Gender and climate change induced migration in Southern Africa: An invitation to an exploration of linkages.

Divane Nzima & Gracsious Maviza

Department of Sociology, University of the Free State, South Africa

Extended Abstract

Climate change is among the most topical concerns that the world is grappling with presently. In this paper we focus on how the persistent challenge of climate change continues to influence gendered migration patterns in Southern Africa. To outline the problem, we will begin by highlighting the trends in climate change and variability in the region of Southern Africa. Thereafter, we will show how this has had a direct impact on the gendered patterns of migration by giving an outline of migration trends and patterns in the Southern African region.

Lim Kam Sian et al. (2021) argues that there is a pressing need to gather knowledge about trends in climate change in order to plan for and make informed decisions about sustainable development. Southern Africa has unique problems that include a bulging population and general poor economic performance which makes its susceptibility to problems of climate change and variability to be more pronounced (Lim Kam Sian et al. 2021). Nhamo et al. (2019) argued that climate change will have an impact on future as well as current farming in Southern Africa and the rest of the continent. In addition, this will affect food systems as climate variability modifies environments substantially, owing to shifts in seasons (Nhamo et al. 2019). In southern Africa, the agricultural sector continues to be negatively affected by climate change which inevitably affects the region's capacity to meet its food demands (Nhamo et al. 2019; Lim Kam Sian et al. 2021). Considering its growing population, Southern Africa faces water deficits due to the increased intensity and frequency of droughts. As a result, many countries in Southern Africa fail to meet their food requirements because they largely depend on rain fed agriculture for food production. Where irrigation is possible, water scarcity remains a lingering problem as the agricultural sector still must compete with other sectors of the economy for the limited water resources (Nhamo et al. 2019; Lim Kam Sian et al. 2021).

Studies have shown that increasing temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and rising sea levels, as well as land and water degradation continue to hinder attempts at managing problems driven by

an increasing demand for water and food (Brown and Funk, 2008; Camill, 2010; Nhamo eta la. 2019). Therefore, this calls for innovative ways of dealing with the problem such as new methods of employing technology to build resilience and adaptation.

Mason (2001) argued that Southern Africa has been prone to El Nino events. He attributes this to the below normal rainfall over much of Southern Africa (Mason, 2001). Studies that investigated the changes in precipitation variability and trends during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries using rain gauge data in Southern Africa suggest that precipitation shows considerable spatial variability unlike temperature whose variation is uniform (Jury, 2013; Kusangaya et al. 2014; Lim Kham Sian et al. 2021; Thoithi et al. 2021). According to Thoithi et al. (2021), Southern Africa is prone to recurrent floods and droughts that adversely affect the growing rural population who are largely economically disadvantaged. Thoithi et al. 2021 suggest that the highly variable rainfall across Southern Africa disproportionately affect the poor rural population that is heavily dependent on rainfed agriculture for food production.

Southern Africa has experienced several climate catastrophes that have left hundreds of people dead, and thousands displaced. In April 2022, the city of Durban and surrounding areas in South Africa was hit by devastating floods and mudslides. This climate disaster left over 400 people dead and thousands more displaced and property worth millions was destroyed. This came after South Africa was still recovering from the Durban floods that occurred in April of 2019. In the year 2022 alone from January to March, Madagascar was hit by five tropical storms and cyclones. These included Ana, Batsirai, Dumako, Emnati, and Gombo. All this caused immerse damage and loss of life and left thousands of people displaced. Mozambique has also been a regular victim of tropical storms and cyclones as evidenced by the devastating effects of Idai in 2019, Eloise in 2021 and Ana in 2022 which left thousands of people from Beira and surrounding areas displaced. Most of the tropical storms and cyclones that affect Madagascar usually end up affecting Mozambique and some parts of the eastern Highlands in Zimbabwe. Some examples of these tropical storms and cyclones that have moved inland and affected the Eastern Highlands in Zimbabwe include Japhet in 2003, Idai in 2019, Chalene in 2020, Eloise in 2021 and Ana in 2022.

In response to the destruction of property, livelihoods and mass displacement from homes, surviving victims of these natural disasters caused by climate change seek for alternative livelihood strategies. Migration then becomes one of the strategies of choice as it allows people to move to

safer areas but also enables them to diversify their livelihoods. Previous studies on migration in Africa have shown that loss of livelihoods due to ecological factors as well as unabated poverty that manifest in high levels of unemployment are some of the key drivers of eternal and international migration (Maphosa, 2007; Abu et al. 2016; Strobl et al. 2015; Mastrorillo et al. 2016). In Southern Africa, there has been limited studies that assess the correlations between climate change and migration. One study that has tried to link climate change as a driver of migration was done by Mastrorillo et al (2016), where secondary data were used to assess the impact of climate variability on internal migration flows in post-apartheid South Africa. The results of this study showed that an increase in positive temperature extremes as well as positive and negative excess rainfall at the origin act as a push factor and enhance out-migration most among poor rural black communities (Mastrorillo et al. 2016). This is an important finding because the effects of climate change in Southern Africa are often heavily felt by poor rural communities whose livelihoods are centered on subsistence farming. The role of climate change in influencing migration is sometimes downplayed or poorly characterized because its role as a contributing factor can sometimes be disguised in other common migration push factors such as joblessness and lack of economic opportunities (Abu et al. 2016; Strobl et al. 2015). Therefore, there is a need for more studies that invariably seek to find a significant causal relationship between the effects of climate variability and both internal and international migration in Southern Africa.

Southern Africa has a well-documented history of migration that driven by the migrant labour system that was centered around the discovery of gold in South Africa in the 19th century (Nzima and Moyo 2017). South Africa has always been the major recipient of migrants in the region with countries such as Malawi, Mozambique, Lesotho and the former Transkei homeland sending men to work in the mines of Johannesburg (Nzima and Moyo 2017). During that time migration was a preserve for males as most jobs were mostly suitable for men. As a result, women were often left to look after their children and attend to subsistence farming in the rural areas. In addition, some of the migration flows within the region were driven by conflict during the liberation wars in the 1960s while many other flows happened when there were incidences of post-colonial unrest in some of the newly independent state in Southern Africa in the 1980s (Zinyama 1990; Nzima and Moyo 2017). Until the present day, South Africa continues to be the main recipient of migrants from across the region and beyond as many post-colonial African countries face continued political

and economic turmoil (Nzima and Moyo 2017). Some of the migrants flee adverse economic conditions that can be attributed to the effects of climate change that have destroyed livelihoods and left many people displaced. As such, there is now a growing trend of a mixture of both males and females in the migrants' stocks (Mukusha and Richter 2015). Therefore, this paper is timely as it seeks to review the effects of climate change and how these have influenced gendered patterns of migration in Southern Africa. In doing so we look climate change and agro-based livelihoods, gender, climate change and agro-based livelihoods. We also review the culture of migration, the feminization of migration in the face of increasing climate variability and migration as a means of adaptation and resilience in the face of climate variability.