supported by the Unit Head of Programs and the Unit Head of Finance.

To this effect, Caritas Zambia implements its interventions or activities through four (4) main programs which include the following: (i) The **Economic and Social Accountability Program** – whose mandate include; Advocating for equitable resource distribution and community empowerment through research, mobilization, and policy advocacy and promoting the transition towards clean and renewable energy sources. (ii) **Democracy and Governance Program** – whose focus is around, promoting democratic values and citizen engagement in governance processes and Advocating for the rule of law, human rights, and governmental accountability. (iii) **Livelihoods and Climate Change Program** – and the focus on; Empowering communities to challenge systems that perpetuate poverty and vulnerability and promoting climate change adaptation and sustainable livelihood practices. (iv) **The Child Protection and Peace Building Program** – whose mandate is to advocate for strengthened national laws and policies to safeguard children's rights and strengthening the gender responseless and integration across all the Caritas Zambia programmes through supporting the establishing and strengthening of systems and structures or mechanisms and networks to ensure vulnerable groups especially the children and women's rights and wellbeing is promoted, protected and respected.

1.2. Gender Responsiveness in Climate Change Policy Frameworks in Zambia

In Zambia, gender responsiveness within climate change policy is increasingly recognized as a critical component of effective climate action. The national framework acknowledges that women, particularly in rural areas, are disproportionately affected by climate impacts due to their reliance on natural resources and limited access to finance, technology, and decision-making platforms. Policies such as the Green Economy and Climate Change Act (2024) and the National Climate Change Policy emphasize equity and inclusivity, ensuring that women's voices are integrated into

adaptation and mitigation strategies. However, while alignment with international commitments like the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, and the Sustainable Development Goals is evident, challenges remain in translating these principles into practice, especially in overcoming cultural barriers and resource constraints that limit women's full participation in climate governance and resilience building.

2.0. BRIEF SITUATION ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN ZAMBIA

Climate change has remained one of the most pressing development challenges in Zambia, posing serious threats to livelihoods, food security, water sources, energy production and overall socioeconomic development. Over the years the country has experienced increasing temperatures, prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall patterns and recurrent floods, which have significantly disrupted economic activities, particularly in climate sensitive sectors such as agriculture and energy. These impacts have intensified in recent years, with severe drought episodes affecting large parts of the country, resulting in crop failure, reduced hydropower generation, food shortages and increased poverty levels.

The agricultural sector, which supports the majority of Zambia's population, remains the most affected by climate change. Erratic rainfall patterns have made farming increasingly unreliable, leading to recurring crop failures and loss of livestock. Smallholder farmers, who largely depend on rain-fed agriculture, face growing uncertainty around planting and harvesting seasons. As a result, households experience reduced food availability, declining incomes, and increased reliance on negative coping mechanisms. These include selling productive assets, reducing food intake, or engaging children in labour, all of which have long-term consequences for household wellbeing and development.

Climate change has also significantly affected water availability and quality. Prolonged dry spells have reduced water levels in rivers, streams, and reservoirs, while intense rainfall events have caused flooding that contaminates water sources. These conditions have increased the incidence of waterborne diseases and placed additional pressure on health systems. Communities with limited access to safe water and sanitation facilities are particularly vulnerable, and the burden of water scarcity often

falls disproportionately on women and girls, who are primarily responsible for water collection in many households.

The energy sector has similarly been impacted by climate variability. Reduced water availability has affected electricity generation, leading to frequent power disruptions that affect households, public institutions, and businesses. These disruptions have broader economic implications, limiting productivity, reducing service delivery in health and education facilities, and increasing the cost of living. Poor and rural households, which have fewer alternatives for energy access, are disproportionately affected by these challenges.

The severity of the climate change impacts was clearly demonstrated during the 2023-2024 drought, where approximately 40% of the country experienced drought conditions, and 84 out of 116 districts were severely affected, prompting the government to declare the drought a national disaster. Agriculture which employs over 70% of Zambia's population and is largely rain-fed, has been disproportionately affected. As a result, climate shocks have significantly contributed to food insecurity with an estimated 6.6 million people requiring humanitarian assistance during the 2023-2024 drought period. The livestock sector has also suffered, with estimated losses of up to USD 2.4 billion threatening rural incomes and household resilience.

The social impacts of climate change are particularly pronounced among vulnerable population groups. Rural communities are more exposed due to their reliance on natural resources and limited access to climate resilient infrastructure and technologies. Women and girls face increased workloads as they adapt to climate stresses, including traveling longer distances to access water, food, and fuel. These added responsibilities reduce time available for education, income-generating activities, and participation in community decision-making, thereby reinforcing existing gender inequalities.

Children are also significantly affected by climate change, both directly and indirectly. Climate-related food insecurity increases the risk of malnutrition, while household economic stress contributes to school absenteeism and dropouts. In some cases, families resort to harmful coping strategies that negatively affect children's rights and wellbeing. Repeated exposure to climate shocks also has psychological impacts on children, affecting their sense of security and long-term development prospects.

Geographically, climate change impacts vary across different parts of the country. Some regions experience prolonged droughts that undermine agricultural productivity, while others are more prone to flooding that destroys infrastructure and displaces communities. These regional disparities contribute to uneven development outcomes, as communities in high-risk areas struggle to recover from repeated climate shocks with limited resources and institutional support.

Overall, climate change in Zambia is not only an environmental concern but a significant human development issue that exacerbates social and economic inequalities. Those least responsible for contributing to climate change particularly poor, rural households, women, and children bear the greatest burden of its impacts. Without strengthening resilience at the household and community levels and addressing underlying vulnerabilities, climate change will continue to undermine livelihoods, threaten wellbeing, and compromise sustainable development efforts across the country.

2.1. Adequacy of the legal and policy framework for advancing gender responsive climate action

Zambia has made substantial progress in establishing legal and policy instruments that provide a foundation for gender responsive climate action. The Constitution of Zambia (Amendment Act No. 2 of 2016) upholds the principles of equality and non-discrimination, creating a legal basis for promoting gender equality in all sectors, including climate change and environmental management. Similarly, the National Gender Policy (2014) provides a framework for mainstreaming gender across policies, programs, and budgets. In the context of climate change, the policy highlights the importance of ensuring that women and men have equal access to resources, technology, and decision making to enhance resilience.

Furthermore, Zambia's Climate Change Act No.10 of 2021 establishes a comprehensive climate governance structure and mandates coordination among government ministries, local authorities and stakeholders. The act acknowledges the need for inclusivity and stakeholder participation, which creates opportunities for gender sensitive interventions. The national climate change policy (2016) similarly recognises gender as a cross-cutting issue, particularly in climate adaptation strategies within agriculture, forestry, energy and water sectors. Despite these frameworks, there

remain critical gaps. Gender considerations are often broad and non-specific, with limited operational guidelines for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Moreover, enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance with gender-responsive practices are weak, and there is no systematic approach to track whether the climate programs adequately address the differentiated needs of women and men.

Overall, while the policy and legal frameworks are broadly supportive, they still remain partially adequate, as gender considerations are often treated as aspirational rather than mandatory, with limited enforcement and resourcing.

2.2. Linkages between the International and National Legal frameworks

Zambia's national climate change legal framework is closely aligned with international commitments, reflecting the country's dedication to global climate action. Zambia ratified the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1993 and the Paris Agreement in 2016, both of which provide the foundation for its domestication of climate policies. These international treaties have been integrated into national laws through instruments such as the Green Economy and Climate Change Act of 2024, which explicitly incorporates obligations under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement to ensure that Zambia's legislation is consistent with global standards.

The country's climate targets also mirror the Paris Agreement's overarching goal of limiting global warming to below 2°C. By structuring its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) around this benchmark, Zambia demonstrates its commitment to contributing to international mitigation and adaptation efforts. This alignment ensures that Zambia's national objectives are not only domestically relevant but also part of the collective global response to climate change.

Furthermore, Zambia's Climate Change Policy emphasizes principles of equity and fairness, recognizing that climate change disproportionately affects vulnerable groups such as **women, children, and rural communities**. This approach is consistent with the UNFCCC's principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, which acknowledges that while all countries must act, the impacts and capacities to respond vary significantly.

Finally, Zambia's climate policies are linked to broader sustainable development goals, particularly **Sustainable Development Goal 13** on Climate Action. By embedding climate considerations into its national development plans, Zambia ensures that its domestic framework contributes to both international climate objectives and the wider agenda of sustainable development. In this way, Zambia's climate change legal framework is firmly rooted in international treaties while tailored to address local realities of vulnerability, equity, and resilience.

While with regards to gender Equality and equality being aligned with the international frameworks, the Zambia's National Gender Policy (2023) is informed by CEDAW, the Maputo Protocol, and the SDGs (Goal 5: Gender Equality). For instance, Marriage Act (Amendment, 2023) speaks to issues such as raising the minimum marriage age to 18, directly respond to international human rights standards – specifically the protection of children against child marriages.

It is also important to note that the Gender reforms are also motivated or highly influenced by international conventions, however, the customary law still poses challenges to support the full implementation of some of these legal frameworks.

3.0. INTEGRATION OF GENDER IN ZAMBIAS CLIMATE CHANGE PROGRAMES AND STRATEGIES

Zambia has made notable progress in integrating gender considerations into climate change strategies, particularly through international commitments and externally financed programmes. The country's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement explicitly recognises gender equality as essential to effective climate adaptation and mitigation. The NDC highlights gender-responsive actions in agriculture, forestry, water, and energy sectors, acknowledging women's central role in climate resilience.

Several climate-related programmes supported by development partners have incorporated gender objectives, including initiatives under the Green Climate Fund, Global Environment Facility, and UNDP-supported climate resilience programmes. These programmes often target women smallholder farmers through climate-smart agriculture, diversification of livelihoods, conservation farming, and access to

improved seed varieties. In some cases, women have benefited from capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing adaptive skills and income diversification.

Despite these positive developments, gender integration remains largely project-specific and donor-driven, rather than embedded within national planning and budgeting systems. Many programmes lack sustainability once external funding ends, and gender-responsive practices are not systematically institutionalised within government structures. Furthermore, women's participation in climate governance institutions such as district development committees, disaster management committees, and climate finance decision-making bodies remains limited, restricting their influence over climate priorities and resource allocation.

There is also limited integration of gender into climate monitoring, reporting, and verification systems. Gender-disaggregated data on climate impacts, access to resources, and programme outcomes is often unavailable or inconsistently collected, constraining evidence-based policy formulation and evaluation.

Therefore, from the brief highlights on the legal analysis of the climate change related legal frameworks as well as the gender, Caritas Zambia has also been able to establish that the Zambian legal frameworks are clearly aligned with the international legal frameworks. Specifically, Zambia's legal frameworks on climate change and gender are strongly linked to international instruments. The country has domesticated the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement through its Green Economy and Climate Change Act (2024), while its National Gender Policy (2023) and related reforms are aligned with conventions such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the SDGs.

4.0. IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON MEN AND WOMEN

i. Livelihoods and Economic Security

Climate change has continued posing severe threats to livelihoods in Zambia, particularly in rural areas where poverty levels are highest. Agriculture employs most of the rural population and remains predominantly rain-fed. Women are heavily concentrated in subsistence farming, informal trading, and natural resource-based

livelihoods, all of which are highly sensitive to climatic variability. According to UNDP estimates, over 60% of rural women depend directly on rain-fed agriculture, making them especially vulnerable to droughts and erratic rainfall.

Recurrent droughts have reduced crop yields, undermined household incomes, and increased food insecurity. Female-headed households are statistically more likely to experience chronic food insecurity and poverty during climate shocks due to limited access to productive assets and formal employment opportunities. Men, by contrast, are more likely to migrate in search of wage labour, which often transfers economic and caregiving burdens to women.

ii. Water and Food Security

Climate induced water scarcity has profound gendered implications. Women and girls are primarily responsible for water collection in most Zambian households. During drought periods, water sources become scarce, forcing women and girls to travel longer distances and spend more time fetching water. This increased burden reduces time available for education, income-generating activities, and rest, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and gender inequality.

Food security is similarly affected. Reduced agricultural productivity leads to higher food prices and limited dietary diversity. Women often prioritise feeding children and other household members, reducing their own food intake during periods of scarcity. This contributes to malnutrition and adverse health outcomes, particularly for pregnant and lactating women.

iii. Health Impacts

Climate change exacerbates public health challenges in Zambia. Droughts and floods compromise water quality and sanitation, increasing the prevalence of water-borne diseases such as cholera and dysentery. Women bear disproportionate caregiving responsibilities during health crises, increasing physical, emotional, and economic stress.

Climate-related malnutrition, particularly among children and women, has long-term consequences for maternal health, child development, and national human capital.

Limited access to healthcare during climate emergencies further compounds these challenges.

iv. Education Impacts

Climate shocks disrupt education systems, particularly for girls. During periods of drought or flooding, girls are more likely to be withdrawn from school to assist with water collection, caregiving, or income-generating activities. Climate-induced poverty also increases the risk of early marriage as a coping strategy, undermining girls' educational attainment and long-term socio-economic prospects.

v. Household and Community Resilience

Women play a central role in maintaining household and community resilience through resource management, caregiving, and social networks. However, limited access to land rights, climate finance, and decision-making authority constrains their capacity to adapt effectively. Gender-responsive climate action must therefore recognise and strengthen women's roles while addressing structural barriers to resilience.

5.0. CHALLENGES LIMITING GENDER-RESPONSIVE CLIMATE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

a) Institutional and Technical Capacity Gaps

One of the most persistent challenges is the limited capacity of government institutions, local authorities, and climate governance bodies to effectively mainstream gender into climate planning and execution. Many officials lack sufficient training in gender analytical tools and gender-responsive budgeting, which hinders their ability to translate high-level policy commitments into actionable programmes with measurable outcomes.

Gender focal points are often under-resourced and lack authority to influence climate planning decisions, resulting in gender frameworks being sidelined during budget negotiations or sector prioritization processes. This technical and operational weakness undermines the consistency of gender integration across various

Government Ministries and this has continued to hamper the effectiveness of gender-responsive climate actions.

b) Limited Access to Climate Finance, Credit, and Productive Resources for Women

Another critical challenge lies in women's constrained access to climate finance and productive resources, which significantly limits their adaptive capacity. Despite women's central role in climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture, water management, and natural resource use, they remain systematically excluded from formal financial systems due to lack of collateral, land ownership, and financial literacy. Climate financing mechanisms both domestic and international often favour large-scale mitigation projects or infrastructure investments that are not easily accessible to women at the household or community level. As a result, women-led adaptation initiatives, such as small-scale irrigation, diversified cropping systems, and renewable energy enterprises, remain underfunded. This imbalance perpetuates gendered economic vulnerability and reduces the effectiveness of climate action, as adaptation strategies fail to reach those most exposed to climate risks.

c) Socio-Cultural Norms and Power Imbalances

Deep-rooted socio-cultural norms and patriarchal power structures continue to pose significant barriers to gender-responsive climate action. In many communities, traditional gender roles limit women's participation in decision-making processes related to land use, resource allocation, and climate adaptation strategies. Women's voices are often marginalized in community meetings and local governance structures, even when they are the primary managers of natural resources and household resilience. These norms also affect intra-household decision-making, where men may control income, land, and productive assets, constraining women's ability to adopt climate-resilient practices independently. Without deliberate efforts to challenge and transform these norms, climate interventions risk reinforcing existing gender inequalities rather than empowering women as agents of change.

6.0. RECOMMENDATIONS

To strengthen Zambia's climate frameworks in ways that effectively address gender disparities, the following strategies are recommended:

i. Institutionalisation of Gender Impact Assessments in Climate Planning

Government should institutionalise mandatory Gender Impact Assessments (**GIAs**) for all climate-related policies, programmes, projects, and public investments at national and sub-national levels. These assessments should be conducted at the design stage and periodically during implementation to ensure that climate interventions do not unintentionally exacerbate gender inequalities. GIAs would enable policymakers to identify differentiated impacts on women and men, particularly in relation to access to resources, labour burdens, and decision-making power. Embedding GIAs within existing environmental and social safeguard frameworks would strengthen accountability, promote evidence-based decision making, and ensure that gender considerations are systematically integrated rather than treated as optional add-ons.

ii. Enhancing Women's Leadership and Representation in Climate Governance

Deliberate measures should be taken to strengthen women's representation and leadership in climate governance structures at all levels, including national climate councils, sectoral planning committees, disaster risk management authorities, and community-level climate adaptation groups. This may include the introduction of minimum gender quotas, leadership development programmes for women, and mentorship initiatives that prepare women to participate meaningfully in technical and policy-oriented climate discussions. Beyond numerical representation, emphasis should be placed on ensuring that women's voices influence decisions related to resource allocation, programme design, and priority setting. Empowering women as decision makers will enhance the relevance, equity, and sustainability of climate action.

iii. Strengthening Women's Access to Climate Information and Early Warning Systems

Government should ensure that climate information services and early warning systems are accessible, inclusive, and responsive to women's needs. This includes

tailoring communication channels to reach women with varying literacy levels, using local languages, community radio, mobile messaging, and women's groups. Women should be involved in the design and dissemination of early warning messages to ensure relevance and usability. Improved access to timely climate information will enable women to make informed decisions regarding agricultural activities, water management, disaster preparedness, and livelihood diversification, thereby enhancing household and community resilience.

iv. Strengthening Gender-Responsive Climate Financing Mechanisms

Zambia should develop and implement dedicated gender-responsive climate financing mechanisms within national and sectoral budgets. This includes introducing gender markers in climate budgets, ring-fencing funds for women-centred adaptation and resilience initiatives and ensuring women's direct access to climate finance through simplified application procedures and community-based financing models. Public financial management systems should track and report on gender-related climate expenditures to enhance transparency and accountability. Additionally, climate finance frameworks should incentivise private sector and financial institutions to design gender-inclusive climate products such as micro-insurance, green credit facilities, and low-interest loans tailored to women-led enterprises and smallholder farmers.

8.0. CONCLUSION

Zambia has made notable progress in establishing legal and policy frameworks that recognise gender equality as a cross-cutting issue in climate change responses. However, increasing climate variability continues to expose structural gender inequalities, particularly affecting women and girls in climate-sensitive livelihoods and rural communities. Policy commitments have not always translated into consistent, well-resourced, and enforceable action, limiting the effectiveness of gender-responsive climate interventions.

To achieve inclusive and sustainable climate resilience, Zambia must move beyond policy statements toward strengthened implementation. This requires embedding clear gender mandates in climate legislation, enhancing institutional capacity, ensuring equitable access to climate finance, and promoting meaningful participation of women

in climate governance. Addressing these gaps will not only reduce gender-based vulnerabilities but also improve the overall effectiveness of national climate action.

Therefore, gender-responsive climate action is essential for advancing resilience, social equity, and sustainable development. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this submission, Zambia can strengthen its climate policy framework and ensure that climate responses benefit all citizens in an equitable and lasting manner.