

# Gender Ideologies and Climate Risk: How is the Connection Linked to Sustainability in an African City?

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## ABSTRACT

Although African cities are nodes of scalable solutions to climate uncertainty, adaptation efforts rarely build on the gender-climate nexus for sustainability. This article examines how gender ideologies intersect with climate risks, based on case study findings from Kampala in Uganda. Climatic hazards in Kampala include prolonged dry spells and seasonal floods; which destroy infrastructure, contaminate air and lead to unprecedented spread of cholera and malaria. Both conventional and emancipatory gender ideologies are characteristic of how the gender-climate nexus shapes adaptation at neighborhood scale. Women, as custodians of domestic hygiene, navigate the health risks of flooding through trade-offs among competing uses of their time and labour, as men comply with the masculinity code of family safety to repair flooded homes and drainages. Emancipatory gender ideologies on the other hand are manifested by women's and men's agency to adopt alternative energy sources and urban greening that have potential for sustainability.

## KEYWORDS

Adaptation, African City, Climatic Risks, Gender Ideologies, Sustainability

## INTRODUCTION

African cities have the potential for a transformative turn in global sustainability through local and scalable climate solutions. Climate action in urban Africa is incremental as more people gradually shift to renewable energy in housing and health, non-motorized transport, urban greening and agriculture, waste re-use and recycling, and a range of other measures that will reduce emissions and enhance capacity to adapt to climate risks. Although access to modern energy is still a challenge, the up-take of solar electrification in urban slums, street lighting and in water disinfection plants is at its peak; through collective action in form of energy forums, slum dweller associations, cooperatives and public-private partnerships (Parikh et al., 2012; Thorn et al., 2015). Urban development that integrates ecological sustainability into planning at neighbourhood scale has taken route in form of rainwater harvesting; restricted hard landscaping; and kitchen or toilet facilities that capture methane gas at the top of the dome, for re-use as cooking gas (Swilling and Eve, 2006; Buyana and Lwasa, 2011; Okello et al., 2013). Urban agriculture and forestry that transcends poverty reduction to scalable adaptation and mitigation potential, has gained traction in African cities through productive greening and ecosystem services for urban resilience to heat-related risks, air and water pollution (Phelan et al., 2015; Padgham et al., 2015; Ogato et al., 2017). Though air quality is being compromised by

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vehicle-generated dust and fossil fuels, walking conditions in public spaces are being improved through wider pedestrian precincts and traffic culming facilities as well as regulatory mechanisms for adoption of non-motorized transport (Tulu et al., 2013; Amoako et al., 2014). Coastal cities are coping with extreme episodic weather events, using not only built infrastructures (such as elevated roads) but also ecosystem-based adaptation, such as mangroves along the Moroccan coast in West Africa for defence against storm water surges, alongside fog-water harvesting; and community reforestation in cities like Durban-South Africa (Marzol & Sanchez, 2008; Roberts et al., 2012; Klemm et al., 2012; Brink et al., 2016). These incremental actions are capable of influencing societal transitions towards sustainability at global scale.

However, adaptation and mitigation efforts in African cities are silent on how the specifics of the gender-climate nexus are linked to progress across the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainability. Many studies on gender issues in climate change have focused on mitigation and adaptation amongst developing countries in general (Lambrou & Piana, 2006; DFID, 2008; Alston, 2014; UN Women, 2016), thus depicting a homogeneous relationship across borders and socio-technical-environmental aspects of different urban system services. Conversely, research that associates gender with climate change is largely underpinned by women-specific vulnerabilities and livelihoods in agrarian settings (Kabonesa & Kindi, 2013; Carr & Thompson, 2014; Mnimbo et al., 2016), hence overlooking the relational nature of how women as compared to men interface with climatic impacts in cities. In other studies, gender has been treated as a sub-element within the broader conceptualization of community-level, pro-poor and low-income adaptation to climate change (Satterthwaite, 2008; Dodman & Miltin, 2015; Jabeen & Guy 2015; Reckien et al., 2017), which blurs the diverse ways women as compared to men experience and respond to different climate change events in various contexts. Whereas the existing knowledge base provides a useful departure for integrating gender responsiveness in adaptation planning, there is need delve into the specifics of whether the interlinkage between gender ideologies and climate risk is symmetrical, asymmetrical or multiple. Gender inequalities can contribute to the intensity of climatic impacts and the impacts of climate change can worsen gender inequalities across different urban system services. Inversely, gender equality can be an enabling factor in creating conditions for off-setting climatic stressors, and adaptation or mitigation efforts can spur considerable progress towards gender parity at multiple scales. For example, reduction in air pollution is symmetrical to improved health for women and men, while non-motorized transport can offer multiple gender outcomes in terms of home-work effectiveness for women who participate in the urban economy, political life and leisure industry. Therefore, a systematic assessment of the key dimensions that shape the gender-climate nexus and the elements on which the relationship depends, can substantiate the alternative ways for determining the depth and breadth of scaling up adaptation and mitigation efforts, while reconciling the often conflicting ideals to economic, social and environmental sustainability in African cities.

## MAIN FOCUS OF THE ARTICLE

This article examines the connection between gender ideologies and climate risks across urban system services, and how the gender-climate nexus is linked to sustainability in an African city, based on findings from Kampala in Uganda.

## Materials and Methods

The study was undertaken in the neighborhood of Kasubi-Kawaala, located in the northwestern part of Kampala city. This neighborhood is known to be a host of unplanned settlements; a pattern that aggravates climatic hazards, especially flooding that makes residential dwellings inhabitable, contaminates air and water sources, restricts mobility due to impassable commuter routes and reduces the longevity of physical infrastructure. It is these social-environmental occurrences that made the neighborhood suitable for holding discussions on urban gender inequalities and climatic impacts

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