

# GenderCC project, South Africa

## Project summary

GenderCC Southern Africa (SA) is an independent unit of the GenderCC International network, based in Berlin, Germany. It was formed after COP9 in 2003 by several gender justice groups and formally set up as a nonprofit organization in 2008 (GenderCC n.d.). GenderCC SA was founded in South Africa in 2010 with the aim of addressing fundamental systemic inequalities to promote gender and climate justice in the region (GenderCC n.d.). The organization works with local leaders to access flexible funding to support community-level social enterprises (Pers. Comm. 2022i).

Many regions in South Africa suffer from climate impacts—such as prolonged droughts and increasingly erratic weather conditions—which decrease agricultural yields and disproportionately affect low-income agricultural communities. GenderCC SA's Gender and Climate-Resilient Communities Initiative (GCRCI) in South Africa aimed to increase the adaptive capacity of women smallholder farmer enterprises, particularly those cultivating mango, and seeking more diversified income sources, to respond to these risks (GenderCC n.d.). Barriers the project confronted included limited access to property ownership among women, which aggravates their vulnerability to climate change impacts (Women for Climate Justice 2022), and limited access to financing. Additionally, as one interviewee noted, women's ability to access funding is often hampered by their lack of well-documented financial histories: "Having a funder understand your story when you have nothing to show is not easy. There are many women out there that have good ideas but don't have funders' buy-in because of lack of previous track records" (Pers. Comm. 2022g).

The driving objective behind GCRCI was to create and enhance a conducive environment for climate-smart enterprises with a focus on women-led enterprises in the vulnerable communities of Hebron, Madibeng Municipality, North West, and Mutale, in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. This was done by shifting to drought-resilient green mango and other crop varieties, and promoting the use of resilient technologies in water harvesting, irrigation, waste management, energy access, and food security. This project, funded by the Government of Flanders, was an attempt to scale up previously implemented projects funded by the European Union and Oxfam (Pers. Comm. 2022i).

The program aimed to achieve its objectives through capacity building of female entrepreneurs and supporting their involvement and decision-making in the local economy. The program

### GenderCC's GCRCI case study overview

**Location:** South Africa

**Years active:** 2019–May 2022

**Key agricultural climate risks:** Drought, erratic weather, and decreasing natural resources

**Financially supported by** Government of Flanders

**Approximate number of people involved:** 2,000 women and men farmers

**Gender-responsive LLA activities:** Women-led cooperatives, women codesigning community climate actions and climate-smart enterprises, collaborative decision-making that includes women and other vulnerable groups, flexible programming, adaptive project management

**Gender outcomes:** Increased women's involvement in leadership roles and influence in decision-making process, reduced workload for women through increased availability of sustainable water and energy resources

**Adaptation outcomes:** Increased climate resilience, reduced climate vulnerability of grassroots communities

Sources: Authors; Barre et al. 2020; GenderCC n.d..

applied participatory methodologies to ensure that women in the communities could determine viable, culturally appropriate, and marketable additions to their food enterprises (Barre et al. 2020). The project also used a hands-on learning method that equipped the marginalized groups to address community climate challenges with gender-responsive skills and tools (Barre et al. 2020), leaving them with technological know-how for replicability and scalability (Women & Gender Constituency 2019b).

## Analysis of enabling factors for gender equity and LLA

In this case example, gender considerations were present at the outset—in the project's funding frameworks as well as in national policies. At the national level, the Ministry of Environment's Governance Adaptation Strategy includes a strong reference to gender-responsive adaptation strategies and inclusion of vulnerable groups in adaptation projects. The government agency directed the project to focus on job creation and improved food security for vulnerable groups. The Ministry of Environment tasked GenderCC SA with ensuring that its work adhered to ministry requirements. The government engaged with GenderCC SA regularly to monitor the project. On the funder side, the Government of Flanders' country strat-

egy paper, which outlines development cooperation with South Africa through such projects, includes a gender component, and the funder also completed a gender action plan for project recommendations. In its call for proposals, the funder included a requirement for gender integration in all project proposals, and once it accepted GenderCC SA's proposal, the funder held itself accountable by engaging external experts to determine the gender-responsiveness of the project and allocated flexible funding for potential project changes, alleviating capacity constraints on implementers. It also ensured that a budget was provided to conduct a gender analysis and trainings for women farmers and cooperatives (Pers. Comm. 2022h).

GenderCC SA conducted gender analyses and vulnerability assessments as a part of its proposal design process. It gained insights into the unique circumstances of men and women, the ways they could work together, and how to best include women in project design, planning, and implementation (Pers. Comm. 2022i). Findings showed that women and girls were most impacted by climate change because of social norms around their roles and responsibilities, especially the burden of completing household chores in addition to their economic roles as entrepreneurs, because women are more dependent on (and have less access to) natural resources than men, and have less resources to adapt (GenderCC n.d.). Another key finding of this analysis was the persistent bias against women in decisions of how to allocate funds, even when the vetting team included women. This hampered women who applied for loans from microfinance institutions and small grants from foundations to start up or boost their enterprises. Women also faced limited access to information on markets and networks. Upon receiving the funding, GenderCC SA carried out a more in-depth gender analysis to bring greater nuance to these findings and design project activities collaboratively with local women. The women advocated diversification of climate smart enterprises and the creation of more small and medium enterprises that they can lead (Pers. Comm. 2022i).

GenderCC SA staff adapted their project to better respond to the barriers identified. To reduce women's domestic labor burdens, they provided technologies such as rainwater harvesting and improved local weather-monitoring systems that reduced drudgery and freed up women's time to engage in other activities identified together with them, including beading, counseling, and developing innovative entrepreneurial approaches for how best to package and sell produce (Women & Gender Constituency 2019b). As one interviewee stated, "Once water and energy are available through green technology, more small and medium enterprises take off since community members have more time to invest in other endeavors" (Pers. Comm. 2022i).

The project's learning approach included awareness training on the integration of gender into climate adaptation, water and waste management, energy, and sustainable farming methodologies, alongside adaptable design and flexibility to local contexts and circumstances (Barre et al. 2020). Where the project engaged men, women, and girls to better inform their approach with vulnerability assessments, it also maintained awareness of the local cultural context to ensure that their work toward women's empowerment did not increase gender-based violence (Pers. Comm. 2022i).

To address the bias against women entrepreneurs applying for loans, GenderCC SA did not allow the vetting committee to view any demographic information in the funding applications, thus helping to confront institutions that constrain women to better promote gender-equal access to finance. GenderCC SA's prioritization of small, flexible grants also provided women entrepreneurs with the necessary capital to establish their own businesses and social enterprises, promoting more gender-equal access to and control over resources (Pers. Comm. 2022i). Mitigating this bias led to more women receiving GenderCC awards to start social enterprises and form local cooperatives. Smaller businesses that receive financial support through this project have since proved to have a better loan repayment rate—a fact that can help fight the perception that women's enterprises are high-risk investments (Pers. Comm. 2022j).

The project also gave women opportunities to build their technical, leadership, and project management skills (Barre et al. 2020). Recognizing that women's voices are generally silenced, even when they offer solutions, the project aimed to amplify their voices and increase their agency through these and other activities (Pers. Comm. 2022i).

GenderCC's approach to project design suggests a strong focus on flexibility and promoting equitable processes to better the lives of local women entrepreneurs and encourage female leadership. The project showcases the importance of rights-based locally led approaches that—when applied strategically with enabling factors—produced constructive LLA processes.