

Female farmers need support to adapt to climate change

In a unified attempt by the world's nations to keep global warming under 2 degrees, the Paris Agreement signed at COP21 came into effect on 4 November 2016 - this as the world prepares for the 22nd Conference of the Parties (COP22) taking place in Marrakech, Morocco from 17 - 18 November.



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It will focus on how to translate the Paris Agreement declarations into reality and follows the signing of the Agreement in early October where 94 of the 197 parties inked their support of the fight against global warming.

COP 22's agenda includes the adaptation, mitigation, transparency, and technology transfer to combat increasing greenhouse gas emissions. There's also a plan to discuss new efforts and implementation of the Paris Agreement with the latest data from the UN Environmental Programme showing that temperatures could rise by over 3 degrees this century unless there's urgent action.

Female farmers at the frontline of dealing with climate change

These efforts are regarded as critical to women farmers across the world who are on the front line of dealing with the impact of climate change. This includes South Africa where a sustainable use of natural resources project focusing on building resilience and adaptation in agriculture, in the face of climate change.

The project is funded by the European Union (EU) and Oxfam to provide grassroots women from Gauteng, Western Cape, and Limpopo with skills to adapt and use natural resources to be resilient to the effects of climate change. Food insecurity, climate change and water shortages (through rainwater harvesting) are some of the critical issues addressed by this sustainable agriculture project.

The project has also provided the use of clean energy by installing solar panels and biogas digesters in different schools. As primary beneficiaries, the women have been trained to use and maintain biogas digesters and solar panels.

Extreme weather takes its toll

A report commissioned by Oxfam titled *Adapting to Climate Change* states that women make up a significant proportion of smallholder producers. It is estimated that 60 percent of economically active women in Africa depend on agriculture for their livelihoods.

Low rainfall and high temperatures during the El Niño, causing extreme weather conditions, triggered a lot of challenges at the project sites such as water scarcity and crops dying because of the heat. “The effects of drought limited our ability to plant and grow crops in our food garden,” said Violet Masinga Community Working Group member at Risenga Primary School, Siyandhani, Giyani. “Water scarcity was a major challenge in our project site, our vegetables died and we had to replant,” she added.

Agents of change

Women are not only vulnerable to climate change but they are also effective actors or agents of change in relation to both mitigation and adaptation.

Another beneficiary has urged global leaders attending COP22 to find solutions for smallholder farmers especially women farmers.

“Women farmers suffer the most, world leaders should implement the climate agreement from the ground, said Zodwa Ranyadi CWG at Nandi Primary School, Diepkloof, Soweto and Women Energy Climate Change Forum member (WECCF).

“Funding should be another aspect that they provide to women farmers as this will give us access to own and control land as economic empowerment,” said Ranyadi. “They should come up with practical solutions that will help women and men farmers to adapt to climate change.” Despite these challenges, the women are determined to take the lead in fighting and adapting to climate change through this project.

List of project sites:

Gauteng

Ekurhuleni – Khangezile Primary School, Kwa-Thema
Emfuleni – Motsewapele Primary School, Evaton
City of Johannesburg – Nandi Primary School, Diepkloof, Soweto
Mogale City – Mphethuto Primary School, Magaliesburg

Western Cape

Khayelitsha – Founders Educare Pre-school, Makhaza
City of Cape Town – Green Park Informal Settlement, Ward 19

Limpopo

Mopani – Risenga Primary School, Siyandhani, Giyani
Mopani – Nwajaheni Primary School, Nwamitwa, Tzaneen

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