

Youth Voices in Development

Sustainable Development Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Target 2.4: By 2030 ensure sustainable food production systems and implement resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production, that help maintain ecosystems, that strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding, and other disasters, and that progressively improve land and soil quality.

Zambia, although having contributed relatively little to environmental degradation, is subject to some of the most devastating effects of climate change. The most distressing of which has been low rainfall levels and rising temperatures, causing ongoing drought nationwide. This is particularly worrisome when considering the importance of the agricultural sector in Zambia – agriculture represents a significant contributor to national GDP as well as a source of livelihood for a large portion of the country's population. Unfortunately, this sector is highly dependent on rainfall, meaning that the effects of climate change pose a serious threat to Zambian food security.

In order to address this goal Zambia must employ both mitigation and adaptation measures. Some of these initiatives require larger scale intervention, namely by the government, and some should be done at the local, or farm level. At the local level, it is important for farmers to begin diversifying crops. Zambia has experienced issues surrounding the growth of their staple food and most common crop, maize. Maize is highly sensitive to rainfall and its cultivation has suffered as a result of unpredictable rainfall patterns. Therefore, it would be beneficial for farmers to seek out crops which have a shorter maturation period and higher heat resistance. Any undertaking as large as climate change adaptation/mitigation also requires government intervention. First, the diversification of crops will be unaffordable for most farmers, particularly small-scale and subsistence farmers. If the government were to provide credit for these farmers to buy new seeds it would lessen the burden of diversification significantly. Second, the government should make an effort to disseminate climate change related information to Zambian farmers, specifically targeting the most vulnerable populations. Generally, these farmers are very in touch with the land and have a very good understanding of changing climate and what that means for their crops/yield. However, in my experience, many of these farmers regard changing temperatures as a spiritual or religious phenomenon rather than a scientific one. Therefore I think it's important for the government to disseminate information which is comprehensible and relevant for Zambian farmers. In addition to these local and government level interventions, there are some initiatives that can be undertaken by both. For example, reforestation should be done on both a large and small scale. Zambia has a very high dependence on charcoal, particularly in rural areas, so deforestation is a serious issue in most of the country. In order to address deforestation adequately, the government would have to implement large scale reforestation programs, while also educating Zambians on its importance.

This goal, and specifically target 2.4, is deeply connected to SDG 4, inclusive and quality education, and 5, gender equality. In order to achieve this goal will require the introduction of a large scale education program focusing on relevant skills building and sustainable development. These programs should also help to increase the incomes of farmers, which will begin to alleviate poverty, the most significant barrier to education in Zambia. These programs would hopefully benefit the most vulnerable members of society, including women, as they are hit the hardest by climate change. Women in Zambia often depend on agriculture for subsistence and income – rising temperatures and inadequate rainfall has made this particularly difficult. In order to combat climate change there are a number of gendered issues must be addressed, namely women's access to information and technology as well as inequalities in land ownership. Moreover, if the country were able to implement resilient and sustainable food production, it would begin to reverse the difficulties felt by small-scale farmers, many of which are women.

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