AN INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST CLIMATE JUSTICE GUIDE

Abridged Version
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Executive Summary

This Intersectional Feminist Climate Action Guide is an advocacy and programming tool for civil society, women rights activists, feminists, environmentalists, and minoritized groups i.e. indigenous people, people with disabilities, gender expansive persons, among others in Africa and the Global South who take on a central role as creators, facilitators and advocates of innovative climate solutions through an inclusive and rights-based approach. The guide adopts an intersectional feminist approach in analysing the climate crisis and the actions of climate movements, climate actors – both state and non-state, the different climate change related laws, policies and systems and proposes strategies to guaranteeing that climate action is just; and is cognizant of the realities African people, particularly women and other minoritized groups who contend with multiple systems of oppression based on gender, socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, nationality, ability, sexual orientation, and age.

This guide seeks to centre the experiences and realities of African women and other minoritized groups, including their history and how that has continued to shape and influence our response to development challenges such as the climate crisis. It acknowledges that the climate crisis, like all other macro level development challenges that face African and the Global South are a result of institutionalised systems and structures of oppression including patriarchy, imperialism, colonialism and neo-colonialism, neoliberalism, capitalism, and all other isms that facilitate oppression. The effects of these systems are far-reaching and continuous, as they continue to affect Africa's and Global South political institutions, social and governance structures, leading to bad governance and limited development. At the heart of colonial histories lies the foundation of export capital and developments that have resulted into a group of those who have more to give and those who barely have enough. The violent appropriation of land, people, and natural resources has resulted in global hierarchies that present socio-economic, legal, and political order that currently links global interests to exploitations. The guide therefore underscores the gendered, racialized, and classed impact of climate change and critically examines how power and misuse of power continue to accelerate and fuel the climate crisis.

The guide further acknowledges and illuminates the role that women and indigenous people in Africa and the Global South have played and continue to play in protecting the planet through environmentally sustainable actions as custodians and caregivers in defending biodiversity and acting for climate justice.

In analysing the climate governance systems and structures at global, regional and national levels, the guide analyses their effectiveness, inclusiveness and gender responsiveness, and identifies entry points for advocacy for feminist climate justice groups in different spaces. In this guide, we recognize that the climate crisis is a societal issue with ethical and human rights impacts occurring alongside a number of already existing inequalities. We therefore, in addition to highlighting the climate governance systems, we also highlight some women's rights and human rights institutional and policy frameworks, related opportunities and entry points for advancing intersectional feminist climate justice narratives and alternatives.

The guide draws out practical ways of applying intersectional feminist approaches to climate justice advocacy in Africa and the Global South. It further highlights initiatives and tools that can be adopted and applied by feminists, women rights organizations, climate justice advocates, environmentalists, and civil society organisations in climate justice advocacy and programming to significantly contribute to and shape the climate governance and decision making processes from an African and Global South feminist perspective.
Introduction

Africa as a whole continent contributes only 3.8% of greenhouse emissions compared to 23% by China, 19% by the US, and 13% by the European Union. Despite this, the Global South, particularly Africa, faces a disproportionate impact of the consequences of these emissions i.e. the climate crisis.

To address this global crisis, which is majorly affecting those already vulnerable and at the margins, global, regional and national initiatives are focused on finding workable and sustainable solutions to address this crisis and its resultant effects. These solutions are in many ways falling short of addressing the root causes of the climate crisis and why it affects certain individuals more than it does to others. Currently, and particularly within Africa and Global South, the climate crisis is being addressed as a single issue and yet those most affected by the crisis do so because of existing inequalities based on their gender, socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, nationality, ability, sexual orientation, and age. Moreover, those responsible for causing the climate crisis are also responsible for a number of oppressions and discrimination that have made those most affected vulnerable through the extractive, exploitative and accumulative courses of slave trade, (neo)colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, racism, sexism, and neoliberalism.

It is also important to acknowledge that while women share similar experiences of discrimination, harassment, sexism, inequality and oppression on the basis of their sex and gender, not all of them are equally disadvantaged or have equal access to resources, power and privilege. In the context of Africa and the Global South, women are affected at a higher rate because they already face peculiar social, economic and political barriers that limit their coping capacity. First, they are charged with the responsibility of care work, of which in the African context, domestic care work heavily relies on resources from the environment i.e. water, food and fuel for cooking and lighting. Second, they face unequal access to resources and largely lack the privilege of flexibility to easily move to a safer location when a disaster strikes—which further increases their vulnerability to climate change. When governments, policy makers, climate activists, and environmentalists do not recognize that the climate crisis is gendered, the humanitarian impacts of the crisis fall squarely on women. To do this requires that we foreground intersectional feminist perspectives to addressing the climate crisis, by exposing the intersection of oppressive forces such as capitalism, patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, racism.

Through this guide, we argue that adoption and integration of an intersectional feminist approach in climate action at global, national and community levels will guarantee that the solutions adopted encompass interventions that seek to transform the root causes of the climate crisis and the inequalities faced by women and other minoritized people, for a just climate transition. It also aims at facilitating the adoption of strategies to prevent the deepening of inequalities while addressing the structural factors that cause and uphold the discrimination of women. This is done in order to find sustainable and inclusive solutions for dealing with the gendered, classed and racialised consequences of climate change.

3 UNFCCC (2019) Differentiated impacts of climate change on women and men; the integration of gender considerations in climate policies, plans and actions; and progress in enhancing gender balance in national climate delegations: Online: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/sbi2019_infB.pdf
We note that adopting an intersectional feminist climate justice approach will provide the tools necessary to develop and assess the viability of climate solutions in the African context to ensure that it does not burden communities, erode Africa’s culture and traditional systems, reinforce past colonial and imperialist influence, but will centre solutions born and bred on the continent and by communities in the continent.

The experiences of the struggles and justifications of indigenous, peasant, black, female, transgender, gender-diverse and minority communities on the continent confirm that colonial powers, far from disappearing, continue to expand; and it is imperative to think of alternative ways to address the development challenges arising out of neoliberalism, capitalism and neo-colonialism, which not only curtail people’s rights but also continue to destroy cultures and ecosystems. Because we acknowledge the role played by these impositions in destabilising age-old systems, we must demand that we be the narrators and shapers of our own societies’ futures and collective and individual destinies, including the solutions to addressing the climate crisis. We must therefore reconstruct power and reimagine the world and by extension, reclaim that which was taken from us. This demands a reclaiming of African indigenous ways of knowing and being, and telling our stories using our own narratives and languages.

Despite the progress made by African countries in developing climate related frameworks and the evidence that exists of the contribution that African people have made in sustaining the planet through their indigenous ways, the continued exclusion/absence of the African continent in general and the voices of African women and other minoritized people in particular, in global policy and decision-making spaces on climate change further reinforces existing barriers to guaranteeing that climate change solutions are contextual and applicable. African people have a key role to play in influencing climate change policy and action at global, regional and national levels through research, and evidence based advocacy informed by Pan African, feminist analysis and principles.

In this approach, we call for the centring the most marginalised, their indigenous knowledge and experiences, and for the re-imagining of the usual gender mainstreaming strategies in climate action by placing emphasis on building African’s and especially African women’s socioeconomic, political, and cultural agency in coping with climate change impacts. This approach also calls for the centring of our history as Africans and as African women in particularly who have in the past and also presently continue to contend with the legacies of slave trade, imperialism, capitalism, (neo)colonialism, and neoliberalism, all of which have played a key role in driving the climate crisis. It further emphasises the need to address the power dynamics and structures that influence the pace of change and levels of existing insecurities, the distribution of resources and a host of benefits on current and future outcomes. This is because what counts as climate risks is ultimately shaped by the realities and power structures that exist between the Global North and Global South, between men and women, between the rich and the poor at various levels. In this regard, the feminist climate justice approach advances the notion that addressing the climate crisis in a just and inclusive way requires that we move beyond just addressing the symptoms, and seek to address the root causes in order to overcome it once and for all.
Inside the Guide: Why, What and Who

This guide unpacks social and structural dimensions of the climate crisis and presents the case for why it is important to adopt feminist intersectional and gender transformative approaches to climate action. It highlights what we perceive to be the root causes of the climate crisis and the resultant cross sectoral, gendered and social inequalities with examples from different countries in Africa. The guide further highlights key processes on which feminist organizations, women’s rights organizations, civil society groups can engage to advance gender responsive and feminist intersectional climate justice approaches for a just and inclusive climate transition. The guide also presents successful approaches in ensuring gender responsiveness in climate policy making and programming to mitigate, from an African perspective, the gendered, racialized, and classed impacts of climate change and climate acti

Chapter 1: Feminist principles and perspectives on the climate crisis

For me, one of the major reasons to move beyond just planting trees was that I have a tendency to look at the causes of a problem. We often preoccupy ourselves with the symptoms, whereas if we went to the root cause of the problems, we would be able to overcome the problems once and for all.

Wangari Maathai of the Green Belt Movement.

This chapter provides a feminist analysis of the climate crisis and shows how patriarchal values and practices, race, class, etc. are at the root of the climate crisis. It provides evidence of how the extractive nature and misuse of power and privilege are harmful to the environment and are driving the climate crisis; and surfaces the intersectional and cross sectoral impact of the climate crisis on women, indigenous people, and gender expansive groups in the global south, with a specific focus on Africa. The section presents the climate crisis as a feminist issue and elaborates how Africa’s traditional systems like traditional farmers’ rights, indigenous seed systems and culture are under attack as the world merely focuses on finding solutions to the symptoms of the climate crisis through neoliberal capitalist approaches.
Chapter 2: Global Economic systems, and the Climate Crisis

‘Before even the British came into relations with our people, we were a developed people, having our own institutions, having our own ideas of government.’ J. E. Casely-Hayford, 1922., African (Gold Coast) Nationalist, adopted from How Europe Underdeveloped Africa by Walter Rodney.

This chapter uses an intersectional, anti capitalistic and decolonial lens and consciousness for ecologically, economically and socially just futures to present an analysis of the role that global economic systems have played in driving the global climate crisis, and gender injustices in Africa and the Global South. It exposes the roots of the climate crisis in Africa and some parts of the Global South tracing it back to the 16th century when Europeans first embarked on slave trade, through the colonial era, and to the present day neo-colonial and neoliberal capitalist era of extraction, exploitation and accumulation through dispossession to maximize profits. It further provides an analysis of the ecological collapse which is the direct result of an unequal social contract in which socially constructed global hierarchies shape our social and economic relations. It makes a case for the need to transform the current paradigm of the global economy and create a new paradigm that forges active links between climate governance, racialized and gendered exploitation, trade rules and economic structures that reproduce inequalities both within and among nations.

Chapter 3: The Climate governance landscape and its implication on people in Africa and the Global South

Existing climate governance does not adequately support inclusivity. On the contrary, as the climate crisis worsens, civic space is shrinking. The voices of local people, particularly women are rarely heard when climate decisions are being made, with women, youth, indigenous people and other marginalised groups being the most noticeably absent - and yet it is these groups, especially in the Global South, that will bear the brunt of climate change impacts. Akina Mama wa Afrika, from the Technical brief on Global South perspectives on Why the climate crisis is a Feminist issue.

This chapter identifies the key global and regional climate governance institutional and policy frameworks and structures; and the opportunities and space for engagement in order to advance and influence the integration of an intersectional feminist analysis in climate policy and action while also providing existing limitations and gaps. This is intended to provide insights on entry points for African feminists’, climate activists, environmentalists and civil society advocacy initiatives at national, regional and global levels. Given the imperative for climate finance as a cornerstone in addressing the climate crisis, this chapter further unpacks various climate financing mechanisms and responsible institutions; and highlights various gaps, particularly in the modalities of accessing climate finance. Using an intersectional feminist approach, it provides an analysis of the key concerns and limitations to accessing financing for locally led climate solutions. While reflecting on the numerous non-economic impacts of the climate crisis in Africa and the Global South, it shines a light on what climate finance looks like revealing that the majority of the finance available targets mitigation rather than adaptation projects; and that more than 66% of climate finance is loan financing.
Chapter 4: Applying feminist intersectional approaches in climate justice advocacy in Africa and the Global South.

“There is one thing I almost never hear leaders talk about, and that is loss and damage. For many of us, reducing and avoiding is not enough. You cannot adapt to lost cultures, you cannot adapt to lost traditions, you cannot adapt to lost history, you cannot adapt to starvation. You cannot adapt to extinction.” Vanessa Nakate

This chapter provides practical guidance to feminists, climate justice activists, environmentalists and civil society on what and how to apply intersectional feminist climate justice approaches. It highlights that addressing climate crisis from an intersectional feminist perspective requires application of multi-dimensional approaches, tools and strategic interventions, while analysing the impact of the climate crisis on people already affected by historical economic, political and social injustices; gender inequality; racisms; sexism; income inequality; poverty; people in rural areas and areas prone to natural disasters; people living with disabilities; the youth and elderly; among others. The chapter reflects on and draws lessons from bold feminist and transformative approaches and campaigns that have been employed to challenge unfair systems and transform power relations, overturn unfair and unjust decisions, and demand for women’s rights as human rights by feminists and social justice campaigners in different contexts. It makes the conclusion that enhancing the involvement and participation of African women in all their diversities is causally connected with stronger climate policies and therefore correlated with a just climate transition. It therefore unpacks various global and regional climate spaces specific to advancing women’s rights, gender justice and intersectional feminist climate justice approaches and emphasizes the need for these groups of people to mobilise each other to increase African women’s influence in these decision making spaces.

The chapter thus proposes various traditional and contemporary communication, mobilisation and advocacy tools taking into account African women’s lived realities, particularly those in rural areas. It challenges climate actors to reclaim Africa’s oramedia such as the talking drums, the folk songs, itinerant dance, mime groups, drama, festivals, town criers, traditional wears, the artefacts, art works, paintings, stories, among others cultural architecture that reflect in the palaces, shrines, and African cities, towns and villages; as well as to take up spaces in contemporary spaces of media such as social media, podcasts, as young African women are doing.
Conclusion

The climate crisis is a social justice struggle and therefore climate action should be approached as such because those most affected are the least contributors to this crisis. They are also the ones facing the consequences of unsustainable climate solutions because they have been systematically excluded from participating in processes and spaces where these decisions are taken.

The current climate discourse urgently requires that women, indigenous communities, people with disabilities, and other minoritized groups in Africa in particular and the Global South in general are visible in regional and global climate governance decision making spaces and that their narratives and lived experiences foreground all decisions and outcomes. Ensuring the inclusion and engagement of these groups of people in the conversations concerning climate policies and programmes is critical, not only to guarantee the protection of their rights, livelihoods, and critical ecosystems and biological diversity on which they survive, but also for the sustenance of the planet on which we all live. We therefore hope that this guide will challenge climate change government technocrats and policy makers, climate researchers, and environmentalists to join feminists, social justice advocates, human rights actors and women rights organizations on a journey to reimagine climate action and urgently adopt and apply an intersectional feminist approach as a lever for achieving a just climate transition.

Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA) is a feminist Pan-African leadership development organization with headquarters in Kampala, Uganda. Our work is rooted in feminist principles and beliefs guided by the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists which define our leadership development program and movement building activities. We envision a world in which African women are politically, economically and socially autonomous and are champions of change in their lives and society. Our thematic areas of focus include: Women’s Political Leadership, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, and Economic Justice and Climate Action. The organization’s work is advanced through feminist and transformational leadership development, feminist research and knowledge building, and policy influence and movement building. AMwA provides strategic direction in key Pan-African networks including NGO CSW Africa, Solidarity for African Women’s Rights, and the Gender Is My Agenda Campaign. AMwA also has consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.
About the Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) Programme

The Voices for Just Climate Action (VCA) Programme brings together global and local voices by connecting a diverse range of civil society organisations representing women, youth, indigenous people, urban poor, digital activists and more. The programme is implemented by an alliance led by four strong Southern CSOs – Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwaA), Fundación Avina, Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and SouthSouthNorth (SSN) – and two Global CSOs – Hivos and WWF-Netherlands – under the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ five-year strategic partnership: “Power of Voices”