



ISEJ EXPLAINER SERIES

Climate Change Is Not Gender Neutral

Why women's health and time belong at the centre of Zimbabwe's climate law

Climate change reaches people through the roles they already hold. In Zimbabwe, as across Sub-Saharan Africa, women carry disproportionate climate risk not because they are inherently vulnerable, but because entrenched social and economic inequalities place them on the front line: small-scale farming, water collection, fuel provisioning and caregiving all heighten exposure to heat, drought and disease, while barriers to land, credit, information and decision-making constrain the capacity to adapt.

Four reasons gender is a climate priority

- **Gendered exposure.** Women's daily work puts them in direct contact with climate hazards, while structural barriers limit their options for responding.
- **The climate-health nexus.** Shifting temperature and rainfall patterns amplify malaria, cholera and other risks that disproportionately affect pregnant women and children, and climate shocks disrupt maternal and reproductive health services.
- **Time poverty.** Heat and drought force women to spend more hours fetching water, firewood and food deepening unpaid care burdens and shrinking time for paid work, education, rest and civic participation.
- **Intersectionality.** Gender interacts with age, disability, class and location. Treating “women” as one category obscures who is most at risk and what works for whom.

The test of a good climate law: does it take women's time, care, health and agency seriously in its definitions, its budgets and its accountability mechanisms or does it just add the word “gender” and stir?

What gender-responsive climate law looks like

- **Rights and consent:** free, prior and informed consent for climate-related projects, with safeguards for women, youth, persons with disabilities and marginalised communities. Consent redistributes voice; it is not a box-ticking exercise.
- **Data:** sex-, age- and disability-disaggregated baselines, targets and indicators for all climate plans, and mapping of hotspots where climate hazards and gendered sensitivities overlap.
- **Twin-track mainstreaming:** gender integrated across all climate programmes, plus targeted measures where gaps persist finance for women farmers, clean energy for health facilities, safe transport for maternity referrals avoiding token “women's projects.”
- **Representation:** guaranteed, resourced participation of diverse women on climate councils and committees at every level.
- **Accountability:** gender-responsive budgeting, independent evaluation and public annual climate-gender scorecards, with incentives and consequences.
- **Care infrastructure:** investment in water, sanitation, clean energy and labour-saving technologies that reduce unpaid care burdens and free women to participate in adaptation and the economy.

Where ISEJ stands

ISEJ made a submission to the Parliament of Zimbabwe's public hearings on the Climate Change Management Bill (HB 05, 2025), urging that the Bill be strengthened on rights and consent, climate health research capacity, governance and accountability, and financing. ISEJ also conducts community-level research on how climate shocks reshape women's care burdens and health across Zimbabwe. Our position is simple: adaptation that ignores power will reproduce inequality. Transformative climate action changes who decides, who benefits, and who bears the burden of care.

About ISEJ

The Institute for Sustainable Empowerment and Justice (ISEJ) is a Zimbabwe-registered Private Voluntary Organisation working at the intersection of law, public policy, gender equality, climate justice, public health and narrative change. ISEJ translates complex legal and policy frameworks into knowledge communities can use because access to the law should not depend on access to a lawyer.

Dignity · Rights · Transformation

Sources: ISEJ submission on the Climate Change Management Bill HB 05 (2025); Global Gender and Climate Alliance (2016); Harare Declaration on Climate and Health in Africa (2024); Resurrección et al. (2019); Lam et al. (2024); Djoudi et al. (2016).