Interventions in Gender-Blind Climate Change: Rethinking Climate Adaptation Policies through Women's Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Tanzania

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Tanzania recently completed the construction of 2,400m of sea walls protect "vulnerable villages and cities" from the threat of rising sea-levels with $8 million dollars of donor funding. Sea-levels may be rising eustatically across the globe, however, they are falling in coastal Tanzania due to tectonic plate movements. In Tanzania's Mafia Island Marine Park, where the research for this paper was conducted, women's traditional ecological knowledge aligns with scientific accounts of falling sea-levels and warming ocean temperatures. Women are acutely aware of these ecological changes because womens access to the sea is limited to the inter-coastal zone where they farm seaweed. Sea-level and water temperature are critical factors in determining seaweed species suitability and spatial extent for seaweed farming. With rising ocean temperatures as a result of climate change and falling sea-levels, women are no longer to farm a more valuable species of seaweed. This, combined with the fact that men are no longer allowed to fish due to marine park restrictions, is a grave threat to their livelihoods and resulting in some of the highest malnutrition rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is in this context that this paper asks why scientific and gendered traditional ecological knowledge is unable to challenge and change climate change narratives resulting in ill-conceived climate change policies? Taking seriously the idea that gendered traditional ecological knowledge matters, I demonstrate the need for a concerted engagement with the changed world of environmental policy and discourse to challenge ill-conceived climate change narratives.