

Tanzania – Climate change, an additional burden to rural women

Africa faces many problems: poverty, disease, rapid population growth, food insecurity, limited water access and poor water management. In addition to these, the effects of climate change could drive the majority of the population into destitution, as assets are lost and resources are diverted to deal with emergencies rather than being used for development.

Climate changes as a result of human activities such as burning fossil fuels and deforestation, have contributed to the increase in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, which contribute to a warming of the earth, a rising sea level and changes in rainfall amounts and distribution.

Food insecurity

Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the most food-insecure regions in the world. Unless adequate measures are put in place, climate change could further aggravate this situation. Some areas may become too hot for certain crops or animals; it may rain too little or too much to allow farming; the breakout of climate sensitive diseases, such as Rift Valley Fever, could seriously affect livestock production, etc. With drier areas projected to get even drier, producing food using irrigation may not be possible due to water shortages. At the other extreme,

flooding could destroy the infrastructure used to store or transport food from production areas to markets. This may discourage farmers from producing more food, potentially contributing to even lower food production.

In short, dealing with the impacts of climate change – called climate change “adaptation” – requires measures that will minimise losses or take advantage of the opportunities presented.

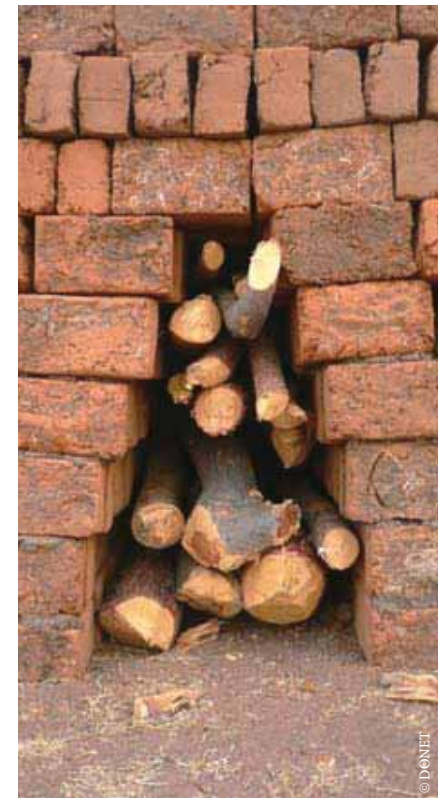
The case of Bahi District

In Tanzania, women play a critical role in the rural economies. In most parts of the country they participate in crop and livestock production, provide food, water and fuel for their families, and engage in off-farm activities to diversify the family income. In addition, they carry out vital functions in caring for children, elderly people and the sick.

A village survey conducted by Flora K. Munyasya, a student at the Institute of Rural Development Planning, in Bahi-sokoni village (Bahi District, Dodoma region) on household basic access needs clearly showed the daily access burden of women and girl children in this region. Women bear the largest share of rural domestic and production burden, contributing more than 70% of household’s time and effort.

With regards to travel and transportation, the survey showed that:

- 95% of all rural travel and transportation is done by foot and head-loading, only 5% by motorised transport;
- 80% of all trips are within the village;
- 80% of all journeys are for transporting water and firewood and travelling to the grinding mills; the remainder is for other activities such as going to markets, farms, school and health centres;



▲ Women pumping water from a bore hole

A mud brick furnace being prepared for burning using fuel wood. ▶



The alarming rate of deforestation in Bahi district.

- 85% of all transportation is done by women, 15% by men and children;
- An average household of 5 persons spends 7 hours every day on transport-related activities.

People in this region are farmers whose only sources of income are food crops and cattle breeding. However, prolonged drought due to climate changes has led the men abandon their previous occupations and to earn a living by making charcoal and clay bricks. Their felling of trees has left the women with long distances to walk in search of firewood, thus spending many extra hours a day on the road and reducing their productive hours. The deforestation has great impact on the environment, economy and women's health.

The practice of keeping excess livestock and the lack of destocking cause overgrazing, which results in the destruction of possible water catchment areas. This, together with long periods of dry weather, has caused a water shortage, which has again left women with long distances to cover to collect water for domestic use.

Facing the effects of climate change

Following the ever increasing effects of climate change in Bahi district, the community decided to take action. Facilitated by members of the Dodoma Environmental Network (DONET) in the district, the community has formed four "Ward Environmental Networks". A ward comprises from two to five villages.

The members of these networks have identified the environmental problems predominant in their wards. They have developed work plans which guide them in implementing the tasks aimed at resolving these environmental problems. Priority is given to the establishment and management of tree nurseries. The next step will be tree planting around homesteads and the establishment of forests in reserved areas of each village. To ensure effective coordination of the Ward Environmental Networks, the members have formed the Bahi District Environmental Network (BAENET).

With these efforts it is hoped that the harmful effects of climate change in Bahi District will be gradually minimized.

DONET is also interested in exchanging experiences with other organizations and communities on counteracting the effects of climate change.

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Fetching water from a natural spring. Such water is not safe. ▶