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Climate change | **Gender**

Building a women-led community climate movement

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This case study examines how Women's Climate Centers International is supporting local community-led action to build resilience to climate change in Uganda and Kenya, including by communicating traditional and technical climate information.

WCCI women preparing land for planting trees and bio-intensive farming (Photo: Rose Wamalwa/Comfort Hajra, WCCI <https://www.climatecenters.org/> Kenya/Uganda)

The 'Engaging citizens for socially just climate action' project <https://www.iied.org

> /engaging-citizens-for-socially-just-climate-action> examines deliberative and participatory processes used by civil society networks in order to understand how to strengthen citizen engagement mechanisms and locally-led climate action and improve inclusive national-level climate decision making. In parallel, the project examines how technology can support citizen engagement by encouraging social inclusion and learning in decision making and resilience building.

Women's Climate Centers International (WCCI) <https://www.climatecenters.org/> is a network led by women development professionals in Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, and the United States that is co-creating community hubs – or 'Climate Centers' – to empower women to become climate movement leaders and promote sustainable climate solutions. Working with vulnerable communities, it is emphasising low-cost environmentally appropriate technologies, advocacy and leadership.

The first 'climate center' is being developed in Tororo district in Eastern Uganda. It features demonstrations of:

- Environmental conservation and restoration through the planting of indigenous trees
- Low-cost, appropriate climate-smart sanitation and hygiene technology options,
- Examples of low-cost bio-intensive farming, and
- Community-level entrepreneurship.

The aim is for the 'climate center' to become a community hub for learning and peer-to-peer training and a focal point for demonstrating climate change solutions by implementing partners. Other 'climate centers' will follow this model.

A core group of four women-led organisations in Uganda and Kenya work as part of WCCI. In Kenya, the local leads are Community Mobilization for Positive Empowerment (COMPE) <http://compekenya.org/> and Women in Water and Natural Resources Conservation (WWANC) <http://wwanckenya.org/home/> . In Uganda, the local organisations are Uganda Women's Water Initiative (UWWI) and Osukuru United Women's Network (OWN). These organisations are supported by a loose coalition of local partners.

The video below provides an introduction to WCCI.

Participation and deliberation

As an international movement, WCCI uses a collaborative operating model, designed to provide support at the grassroots in East Africa by bringing a range of skills from other geographies.

Ugandan and Kenyan organisations lead on engaging with local communities and supporting existing self-organised groups. Rosemary Atieno, from COMPE, describes the WCCI community engagement process: "One of the key approaches we have is the community dialogue – we start with the changing the attitude stage, having a deeper conversation about what the community wants.

"Then we go on to collect data from the community, to understand causes of climate change and impacts on the community, and the resources available for response. The information is used to develop a common action plan, and once the community is clear on what needs to be done, we take it day by day."

The strength of community dialogues is that they enable reflection and consensus building. To ensure all voices are heard, the women sometimes work separately with different parts of the community before bringing groups together.

They also use approaches such as asking people to rank their priorities and work through community representatives. Godliver Businge, director of technology at UWWI, described how games are used to reach consensus on difficult issues, for example, a game called 'the boat is sinking!' helps people find solutions under difficult circumstances without discrimination and involving everyone.

Taking meetings to the community is important: UWWI's country director, Hajra Mukasa, explains: "We don't use hotels, we take our meetings to the community, or we lose people in time and in transport. Meetings in open spaces make the community curious, when they see a meeting under a tree, they want to know what is being discussed and they join in."

WCCI Uganda uses informal bottom-up mechanisms to engage government and enable local voices to inform government processes. They invite local leaders to attend WCCI meetings focused on specific issues, reducing the time and bureaucracy involved in formal

consultations. They support the capacity of grassroots women leaders to represent their communities and increase their voice in government processes.

Using climate information and digital tools

All WCCI partners report that traditional climate information is being generated and used by their communities. Hajra Mukasa reported that storytelling helps present information in an easy to understand way and remains widely used for sharing knowledge and experience around weather and climate.

Data from national meteorological departments is difficult for communities to process and utilise for decision making; often it is overly technical – and sometimes it's inaccurate on localised impacts. Some communities use government weather information in conjunction with their own knowledge to triangulate and better understand risks.

WCCI regional coordinator Rose Wamalwa described how WCCI is accessing and distributing climate information via mobile phones. Local-level climate knowledge and government data are processed into a format tailored for communities and sent via SMS to 'Women Climate Accelerators' – community members in different counties trained on climate issues.

The 'accelerators' then reach out to community groups of 25-30 people. They play a key role in transmitting information because they can understand and – if necessary – translate it, and then communicate it to households in the local language. Indigenous women are working directly with the mobile phone network providers to send out the messages.

WCCI members and communities use WhatsApp to communicate issues via pictures or video. This helps overcome literacy issues and information can be shared easily across the network, and with neighbouring communities. Community members also send local information to WCCI contacts via their trusted community leaders. WCCI contacts can use this information for decision making and liaising with national government.

Rosemary Atieno, of COMPE, has set up a Facebook group <https://m.facebook.com /compekenya/?ref=dbl&rdr> to share information. She said: "Over 60% of our farmers have a

phone that could access social media like Facebook, and we have started using this media to share climate information, pictorials – and then breaking it down into simple language that can be easily understood by the grassroots women and translated into action."

This information is also shared with other community groups. Atieno said: "They use the same platform to ask questions and responses are shared. One example is the 'Shamba Shape Up' TV programme."

There is scope to broaden the array of digital tools being used. WCCI identifies the potential to use digital tools to capture climate impacts (through digital photos), to communicate with donors to demonstrate project impacts (through photo narratives) and to raise awareness on projects and community needs (through Twitter and Facebook).

Most interviewees reported that the use of digital tools is limited by a lack of connectivity. Modern smartphones are prohibitively expensive for many, and this limits the effectiveness of digital applications.

Policy influencing

Organisations working with WCCI engage with policymakers and local policy processes, seeking to ensure the perspectives of women are heard and considered. WCCI also aims to influence policy by using its 'climate centers' to demonstrate what is possible.

WCCI Uganda uses informal mechanisms that are bottom-up to engage government and local voices to inform government processes. The process involves inviting leaders to WCCI meetings based on the issue being discussed. This approach of engaging the leaders reduces the bureaucracy of formally presenting issues, which takes long to get their response.

In addition, community issues are shared with the sub-county or district on behalf of the group, targeting relevant issues in the budget of the local governments. They also support capacities of women leaders to represent the community and increase the voice of the women in government processes. Through these influencing processes and inviting local leaders to their meetings, political commitments are made on the spot.

The WCCI board is using a 'women of influence' strategy to support their political engagement processes. In Uganda, they work with a retired UN officer who can leverage long-term relationships she has built within government ministries to lobby for WCCI. During the Spring 2020 floods <https://www.independent.co.ug/tororo-flood-victims-urged-to-go-home-three-monthslater/> in Tororo, she helped engage the office of the prime minister responsible for disaster management to support communities with early warning information.

Community engagement is also determined by the level of trust in the processes, and this is supported through working with existing groups. However, WCCI notes that there are instances where top-down approaches are used and there is a tendency to question the bottom-up approaches in relation to generating development ideas and implementing them. Engaging leaders in community processes therefore becomes useful to break down these barriers.

Responding to COVID-19

During the pandemic, WCCI Uganda joined task forces in Tororo and worked with government from district to village level. They have supported food mobilisation, raised awareness about COVID-19, helped build 'tippy taps' for handwashing and supported women to make soap using local materials.

WCCI women promoting handwashing through demonstration using locally appropriate hand washing facilities during COVID–19. (Photo: Rose Wamalwa/Comfort Hajra, WCCI Kenya/Uganda)

The central government pandemic response has been top-down, but in Tororo, communities agreed with the district to use a local approach to support those in need, rather than waiting for central government action. As Tororo is on the border with Kenya, they supported tracing of new arrivals by local council leaders. This was all done with government buy-in and it is continuing.

Key lessons

- Organisations working with WCCI use a community dialogue model. This is an open process engaging different parts of the community through a staged discussion on how the community wants to respond to challenges.

- Communities are already using a combination of traditional and technical-scientific climate information at the local level, but they still rely primarily on information that is generated and shared within communities.

- Social media, especially WhatsApp, provides a useful and easy way to spread timely

information to large numbers of users.

- WCCI seeks to influence policy and discourse by using the 'climate center' model to demonstrate what is possible at the grassroots, and by engaging government in community processes to secure buy-in.

- WCCI uses the Women's Climate Center approach to build links between the grassroots community and institutions such as the meteorological department to promote early warning climate messages.

This case study was co-produced with WCCI East Africa coordinator Rose Wamalwa; Hajra Mukasa (comforthajra@gmail.com), lead administrator at WCCI; Susannah Fisher <https://www.iied.org/users/susannah-fisher> , Tracy Kajumba <https://www.iied.org/users/tracy-kajumba> and Barry Smith <https://www.iied.org/users/barry-smith> . It is based on interviews with WCCI founding member organisations and partners in Kenya and Uganda.

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