

Impact of Floods on Kenyan Women: A Critical Review of Media Coverage, Institutional Response and Opportunities for Gender Responsive Mitigation

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Abstract

Natural disasters pose serious threat to human life and livelihoods. Kenya is perennially exposed to floods, landslides and drought due to effects of climate change. Flooding is particularly rampant in Western Kenya and women are disproportionately affected due the important roles they play in rural economies particularly in agriculture, the informal sector as well as household survival. The media is always at hand to capture the details of the catastrophe with press reports highlighting the specific experiences of individuals, and the prevailing conditions of the affected villages including: destruction of shelter, displacement and loss of livelihoods. Similarly, Government and Non-Governmental agencies move into the affected communities to provide the much-needed support. This study reviews existing institutional literature and media coverage reports to examine the specific flood related vulnerabilities among women in Western Kenya in order to identify existing gaps. Women experience specific difficulties in performing their traditional family roles, and are often unable to meet their personal hygiene and sanitation needs but are largely missing from the decision forums where Disaster Risk Reduction is discussed leading to lack of prioritization of their specific needs. The lessons drawn from this study should inform gender responsive mitigation efforts and resilience capacity building.

Keywords: Natural Disaster, Flooding, flood-related vulnerability of women, Western Kenya.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Natural disasters like floods have devastating socio-economic impact on the affected Communities. Women play important roles in rural agriculture and pastoral livelihoods where they are directly involved in the management of productive resources, ensuring food security, and providing unpaid household labor and caring for elderly and sick members of their communities. These traditional gendered roles and socio-economic responsibilities place a disproportionate burden on them whenever disaster strikes. Disaster risk does merely affect women in time and location there is a host of complex factors that

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influence and shape their capacity for anticipation, preparation for, response to, and recovery from disasters such as role and vulnerability differentiation, customs and socio-cultural attitudes, and existing institutional structures (Bankoff,2006; Cvetković, V. M et al,2018). Cultural contexts influence the lives of men and women differently. The inequitable gender relations unfavorably impacts on women and girls in hazardous conditions due to the multifarious interaction between poverty and their specific vulnerabilities and household, community and decision roles in the face of disaster (Ariyabandu,2009; Valdes, 2009). Besides these inherent overt factors, women and adolescent girls experience access and logistical challenges in meeting their menstrual hygiene needs during disasters.

During disasters such as floods, women utilize their rich knowledge of local community and existing social networks to play important but often unrecognized roles. They meet the immediate survival needs of family members and their children, secure relief food, manage temporary household evacuation, identify and assist highly vulnerable community members such as adolescent girls, the elderly, the sick and people living with disability yet their needs are relegated within the broader disaster plans without specific prioritization (Enarson, 2002;Yadav, 2019).The potential and actual roles of women as resourceful community actors in frontline response in disaster risk mitigation are largely unrecognized and women's voices are generally sidelined in development of policy frameworks and decision (UNISDR, UNDP and IUCN, 2009).They contribute valuable resources to disaster and climate risk reduction and recovery and are active participants at all stages of disaster response (Wahlström,2012).

Kenya's empirical record of flood disaster indicates that the 2019-2020 were the worst floods recorded after the 1961-62. The combined impact of these extreme climatic disasters and the inherent socio-economic limitations have worsened the vulnerabilities of populations living in flood prone areas. Both government and Non-governmental driven interventions to disaster risk reduction in Nyando and other areas have largely consisted mainly of temporal structural relief and the provision of emergency supplies.

This study seeks to investigate the gendered response of the existing institutional policy frameworks in addressing women specific needs during disasters, the media's portrayal of women during floods; and to document women specific vulnerabilities and contribution during floods.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Floods and the Vulnerability of Women

Women bear the brunt of the effects of climate change including flooding. Their gender specific vulnerability is generally occasioned by their reproductive nature

and roles, their domestic productive gender roles and the economic activities they perform. A study by Salome (2016), found little effort by Kenya government to help women cope with effects of climate change and that women have not been adequately involved in addressing gender-based resilience and adaptation to climate change in Africa.

The effect of flood and displacement comprise the menstrual hygiene practices of women and girls and the tough shelter conditions make is very difficult for them to dispose their menstrual waste (Bhattacharjee, 2019).

The after effects of disasters like floods and the challenges of reconstruction affect women most due to the destruction of their farm based rural livelihoods thereby compounding their impoverishment and vulnerability in an already highly skewed feminized poverty (Banik, 2018). Certain cultural norms increase the vulnerability of widows and single women with regard to acquisition of shelter during and after disasters and further compound their poverty and affects the resilience (Ashraf, & Azad, 2015).

Flood disaster expose women to unique physical, psychological and socioeconomic impacts occasioned by among other things financial constraints, household dynamics, increased risk of gender-based violence due to existing cultural attitudes and the absence of gender- responsive plans and action from the response agencies (Lammiman, 2019).

Women are often the victims of the combined effect of flooding and climate change that damages safe water supply systems, but by sharing their stories on social media and engaging their progressive adaptive skills, they have developed water purification techniques through design thinking (Pruneau, D. et al, 2018) A vulnerability assessment study found that women are more negatively impacted by climate change than men, due to disproportionate poverty and their dependence on natural resources; they provide care for close relatives when disaster hazards and traumatic events happen, yet are marginalized in resource and decision processes (Goldin, et al, 2019).

A study of gender differentiated vulnerability in Budalangi flood plains in Kenya established that women and men are affected differently by flooding, with latter often running to urban centres leaving the women to deal with a host of challenges ranging from displacement and loss of property and livelihoods, to exposure to injuries, disease and sexual violence and increased domestic workload in disaster response and reconstruction (Mukuna, 2015).

2.2 Institutional Policy Frameworks on Disaster

The global awareness on the need for disaster risk reduction became apparent in the 1990s when the proclamation of the International Decade

for Natural Disaster Reduction (1990 to 1999) by the UN General Assembly. Subsequently the international platform has seen a successive development in policy frameworks that are highlighted below.

The Yokohama Strategy⁶ for a Safer World: Guidelines for Natural Disaster Prevention, Preparedness and Mitigation (United Nations 1994), that was adopted during the first world Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction lay down the principles of disaster management ,assessment, strategy and action .This was succeeded at the second World Conference on Disaster Reduction in 2005 by the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005–2015 (HFA 2005) ⁷which came up with three strategic goals numerous guiding principles, and five key priorities for action and considerations for implementation and follow-up by member states.

Following the expiry of 2015, the Sendai Framework⁸ for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 came into effect with the aim to achieve significant reduction of disaster risks and loss of lives, livelihoods, and health and the economic, physical, social, cultural, and environmental assets of people, businesses, communities, and countries through the prevention of new disaster risks and reduction of existing ones through an integrated and inclusive approach to strengthening resilience (SFDRR,2015). The framework identifies four priority areas of action: Understanding of disaster risk; Strengthened governance in disaster risk management; risk reduction and resilience building through investment; and enhanced preparedness for effective disaster response and recovery, restoration and reconstruction.

During the same year 2015, the current international development blue print: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁹ was developed. Goals 9, 11 and 13 respectively speak to: the need for resilient infrastructure; ‘making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’; and taking ‘urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts’. This can be said to allude to issues of disaster without explicit mention of the increasing global effects of disasters like floods.

Efforts towards a legal framework on international and national disaster response was first discussed at the 2010 meeting of the Commonwealth

⁶https://www.preventionweb.net/files/8241_doc6841contenido1.pdf

⁷https://www.unisdr.org/files/1037_hyogoframeworkforactionenglish.pdf

⁸https://www.unisdr.org/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordren.pdf

⁹UN General Assembly, ‘The Sustainable Development Goals’ (SDGs), Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, UNGA res 70/1 (25 September 2015).

law ministries in London, following a joint paper by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).¹⁰

In continental Africa, the disaster risk reduction policy frameworks are aligned to the international instruments respectively as follows: Programme of Action for the Implementation of The Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction¹¹ (2006–2015); the Extended Programme of Action for the Implementation of the Africa Regional Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction (2005-2015); and the Declaration on the Implementation of the Sendai Framework in Africa (Clause 32).

Kenya has put in place a number of disaster risk management policy frameworks and financing including: National Disaster Management Policy (2009); National Disaster Response Plan (2009); Constitution of Kenya (2010); The County Governments Disaster Management Act (2014); National Adaptation Plan (2015–2030); National Emergency and Disaster Response Plan and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and the National Climate Change Action Plan (2018-2022).

2.3 Media Reporting on Floods and Women

The role of media in covering natural disasters cannot be overemphasized. Media outlets provide updates on warnings, victim details and experiences, evacuation and act as a bridge between victims, general public and national and international aid organizations. Women's gendered roles place them at the centre of disaster experiences as both victims and active actors in the response process and reconstruction.

Media remains a crucial source of information on hazardous disasters but their role has not received considerable attention by academic researchers and especially their reporting during disasters. The manner in which they frame disaster messages plays a significant role in alerting government agencies and other response organizations about the unique needs of people affected by disasters, and appeals to the general public through timely, accurate and information (Ali, 2014).

The media usually sets the agenda that gives prominence to the social problems and the need for immediate relief by vulnerable people without many prospects for future disaster (Barnes et al., 2008; Giri, & Vats,

¹⁰https://www.ifrc.org/global/publications/idrl/resources/newsletter/october_2010/commonwealth.pdf

¹¹https://www.unisdr.org/files/13655_POAinEnglishadoptedinNairobi16April%5B1%5D.pdf

2018). They actively engage women in reporting the effects of disaster and in the discussion of reconstruction, with emphasis on issues of governance rather than health and protection which are the core concern for women and children in the affected areas (Ali, 2014).

Majority of media outlets often portray women as lamenting and passive victims helplessly waiting for strong men to rescue or evacuate them into safety. Such images reinforce deeply entrenched patriarchal notions that overlook the active reproductive, productive and community disaster roles (Enarson, 2002).

3.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out in Awasi ward of Nyando Sub -Kisumu County, Kenya. It was hinged on a feminist qualitative content analysis which was useful and appropriate in reviewing of existing international and national institutional frameworks and policies for disaster response and in gaining insight on how the local media reporting portray women during floods. Besides, it is useful in categorizing the issues arising from the personal stories and discussions with women as well other key informants involved in the study. The central goal of feminist research is to promote social justice and empower women the application of finding in influencing the various local and international actors to appreciate gendered effects disasters and other forms of human experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2013).

All the information and data used in the study was purposively sampled at various levels. This involved an online targeted search of the existing literature on disaster risk reduction frameworks and relevant information on newspaper coverage of floods in Nyando. The case study area was informed by a snowballing of victims based on media reports. A systematic desk review of the existing relevant international and national institutional frameworks and policies for disaster response was done in order to check for their gender responsiveness and possible gaps in local action. An online search of local print and electronic media reports on floods in period covering 2019 and 2020 was done from the three leading local media outlets: The Daily Nation, the Standard and the Star. This was followed by a purposive selection of relevant information on women. The stories, captions and pictures were analyzed to interpret in order to uncover the media portrayal of women and the gaps in voicing their specific needs. The choice of 2019 and 2010 flood reports was informed by the fact they are the most recent coupled with the

compounding effect of Covid19 pandemic that has slowed down economic activities and exposed people to worsening poverty and loss of income.

In order to generate information from the affected floods, a feminist storytelling and focus group discussions were conducted with women living in perennially flood affected areas of Nyando Sub -County. Feminist storytelling employs first person narration to highlight the complexity of the subtle experiences of women within the wider socio-cultural contexts in order to facilitate transformative consciousness (McGuire et al., 2010; Mootz & Mollen, 2015), and recognize women's contribution through their own lenses. The case study areas of Kobong'o, Tura and Kak Mie villages in Awasi ward are prone to severe perennial floods. A total three focus group discussions (one per village, with eight to 10 participants in each group) and three personal narratives were collected from an adolescent girl, a single mother and a married woman to capture the commonalities and variances in their experiences. In addition, two key informant interviews; one with the program manager, protection, Gender and Inclusion from the Kenya Red Cross and another with an official from the National Disaster Response Unit were conducted.

The research questions addressed the following broad areas (1) The existing policy frameworks that address women specific issues during disaster and floods (2) The nature and aspects of women specific vulnerabilities during floods (2) The personal and communal experiences of women and girls during floods in Nyando and (3) The institutional response mechanisms and the role of women.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are organized under the key thematic areas that guided the study as presented below:

4.1 Institutional Policy Frameworks and Women in Disaster Response

Document analysis and review of existing institutional frameworks reveal considerable steps towards mainstreaming gender in disaster risk reduction with lingering challenges on how the top-down approach navigates the national governments, local actors, community involvement in cascading effective implementation. The Hyogo Framework makes special reference to gender by stating that: "A gender perspective should be integrated into all disaster risk management policies, plans and decision-making processes, including those related to risk assessment,

early warning, information management, and education and training” (UNISDR, 2005). The Beijing Agenda for Global Action on Gender sensitive Disaster Risk Reduction (2009), entitled “Women 2000: Gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century,” advocates gender-responsive methodologies and strategies to disaster response and recovery.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies affirms that disasters like floods disproportionately affect women and girls with increased risk of injury, death and loss of livelihoods amidst knowledge gaps in gender responsive institutional policy frameworks and national laws for disaster risk management (IFRC, 2017)¹². Further to this assertion, they have developed certain instruments towards the achievement of gender inclusivity in disaster response including: the Strategic Framework on Gender and Diversity Issues 2013-2020; Gender and Diversity Policy 2019 and the Minimum Standards for Protection, Gender and Inclusion in Emergencies¹³. In spite of these progressive frameworks, implementation is hampered by lack of funds, inadequate institutional collaboration between the national disaster management unit and other organizations at the community level and lack of sufficient capacity and funding.

Kenya, like many African countries has endorsed and adopted international frameworks including: the United Nations (UN) Framework Convention for Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol; the UN Convention for Combating Desertification; and the Hyogo Framework of Action, 2005. There is no specific legal framework for disaster response; instead it operates under the Constitution of Kenya, 2010 which entrenches Disaster Management in the Schedule 4 and policy and administrative processes operating within emergency powers. The National Disaster Management Authority Bill 2019¹⁴ is gender blind with a broad outline of specific functions and an establishment of a board that includes representation from the Ministries of Finance, Defense, Health, Environment, Communication, Foreign Affairs and the office of the Attorney General, and a representative from County governments. There is no express reference or inclusion of the Ministry that deals with Gender Affairs that can ensure the inclusion of women’s representation and

¹² Gender disparities in disaster response <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/2017/11/07/new-research-shows-gender-disparities-disaster-response/>

¹³ https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/document-library/?wpv-theme=sexual-and-gender-based-violence&wpv_aux_current_post_id=26486&wpv_view_count=26485-TCPID26486

¹⁴ <http://www.parliament.go.ke/node/11142>

voices at the highest Policy level in disaster management. Besides, KIIs with an officer at the National Disaster Management Unit revealed that currently there is nospecific policy on women and disaster but, the regional counties are expected to adopt the National Disaster Risk Management into their contexts and include women’s issues.

These findings indicate a notable push towards gender mainstreaming in mitigating the effects of disasters through policy guidelines but challenges remain in their integration and practical application in national legislation and policies. Women specific issues remainmarginal and the various Country programs and intervention bodies are left to decide on how make vulnerabilities a separate agenda in disaster planning, budgeting and mitigation. The generic use of the word gender in policy frameworks andprotocols often clouds the real issues that should be considered with regard to women’s lives.

4.2 Media Coverage of Women and Floods in Nyando.

The perennial flooding around river Nyando has caused untold suffering to the localcommunity in the catchment area. Local media reports on the floods menace in the area extensively used personal stories to reinforce the magnitude of devastation experienced by women in varied perspectives. The visual images and personal accounts of women tell stories of their displacement, destruction of property and sense of helplessness as they move to rescue centres or safer grounds. The information sourced from electronic and print media was summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Experiences of Women during Flooding of River Nyando, Kenya

| Date | Media Outlet | Type of Media | Women Experiences |
|---------------------|--------------|------------------|---|
| 2nd December, 2019 | The Star | Print Media | – Lost chicken and heads of cattle |
| 30th December, 2019 | Citizen TV | Electronic Media | – 1200 women and children displaced and sheltered in the nearby school – One of the women had been receiving antenatal care at the evacuation Centre |
| 2nd December, 2019 | The Standard | Print Media | – Helpless mothers ferried loads of household goods to safer grounds, with children shivering in the cold – A mother of three, said her crops were swept away by the waters. |

| | | | |
|--------------------|--------------|------------------|---|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The lady resident complained about house being swept away as well as loss of livestock including chicken, cattle, kitchen utensils, destruction of farms - The lady appealed to the leadership to come to the rescue of the flood victims especially in terms of a shelter |
| 30th April, 2019 | The Star | Print media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One of the ladies decried loss of crops, livestock and houses to floods |
| 1st December, 2019 | Daily Nation | Electronic media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One of the women complained that they had lost tomatoes, Sukuma wiki and maize crop - The lady appealed for support from the government |
| 22nd April, 2020 | KBC TV | Electronic media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - One of the male interviewees requested for support from the County Government so they can rescue women and children - He also reported that some of the women and children had not eaten since the rains started |
| 2nd February, 2020 | Daily Nation | Print media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A local Chief reported that the displaced are mainly women and children |

Source: Various Kenyan Media Outlets, Compiled by Researcher (2020)

Furthermore, the visual representations of women’s experiences are captured in figure 1 and 2 below:



Figure 1. Women and children displaced by floods after River Nyando burst its banks. Source: Citizen TV (2020). Available on YouTube.

Figure 1 presents screenshots of News bulletin from *Citizen TV*. The pictures depict media characterization of the experiences of women during

flooding in River Nyando by portraying them as helpless and desperate with an urgent need for relief and evacuation to safer places.

Additionally, visual images of news reports from other media outlets including *KBC TV*, *Nation Media Group* and *KTN TV* were presented in the first, second, and third columns respectively as shown in Figure 2 below:

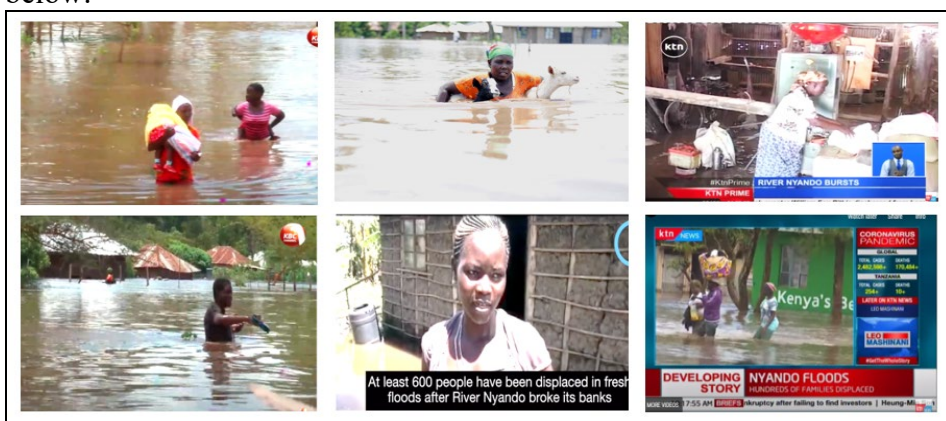


Figure 2. Women walking across flooding waters after River Nyando burst its banks. Sources: KBC TV (2020), Nation Media Group (2020), and KTN TV (2020). Available on YouTube

From the narrative experiences captured by the newscasts, women faced dire consequences following the flooding including, displacement from their homesteads and loss of household goods, loss of livestock and sources of livelihoods among others. A case in point is the story of the woman in the first row in the third column of the screenshot above who said that she had lost her stock of rice which, a business which had been a constant source of livelihood. Similar experiences were echoed in the narrative of the lady in the second column of the third row, who decried the loss of livestock and other sources of livelihood; and who urgently appealed to the government to come to her rescue.

Inferably, the media coverage depicts a gendered perspective of the effect of flooding and the unequal plight and vulnerability of women during times of disaster as compared to men. The images and stories speak to the nuanced roles of women in their households and rural economies which often remain silenced within the broader socio-economic discourse. In spite of the positive rally call to respond to the needs of affected women, the media has failed to encapsulate the attendant contribution of women through their active involvement in mitigation of the challenges they experience. These further obscure their voices as sources of active solutions and not just victims in need of temporary relief.

4.3 Challenges Experienced by Women and Girls during Floods and their Coping Strategies

Findings from focus group discussions with women and girls together with select personal narratives reveal a number of common and age specific challenges during the perennial floods in Nyando. They experience destruction of shelter, property and loss of livelihoods leading to scarcity of food, exposure to disease and injury, personal hygiene challenges and loss of dignity. Further to these, mothers of reproductive age spoke of increased marital infidelity and desertion by their husbands, missed immunization for children, lack of sanitary towels, sex for food and exposure of STIs, challenges accessing family planning and HIV treatment for the positives, and care for the elderly in-laws. Similarly, the adolescent girls had certain specific problems such as lack of sanitary towels (the parents can no-longer provide), exposure to sexual exploitation, pregnancy and STIs, loss of hope in Education, early and forced marriage. It was also established that the 2020 floods were the worst in many years and that the villagers do not receive any early warning alerts since the flood water originate from neighboring counties.

An elderly participant said: *I have lived here for 45 years, and this year's flood is the worst. They tell us that they will fix it but it has never happened. We hardly get the warning sign; you just wake up in the middle of the night to find your house submerged in water. The floods sweep off our farm crops and household items. When the water subsides, we struggle to rebuild our collapsed houses with no help from anyone. It is painful recurrent experience but we have nowhere else to go.*

Jane: *majority of us work in the irrigation scheme, and engage in other menial jobs. The river is destroying and depleting our farmlands through erosion. Our farms are shrinking. These extreme floods alternate with extreme drought and further compound our problems.*

Judith Obuya, a mother of a young baby: *Many of our children miss important immunization schedule especially when the dates fall on the days of flooding. This corona period has been very hard, the doctors are on strike and we can't afford private clinics.*

Adolescent Girl: *Often we don't have sanitary towels so we improvise old pieces of clothes or old mattress. We really want to go to school and accomplish our dreams but the problems are overwhelming. Some of us have run off to be married and many of our friends have become pregnant. Sometimes you are pressured by a grown man and you don't know to resist his sexual advances.*

In order to cope with the challenges, the women and girls engage in various activities notably, communal cooking and sharing of meals, traditional herbal

medicine, casual domestic and farm labour, use of old clothes for sanitary towels, raising floors to deflate water, and table banking to raise money for rebuilding of livelihoods.

Table 1: Summary of key flood- induced challenges faced by women and girls and coping strategies

| Focus Group | Challenges | Coping Strategies during and after floods |
|--|--|---|
| Elderly women aged between 50 and 70 years. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of shelter and household items; farm crops and produce and domestic animals (crops, cattle and chicken are swept away). • Loss of agricultural land through erosion. • Disruption of lives and exposure to indignity • No firewood for cooking • Food scarcity • Water contamination • Human waste Pollution • Increased cases of malaria and diarrhea, stomachaches, • Injuries like falls and snake bites • Lack of reconstruction materialism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We put children on tables as you sleep while seated • Raising the floors high to deflect waterlogging • Small groups of table banking • replanting of vegetables in the wet soil |
| Mothers aged between 23 -49 years. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of Loss of shelter and household goods; farm crops and produce; domestic animals. • Care for the elderly in-laws. • Children miss important immunization schedule. • Increased marital infidelity and desertion by husbands • Exposure to diseases and STIs and flood separation/divorce • Challenges refilling their medications (Family planning and ARVs). • Challenges accessing sanitary towels. • Alternate drought (flooding and drought) • Sex for food and discrimination in cash transfer to the vulnerable households. • Increased disease outbreak • Poor sanitation at the school camps • Personal hygiene challenges | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small groups of table banking. • Communal cooking and sharing of meals. • Traditional herbalists and birth attendants. • Stronger women go without food to allow the children and the elderly to eat the little that is available. • Casual domestic and farm labour in neighboring areas not impacted by flood displacement. • Donations from well-wishers and those who rescued more items like children’s clothes and bedding. • Small groups of table |

**Adolescent girls
Aged 16 to
20 years**

- Lack of adequate clean water for drinking and cooking.
- Lack of clothes for children
- Lack of sanitary towels.
- Scarcity/lack of food.
- Congestion and lack of privacy at rescue centres.
- Exposure to sexual exploitation, pregnancy and STIs
- Early and forced marriage.
- Loss of hope in Education.
- Loss of dignity at the camp due to common living spaces
- banking.
- Replanting of vegetables and restocking chicken.
- Improvise old clothes for sanitary towels.
- Casual domestic and farm labour in neighboring areas not impacted by flood displacement.
- Sex for cash with “Ngware”/motorbike operators and other older men
- Improvise old clothes for sanitary towels

Source: Focus Group Discussions with different women segments and Adolescent girls

The personal narratives by three volunteers captured the complexities of poverty, culture and how disasters like floods exacerbated the already dire conditions that majority of women and girls face especially in rural areas and their unrecognized contributions to family and community survival. Below are summarized versions of their stories:

Tabitha Ogallo: *My name is Tabitha AdhaimboOgallo from the kobongo'o. I have six children and my husband has been jobless since I was married. All the household responsibility is in on me. I farm around the river where I grow vegetables, onions and tomatoes. Whenever the floods come, they are all swept away. This year has been the worst. My husband is a drunkard and whatever little money he gets goes to his drinking. He expects me to look for food. I just married but not in the real sense since I live like a widow. I have had to sleep hungry several times. My husband beats me when I don't bring 'soup food' like fish or beef because he doesn't like vegetables. I know many of my women neighbours who go through the same. It would have been better if the floods don't interfere with the little we have.*

Zilper Adhiambo 16 years: *My name is Zilper Adhiambo. I am a form one student at Karanda Secondary School. I am an orphan and I live with my sister in Ahero. My sister is a rice farmer and when the floods come they crop is all swept away. I have had challenges raising school fees and I have applied for bursary several times without success. Sometimes I miss school to go do manual jobs in the rice farms in order to get some money for my personal needs like sanitary towels and school fees. I also have to keep a boyfriend and sleep with him in exchange of money. My boyfriend only gives me Ksh.1000 which is very*

little so I have to sleep with motor bike riders to get more money. Many young girls are forced by circumstances to sleep with multiple men to try and get some money because no one can help you for free. My appeal is that the government should prioritize the needs of girls. They can provide a special fund for girls for sanitary towels and schools fees. We also need guidance and counselling services in the community. I have tried to insist to my boyfriend to use protection but other men refuse. It is a difficult life but I want to complete my Education.

DoriceAtieno: *My name is Doris Atieno. I am a single mother and HIV positive. I got my three sons before marriage. I tried my best to get married in keeping with custom so that I would get a place to settle with my sons. I got married as a third wife but didn't stay long in that marriage due to many challenges. I came to live in a rental house here in Ahero with my sons and settled in my tailoring business. This year's floods were the worst I have witnessed. The flood waters flowed unexpectedly into my house and I had to evacuate to a friend's place. It destroyed my household goods, grain food stock and fabrics for my tailoring business. It was very painful to lose clothes that customers had brought to me to stitch. I have not been able to repay them because I have no money and Covid 19 has made things worse. I have not received any assistance or money from anywhere but I hear some people receive relief from government. I have registered twice without success. The 'nyumbakumi' man in charge is biased. Some people tell me that I have to part with something or offer sex to benefit but am done with men. I have seen so much suffering in relationship with men and I don't want such things. Interestingly, the places where women were in charge of registering people receive relief and money every week. I think this work should be done by women or people from other areas who for transparency. I have no money to buy a parcel of land where I can build a house. I have talked to my elderly mother about giving me a portion of land but she refers me to my brothers who object saying that a daughter has no place in her father's ancestral land. Since the onset of floods and the coming of covid, I have not received all my drugs for HIV treatment and this worries me a lot for I fear I might become sick.*

Some of these findings resonate with those of Mukuna (2015), whose study found that women experienced specific vulnerabilities such as loss of property and livelihoods, risk of injury and health problems while the girls dropped dropout, and went into early marriage and prostitution.

It should not be lost that in spite of these many challenges women continue to play critical roles during disasters such as floods. During the focus group discussions, the women outlined their several key roles including care giving for children and the elderly, securing and preparation of food, reconstruction of their homes and organizing themselves through small groups to rebuild their lives. This was further acknowledged during the KIIs with the project manager,

Protection Gender and Inclusion at Kenya Red Cross who said that women played very significant roles during flood disaster by providing information on best practices, safety nests for unaccompanied children, care giving for the elderly, and the sick, participating in rebuilding interventions, and coming up with innovative ways to ensure their recovery from disaster. She further acknowledged that these roles have not been adequately recognized. Similarly, the officer from the National Disaster Management Unit spoke of the critical role women played in caregiving and protection of children and the elderly as well as securing relief supplies in the event of disasters including floods.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Majority of disaster risk interventions are focused on meeting the immediate relief needs without addressing and reducing the long-term effects of vulnerability. Women specific vulnerabilities and the need for proactive approach to disaster and flood mitigation cannot be overemphasized. They experience a host of challenges that further affect their psychological and emotional wellbeing and worsen their poverty. Acknowledging the unique needs and strengths of women during flood disasters with deliberate steps to reduce their vulnerabilities and build gender-based resilience will help alleviate the adverse effects of disasters and develop effective mitigation. The existing global and regional policy frameworks is a commendable step in the provision of general guidance on addressing disaster induced challenges across all sectors and population groups. However, neither the Hyogo Framework nor the Sendai Framework and the subsequent respective regional guidelines can be effective without accounting for women specific issues as they form the majority of those worst hit by disaster, are disproportionately poorer and always at the centre rural economies that remain inaccessible to modern technology and knowledge of disaster management. In view of the findings, the study recommends the following:

- i. The deliberate inclusion of women specific action points in dealing with disaster risk reduction to ensure that women's vulnerabilities are mainstreamed at all levels of policy implementation.
- ii. The National policy framework should include a women specific chapter and that the relevant guidelines and protocols on disaster risk reduction should be reviewed to address women's practical and strategic needs for a more responsive mitigation process.
- iii. The disaster response kits should include water purification training and equipment for women in flood affected households. This will go a long way in helping women provide safe water to their families even when they return to their homes.
- iv. Women should be involved in the identification of vulnerable households and distribution of relief funds and supplies in order to eliminate the food for sex phenomenon and other corrupt activities.

- v. The need to develop a home grown participatory gender responsive process that looks at both downward and upward policy adoption and instrumentation and accounts for unique needs of women within the country specific socio-cultural and economic context.
- vi. The need for local media houses to involve community women in national debates on disaster risk mitigation and building of community resilience.
- vii. The scaling of up women's representation in disaster planning activities and decision-making processes pertaining to disaster risk reduction, allocation of specific funds for gender mainstreaming in disaster risk reduction policies in Kenya.
- viii. Inclusion of capacity and resilience building strategies for adolescent girls during disasters.

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