Green Deals and Reproductive Justice: A Promise of Just Transition

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Introduction

Research has linked climate change and reproductive rights, as demonstrated by the increased exposure of women to sexual assault as they collect firewood or search for water. Such sexualized violence is prevalent in women-led rural households and highly vulnerable settings. For example, humanitarian contexts, slums, and arid areas have high rates of sexual violence due to water scarcity and poor lighting as women and adolescent girls travel long distances to access water. From an African socio-cultural context, fetching water and firewood are mainly feminine roles. Thus, energy distribution and water scarcity associated with climate change interact with gender dynamics to provide a setting for enacting sexualized violence. Freedom from sexual violence is an integral aspect of reproductive justice, a state where people have bodily autonomy and live in a safe and healthy environment that protects and upholds

their reproductive rights and decisions. The question that arises is - can green projects, including the EU Green Deal, address climate change in a manner that addresses the associated sexual and reproductive justice issues in Sub-Saharan Africa?

The Green Deal does not contain express provisions to expand or support reproductive justice in a context of climate change vulnerability. Nonetheless, there are existing green projects in Sub-Saharan Africa that have had an impact on reproductive justice. Key among these include USAID's renewable energy initiatives under Power Africa. Through a USAID-led partnership, Power Africa aims to decarbonize Africa's health sector by expanding access to renewable energy. As a result, this enhances the resilience of healthcare and capacity to provide quality and reliable services, including reproductive health. Given that women in Sub-Saharan Africa are at an elevated risk of sexual violence as they collect firewood for domestic energy uses like cooking, clean cooking projects have the potential of enhancing reproductive justice. Specifically, they would reduce women's vulnerability to sexual assault that might lead to HIV/AIDs infection and unwanted pregnancies.

Under the Green Deal financing, EU has supported reproductive justice through clean cooking. An illustrative example is the EU-financed CookFund in Tanzania. As a green project, it provides grants and technical assistance to support the production, sale, and distribution of clean cooking solutions. Directly, clean cooking limits climate change and supports a green economy through the sale of clean cooking products and services, and enabling a carbon credit market. These collaborative projects are consistent with the AU's Renewable Energy Framework under its Africa Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI) which calls for socially and environmentally sound initiatives that are responsive to social, gender, and economic needs.

In relation to other non-EU countries, what is absent from the EU Green Deal are clear-cut mechanisms for addressing reproductive injustices associated with climate change vulnerability. Accordingly, this paper does not propose the conditioning of climate change adaptation or mitigation financing on sexual health and reproductive justice. Instead, it proposes that climate action should acknowledge that climate change increases the vulnerability of some populations to sexual and reproductive injustices. In so doing, climate action

should explore avenues for empowerment and capacity-building to enjoy different sexual and reproductive health rights.

In any case, the extent to which Green Deals include reproductive justice invite a range of questions. Among these include the extent to which the market nature of Green Deal financing and assistance displaces reproductive justice? Essentially, this commentary takes a realist approach to the Green Deal by treating it as a market tool for building a green economy and disincentivising investments in pollutive industries. The EU Green Deal seeks to reduce carbon emissions and move towards a net-zero economy. Initially, the EU Green Deal focuses more on EU's economy and was not strong on foreign policy. However, this has changed and foreign policy or engagements with foreign nations are crucial for net-zero. In Kenya's case, the Green Deal primarily supports projects in the energy sector that address energy poverty through renewables like hydrogen. While it is possible to mainstream gender, the Green Deal is structured as a special vehicle and one that uses market relationships.

However, this sustainability paradigm inadvertently promotes commodification in the Global South while neglecting issues of reproductive justice. Rather than treat the green deal as a bundle of initiatives inspired by climate change, this essay reconceptualises the green deal as primarily a market framework that seeks to promote economic growth with spill-over climate benefits. Treating climate benefits as ancillary supports the paper's main position that green deals sideline reproductive justice in that climate change in the Global South is gendered but green deals are assumed to be gender-neutral. The gender-neutral nature of most financial and technical assistance means that recipient communities use patriarchal structures to implement proposed projects. This excludes women and often preserves existing inequalities that contribute to reproductive injustices. As a result, the economic goals of Green Deal initiatives are more likely to reproduce gendered injustices.

Political and Economic Factors affecting Reproductive Justice in Green Deals

Green deal initiatives in Africa also fail to take into account reproductive justice concerns. As it is, climate change politics are highly divisive and most African nations have not implemented policies that dually address climate change and

reproductive justice. This is not to say that African governments do not acknowledge the link between climate change and reproductive justice. Rather, traditional gender norms on the legitimacy of reproductive rights such as abortion rights offer an explanation for this neglect of reproductive rights in climate change discourse.

Looking at economic issues with a climate change impact, governments have created institutions to facilitate the sustainable economic exploitation of these resources. For example, Kenya has a National Environmental Management Agency that conducts climate change and environmental impact assessments to foster sustainability in construction, manufacturing, shipping, mining, among other economic operations. Yet, the country lacks an institution or policy framework to facilitate gendered recognition and promotion of rights affected by climate change. Accordingly, green financing should enhance reproductive justice, albeit indirectly, by requiring gendered based analysis of green projects.

An example to illustrate this is how expanding the grid to enhance cheaper access to energy would reduce vulnerability of women and children to sexual attacks that they might encounter when picking firewood for domestic uses. Notably, such a grid expansion project generates reproductive justice benefits indirectly and it is primarily meant to enhance energy access. However, efforts to design green financing in a manner that explicitly includes gendered perspectives are not guaranteed to succeed. In some cases, they may end up expanding inequalities. For example, green financing to expand energy access may end up excluding some poor households from the grid thus widening the already existing inequalities. An illustrative example is the high connection costs to the solar mini-grids in Kenya's highly marginalised Turkana region. Besides displacing poor community members and limiting access to community land that was previously treated as commons, power from the Turkana-based solar plants is expensive as it fed into the national grid for sale at prevalent tariffs, meaning that the local community does not enjoy cheap energy from the green solar plants.

At the international level, regional and supranational bodies should consider tying up external green financing with reproductive justice but the commodification of knowledge to foster sustainability seems to dissuade them.

Here, it is becoming increasingly common for liberal Africans to contest their governments' positions on human rights issues such as LGBTQ and gender equality by asking foreign governments and regional organisations to withdraw funding or pause programmatic development assistance until their governments can acknowledge or promote the rights of marginalised groups such as LGBTQ. Interestingly, these citizen and activist groups have opposed the criminalisation and restriction of abortion rights but have not advocated or marched to ask foreign governments and donor organisations to bundle green financing or program support with reproductive justice rights such as abortion.

Instead of making all climate finance conditional on reproductive justice, it would be reasonable to set aside a portion of climate finance for green deals supporting reproductive justice directly or indirectly. This would work by encouraging women entrepreneurs to participate in implementing green projects. For example, women by searching for firewood fuel and water lose significant amounts of time that could have been spent on productive activities. From a capabilities approach, green projects like off-grid solar projects or clean cooking would assist in spending time productively on economic activities that improve household wealth, and increase disposable income that can be spent on health, including reproductive health. Climate change, resource scarcity, and environmental pollution have significant financial health costs and lost opportunity costs that impact human flourishing. Women involvement as green entrepreneurs is strategic as they have a gendered understanding of women's energy needs. This would support just transition by ensuring projects reduce carbon emissions, and generate equitable and fair outcomes.

While it would be interesting to watch EU's reaction to a push by citizens to limit or deny green financing to governments that do not advance reproductive justice rights, it is likely that the market framework of green deals and financing would obfuscate the inclusion of reproductive justice as an integral component of greening.

At the heart of this essay's argument that the Green Deal is deliberately designed to exclude or sideline reproductive justice is the treatment of green projects as economic tools to address climate change and the notion that reproductive rights are social factors with minimal impacts on the financial viability of green initiatives. Specifically, implementing the Green Deal is

expensive and Green Deals initiatives that would support reproductive justice have an extra cost component. They require additional support to promote the sexual and reproductive health rights of women. While there is no guarantee that infusing green deals with sexual and reproductive rights will successfully mitigate climate change, green projects that are blind to reproductive rights could exacerbate the already adverse impacts of climate change affecting women.

Re-Imagining Reproductive Justice in Green Projects

For a variety of social and economic reasons, green deals are germane to reproductive justice concerns. Integrating these reasons in green deals would have a powerful effect on expanding reproductive justice and capacity to attain reproductive health rights among women. For example, as part of addressing reproductive justice rights, the Green Deal market-centric solutions should prioritize female entrepreneurs and women-led companies. This will lead to green solutions that address unique reproductive justice issues associated with women.

For example, green projects for clean energy like clean cooking led by women might adopt distribution and scaling mechanisms that reduce vulnerability of women to sexual violence as they search for firewood fuel. Still, WASH programs addressing water scarcity associated with climate change may reduce exposure of women to sexual abuse by increasing water accessibility in plots and in safe spots. Partnerships with government to coordinate financing or project implementation will increase the success of such measures. For example, Kenya's law allocates 30% of government tenders to women and marginalised communities. The aim of this allocation is capacity-building and empowering women and traditionally marginalised segments. Sensitive to the instrumental role of gender-aware programming in increasing the substantive participation of women in institutions, green deals should provide technical assistance and privilege financing for women and women-led groups involved in different stages of green project implementation. In doing so, green projects can respond to the gendered effects of climate change on reproductive health and justice.

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