

Women and Young Girls in the Tana River Region Face the Devastating Impact of Climate Change

The Tana River region of Kenya is feeling the pinch of climate change challenges in several forms, and the fate majorly of women and young girls is deeply rooted in it. Changing climate conditions such as increased temperature, fluctuating rainfall patterns, and climatic shocks such as cyclones and frequent flooding and drought are adding to earlier vulnerabilities and creating additional ones for the female populace, with this region being primarily agrarian.

The state of health in Kenya has continued to worsen, and this has been attributed to climate change. The Tana River County boss of health, Oscar Endekwa, notes that problems of malnutrition have escalated given the frequent droughts more so as they affect crops and livestock, which are essential foods and sources of income." We are experiencing increased instances of acute malnutrition entailing children and pregnant women," Oscar Endekwa said, adding that inadequate nutrition has far-reaching consequences on expectant women and breastfeeding mothers as they are most likely to experience some challenges during and after birth, consequently resulting in high incidences of maternal mortality.

National statistics revealed that malnutrition has sharply risen in arid and semi-arid areas over the last five years to the tune of 20%. Due to frequent droughts, these commodities have become scarce in the world today. The main burden still lies with the female sex, especially young women and girls, who have to spend considerable amounts of time and effort on water collection. Some have to cover longer distances in search of water for the household and the livestock, meaning that they are more likely to encounter aggressive and hostile attackers on the way or be exposed to GBV.

Consequently, the role that climate change has on the delivery of education is also profound. Young girls are likely to be withdrawn from school to engage in household activities and water fetching, thus inhibiting their chances of attaining education and, therefore, reading more on poverty and gender imbalance. According to the Ministry of Education, girls' enrollment into schools in the Tana River region has registered a staggering 15% attendance in the past two years, particularly during times of famine due to drought.

The social and economic impacts of climate change have forced people to change their livelihoods, thus creating a conducive environment for gender-based violence. Most of the local NGOs have reported a perceived rise in cases of domestic violence and early marriages due to the increasing struggles in feeding families and paying school fees because of the effects of climatic change in the community in terms of crop failure and loss of stock. Another respondent narrates and says, "Due to poverty, young girls are married off early as a coping mechanism, only to face a life of hardships with little or no options." Jane Mwangi, a Tana River-based women's rights organization respondent.

In response to these challenges, both the national and county governments are adopting different measures. The national government has adopted the Kenya Climate-Smart Agriculture Strategy (KCSAS), which aims to enhance farmers' resilience to the Sh101 billion negative impacts through sustainable agriculture. Tana River, which has the county government as the chief political implementation player, has targeted water infrastructure and health services delivery, among other sectors.

Still, much more needs to be done, and the above efforts should continue to achieve maximum results. To sum up, Dr. Noor stated that there should be more special programs to

foster women and girls, as they are one of the most vulnerable groups. However, the terrible effects of climate change are not only environmental but socio-economic and epidemiological.