Global Seminar – Workshop on Indigenous Women, Climate Change and REDD+

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A CASE OF MAASAI WOMEN IN KENYA

The Maasai are a Semi Nilotic group of semi-nomadic people located in Kenya and northern Tanzania.
Due to their distinctive customs and dress and residence near the many game parks of East Africa, they are among the most well known of African ethnic groups.
The Maasai population has been variously estimated as 377,089 from the 1989 Census in Kenya and 430,000 in Tanzania in 1993 with a total estimated as approaching 900,000.
• Maasai are pastoralists and have resisted the urging of the Kenyan government to adopt a more sedentary lifestyle.
They have demanded grazing rights to many of the national parks in both countries to no avail due to bad land tenure policies especially in Kenya.
Starting with a 1904 treaty, and followed by another in 1911, Maasai lands in Kenya were reduced by 60 percent when the British evicted them to make room for settler ranches, subsequently confining them to present-day Kajiado and Narok districts.
More land was taken to create wildlife reserves and national parks and with all these changes, women are the most affected!
• Women, Food Security and Climate Change
Persistent gender inequalities experienced by women are exacerbated by disasters, poverty, inequalities and impacts of climate change.
Maintaining a traditional pastoral lifestyle has become increasingly difficult due to outside influences of the modern world.
Increase in Maasai population,
loss of cattle populations to drought and disease,
lack of available rangelands due to park boundaries,
and unfriendly land tenure systems, and land privatization
has forced the Maasai to change considerably to develop new ways of sustaining themselves.

In all the changes, women and children are the most affected
Climate Change, Food Security & Women's Rights

**Climate Disasters**
In the last two decades, the total number of disasters—mostly floods, droughts and storms—has quadrupled. Women living in poverty are the least responsible for climate change—and the most burdened by the impact.

**Food Security**
All people at all times should have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life.

**Women's Rights**
When women's rights are respected, women are healthier, better educated and better paid. Children thrive and so do communities—lasting benefits for generations to come.

- **FLOODS** damage infrastructure and disrupt food supply & production.
- **DROUGHTS** affect crop yields & create water shortages.
- When food is scarce, women and girls are the first to go hungry.
- In rural areas, women & girls walk an average of 6 km every day to collect water.

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Pastoral lifestyle & Food
Insecurity

Pastoralist communities in Kenya produce up to 80% of the meat consumed in Kenya, and the women are directly involved in milking and food reparations.
However, as a patriarchal society, women do not own land or livestock, neither can they buy and sell any of those, a practice that women human rights are fighting against.
For Maasai pastoralist women therefore, food insecurity is compounded by poverty resulting from comparative lack of assets, grazing land and livestock ownership.
Erratic rainfall and unseasonal temperatures persistently cause severe and prolonged droughts to pastoralists and this poses a lot of challenge to women and children who have less capacity to adapt.
During severe drought, men travel for long distances in search of green pastures leaving behind women, children, and the elderly to be cared for by women.
In the event that the livestock is wiped out by the drought and animal diseases which are also very common during drought; women and children and the elderly are the most affected.
Heavier Household Burdens
Maasai women are entrusted with the responsibility of making a shelter for their families and have traditionally relied on local, readily available materials and indigenous technology to construct their housing.
In order to ensure the safety of both human and livestock, Maasai women have to walk for long distances and labor for very long hours in very dangerous circumstances, in the process they risk their lives to wild animals and other dangers in the forests such as minor accidents, as well as sexual violations such as rape.
During severe drought, Maasai women walk for long hours and distances to fetch water. Young girls in school are forced to miss hours and even days of school as they opt to help their mothers to fetch water and firewood.
There is need therefore to carry out a study in Maasai land to ascertain exact numbers of women affected by climate change and find means and ways of including women in key policy decisions on issues of climate change.
Key recommendations

In developing countries, it is clear that women are the most affected by climate change yet they are not involved in policy decisions on climate change at any level.
The new constitution in Kenya also spells out a lot of women's gains which includes inheritance rights, access to and control of assets including land and livestock and water.

Advocacy around these gains should be increased and the capacity of indigenous women built to demand these rights.
ASHE OLENG!