

GENDER, EQUALITY, AND SOCIAL INCLUSION: INSIGHTS BRIEFING

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July 2026



1. INTRODUCTION

This insight briefing explores the conceptual underpinnings, methodologies, and emerging lessons relating to socially inclusive and gender-responsive approaches as adopted under the Designing Inclusive African Coastal City Resilience (INACCT) project. Its intended purpose is to provide insights for structuring engagements and knowledge co-production processes in ways that actively strengthen dimensions of gender, equality and social inclusion (GESI). Links to supplementary practical resources and methodologies are included, to support the implementation of gender-responsive and inclusive projects and processes for equitable and justice-driven climate resilience.

2. WHY GESI MATTERS

Gender relations, inequalities and social exclusion – shaped by structural conditions, sociocultural norms and institutional frameworks – affect the vulnerability, adaptive capacity and climate resilience of different social groups. Addressing these interlinkages is increasingly recognised as critical for effective and inclusive resilience building and adaptation, as gender and social dynamics determine how individuals engage with and benefit from climate programming (Brown et al., 2019; UN Women, 2025). The IPCC AR6 Report (2022) cautions that adaptation investments are likely to inadvertently exacerbate or reinforce gender and social inequalities if they do not explicitly address gender considerations. This interaction reflects a complex circular relation, wherein intersecting social hierarchies, vulnerabilities, and inequities reinforce, and are subsequently reinforced by, disaster impacts (Finucane et al., 2020; Goodrich et al., 2017).

It is widely recognised that gender significantly affects how individuals experience and respond to climate change. Gender does not act in isolation – it intersects with various other identity factors such as age, race, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status, and sexual orientation (Djoudi et al., 2016). These overlapping elements place individuals within dynamic, context-specific power structures, where intersecting identities produce distinct experiences of both privilege and oppression (Guttermann, 2022; Kaijser and Kronsell, 2014). These factors shape people's roles in society, the extent to which they face marginalisation, and their responsibilities. They also shape access to essential resources and information, life opportunities, as well as influence over resilience planning processes and actions. Therefore, an intersectional approach is critical to understanding how a raft of factors determine how well different individuals and groups are able to cope with and adapt to climate-related challenges.



These social dynamics are evident at various levels – within households, across communities, and at broader societal scales – resulting in diverse adaptation needs and capacities across gender and social lines. It is critical to recognise that these distinct vulnerabilities are not inherent to specific groups but are actively produced and shaped by social, political, and economic systems. Therefore, INACCT adopts a cross-cutting GESI responsive approach to understand the ways in which vulnerabilities are produced by systemic influences, in order to strengthen proactive, gender-responsive and inclusive flood resilience for vulnerable and marginalised groups.

The project recognises that transformation often occurs through radical incrementalism – gradual, small-scale interventions that emerge from within communities, respecting their autonomy rather than being top-down. By fostering horizontal linkages between informal settlements, the project enables an incremental aggregation of community voices that eventually translates into vertical influence over municipal and national policy-making (ICLEI Africa, 2025). By acknowledging that climate-related disruptions hold potential for transformative change, the project challenges entrenched norms and creates opportunities for more equitable and just outcomes.

2. WHAT MAKES INACCT A GENDER-RESPONSIVE PROJECT?

INACCT Resilience is an action-orientated research project that advances proactive, inclusive, and resilient municipal planning, focussing on recent extreme hazard events in Durban, South Africa (flooding) and Beira, Mozambique (tropical cyclones) through contributing to the evolving body of resilience research and practice, specifically in informal settlements.

Guided by human rights principles, the project actively includes diverse voices, particularly those of marginalised groups, in climate resilience and disaster risk reduction. INACCT's commitment to GESI is operationalised through various inclusive and interactive engagement methods (see Section 7) – all of which prioritise the active involvement of underrepresented and marginalised groups such as women and persons with disabilities, through a gender responsive approach.

This means that the project explicitly identifies and addresses the differentiated needs of all genders; promotes equal outcomes and responds to practical and strategic gender needs (Murray, 2019). The framework of gender-responsiveness is inherently intersectional, and as such the lens of intersectionality is applied across the project. Intersectionality refers to the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect. The idea is that multiple identities intersect to create a whole that is different from the component identities (UNICEF, 2024).



Community members clean up and repair post flooding events.

4. GUIDING PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING INACCT'S GENDER-RESPONSIVE, SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE APPROACH

- **Social and cultural norms:** A gender responsive approach recognises that inequality and exclusion arise from entrenched social, cultural, religious, and traditional norms shaping sanctioned roles and expectations. These institutionalised norms persist across contexts, intersecting with other factors such as class, age, ethnicity, and sexuality. Visible reforms coexist with invisible, normalised practices that perpetuate discrimination, marginalisation, and unequal opportunities.
- **Intersectionality:** INACCT's intersectional approach examines how overlapping vulnerabilities such as gender, race, class, and age interact within dynamic power structures to reinforce marginalisation. Recognising that social categories are not homogenous, it highlights how intersecting identities shape diverse experiences of privilege and oppression, informing context-specific analysis in cities like Beira and Durban.
- **Localising GESI for urban resilience:** Integrating GESI into urban disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate policy is essential to address differential vulnerability and promote equitable resilience. Although Mozambique and South Africa align with international frameworks and national strategies targeting marginalised groups, gaps remain in translating policy into meaningful change, highlighting the need for locally tailored, gender-responsive approaches in both cities.
- **Integrating different forms of knowledge:** Integrating community-based and technical knowledge creates a nuanced understanding of flood resilience. Tools like Photovoice allow residents to share local innovations while officials provide systems perspectives. Crucially, knowledge validation by municipal officials builds resident confidence and disrupts traditional power dynamics. Women act as vital "lifelines," leveraging their social networks and care roles to transfer co-produced knowledge back to their families and communities. Durban's Community-Based Forecast Early Warning System (CBFEWS) further exemplifies this by integrating local expertise with technical data into a practical, scalable model. By centering community agency, these co-production processes foster engaged citizenship and a shared responsibility for addressing complex urban climate hazards.



4. ADOPTING A GESI-RESPONSIVE APPROACH FOR THE INACCT PROJECT

A number of foundational documents, strategies, and frameworks were developed during the project design phase, with iterations occurring throughout implementation to ensure continuous learning and capacity development, relevance and impact across project's activities and overarching strategy.

- The project's gender, equality, and inclusion (GEI) Framework, available [here](#), outlines domains, dimensions, impact areas, and identities of vulnerability. The Framework also contextualises INACCT's gender-responsive approach within a GESI integration continuum – a framework used to assess the extent to which projects or interventions address gender equality, ranging from gender discriminatory to gender transformative.
- INACCT's GEI Action Plan outlines the project's various GESI actions and outputs, including descriptions and indicators. The plan is closely linked to MEL indicators and R4I, aiming to mainstream gender responsiveness throughout the project cycle, with a focus on human rights principles.
- A detailed GESI Baseline Review focussed document was developed during the initial phases of the project's implementation, forming part of the city profiles developed for Beira and Durban. It focuses on GESI issues within the context of climate change resilience (including DRR). It highlights key dimensions of gender and social in/exclusion in each city and their wider provincial and country contexts, exploring the interactions of these conditions with climate change - in particular the differentiated experiences of recent hazard events - while also outlining existing policy and planning interventions.



4. GESI-CLIMATE NEXUS (RESILIENCE, VULNERABILITY, DRR)

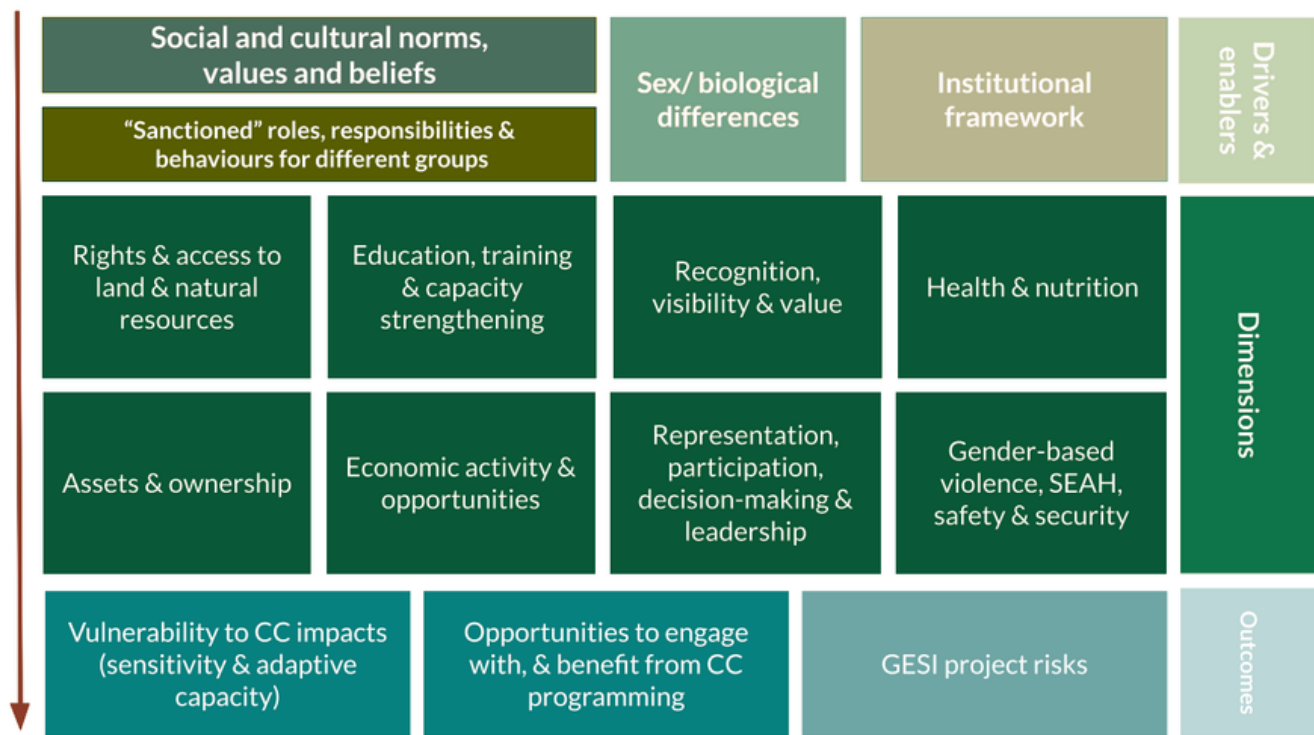


Figure 1: GESI-Climate Nexus (Jones-Philipson, 2024)

Key dimensions of gender and social (in)equality and ex/inclusion intersect with climate change, both in terms of different individuals and groups’ experiences of acute climate change events and their resilience/capacity to cope with, and recover from impacts (Gutterman, 2022). Drivers and enablers of resilience and vulnerability play out across multiple interlinked dimensions ranging from assets and ownership to issues of decision-making and leadership, ultimately shaping climate change vulnerability and impacts, opportunities to engage with and benefit from resilience interventions, and GESI project risks (see Figure 1). Cumulatively, this interaction reflects a complex circular relation, wherein intersecting social hierarchies, vulnerabilities and inequities reinforce, and are reinforced by, disaster impacts (Finucane et al., 2020; Goodrich et al., 2017).

For example, social norms and cultural beliefs strongly shape disaster behaviors. In Beira, highly gendered norms have limited girls’ and women’s access to education, training, and capacity-building, reducing their participation in early warning systems and access to disaster and evacuation information (Brown et al., 2019; Haneef and Tembe, 2019). These aspects which increase exposure to climate risks have emerged strongly through INACCT’s empirical investigations. Research findings have also reaffirmed that expectations around unpaid care and domestic work further restrict women’s livelihood opportunities and financial independence, undermining adaptive capacity and deepening inequality (PCICR, 2019). At the same time, norms around masculinity that emphasise self-reliance and emotional restraint can discourage men and boys from seeking assistance during crises, contributing to risky behaviours and

mental health challenges that heighten vulnerability (Blanchard, 2024). This has been revealed as a key challenge in Quarry Road West Informal Settlement in Durban, one of INACCT’s key research sites. Overall, disaster risk and resilience are influenced by complex, interconnected social factors rather than simple gender differences. While climate shocks often exacerbate existing inequalities, they can also disrupt entrenched norms, creating opportunities for more inclusive, transformative approaches to resilience and recovery.

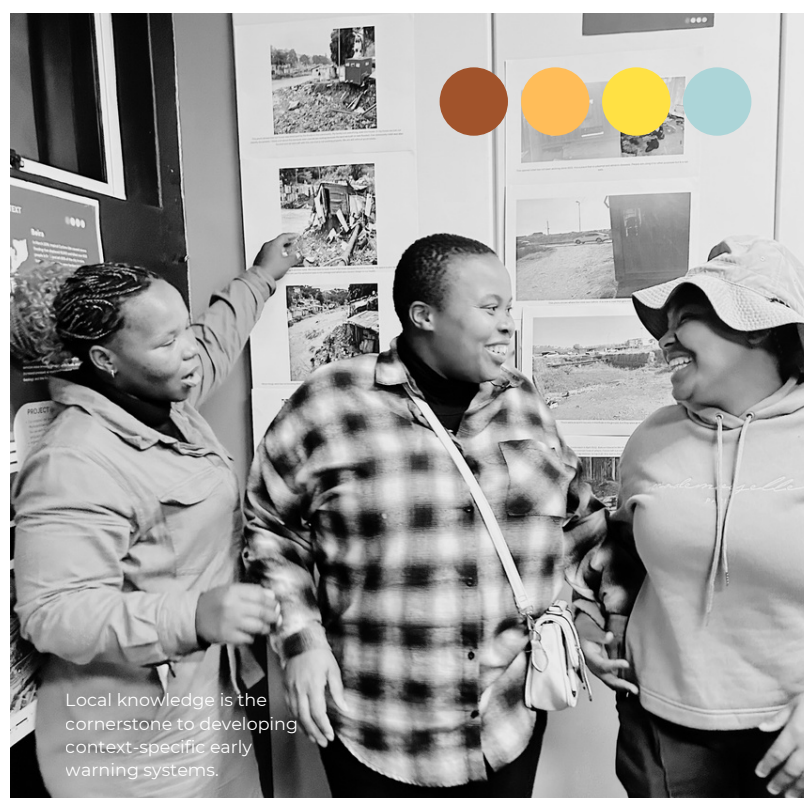
4. INACCT'S METHODOLOGICAL AND CONCEPT APPROACH TO GESI

A number of innovative research and engagement methodologies have been deployed throughout INACCT's project lifecycle in order to facilitate gender-responsive and socially inclusive processes and outcomes. The project's primary methodologies are outlined in the following resource, titled "[Innovative, inclusive and gender-responsive engagement](#)". The guide details various methodological approaches to inclusive engagement and gender responsiveness, ranging from Learning Labs and city-to-city peer learning exchanges, to creative arts-based methods such as PhotoVoice (including photo stories for [Beira](#) and [Durban](#)) and [plasticine \(playdough\) modelling](#). It also explores cross-cutting considerations for GESI-focussed research and outcomes, and includes numerous case studies to illustrate the application of various methodologies in practice.

Innovative GESI-responsive engagement approaches are used to challenge symbolic power structures which have historically privileged technical knowledge over the lived experience and place-based knowledge of marginalised groups. Methodologically, these tools facilitate more bottom-up and inclusive approaches to climate resilience wherein the priorities and insights of climate vulnerable communities are meaningfully represented within co-produced knowledge systems and governance networks. The implementation of INACCT was also guided by particular theoretical and conceptual framings. For example, the Strengthening and Enhancing Contextual Urban Resilience (SECURE) framework was applied in Durban as part of the INACCT research, using a detailed context analysis to facilitate strategic and systematic co-production for urban resilience. More lessons and insights on this process can be found in the following brief, "[Networks and power in co-production processes for urban resilience: An evaluation of the SECURE framework in Durban, South Africa](#)".

Central to INACCT's conceptual foundations and overall approach is the concept of negotiated just resilience, which emphasises moving beyond purely technical solutions to 'negotiated' inclusive approaches in order to advance equity, accountability, and justice (Ziervogel et al., 2017). This framework recognises that resilience is not a static state but rather a continuous procedural process of negotiating meaning among diverse actors across different scales. By centering the question of "resilience of what and for whom," INACCT ensures that climate interventions do not inadvertently reinforce existing inequalities, but instead address the socio-economic and spatial disparities that shape differential vulnerabilities, as well as how different communities in cities like Durban and Beira prepare for and respond to hazards.

The project is further grounded in a political ecology and political economy theoretical paradigm which examines vulnerability as a socially produced condition that is actively shaped and maintained by multi-scalar social and cultural influences. This framework allows INACCT to explore the structural drivers of hazard vulnerability and risk – ranging from historic marginalisation, intersectional identity factors, governance challenges and geographic influences – to ultimately create opportunities for more inclusive and justice-oriented resilience outcomes ultimately encourages a shift towards more transformative modes of adaptation (Anguelovski et al., 2016).





4. KEY EMERGING GESI INSIGHTS AND THEMES



Throughout the design and implementation of the INACCT project, several key GESI-related findings and themes have emerged. Many of these insights were surfaced and documented using one, or a combination, of the approaches outlined in the aforementioned [engagement methodologies document](#).

1. The Intersectional Nature of Climate Vulnerability

Findings from INACCT's research to date demonstrate that gender intersects in complex ways with numerous other identity factors, such as socio-economic status, race, age, and disability, to significantly shape individuals' vulnerability or resilience in the face of climate hazards. As was stated on INACCT's podcast episode ([The importance of including women's voices in climate resilience](#)), "barriers and facilitators to participation are much more nuanced than looking through a narrow gendered lens... some communities have very strong women's participation, while in others young men have been marginalised."

Evidence from both cities shows that barriers and facilitators to participation in decision-making related to urban resilience initiatives are highly contextual: some communities demonstrate strong women's leadership, while in others young men experience marginalisation and exclusion. These findings reinforce that no single social category is inherently vulnerable; rather, vulnerability and resilience are produced through context-specific combinations of social position, power, and access to resources. Across sites, intersecting factors – including financial constraints, weak infrastructure, insecure tenure, and social marginalisation – compound exposure to flood risk and constrain recovery capacity. This cumulative dynamic contributes to chronic risk accumulation and entrenched urban precarity. Overall, the research underscores the importance of intersectional analysis in identifying differentiated needs and avoiding one-dimensional approaches to gender and climate resilience planning.

1. The disproportionate, gendered dimensions of climate vulnerability/ flood impacts

Across INACCT's study sites in Durban and Beira, intersectional vulnerabilities shape flood vulnerability and hardship for specific groups. There are several key findings related to the social and gendered dimensions flood vulnerability and the disproportionate impacts of extreme hazard events:

WASH facilities and disproportionate burdens:

Empirical findings from Durban and Beira show that flood-related damage to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) facilities disproportionately affects women, children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities (Pörtner et al., 2022). When water infrastructure is disrupted, women and children – primarily responsible for water collection – must travel longer and often unsafe routes, increasing exposure to injury, harassment, and water-borne disease. Even outside of hazard periods, sanitation facilities are frequently distant, poorly located, inaccessible for mobility-impaired users, or locked at night. Women also shoulder primary responsibility for maintaining shared facilities, compounding their unpaid care burden when infrastructure fails. Learning Labs and focus group discussions in Durban highlighted heightened protection risks following infrastructure damage. Reflections shared through PhotoVoice exercises in [Durban](#) and [Beira](#) highlighted that women and girls experienced increased exposure to sexual violence where facilities are not gender-segregated, well-lit, and secure. These findings demonstrate that inadequate WASH provision amplifies flood impacts through intersecting gender, age, and disability vulnerabilities, resulting in compounded health, safety, and time burdens.

Post-disaster gender-based violence

Across Beira and Durban, women and children face heightened risks in temporary post-disaster shelters, which are often not adequately gender-segregated or compartmentalised. In Beira and Durban, participants reported increased sexual exploitation and abuse in the immediate and mid-term aftermath of disasters. Shelter scarcity pressures women and girls into "exchanges of favours" to secure refuge, with some community leaders implicated in abusing authority during aid distribution. Although police posts are present in some shelters, transitory centres remain high-risk spaces. Learning Lab participants noted that women-led shelter coordination can reduce protection risks. Legal reparations for survivors of sexual abuse were reported as absent in Beira.

Burdens of care

Women reported often having slower recovery from climate hazards, which is closely linked to gendered care burdens shaped by social norms. Evidence from Beira shows that while men typically engage in short-term reconstruction, women assume primary responsibility for children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. These largely unpaid roles limit women's participation in income-generating activities, increasing economic insecurity. Interviews revealed that many women cared not only for their own children but also for those of neighbours, often with minimal support. When floods disrupt access to markets, schools, and mobility routes, women are disproportionately affected due to responsibility for food, water collection, and accompanying mobility-impaired family members. Increased care burdens were also associated with heightened emotional distress, including anxiety and insomnia.

Healthcare access and mobility constraints

Following extreme climate events, healthcare services are often damaged, disrupted, or overwhelmed, limiting access to essential care such as sexual and reproductive health services and chronic disease treatment (e.g., HIV). Disruptions disproportionately affect elderly people and persons with disabilities (PwD). During flood events in Durban and Beira, mobility constraints, uneven terrain, and inadequate infrastructure significantly hinder evacuation for PwD, increasing risks of injury and psychological trauma. Limited resources constrain the inclusivity of local disaster management responses. Flood-related damage to WASH infrastructure further heightens exposure to water- and vector-borne diseases, compounding health risks and delaying recovery for already vulnerable groups.

Flooding disproportionately impacts the livelihood activities of women

In Beira, survey data revealed that women are heavily represented among informal vendors, with livelihoods tied to selling snacks and cooked food, or providing laundry services. These activities are highly sensitive to extreme rainfall and flooding. A lack of safe storage facilities result in products spoiling in the event of a flood, which leads to a loss of income. Women's dependence on informal livelihoods in Beira and Durban (where informal residents engage in 'piece jobs' - adhoc, temporary employment such as domestic services) exacerbates their economic vulnerability. This ultimately compromises their ability to recover from a flood event, or provide for children and family members under their care. This economic vulnerability aligns with the global concept of the "feminisation of poverty" under climate stress, where women's dependence on informal livelihoods compromises their ability to recover and provide for their families (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Muhwezi and Turyasingura, 2025).

Overlooked vulnerability of young men

Findings in Quarry Road West Informal Settlement in Durban show that young men and teenage boys are among the slowest to recover from extreme flood events, largely due to the fact that they are oftentimes overlooked by support and recovery services. Young men face specific crises of masculinity, with societal expectations of them as providers having the potential to lead to profound disempowerment and a loss of status when they cannot protect their families during disasters. Loss of income further undermines this perceived role, generating feelings of inadequacy and loss of status. Additionally, social norms around masculinity which promote self-reliance and stoicism can contribute to social isolation and limited access to support, increasing the risk of depression, substance abuse, and criminal activity (Blanchard, 2024). Following the 2022 floods, women reported increased instances of intimate partner violence, underscoring the cascading and intersectional nature of vulnerability during disaster recovery



Vulnerabilities are context-specific, and differ across study sites

Emerging findings reveal marked social differences between Durban and Beira, shaped largely by migration dynamics. In Durban, informal settlements comprise mixed migrant populations from the Eastern Cape and rural KwaZulu-Natal seeking economic or educational opportunities.

Many retain strong ties to their rural homes, limiting willingness to invest in permanent urban resilience measures. Furthermore, there is a noted reluctance to apply traditional rural knowledge within the urban context of Durban, as these ideas are often stigmatised or disregarded in the urban environment, which risks excluding valuable indigenous adaptation strategies. In contrast, Beira's informal settlements are more stable, and often house third- and fourth-generation residents, which may foster a stronger sense of "infrastructural citizenship" and long-term commitment to local adaptation interventions.

Livelihood profiles differ significantly across the two cities, creating unique intersectional vulnerabilities. Small-scale farming plays a central role in Beira's household income and food security, and this dependence increases vulnerability to cyclones and flooding which can destroy crops, thereby compromising livelihoods and leading to food insecurity. This dependence is far less pronounced in Durban's informal settlements which occupy marginal land with very little scope for small-scale farming. Livelihoods are based largely on ad-hoc 'piece work' described above. Specifically, female informal vendors in Beira who sell snacks or provide laundry services are highly sensitive to rainfall as a lack of safe storage results in products spoiling during floods which leads to a total loss of income.

Engagements in Beira – particularly through Local Committees for Disaster Risk Management (CLGRCs) which are volunteer-led and formally gender-balanced – demonstrated established institutional pathways for gender-responsive planning. However, survey data showed that formal representation does not always guarantee equal and active participation. In some neighbourhoods, female participation remained low due to heavy domestic workloads and limited access to disaster information. In Beira, persons with disabilities (PWD) were found to be minimally involved in early warning and adaptation planning due to the fact that most information is transmitted in inaccessible oral or visual formats. Mothers with disabilities in Beira face compounded difficulties during evacuations and lack tailored support. This finding highlights that, while gender-balanced representation in resilience planning is a vital step, it might not sufficiently address the systemic exclusion of women or other marginalised groups such as PWD.

Intra-city variation was also significant. In one Beiran neighbourhood led by a female chief of post, women were highly vocal and solutions-oriented. In another, more patriarchal site, men dominated discussions and frequently spoke on behalf of women. Similar dynamics were revealed in Durban. In the Pholani informal settlement, women expressed a strong preference for women-only focus groups to speak freely, whereas in Quarry Road West, women occupied leadership roles and were more comfortable in leading discussions in the presence of men. In Quarry Road West, women acted as first responders by coordinating evacuations and mobilising neighbours, thereby directly contradicting dominant narratives that depict women solely as victims. Additionally, context-specific dynamics in Durban are shaped by Ratepayer Associations in surrounding formal neighborhoods; while these neighbors often assume "humanitarian roles" to save lives during floods, they may simultaneously block long-term development efforts that would grant legitimacy to informal residents' land claims. These findings underscore heterogeneous, context-specific social dynamics and the value of affinity-based engagement to support equitable, community-led resilience planning.



1. Integrating GESI in flood preparation and response planning

Empirical findings indicate that gender and inclusion are increasingly recognised in flood planning processes, and that women play critical, though often undervalued, leadership roles in flood preparedness and response. However, it is noted that GESI-responsiveness is unevenly implemented across different levels of governance.

In Durban, municipal risk-informed development processes formally integrate gender considerations, and public participation is both legislatively required and embedded in project design. Insights from the Women's Day special of the INACCT Resilience [podcast](#) (which features voices from informal settlements and explores real-world resilience strategies) emphasise that, "when women are involved in planning and leadership roles, projects are more likely to address the needs of the most vulnerable populations [...] ensuring equitable access to resources and benefits." In Quarry Road West, Durban, women acted as first responders – coordinating evacuations, safeguarding documents, and mobilising neighbours. In these processes, ward committees act as influential intermediaries that determine whose specific needs are reflected in planning outcomes. Nature-based initiatives such as Durban's reforestation programme yielded significant co-benefits: women's employment in tree planting reduced flood risk while enhancing household income and recovery capacity. Overall, integrating women's knowledge and agency measurably strengthened community cohesion and resilience outcomes.

In Beira, gender-balanced Local Committees for Disaster Risk Management (CLGRCs) and visible women's leadership at neighbourhood level strengthened gender-responsive action across early warning systems and community preparedness plans, reducing cyclone impacts on vulnerable groups. Within this context, women consistently prioritised children's safety, WASH access, healthcare, and education, reflecting holistic understandings of risk. However, women remain under-represented in higher-level government decision-making. Survey data further revealed minimal participation of persons with disabilities (PwD) in early warning and adaptation planning, particularly those with hearing or visual impairments, due to inaccessible communication formats. Respondents, primarily long-term residents aged 40–70, provided valuable historical knowledge of flood risk, underscoring the importance of locally embedded expertise.

Overall, findings highlight persistent institutional exclusion of women and PwD. This exclusion reveals unrealised adaptive capacity and underscores the need for climate resilience and disaster planning mechanisms which are genuinely accessible and representative



Barriers and enablers to more gender-responsive and inclusive resilience planning and implementation

Category	Factor	Empirical insights from Durban and Beira
Barriers	Complex power relations	Informal settlements are shaped by entrenched local hierarchies (e.g., landlords, inherited leaders). These actors can enable or obstruct development initiatives, directly influencing whose needs are prioritised in resilience planning. Political agendas and fragile stakeholder relationships further constrain inclusive implementation.
	Social and cultural norms	Patriarchal norms in several Beiran communities limit women's public participation, reinforcing exclusion from planning processes. In Durban, masculinised norms discourage young men from seeking post-disaster support, contributing to isolation and slower recovery.
	Gender-blind interventions	Post-disaster shelter responses in Beira exposed design gaps: after Cyclone Idai, 20% of temporary shelters lacked adequate WASH facilities and fewer than half were gender-segregated. Remote or poorly lit sanitation facilities increased safety risks for women and girls in both cities.
	Language and communication	Low literacy rates and linguistic diversity reduce accessibility and trust in understanding hazard risk and early warning communications, constraining effective preparedness and response. In order to facilitate access to critical information, infographics were developed in English and Zulu , outlining the following in an accessible format and two languages (English and Zulu): hazards and impacts; compound risk factors; and what to do before, during, and after a flood event.
	Weak infrastructural citizenship	Inaccessible or locked facilities (e.g., distant toilets on steep terrain) disproportionately affect elderly people and persons with disabilities. Long histories of underservice foster distrust and reduce incentives for proactive community investment in flood mitigation. This history of underservice has caused many residents to feel policed rather than included by the municipality, which actively reduces their incentive to invest in more long-term proactive flood mitigation measures.
	Political agendas and tenuous stakeholder relationships	Connected to the issue of power relations, it was noted in research engagements that political agendas as well as tenuous stakeholder relationships can impede the effective implementation of gender-responsive and inclusive resilience planning.
Enablers	Women's leadership and participation	Across both cities, women play central informal leadership roles in preparedness and response. In Beira, women's involvement in local disaster risk committees strengthened early warning systems and preparedness plans. In Quarry Road West (Durban), women acted as first responders, coordinating evacuation and safeguarding essential documents.
	Holistic planning perspectives	Women consistently prioritised children's safety, WASH access, healthcare, education, and transport-childcare linkages, reflecting integrated socio-economic understandings of resilience. These priorities enhance long-term stability and recovery capacity.
	Nature-based solutions (NbS) with co-benefits	In Durban, reforestation under the Transformative Riverine Management Programme (TRMP) employs women in tree planting and maintenance. Increased vegetation reduces flood risk while generating income, strengthening household security and recovery potential.
	Affinity-based engagement	Women-only focus groups in Beira enabled more equitable participation, particularly in communities led by female chiefs of post. This contrasted with patriarchal sites where men dominated discussions.
	Creative and participatory methods	Participatory and creative research methodologies helped challenge knowledge hierarchies, elevating marginalised voices and surfacing context-specific insights.
	Intermediaries and shared governance	Partnerships (e.g., universities and municipal actors) facilitate dialogue and mainstream gender and social inclusion (GESI) into adaptation planning. Systems-oriented and collaborative governance approaches support integrated resilience strategies.
	Mutual learning and networks of care	Cross-community, peer-to-peer learning exchanges relationship-building between informal and formal neighbourhoods enhance equitable resource distribution and collective flood resilience.

1. Overall, findings demonstrate that while entrenched power dynamics, social norms, and institutional blind spots constrain inclusive resilience, deliberate participatory design, women's leadership, and collaborative governance mechanisms significantly strengthen gender-responsive flood adaptation outcomes.

1. Critical gaps and limitations identified to date

Sex-disaggregated and gender statistics	There is a significant need for more robust collection and analysis of data disaggregated by sex and other social categories to accurately assess differential impacts and needs. This may be due to inconsistent data collection or insufficient conceptual awareness and training on GESI issues, amongst other factors.
Analysis of intersectional vulnerabilities	While recognised, a deeper and more nuanced exploration of how multiple identity factors intersect in unique contexts to shape vulnerability remains a critical area for further research.
Integrating biophysical components with GESI research	Future research should more comprehensively integrate biophysical data with GESI insights to provide a holistic understanding of risk and resilience. INACCT aims to address this gap through the integration of GIS flood mapping and risk data.
Long-term, community-driven research	Current research often lacks the long-term commitment and participatory depth required for truly effective and sustainable GESI-responsive interventions.
Discrimination and violence arising from displacement and emergency evacuation shelters	The GESI implications of displacement and relocation following disasters are insufficiently documented. Furthermore, the issue of safety and hygiene, particularly for women and children, in emergency shelters due to inadequate facilities and management needs urgent attention.
Strengthening GESI-responsiveness in early warning systems	Existing early warning systems identified through desktop research often do not adequately consider the diverse needs and communication channels required to reach all members of vulnerable groups. The development and upscaling of the co-developed community-based flood early warning system (CBFEWS) in Durban aims to address this critical gap. Visit INACCT's CBFEWS Briefing Document and Infographic for more information.
Representation for people with disabilities (PwD)	The significant challenges faced by PwD both during and after a disaster event in Beira's informal settlements was repeatedly highlighted as a pressing concern, as PwD have been historically excluded from risk communication and response systems. This highlights that equal representation of genders does not account for inclusiveness across other categories of marginalisation. Mothers with disabilities face compounded difficulties during evacuations and lack tailored support.
Urban resilience plans frequently neglect informal communities	A significant gap in urban planning is the exclusion of informal settlements, which are often the most vulnerable to climate impacts.

9. Practical resources to facilitate gender-responsive and socially inclusive processes

GESI discussion starter card pack

These cards are designed for use as an interactive facilitation tool which can help teams integrate Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) into climate resilience, disaster risk reduction, and proactive municipal planning conversations. They can be used at Learning Labs or other engagements, and help to make resilience planning more participatory, shifting traditional power dynamics away from top-down, strictly technical approaches. By translating INACCT's theoretical frameworks (intersectionality, negotiated resilience etc.) into accessible prompts, the pack encourages diverse stakeholders to share insights which can strengthen inclusive planning and foster partnerships between local governments, flood affected communities, and other relevant stakeholders.

The cards translate INACCT Resilience principles into visual, tangible prompts, with connections to themes like informality, early warning systems, co-production, and intersectionality to everyday practice. They are structured around specific categories to facilitate various levels of dialogue.

Innovative, inclusive and gender-responsive engagement methodologies

This resource has been developed to share insights from the INACCT Resilience for effectively facilitating innovative, inclusive, and gender-responsive engagements to strengthen climate resilience. It draws on lessons from a range of project engagements including focus groups, Learning Labs, cross-city peer-to-peer learning exchanges, and other arts-based methodologies such as PhotoVoice and plasticine modelling. INACCT's engagements have implemented, tested, and refined multiple approaches, ensuring that all voices are included in climate resilience research and intervention implementation.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, GESI is not an "add-on" but a fundamental determinant of effective and justice-driven resilience. INACCT's journey demonstrates that climate hazard vulnerability is a socially produced condition rather than an inherent trait, requiring a shift toward more inclusive and transformative adaptation pathways that challenge the structural inequities driving vulnerability. By leveraging co-production and creative methodologies, practitioners can strengthen GESI-responsiveness through bridging diverse knowledge systems and facilitating participatory climate governance structures which redress symbolic power imbalances. Ultimately, achieving equitable, and justice-centred resilience depends on sustained trust, the recognition of community agency, and a steadfast commitment to ensuring no one is left behind.



Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge all the members of the PCRP CBEWS, including Sibongile Buthelezi and Duduzile Khumalo (University of KwaZulu-Natal) and Nomandla Nqanula, Thembisa Nomlala, Luyanda Xolo, Zandile Ntuli, Mabutho Miya, Samuel Zwelibanzi Zondani, Sebenzani Hlongwa, Nobuthanani Thuthu and Joice Stein (community based researchers in Quarry Road West) and Lee D'Eathe (RiverWatch)

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Please cite this briefing as:

CLARE is a flagship research programme on climate adaptation and resilience, funded mostly (about 90%) by UK Aid through the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and co-funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada. CLARE is bridging critical gaps between science and action by championing Southern leadership to enable socially inclusive and sustainable action to build resilience to climate change and natural hazards.

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