

GBV AoR HELPDESK

Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies



Exploring the links between flooding and violence against women and girls in the Eastern and Southern Africa region

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Introduction

In the coming decades, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths per year¹. More than 3.6 billion people live in areas that are highly vulnerable because of climate change². Among these, 1.81 billion people, or 23% of the world's population, face significant flood risks³. Women are disproportionately affected by climate-related disasters, including flooding⁴. This includes higher rates of mortality in the immediate effects of flooding, and also the experience of violence and discrimination in the aftermath. Disasters such as flooding exacerbate existing gender inequality and increase both the risk of GBV occurring, and the vulnerability to these risks. Eastern and Southern Africa has been particularly affected by the climate crisis. According to the [ND-GAIN Country Index 2023](#), 28 of the countries most vulnerable to climate change are in this region⁵. In the last decade Eastern and Southern Africa has seen increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events including storm and cyclones leading to floods. In 2022 the KwaZulu-Natal floods in South Africa killed over 400 people and destroyed or damaged the homes of at least 13,000 households⁶. In the last year heavy El Niño rains and associated flooding have afflicted the East African region where more than 637,000 people have been affected, and an estimated 234,000 displaced⁷. The worst of the flooding has been in Kenya, Burundi, Somalia and Tanzania, compounding existing vulnerabilities in

¹ World Health Organization (2023) "Climate change". <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>

² World Health Organization (2023) *Ibid*

³ World Bank (2022) 'Flood risk already affects 1.81 billion people. Climate change and unplanned urbanization could worsen exposure'. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/climatechange/flood-risk-already-affects-181-billion-people-climate-change-and-unplanned>

⁴ World Bank (2012) 'Making Women's Voices Count: Integrating Gender Issues in Disaster Risk Management' p2.

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/723731468234284901/pdf/658410REVISED00view0Final0for0email.pdf>

⁵ Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (2023) "Country Index". <https://gain.nd.edu/our-work/country-index/>

⁶ JBA (2022) 'South Africa KwaZulu-Natal Floods' <https://www.ibarisk.com/products-services/event-response/south-africa-kwazulu-natal-floods/>

⁷ UNICEF (2024) 'Almost 1 Million People in Kenya, Burundi, Tanzania, and Somalia Affected as Unprecedented Heavy Rains Continue to Wreak Havoc in Eastern Africa'. <https://www.unicef.org.uk/press-releases/almost-1-million-people-in-kenya-burundi-tanzania-and-somalia-affected-as-unprecedented-heavy-rains-continue-to-wreak-havoc-in-eastern-africa/>

the region, including further displacement for refugees and IDPs.⁸ Women and girls have shared that in the aftermath of these floods they fear for their safety, as they feel more vulnerable to GBV⁹. Concerns of sexual exploitation and abuse have also been raised¹⁰.

To provide information that can be useful to humanitarians, as well as development actors, working in flood-prone contexts, this report examines how flooding, induced by climate change, disproportionately affects women and girls and increases their risk of experiencing GBV. The report has a particular focus on the Eastern and Southern Africa region. It identifies effective emergency preparedness and response strategies, particularly in the Eastern and Southern African region.

This report is based on rapid desk-based research of literature published in English. It considers the available evidence on flood-affected countries and communities globally with a specific focus on the Eastern and Southern Africa region. While some grey literature and practice-based sources have been included, there is a lack of systematic evidence – indicating that this is an area that requires further study. After synthesizing evidence, the paper outlines recommendations for practitioners and policy makers to support addressing GBV in flooding crises.

The gendered effects of flooding

Flooding is the most common form of natural disaster worldwide. The World Meteorological Organization says that 44% of worldwide disasters have been flood-associated, and an additional 17% were related to cyclones¹¹. The WHO describes the three main types of floods as follows:

Flash floods are caused by rapid and excessive rainfall that raises water heights quickly, and rivers, streams, channels or roads may be overtaken.

River floods are caused when consistent rain or snow melt forces a river to exceed capacity.

Coastal floods are caused by storm surges associated with tropical cyclones and tsunamis.¹²

All types of flooding have the potential to cause high mortality, widespread devastation, displacement, economic losses, and the disruption of essential services and critical infrastructure. Flooding often leads to outbreaks of epidemics and waterborne diseases, such as cholera, typhoid and diarrhea. These all have a disproportionate impact on women and girls.

Research shows that in most crisis situations, women and children account for the majority of those affected, making up more than 75 percent of those displaced by natural disasters, and typically 70-80 percent of those

⁸ UNHCR (2024) “Heavy rainfall in East Africa forces thousands of refugees from their homes”. <https://www.unhcr.org/news/briefing-notes/heavy-rainfall-east-africa-forces-thousands-refugees-their-homes>

⁹ Plan International (2023) ‘Girls and young women bear the brunt of El Niño rains in Kenya’ <https://plan-international.org/news/2023/12/11/girls-and-young-women-bear-the-brunt-of-el-nino-rains-in-kenya/>

¹⁰ UNICEF (2024) ‘Almost 1 Million People in Kenya, Burundi, Tanzania, and Somalia Affected as Unprecedented Heavy Rains Continue to Wreak Havoc in Eastern Africa’ <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/almost-1-million-people-kenya-burundi-tanzania-and-somalia-affected-unprecedented>

¹¹ World Meteorological Organization (2021) ‘Weather-related disasters increase over past 50 years, causing more damage but fewer deaths’ <https://wmo.int/media/news/weather-related-disasters-increase-over-past-50-years-causing-more-damage-fewer-deaths#:~:text=Distribution%20of%20disasters%20and%20impacts,been%20associated%20with%20tropical%20cyclones.>

¹² World Health Organization (no date) ‘Floods’ https://www.who.int/health-topics/floods#tab=tab_1

needing assistance in emergency situations¹³. As a result, women's mortality rates in natural disasters are higher than for men, especially in countries where women have lower socioeconomic status¹⁴. In the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone, for instance, women made up 90% of the 140,000 fatalities¹⁵. In the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, four times as many women as men died.¹⁶ Discriminatory gender norms worsen susceptibility to risk, impede mobility, and reduce adaptive capacity, including access to life-saving services during disasters¹⁷.

In addition to deaths directly caused by flooding, women and girls are also disproportionately affected by post-flood health effects. They are less likely to have access to safe water and sanitation facilities and also bear a disproportionate responsibility for taking care of older persons and children. Pregnant and lactating women may have additional vulnerabilities during flooding crises and in their aftermath. An analysis of 130 studies found that women were more at risk than men for poor physical and mental health as well as food insecurity.¹⁸

Periods of heavy rainfall and flooding often exacerbate existing vulnerabilities such as severe malnutrition and acute food insecurity, due to reduced crop production and extensive livestock deaths. These effects are also gendered. In Zambia, from 1991 to 2008, four droughts followed by two floods led to a significant decline in agricultural output, resulting in widespread hunger and poverty – each event impacting over a million people. In rural Zambia, flooding hit women hardest, especially female-headed households, as they made up the majority of subsistence farmers and were primarily responsible for agricultural production and crop yields.¹¹

Older women, adolescent girls, disabled women and girls, ethnic minorities, sexual and gender minorities, and women, particularly from poor and indigenous communities, are at greater risk of experiencing the adverse effects of extreme flooding events. They are at higher risk due to the impact of social inequalities, economic, cultural, institutional and legal discriminations that worsen during natural disasters that contribute to having unequal access to quality resources that help build adaptive capacity to climate change¹⁹. When examining the experiences of women and girls in flood-affected areas, produced by differences in vulnerability, risks and exposure, it is crucial to consider all forms of discrimination, such as socioeconomic status, age, disability, ethnicity, caste, and cultural barriers.²⁰ The risks, burdens and impacts of climate-related flooding and extreme events are compounded for marginalized groups affected by intersecting forms of discrimination.²¹ The gendered impacts of disasters can be attributed to a variety of factors, such as gender discrimination in relief efforts, limited access to resources and information, caregiving obligations, and gendered poverty.

¹³ South African Development Community (2020) "Gender-Responsive Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Plan & Action Plan 2020-2030".

https://www.gfdrr.org/sites/default/files/publication/SADC_GRDP_Feb%202020%20%28clean%29.pdf

¹⁴ Erman, A., Robb , S.A.D.V., Thies, S.F., Kabir, K. and Maruo, M. (2021) "Gender Dimensions of Disaster Risk and Resilience", *International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank*. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/80f2e78e-f04f-5a59-86a6-9cfe6bcd7b87/content>

¹⁵ Ikeda, K. (1995) "Gender differences in Human Loss and Vulnerability in Natural Disasters: a case study from Bangladesh", *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097152159500200202>

¹⁶ MacDonald R (2005) How Women Were Affected by the Tsunami: A Perspective from Oxfam. *PLoS Med* 2(6): e178.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pmed.0020178>

¹⁷ Center for Disaster Philanthropy (no date) 'Women and Girls in Disasters'. <https://disasterphilanthropy.org/resources/women-and-girls-in-disasters/>

¹⁸ Dunne, D (2020) 'Mapped: How Climate Change Disproportionately Affects Women's Health' in Carbon Brief

<https://www.carbonbrief.org/mapped-how-climate-change-disproportionately-affects-womens-health/>

¹⁹ Casta eda Camey, I., Sabater, L., Owren, C. and Boyer, A.E. (2020) "Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality", *IUCN*. <https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/2020-002-En.pdf>

²⁰ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2014) 'Summary for policymakers', *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability*.: https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2018/02/ar5_wgII_spm_en.pdf

²¹ UN Women (2022) "Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in the Context of Climate Change".

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Tackling-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-the-context-of-climate-change-en.pdf>

Case study: Tsholotsho District Floods in 2014

Tsholotsho is a district in northwest Zimbabwe. In 2014 the district was affected by the flash floods that displaced more than 15,000 people. Ernest Dube and Smart Mhembwe conducted a qualitative study²² after the floods to better understand the impact on women in the area. They found that there was gender inequality throughout the emergency.

Preparedness

Zimbabwe had preparedness measures in place. However, the methods by which early warnings were disseminated did not take into account women's needs and behaviors. As a result, many women in the district lacked access to information that would have allowed them to take mitigating measures.

Response

The response mechanisms that had been designed did not fully consider women's needs. For example, menstrual hygiene products were not included in the essential supplies, nor were items needed for pregnant and lactating women. Medical care was gender-unaware – general medicines had been stocked, but nothing relating to reproductive health. The toilets and the washing areas in the shelters that were provided were not properly segregated, and women and girls were concerned at the lack of dignity this afforded them.

Recovery

The cultural norm in Tsholotsho is that men will provide for their families by working elsewhere – often in South Africa or Botswana. Women stay in the district with children and are responsible for the houses and the agriculture. Despite this, recovery efforts were dominated by men, who decided who would get support. Although most huts that were damaged had been built by women, and women had planted most of the crops, the building materials and food items were more likely to be given to men.

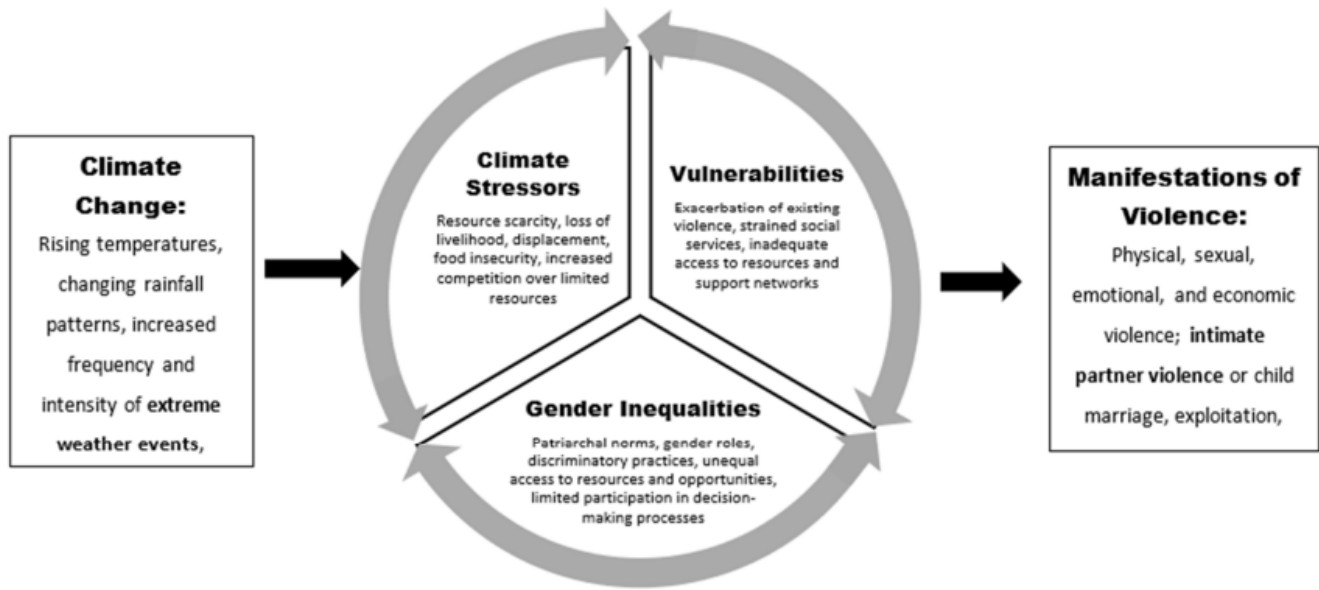
Flooding and gender-based violence

In addition to gender disparity in mortality and the overall effects of flooding, current evidence suggests that exposure to disasters caused by natural hazards, such as flooding, specifically increases GBV.²³ Exposure to a climate-related disaster, such as flooding, has significant implications for women and girls' health and wellbeing. A study looking at the relationship between intimate partner violence and climate change in East Africa developed the conceptualization shown in figure 1 below, to explore climate change leads to inter-related climate stressors, vulnerabilities and gender inequalities, which themselves lead to manifestations of violence.

²² Dube, E & Mhembwe, S (2019) 'Heightening gender considerations for women in flood disaster response through resource allocation and distribution in Zimbabwe' in *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 40. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2019.101281>

²³ Thurston, A. M., Stöckl, H., Ranganathan, M. (2021) 'Natural hazards, disasters and violence against women and girls: a global mixed-methods systematic review', in *BMJ Global Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-004377>

Figure 1: Interconnectedness of climate change, flooding and gender-based violence²⁴



Within the context of flooding, the model can be applied as follows:

Climate stressors

Flooding leads to increased stressors both immediately and longer term. People are often displaced from their homes, either to a short-term local solution, or to a longer-term more distant place. Homes are often destroyed or very badly damaged in flooding. Damage to crops can lead to immediate hunger and longer-term effect on food security into the growing and harvesting seasons ahead. Where these are cash crops, livelihoods are also affected both short and long-term. Access to natural resources such as clean water and firewood will be reduced, and increased competition may lead to conflict over these and arable land. In Eastern and Southern Africa, women’s dependence on natural resources and agriculture for their livelihoods and their families’ nutrition, coupled with lack of control and ownership over land and resources and discriminatory norms, make them less able to respond to and recover from severe flooding events²⁵. This also leaves them vulnerable to GBV in households and communities, often resulting from negative coping mechanisms in the face of livelihood and resource stress²⁶.

Vulnerabilities

The loss of livelihoods, agriculture, property, and infrastructure due to floods can create economic stress and strain on families, which can, in turn, lead to an escalation of violence within households. Additionally, the unequal

²⁴ Munala L., Allen, E.M., Frederick, A.J., Ngunjiri, A. (2023) ‘Climate Change, Extreme Weather, and Intimate Partner Violence in East African Agrarian-Based Economies’ in *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20237124>

²⁵ Udo, F., & Naidu, M. (2024). ‘Assessing local government’s response to black women’s vulnerability and adaptation to the impacts of floods in the context of intersectionality: The case of eThekweni metropolitan municipality, South Africa’. in *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 34(1), 31–41. <https://doi.org/10.1002/eet.2053>

²⁶ Jewkes, R., Gibbs, A., Mkhwanazi, S. et al. (2023) Impact of South Africa’s April 2022 floods on women and men’s lives and gender relations in low-income communities: A qualitative study, *SSM – Mental Health*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmh.2023.100255>

distribution of relief supplies and resources in the aftermath of floods can create tensions and conflicts within communities, further increasing the risk of GBV. Flooding increases existing vulnerabilities that might be in place and adds new ones. People with disabilities may become more isolated if they are unable to move around an environment that has been inundated and may not have access to information in a manner they can understand. When temporary shelters are not designed to mitigate GBV risks, they may create unsafe areas such as toilet and washing areas. Conversely, when faced with the likelihood of experiencing harassment or sexual violence in relief camps, some women or sexual and gender minorities choose to stay home or return to their homes even before doing so is safe²⁷. This self-protection method can inadvertently place women and girls at increased risk of additional danger from extreme events and further restrict their already limited access to relief resources²⁸. Infrastructure such as social services and medical facilities are likely to have been severely reduced. Informal support networks are also damaged, with physical distance between family members increased, and communications tools less likely to be available. The forms of GBV that are already present are likely to increase, and new forms such as the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse may start if there is an influx of aid and aid workers.

Gender inequalities

Post-flood environments often intensify rigid gender roles and inequalities, contributing to an increased risk of GBV. Communities may (re-)adopt more conservative or customary patriarchal practices as a coping mechanism. This can further entrench gender-based inequalities and increase the risk of GBV. Patriarchal norms governing the roles of women and girls may lead to them being excluded from decision-making around preparations for flooding, and not being included in warning messages. These gendered roles may also make women less likely to be able swim or climb trees, which has been cited as a cause of increased mortality rates for women in floods.²⁹ Women and girls have unequal access to resources that would enable them to prepare for floods or to respond to the aftermath, rendering them more vulnerable to sexual exploitation.

Flooding, therefore, is a disaster that creates an environment where GBV is likely to increase. The particular manifestations of violence are contextual for each instance. However, there are patterns of how GBV has occurred in flooding disasters, particularly in East and Southern Africa.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

IPV increases after disasters such as floods³⁰. According to a study on climate change in East Africa, 61% of women in Uganda, 37% in Zimbabwe and 43% in Mozambique reported experiences of intimate partner violence (physical, sexual, emotional, or any other form)³¹. In all three countries, extreme weather events such as flooding lasting longer than five days and affecting more than 10,000 people, were found to be linked with an increase in the

²⁷ Memon, F. S. (2020). 'Climate Change and Violence Against Women: Study of A Flood-Affected Population in The Rural Area of Sindh, Pakistan'. in *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies: Alam-E-Niswan*, 27(1), 65-85, DOI: 10.46521/pjws.027.01.0039, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3650270>

²⁸ Rezwana, N. and Pain, R. (2020) "Gender-based violence before, during and after cyclones: slow violence and layered disasters", *Disasters*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12441>

²⁹ Oxfam (2005) 'The tsunami's impact on women' <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/115038/bn-tsunami-impact-on-women-250305-en.pdf>

³⁰ Castañeda Camey, I., Sabater, L., Owren, C. and Boyer, A.E. (2020). [Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality](#). P146

³¹ Munala L., Allen, E.M., Frederick, A.J., Ngūnjiri, A. (2023) "Climate Change, Extreme Weather, and Intimate Partner Violence in East African Agrarian-Based Economies", *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20237124>

reporting of intimate partner violence. Similar risks exist in Southern Africa, where slow-onset irregular droughts and sudden-onset floods have increased IPV as well as sexual exploitation.³² Research suggests that this rise is linked to stress as a contributing factor, and gender inequality as a root cause. When men lack employment or are unable to provide for the household elements associated with norms of what ‘successful’ masculinity constitutes, this can be a driver for backlash and men’s violence against their intimate partners as well as other women and girls in the household. Men’s traditional provider/protector role is often further disrupted by the floods, which can lead to increased tension and dissatisfaction in intimate partnerships³³. This can result in controlling and coercive behavior as well as physical, emotional, economic and sexual violence.

Early and child marriage

Similarly, when families are unable to meet their basic needs as a result of flooding, the risk of child marriage increases significantly for girls³⁴. In areas affected by floods, families may resort to marrying off their daughters at a younger age as a survival strategy to obtain resources such as cattle, money, and other assets. For example, in East Africa³⁵, reduced agricultural output due to the destruction of crops by floods led to families using early and forced marriage to enable them to feed their families. Child marriage may also be viewed as a method of protecting young girls against increased post-disaster sexual assault, or by finding them a new home somewhere less at risk of flooding³⁶. The Government of Malawi saw a sufficient upwards trend in child marriage after disasters such as floods that they have included it in needs assessments.³⁷ The report on the climate crisis and GBV by the UN Secretary General’s Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) also notes an increase in female genital mutilation (FGM) linked to climate crisis in the Horn of Africa³⁸.

Sexual violence

Temporary shelters set up for refuge during a storm or after the destruction of shelters in flooding have been a site of sexual violence for women and girls³⁹. Women living in displacement camps in Malawi following the southern Africa floods of 2015 reported that they felt a high risk of sexual assault because of the distance from their shelters to the toilets at night⁴⁰. Inadequate infrastructure and WASH facilities, such as overcrowded temporary accommodation centers, poorly planned toilets, lack of separate facilities and privacy, and lack of sufficient lighting

³² GBV AoR Helpdesk (2020) “Learning Brief: Climate Change and Gender-Based Violence: What are the Links?”.

<https://www.sddirect.org.uk/node/94>

³³ Rai, A; Sharma, A J & Subramanyam, M A (2021) ‘Droughts, cyclones, and intimate partner violence: A disastrous mix for Indian women’ in *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*,52. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2020.102023>.

³⁴ UNFPA (2021) ‘Child Marriage and Environmental Crises: An Evidence Brief’ https://esaro.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/child_marriage_and_environmental_crises_an_evidence_brief_final.pdf

³⁵ Munala L., Allen, E.M., Frederick, A.J., Ngũnjiri, A. (2023) “Climate Change, Extreme Weather, and Intimate Partner Violence in East African Agrarian-Based Economies”, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20237124>

³⁶ Pope, D. H., McMullen, H., Baschieri, A., Philipose, A., Udeh, C., Diallo, J., & McCoy, D. (2022). ‘What is the current evidence for the relationship between the climate and environmental crises and child marriage? A scoping review’. In *Global Public Health*, 18(1).

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2022.2095655>

³⁷ Castañeda Camey, I., Sabater, L., Owren, C. and Boyer, A.E. (2020). [Gender-based violence and environment linkages: The violence of inequality](https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2020.1811111).

³⁸ Alsalem, Reem (2022) ‘A/77/136: Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences, Reem Alsalem - Violence against women and girls in the context of the climate crisis, including environmental degradation and related disaster risk mitigation and response’ p13 <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a77136-report-special-rapporteur-violence-against-women-and-girls-its>.

³⁹ Ibid, p16

⁴⁰ UNFPA (2015) ‘Southern Africa floods’ <https://www.unfpa.org/news/floods-hit-hundreds-thousands-southern-africa-women-and-girls-most-vulnerable>

can leave women and girls, especially those with disabilities or older women, exposed to sexual harassment and assault as they have limited ability to protect themselves or seek help in such situations. Women and other people of diverse SOGIESC have faced discrimination and violence after storms⁴¹. When floods decimate nearby supplies, women and girls are typically responsible for gathering food, water, and firewood which may require traveling increasingly long distances, creating additional security risks and increasing their risk of sexual and physical violence⁴². This can also lead to girls withdrawing from school to manage the increased workload, which in turn increases their vulnerability to GBV as well as unintended pregnancies. Low educational attainment can also increase the long-term vulnerability of girls who have not been able to learn skills that might better help them adapt to a changing climate. Experiences of sexual violence and/or assault during a flood may make it difficult for GBV survivors to report the crime due to a lack of/access to medical care, legal aid services, safe shelters, and psychosocial support services to cope with trauma or fear of stigma and retaliation. This lack of access leads to delays in the uptake of services and can discourage survivors from reporting incidents and seeking help.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (SEA)

In the context of resource scarcity, women and girls are more likely to be coerced into sexual exploitation. Displaced women and girls may also lack access to food or an ability to feed their families, leading to increased risk for sexual exploitation through transactional sex and child marriage by forcing adolescent girls and young women to marry early in exchange for food or livestock. Poorly-designed relief efforts can compound such risk. Following Cyclone Idai and associated floods, Human Rights Watch reported that women in Mozambique had been exploited for sex in exchange for food and other relief items⁴³. The chaos and disruption caused by flooding can lead to heightened risks of sexual exploitation and human trafficking, particularly for women and girls with disabilities who may be more vulnerable to exploitation.

⁴¹ Asalem (2022) p15

⁴² Munala et al (2023) p2

⁴³ Human Rights Watch (2019) 'Mozambique cyclone victims forced to trade sex for food' <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/25/mozambique-cyclone-victims-forced-trade-sex-food>

Case study: Cyclones Idai, Kenneth and associated flooding

Cyclone Idai hit Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe in March 2019. Only six weeks later, Mozambique was further hit by Cyclone Kenneth. The storms and resulting flooding killed more than 1,500 people and affected 3.1 million⁴⁴. Widespread displacement saw thousands of women and girls living in temporary shelters and camps. Five years later, communities are still dealing with the aftermath of flooding⁴⁵.

The GBV subcluster in Mozambique reported that incidents of GBV had increased in the camps⁴⁶. Overcrowding and associated stress had contributed to a rise in IPV. WASH facilities were inadequate to enable women and girls to attend to their needs in privacy. Fewer than half of the sites had gender-segregated facilities, and more than half of the sites did not have lighting in communal spaces. These factors made the camps a dangerous space for women and girls. While there were some local organizations able to offer support to GBV survivors, they were not used to operating in an emergency space, and urgently needed capacity-building.

The delivery of aid also increased GBV and SEA. Some distribution lists only included male heads of household. Female-headed households, who are often more vulnerable, were excluded. This led to sexual exploitation, where the humanitarian actors who were in charge of distributions would extort sex from women in exchange for food or being included on the distribution lists⁴⁷. In Zimbabwe, women were subjected to multiple sexual assaults from soldiers who had been sent to help those trapped by the floods⁴⁸. Humanitarian agencies found challenges in responding to this because the exploitation and abuse were largely conducted by local authorities and community leaders, who did not fall under the usual reporting mechanisms for SEA run by the United Nations and its partners. In order to respond more effectively, a PSEA Coordinator position was funded to establish a referral and reporting mechanism for survivors⁴⁹.

Addressing GBV in flooding crises

In flood-affected areas, the integration of GBV prevention and response into climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies is essential for building resilience at all levels. This involves addressing the root causes of GBV, such as gender inequality and social norms, and ensuring that the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls are considered in disaster planning and response. To address the violence that women and girls face during and after floods, GBV risk mitigation and prevention efforts need to be built into policies and programs addressing flood and other climate related emergencies from the start, with women-led organizations' (WLOs) expertise being essential to

⁴⁴ Disaster Emergency Committee (2022) '2019 Cyclone Idai Appeal: Final Report' https://www.dec.org.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/2021-10/DEC_Idai%20Report%20final_21_HR_SP_AW.-compressed.pdf

⁴⁵ Mediciens du Monde (2024) '5 years after Cyclone Idai: thousands of people in Mozambique still in need of primary health care' <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/5-years-after-cyclone-idai-thousands-people-mozambique-still-need-primary-health-care>

⁴⁶ GBV Subcluster (2019) 'Secondary Data Review GBV - Mozambique: Cyclone Idai and Floods' <https://reliefweb.int/report/mozambique/secondary-data-review-gender-based-violence-mozambique-cyclone-idai-and-floods>

⁴⁷ Human Rights Watch (2019) 'Mozambique cyclone victims forced to trade sex for food' <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/04/25/mozambique-cyclone-victims-forced-trade-sex-food>

⁴⁸ Mavungha, C (2022) 'Three Years Later, Some Zimbabweans Still Tormented by Rapes After Cyclone Idai' <https://www.voanews.com/a/three-years-later-some-zimbabweans-still-tormented-by-rapes-after-cyclone-idai-/6501349.html>

⁴⁹ Humanitarian Practice Network (2022) 'Lessons from Mozambique and Venezuela on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse' <https://odihpn.org/publication/lessons-from-mozambique-and-venezuela-on-preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/>

driving progress. Since climate-induced disasters such as flooding happen outside contexts where humanitarians normally operate, development actors also need to be able to respond to these emergencies in a safe and effective manner. This will enable the inclusion of evidence-based ethical programming that enables the prevention of and response to GBV in the immediate aftermath of disaster and the longer-term recovery.

Disaster risk reduction (DRR) frameworks and policies

Gender-responsive global disaster risk reduction frameworks, coordination mechanisms and processes that specifically address GBV are essential to create the governance environment and political economy for systematically building women’s resilience to flooding. ⁵⁰ There has been success in mainstreaming gender into some documents. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) 2015–2030⁵¹ explicitly states that gender considerations must be integrated into inclusive policies, strategies, and practices in DRR. However, the targets and indicators for the Sendai Framework are not themselves gender responsive, which limits the usefulness of the statement⁵². Despite the recognition of the importance of addressing gender inequality in disasters, and the reference to disasters and preparedness in key global tools and guidelines, there is no standard approach to integrating GBV considerations into DRR plans and there is little targeted guidance to further this approach. Policies and documents that do pay attention to gender frequently do not address GBV specifically. Even when policies do include GBV, questions remain about the implementation of the policies. One report found that there had been an increase in post-disaster needs assessments that looked at GBV, but that the information from the needs assessments was not necessarily used to improve interventions⁵³. The voices of women from flood-affected populations and of women-led organizations (WLOs) is often absent from policies. Their involvement and leadership are vital in combatting climate crisis. The IPCC cites the engagement of “gender activist” groups in influencing climate governance as a key step⁵⁴.

Locally-led GBV inclusion

The engagement of civil society organizations (CSOs), particularly WLOs, with expertise in VAWG has been identified as a key factor in promoting resilience and mitigating the risk of violence. Local CSOs are also vital to emergency preparation and response⁵⁵. Ensuring that WLOs are at the forefront of disaster planning and management, and enabled to respond to the needs of survivors in their communities during response is therefore essential. These organizations are often best placed to apply adaptive VAWG prevention programming and respond to crises due to their strong pre-existing relationships with communities and service providers. By building the capacity of these organizations⁵⁶ to engage in policy advocacy on the integration of gender and GBV considerations into climate change policies and programs at the national and local levels, they can effectively contribute to rebuilding the lives of women and girls in flood-affected areas. Meaningful engagement and involvement through consultations with affected

⁵⁰ UN Women (no date) ‘Global Frameworks’ <https://wrd.unwomen.org/practice/topics/global-frameworks>

⁵¹ UNDRR (n.d.) What is the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction? <https://www.undrr.org/implementing-sendai-framework/what-sendai-framework>

⁵² Alsalem (2022) p. 17

⁵³ Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) (2018) ‘Disaster Recovery Guidance Series Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Disaster Recovery’ p4. <https://www.gfdr.org/en/publication/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment-disaster-recovery>

⁵⁴ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2023) ‘Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’ p.52 <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>

⁵⁵ Oxfam (2024) ‘In ten worst-hit countries, increasing floods and drought have forced people to flee 8 million times last year – over twice that of a decade ago’ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/ten-worst-hit-countries-increasing-floods-and-drought-have-forced-people-flee-8> .

⁵⁶ Where they, the local CSOs/WLOs, identify this as an area in which they require additional capacity strengthening support.

populations especially women and girls, using inclusive and participatory methods⁵⁷, can help identify and respond to GBV – from analyzing risks to defining response plans - as well as build networks, partnerships, and other enabling conditions across sectors.

Evidence-based ethical approaches

The GBV Coordination Handbook recommends that humanitarian actors should support government-led disaster responses by providing technical assistance, establishing minimum GBV standards, and promoting gender-inclusive approaches to ensure women's participation in disaster risk reduction. Additionally, the GBV Minimum Standards emphasize the importance of engaging the affected population, particularly women and girls, in supporting risk reduction strategies. The IASC GBV Guidelines also provide guidance on how non-sector specialists can implement risk mitigation measures as part of preparedness planning. Specific measures include:

Emergency preparedness

- Include women in decision-making on policies and action for disaster preparedness at local, national and international levels
- Design early warning systems that work for women, girls and other vulnerable groups to ensure they have adequate notice of floods
- Build GBV risk mitigation into preparedness activities for floods and other disasters, including increasing the availability of GBV phonelines and GBV capacity-building initiatives (including GBV Emergency Preparedness and Response⁵⁸) and stockpiling dignity kits

Response

- Ensure that shelters follow the GBV Minimum Standards for women and girls' safety, including lighting, gender-segregated facilities and private washing spaces. Carry out regular safety audits with women and girls.
- Establish or re-establish a referral pathway for GBV survivors that takes into account inaccessibility of services due to floods and provide remote alternatives where possible and safe.
- Work with women and girls to support them to access firewood and water in a way that is safe for them⁵⁹
- Integrate a do-no-harm and safeguarding approach that mitigates the risk of SEA, including clear reporting structures, support for survivors and training for staff, volunteers and communities.

Recovery

- Incorporate livelihoods and food security programs that are gender-responsive, understanding the ways in which women interact with the formal, informal and subsistence markets.
- Continue to mitigate against SEA and ensure equitable access to recovery measures.

⁵⁷ South African Development Community (2020) "Gender-Responsive Disaster Risk Reduction Strategic Plan & Action Plan 2020-2030". https://www.gfdr.org/sites/default/files/publication/SADC_GRDP_Feb%202020%20%28clean%29.pdf

⁵⁸ For example, https://gbvresponders.org/response/emergency_response/

⁵⁹ Bearing in mind that firewood may also be a source of income generation for women.

- Build resilience in communities in a way that addresses the gender inequality and power imbalance at the root of GBV and increases the engagement of women in decision-making to inform future preparedness work for floods⁶⁰.

Conclusion

This report reveals the intricate interconnectedness between climate-change-related flooding and GBV in the East and Southern Africa region. The impact of climate change on the frequency and severity of flooding events has been shown to exacerbate gender inequalities, particularly impacting women and girls. The disproportionate vulnerability of women and girls to GBV in the aftermath of floods has been highlighted, emphasizing the need for gender-sensitive emergency and disaster preparedness and response strategies and for development actors to support safe and effective responses to GBV when flooding emergencies occur⁶¹. There is a need for further inquiry into the impact of emergency response and preparedness (ER&P) strategies on mitigating VAWG in disaster settings, as well as the integration of gender considerations into national disaster plans and policies.

The implications for policy and practice underscore the necessity of gender-sensitive emergency and disaster preparedness and response strategies (including for flooding) that consider the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls, especially those who experience intersecting forms of marginalization. This includes integrating GBV risks into national disaster plans and policies, conducting gender analyses to identify specific needs related to emergency preparedness, and ensuring the active participation and leadership of women and girls in decision-making processes related to disaster management. Furthermore, the engagement of women's civil society organizations (particularly women-led organizations) with expertise in VAWG has been identified as a key factor in promoting resilience and mitigating the risk of violence.

In conclusion, this report emphasizes the urgent need for comprehensive and gender-responsive approaches to disaster risk reduction, adaptation, and resilience building. It underscores the importance of addressing the underlying gender inequalities and harmful practices that contribute to vulnerability, in order to mitigate the impacts of climate change and flooding on women and girls. There is also a need for more data and research on flooding and GBV, especially practice-based and real-time learning that can be applied rapidly. While there is an increasing body of work on how the climate crisis more broadly affects women and girls, and leads to increased GBV, there is significantly less work on GBV in flood-hit zones. As climate-induced flooding increases in both frequency and severity, humanitarian and development actors need to understand and respond to the severe impacts on the lives of women and girls in ESARO and beyond. The findings call for a concerted effort to integrate gender considerations into emergency response and preparedness efforts, and to promote the participation, agency, and leadership of women's civil society organizations in addressing VAWG in the context of climate change and disasters, building on the promising practices identified in this report.

⁶⁰ For example, UN climate change regional hub training women leaders for climate negotiation <https://unfccc.int/CB4ESAWomen-events>

⁶¹ For further information see GBV AoR Helpdesk (2024) Briefing Note: How development actors can support safe and effective response to GBV when emergencies occur. <https://www.sddirect.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-04/GBV%20AoR%20HD%202023%20-%20HDP%20Briefing%20Note%20Final%20050424.pdf>

Methodology

This research was desk-based conducted through a thorough web search using the following key terms and word combinations:

“Climate Change+Africa”, “Climate Change+East+South+Africa”, “Flooding+GBV+Africa”, “Flooding+Gender based Violence+East+South+Africa”, “Flooding+GBV+Response+East+South+Africa”, “Flooding+South Sudan”, “South Sudan+Flooding+Women+Crisis”

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The GBV AoR Help Desk

The GBVAoR Helpdesk is a unique research and technical advice service which aims to inspire and support humanitarian actors to help prevent, mitigate and respond to violence against women and girls in emergencies. Managed by Social Development Direct, the GBVAoR Helpdesk is staffed by a global roster of senior Gender and GBV Experts who are on standby to help guide frontline humanitarian actors on GBV prevention, risk mitigation and response measures in line with international standards, guidelines and best practice. Views or opinions expressed in GBV AoR Helpdesk Products do not necessarily reflect those of all members of the GBV AoR, nor of all the experts of SDDirect's Helpdesk roster.

The GBV AoR Helpdesk

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Our services are free and confidential.