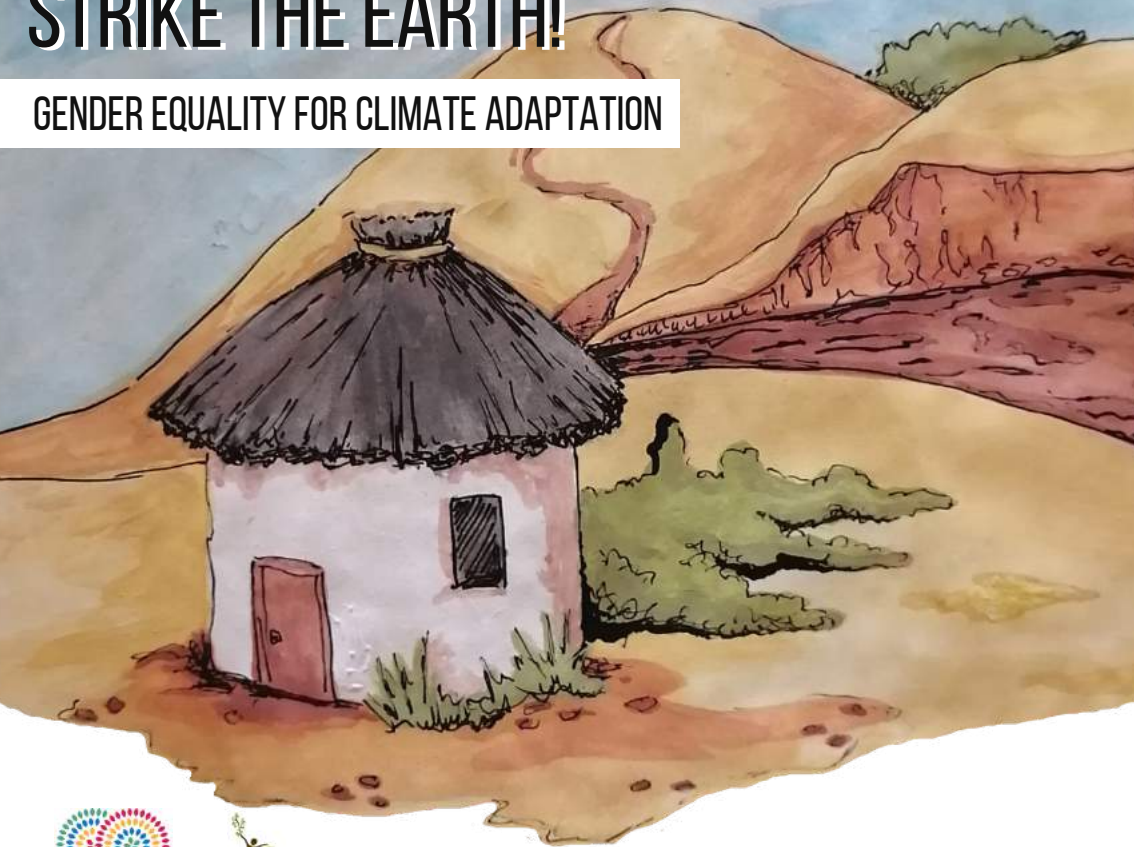


YOU STRIKE A WOMAN, YOU STRIKE THE EARTH!

GENDER EQUALITY FOR CLIMATE ADAPTATION



Rural Action for
Climate Resilience



SOCIAL CHANGE
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SOUTHERN AFRICAN
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HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG
CAPE TOWN
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Rural Action for Climate Resilience

This booklet was produced as part of the Rural Action for Climate Resilience (RACR) project in 2022. RACR is a partnership project between Social Change Assistance Trust (SCAT), Southern African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) and Heinrich Böll Foundation which aims to increase climate resilience and so protect livelihoods in rural communities. It is co-funded by the European Union and the Heinrich Böll Foundation.

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This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union and The Heinrich Böll Foundation. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the implementing organisations and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

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Climate is the average weather in a place over many years.

Climate change is a shift in those weather conditions caused by human activity. The world is currently seeing rapid climate change because humans are using fossil fuels like oil, gas and coal for their homes, factories and transport. Although not everyone uses these fossil fuels equally across the globe or even within communities, we will all feel the impact of these activities because they release greenhouse gases that cause global warming.

Climate change is already threatening lives and livelihoods due to extreme or unpredictable weather. Some places could become uninhabitable as farmlands become a desert. In other areas, the opposite could happen, with extreme rainfall causing flooding, destroying homes, infrastructure, and lands.

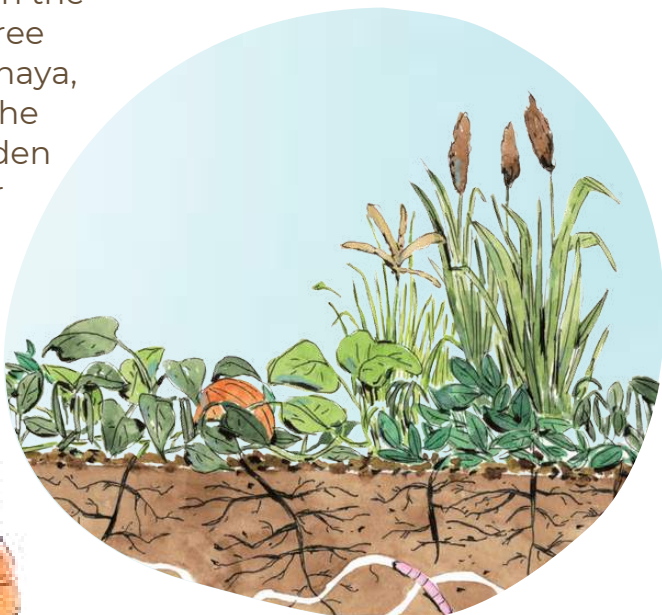
Research in South Africa indicates that the impact of climate change in our region will be:

- Higher average annual temperature, higher maximum temperatures, and more hot days and heatwaves
- Higher minimum temperatures
- Fewer cold days and frost days
- Reduced average rainfall in some provinces
- Rising sea levels
- Increased fire risks
- Increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, including floods, droughts, and storm surges




People with less resources and in rural areas will suffer more as they may not have the necessary information, resources, and money to adapt to climate change. Adaptation refers to changes in processes, practices, and structures to manage potential damage or to benefit from opportunities associated with climate change. Gender inequality is another barrier to adaptation. This booklet tells the story of how someone's gender makes climate change even more difficult to deal with.

Miriam lives in Talemofu in the Eastern Cape with her three children Aneziwe, Jongikhaya, and Busisiwe. For years, she has kept a vegetable garden and helped to sustain her family on the maize and root vegetables that she grows.

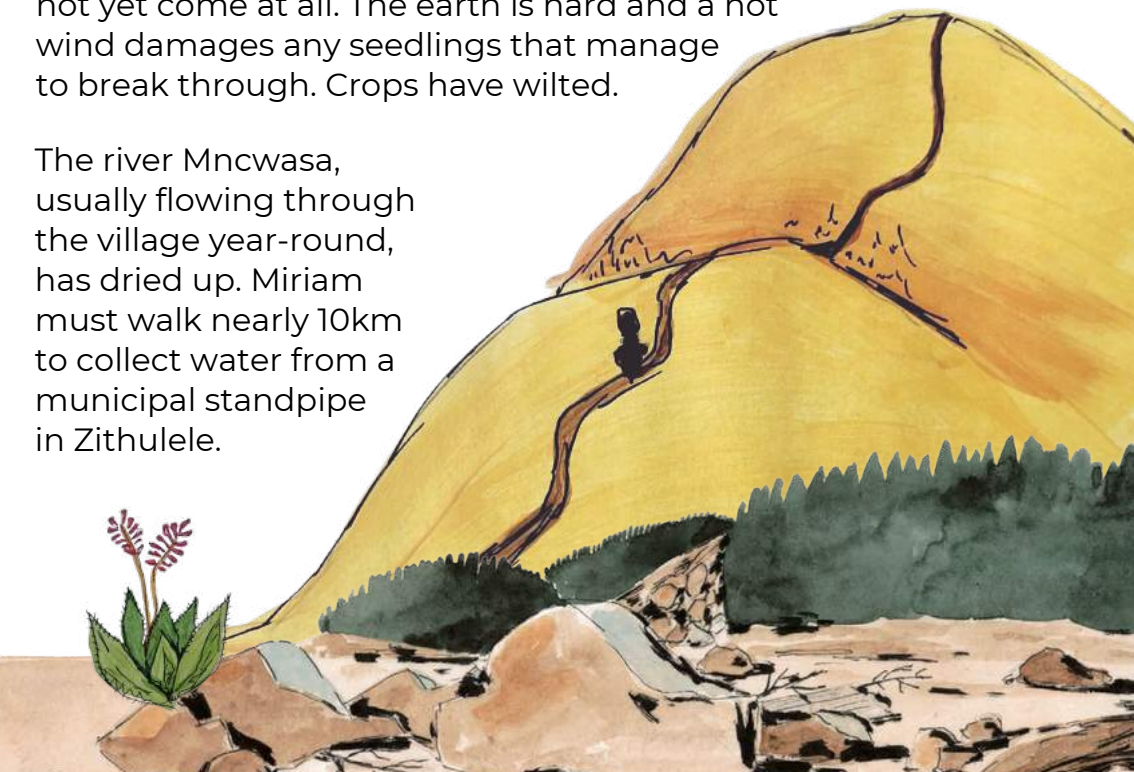


Miriam's husband Luzuko has recently returned to Talemofu after losing his job at a shopping centre in the nearby town. With an extra person in the home and less income to rely on, Miriam has been worrying about food more than usual.



An illustration of a wide, dry riverbed with a yellowish-brown, cracked surface. Two cows, one brown and one white, are walking across the dry ground. The background is plain white.

Her garden has been struggling. Recently, the rains have been difficult to predict. This year, they have not yet come at all. The earth is hard and a hot wind damages any seedlings that manage to break through. Crops have wilted.

An illustration of a dry riverbed winding through a yellowish-brown landscape. A small black silhouette of a person is walking along the dry riverbed. In the foreground, there are brown rocks and a small green plant with purple flowers. The background shows a dark green forest line.

The river Mncwasa, usually flowing through the village year-round, has dried up. Miriam must walk nearly 10km to collect water from a municipal standpipe in Zithulele.

One day, Miriam returns from the long journey to get water and finds her husband waiting at home. The couple argue.

"I gave you the last of our money for seeds and you failed to raise them!"

"There hasn't been rain, Luzuko, what could I do?! Maybe if you hadn't wasted our money we could have bought a rainwater tank that could water the seeds in this drought!"

"No seeds will grow for a lazy woman. Look at this house, it's a mess!"

"I've been gone all day to get water, there is not enough time! If you hadn't lost your job, I could buy what we need!"

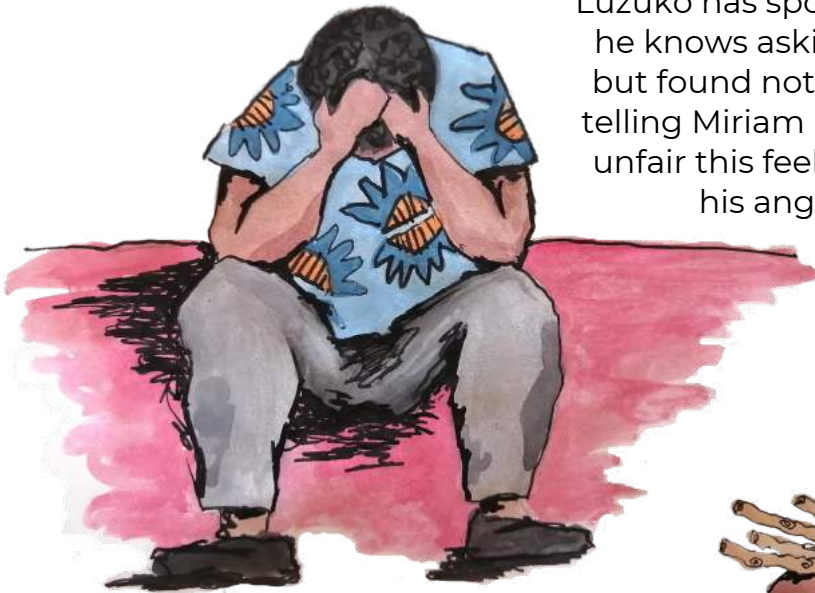
What expectations do Miriam and Luzuko have of each other?



Miriam storms out of the house, slamming the door behind her.
Luzuko sinks onto the bed in frustration.

He did not mean to shout at his wife. She needed to ask for more money when the child grant ran out. But he has nothing to give.

Luzuko has spoken to everyone he knows asking about work, but found nothing. Instead of telling Miriam how painful and unfair this feels, he expressed his anger at her.

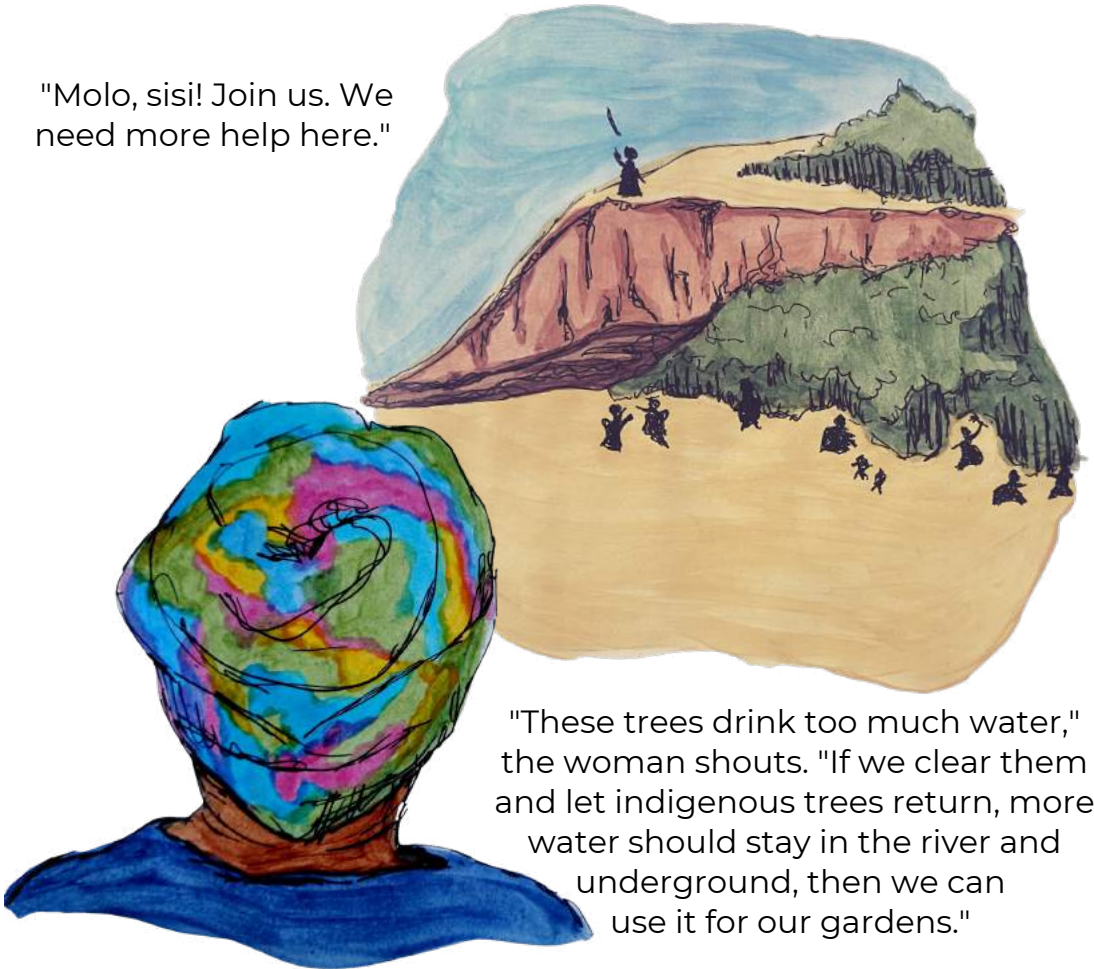


Just then, their son Jongikhaya comes in with an armful of firewood, collected for cooking. He asks his father to help him.



Meanwhile, Miriam walks to the river to think. She notices a large group of women cutting trees on the bank where the water once flowed. One of them calls out:

"Molo, sisi! Join us. We need more help here."



"These trees drink too much water," the woman shouts. "If we clear them and let indigenous trees return, more water should stay in the river and underground, then we can use it for our gardens."



The woman who called out to her comes closer to continue speaking:




"You must remember when these banks were lush and the men cared for large herds of cattle on their shores," she says. "Now, the only green is these trees that are not supposed to be here."



"The rain patterns are changing. Livestock have died and water is scarce. Most of us are barely surviving."


Other women nearby begin to share too.



"I used to pay school fees from selling the extra vegetables that I grew in my garden. Now I can barely grow enough to feed my own children!"

"It shouldn't be windy at this time of year and erratic fires make it worse. Plus do you remember, last year there was snow?"

"I spend hours getting water, I don't see my family or have time for housework."



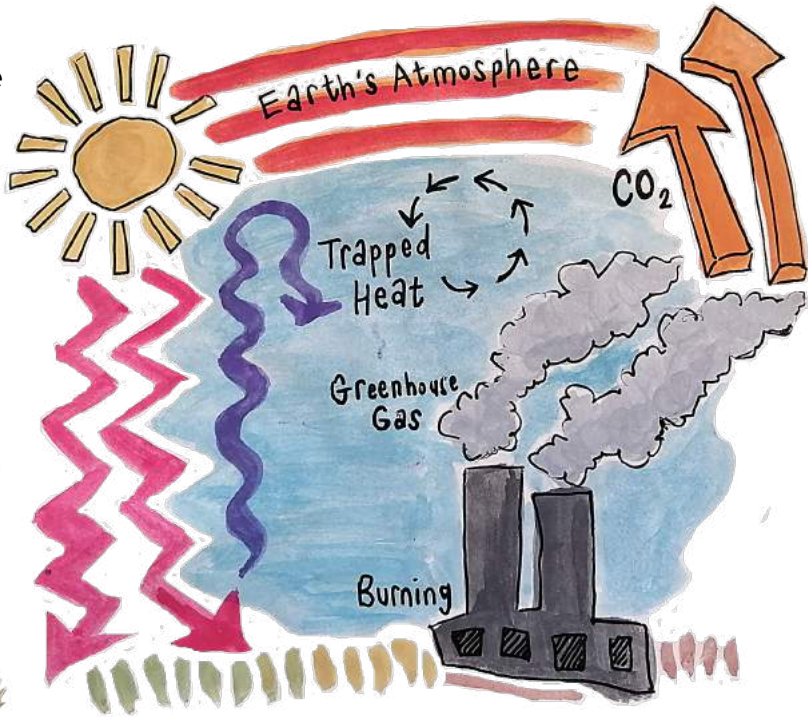
Miriam listens and can relate to everything the women say. She is not alone in her troubles.

What does this tell us about the differences in how men and women use resources?



The woman who first called her over speaks again. "My son is in high school," she says to the group that has gathered. "He told me that this change is happening everywhere."

"Apparently, activities that use petrol, coal, and gas like driving, flying airplanes, and running big factories are changing the weather by producing gases that trap heat in our atmosphere."



"As the atmosphere gets hotter, the weather that we've relied on for generations is starting to change. My son says it could get worse than this, with more drought, fires, and floods. People in power don't seem to care as long as they make money"



To understand why climate change is happening, it's important to understand something called "the Greenhouse Effect". Energy comes from the sun into the Earth's atmosphere. Some of this energy is reflected back into outer space and some energy is trapped in the atmosphere. The flow of energy normally traps enough heat in the atmosphere to allow for life on earth to flourish. The Earth's atmosphere acts like the roof of a greenhouse that maintains healthy conditions. This naturally occurring phenomenon is called the Greenhouse Effect.

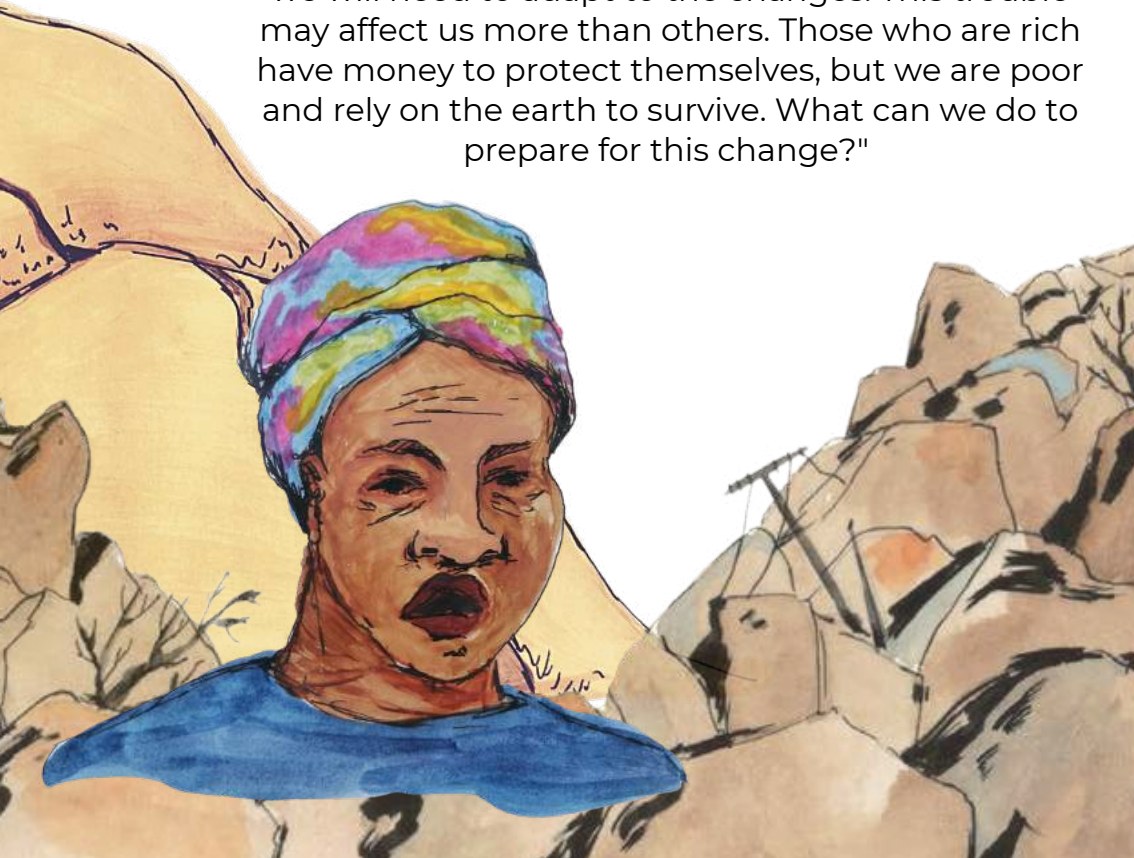
Gases like water vapour, carbon dioxide, methane and others are responsible for trapping the heat so we refer to them as greenhouse gases. The activities of some human societies and communities have increased the amount of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Wealthy countries and communities have burned fuel to move cars and planes and burned coal to make electricity, run industries, and created chemicals for agriculture. The increase in greenhouse gases from these activities is trapping more energy. You can think of the atmosphere as a blanket that is getting thicker and thicker with greenhouse gas. As more energy gets trapped by this "thicker blanket", the atmosphere heats up.



This heating is called global warming. As the earth's atmosphere gets hotter, global weather systems are being affected. Some areas are experiencing a significant increase in temperatures while others have less marked increases in temperatures. Some places are getting far more rain, while others are getting less rain. These significant changes are set to continue and worsen. This is Climate Change. Although wealthy societies are the most responsible for this crisis, it is rural communities who will suffer most.

Listening to the woman explain, Miriam pictures what could happen in the future. At last, she raises her own voice.

"We are all barely coping already. If this continues, we will need to adapt to the changes. This trouble may affect us more than others. Those who are rich have money to protect themselves, but we are poor and rely on the earth to survive. What can we do to prepare for this change?"



The women all start speaking at once.

"In addition to removing alien trees, we need to reconnect with traditional water saving techniques."

"There are crops that grow better in heat. What money can we use to buy the seeds?"



"We need more information about what this climate change means for our crops, livestock, and homes."



"The child support grant isn't enough. Perhaps once we grow crops that do well in the drought, we can sell the seeds and seedlings?"

"Our local government, NGOs and universities have a lot of information. Let's approach them!"



At the next community meeting, the women address the village about their ideas.

"We need your help to finish the work we are doing at the river bank. Our animals need shade and water," one woman explained.

"We also need to save money to buy a Jojo tank and create a system to catch as much water as we can when the rains eventually come."

"In the meantime, we ask our leaders to engage with the municipality about taps and a borehole system."



Miriam's son Jongikhaya addresses the people too.



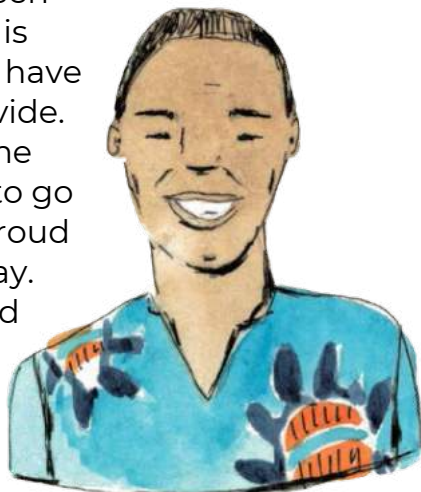
"My mother has too much to do now. I try to help her by collecting fire wood. She taught my sisters and me to help our family in whatever way is needed. There is a lot we as youth can do."

At this point, to Miriam's surprise, her husband Luzuko stands up to speak.

"Many of us as men here do not have work anymore. Since losing my job, I've been depressed. I see the stress my wife is carrying; I see that my children do not have enough. I feel like I have failed to provide.

But what Jongikhaya says makes me realise that we cannot wait for things to go back to how they were before. I am proud to listen to my son and my wife today.

They are teaching us what we need to do to adapt."





"There is work to do," Luzuko says, smiling toward Miriam. "Our families need us to contribute in new and different ways."



"We must work together to survive. Individual, family, and community! The government and businesses have their roles to play too."

Men and women living in rural areas know more about the impact that climate change is having than most people, because they directly experience how it is changing weather patterns and affecting the earth. Rural communities have already developed ways to adapt to the changing conditions around them. However, because there are high degrees of poverty in most rural areas, it can be very challenging to adapt without enough resources.

Another challenge to adaptation is our own views about the roles that we play in our families and society. Some of our strongest expectations are based on gender roles we play in our families and communities.

Gender roles are the behaviours that men and women often carry out both at home and in public. These ways of doing things are shaped by how society expects the individual to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct themselves based on the sex (male or female) they were assigned at birth. Usually, an individual's sex is determined by how their genitalia look when they are born, though this might not always represent the gender they experience later on in life.

Both men and women are impacted by climate change, but the impact could be different due to their traditional gender roles. Research has shown that the unequal distribution of roles and responsibilities between men and women, especially in rural settings, currently results in women being most vulnerable to climate change. Traditionally, many rural communities expect women to take care of the home and children, managing food security, tending to gardens, collecting firewood and water for household activities. All of these responsibilities are impacted by climate change.

As climate change affects these resources and the weather conditions, women have extra workloads trying to cope. This affects them both physically and emotionally as they constantly have to worry about the well-being of their household members, especially children and the youth who depend on them.

Men's traditional gender roles will also be impacted by climate change. Men have traditionally been expected to tend livestock, protect and provide for the family. They are often the first to seek paid work if the family needs money, leaving women in rural areas to look for work in the cities. Heat may cause livestock to get sick and die, while climate change may lead to even more unemployment as some economic sectors shrink (for example, coal mining). As they lose incomes, men can experience psychological stress and depression which can result in negative coping mechanisms (such as drinking too much alcohol).

Despite growing recognition of the different vulnerabilities as well as the different experiences and skills that women and men bring to the table, women in rural areas still generally have less economic, political and legal power and are therefore less able to cope with – and are more exposed to – the negative effects of the changing climate. On the other hand, women are powerful agents of change in their communities who often drive adaptation strategies forward, despite existing structural and socio-cultural barriers.

As communities adapt to climate change, it is important to consider how improving gender equality will strengthen our adaptation strategies. When families and communities seek to share roles and responsibilities more widely and equally, the burden is eased. Gender equality results in fewer barriers to change that lessens the negative impact of climate change.



Questions for Reflection

- What gender roles were seen in the story? How are these similar to or different from the roles and expectations you experience in your community?
- What assumptions do we make about men and women's strengths and vulnerabilities at the individual / household / community / institutional or government levels?
- How are men and women affected by changing weather patterns in your community?
- What are the current coping and adaptation strategies that men and women are using in your community?
- How can the capacity of women and men be strengthened to better adapt to climate change and climate variability?



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