

Capacity needs for gender integration and women's engagement in energy, environment and climate change action in refugee-hosting districts in Uganda

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Abstract

Settling displaced communities adds pressure on natural resources, especially where host communities also rely on the same resources to meet their needs. The capacity of individuals to cope with the results of conflict is strongly influenced by their gendered roles and responsibilities. Women's participation in natural resource use and decision making is undervalued. This study was conducted to understand local government leaders and other stakeholders' actions and capacity in gender integration in natural resource management, and the participation of women in existing environmental coordination mechanisms/structures in five refugee-hosting districts in Uganda.

The processes applied qualitative and quantitative approaches that involved interactions with district and subcounty local governments' technical and political leaders and other key stakeholders. The individual interviews sample comprised 84 men and 42 women, while focus group discussions (FGDs) involved 95 males and 67 females. Our assessment revealed limited knowledge on gender and gender integration in natural resource management to be a key challenge facing government leaders and other stakeholders. Capacity development was identified as an important action to enhance knowledge on gender integration, while skills in conflict resolution and communication are also needed. Other challenges identified included misconceptions about gender work in research and development; fewer women being employed in district local government and other organizations; and women's lack of land ownership.

Women's participation in environmental coordination mechanisms/structures was affected by low levels of education limiting appointment in leadership and speaking up in decision-making structures. The burden of domestic chores, husband-imposed restrictions and low selfesteem mainly associated with prohibitive cultural beliefs and communities' negative perceptions of women's skills and knowledge all required women to prove themselves. Community sensitization on negative mindsets towards women's capacity and affirmative action for women in education and employment were the priority interventions by women and men respectively. There should be deliberate efforts to involve women in decisionmaking processes and give them safe spaces to express their ideas. There is a great need to prioritize the improvement of social conditions and attitudes so that women can fully participate

in leadership and decision making. Relatedly, it is important to advocate for change in the perceptions towards women that undermine their capacity at the planning level if they are to be fully involved in leadership and coordination.

1 Introduction

Human displacements have major impacts on the environment, especially where the displaced and poor host communities rely on the same natural resource base to meet their needs. The capacity of individuals to cope with the results of conflict is strongly influenced by their gendered roles and responsibilities, and existing coordination and management structures. The dynamic and intersectional nature of these roles means that experiences vary depending on religion, ethnicity, economic status and level of education, among other factors. Limitations imposed on women to access or use natural resources, especially land, lead to inequalities and discrimination.

Gender inequalities and protection concerns are inextricably linked to access and utilization of resources. Women and girls are disproportionately burdened with domestic chores, including collection of fuelwood, which often put them at risk of human rights violations including sexual gender-based violence (SGBV). Women and girls spend between 12–24 hours a week collecting fuelwood, and 64% reported harassment while accessing food and water in BidiBidi refugee settlement.

1.1 Gender bias in natural resource management

Men and women hold gender-differentiated interests in natural resource management through their distinctive roles and responsibilities. Women's responsibilities in households and communities put them in a good position to contribute to livelihood strategies adapted to changing environmental realities. Thus, gender can be a critical variable in shaping the process of ecological change, livelihoods and prospects of sustainable development. However, women's participation in natural resource use, decision making and implementation of actions is undervalued. It is imperative to remember women are not only vulnerable to environmental degradation, but are also effective agents of change for sustainable natural resource management. It is thus important to identify gender-sensitive strategies to respond to environmental and humanitarian crises.

Women and men have different approaches to leadership that may be influenced by gender roles, power relations and experiences. It is prudent to focus on helping everyone in the coordination structures to

realize these differences and use them to recruit and retain female leaders/members and enhance their effective participation. It is also vital to acknowledge that displacement conditions are examples of communities undergoing substantial social change. When communities move to escape political instability, violence, drought or poverty, they are no longer exact replicas of those in the home locations they left behind. Some vulnerable groups are notably missing from displaced groups. These include the elderly, and young men in groups that have exited warzones. When devising interventions, one must consider both the trauma of displacement and the reality that social relations may become more flexible from necessity under new conditions. This study was conducted to understand local government leaders and other stakeholders' actions and capacity in gender integration in natural resource management, and the participation of women in existing environmental coordination mechanisms/structures.

2 Study area description

The assessment was conducted in five refugee-hosting districts, with four districts – namely Adjumani,

Madi-Okollo, Terego and Yumbe – located in the West Nile sub-region of northern Uganda, and the fifth in Kiryandongo District in mid-western Uganda. The population density in West Nile settlements is 3,000–5,000 persons per square kilometre, which exerts great pressure on natural resources for energy, shelter and livelihoods (UNHCR 2023). The West Nile sub-region consists of open and closed woodland, bushland, grassland and cultivated areas. The density of tree cover increases westwards towards the tropical forests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Woody biomass is heavily utilized by both locals and refugees mainly for fuelwood to meet their cooking energy needs, for building materials and for health (e.g., medicine, food) needs.

2.1 Information gathering and tools of analysis

The methodology applied included mixed qualitative and quantitative approaches that involved interactions with district and subcounty governments' technical and political leaders, and other stakeholders including representatives from the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), refugee

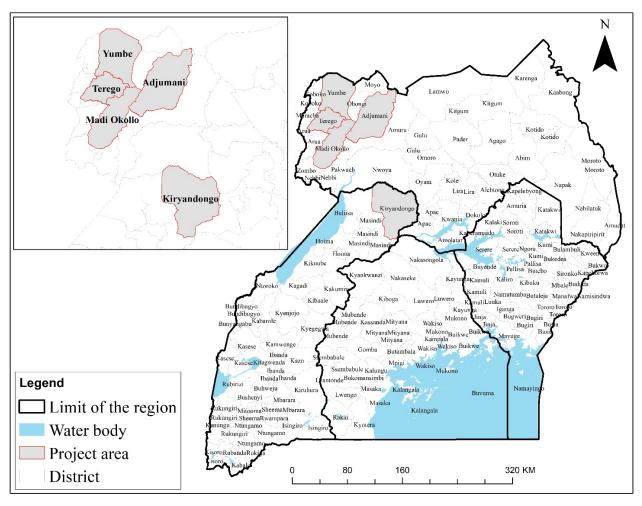


Figure 1. Geographical location of the project area



Figure 2. Participants taking part in an FGD

welfare councils (RWCs) and vulnerable groups (people with disabilities (PWDs), youths and the elderly).

The information and knowledge gained from the literature review was applied in the development of a semi-structured individual questionnaire that was uploaded onto the Kobo Toolbox. In addition, data from individual interviews informed the design of a checklist for stakeholder consultations, engagement and discussions. Data quality control for each completed questionnaire was carried out by the field team leader before it was uploaded to the server. Data was then transferred into Microsoft Excel, post-coded and analysed using Statistical Packages for Social Scientists (SPSS) software.

The stakeholder consultations and engagements were conducted through workshops, where separate focus group discussions (FGDs) were held for men and women and facilitated by the same gender. Further, the FGDs were also designed to allow participants from district and subcounty local governments to hold discussions separately where the numbers of men and women exceeded 12 per focus group discussion. The discussion sessions were voice recorded in addition to note taking, and analysed thematically. In each FDG, beans were used as counters in the prioritization and ranking of main factors (Figure 2).



2.2 Summary of participants for individual interviews and FGDs

Participants for individual interviews were specifically those with expertise in environment, energy, climate change and gender in local government, and other stakeholders from CSOs as listed in section 2.1 above. The individual interview sample comprised 84 men and 42 women indicating a lower representation of women than men at a ratio of 1:2, while the stakeholder consultations and engagements through FGDs involved 95 males and 67 females (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of participants for individual interviews and FGDs

	District		Terego	Madi-Okollo	Yumbe	Adjumani	Kiryandongo	Total
Individual Interviews	İ	Male	17	11	19	18	19	84
		Female	8	6	6	9	13	42
	ķ	PWD*	3	1	4	0	1	9
Focus Group Discussions	Ť	Male	13	16	24	20	22	95
	*	Female	9	7	8	25	18	67
	ķ	PWD*	2	1	2	3	3	11

Note: *People living with disability are counted within males and females in individual interviews and focus group discussions



3 Gender integration in natural resource and environmental management

3.1 Challenges of gender integration in natural resource and environmental management

From the literature review, it is clear that there are still several limitations that need to be addressed for effective gender integration. These include: limited knowledge of policy instruments such as gender policy (2007), the Constitution of Uganda (1995) and the National Environment Management Act 5 (2019), among others; limited knowledge of gender definitions, gender analysis and gender integration; limited numbers of women in technical and decision-making positions; low financing, poor coordination and reporting mechanisms; weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Namanji et al. 2017; Ssali 2019); and lack of underlying baseline data about the intersectional gender context for research projects.

During data collection, the following challenges affecting effective gender integration in natural resource and environmental management were identified:

- a. Misconceptions about gender research and development work: It was evident from interactions that most people interviewed had no clear understanding of gender and how it could be integrated in natural resource and environmental management. Some respondents erroneously assumed that interviewers were strictly interested in zero sum political gain, in other words, that gender integration was intended to support, "women taking over what is presumed to be men's power".
- b. There are fewer women employed in district local governments and other organizations. The individual interview sample comprised 84 men and 42 women, indicating there were fewer women representatives. Nonetheless, the experience informed us about the realities and the dynamics playing out in policymaking circles. These findings were especially important as they helped to inform subsequent interventions and engagements, such as training stakeholders from local governments and civil society organizations (CSOs) on gender responsive energy, environment and climate change action programming. This experience also reinforced the urgency in our own endeavours to integrate gender in natural resource and environmental management.

- c. From the women's FGDs, one major constraint affecting women was lack of land ownership.
 Land is culturally owned by men, and upon their demise it often reverts to clan leadership or male relatives, rendering women powerless to make decisions over the same land. Lack of land ownership rights for women also limited the scope of their participation in livelihood programmes.
 Women without collateral have a lower chance of accessing credit from financial institutions.
- d. Although women often engage in some form of trade, mainly selling surplus from their subsistence agricultural produce, their opportunities to control cash income, and voice opinions on crop production and natural resource management processes were severely limited. As men are landowners, they take control of commercial activities done on the land, including the sale of agricultural produce, trees and other products. They asserted that their failure to entrust women with land and produce from land was because women marry into other clans where they are expected to access their husbands' land resources. "Women are mobile and can shift from one home to the other for marriage". However, this reasoning is undercut by the reality that unmarried women are also precluded from landownership and its benefits.
- e. Gender norms and culture influence women's roles in natural resource and environmental management, which needs to be well understood if the status quo is to improve. During FGDs, women stated that women and girls are expected to be engrossed in domestic household chores, making it hard for them to attain formal education. The low education levels limit women's recruitment in technical and decision-making positions as well as their potential to clearly articulate and argue their ideas related to natural resource and environmental management. Further, women in FGDs revealed that culturally, they were not expected to speak in gatherings as their opinions were often considered inferior to those of men. This denies women a platform to clearly argue their ideas on environmental management and governance. As such, women were excluded from active decision-making processes.

3.2 Capacity needs and opportunities for enhancing gender integration in natural resource and environmental management

Various types of capacity needs were identified for enhanced gender integration in natural resource and environmental management (Figure 3), and this study informed the subsequent trainings that were

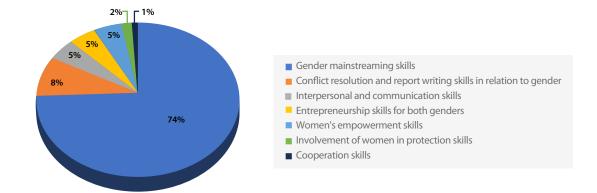


Figure 3. Skills required to integrate gender in natural resource management

conducted. The different roles that men, women and youth play have not been considered in natural resource management planning. The majority (98%) of respondents agreed that gender considerations should be integrated in planning and designing natural resource and environmental management interventions. However, the majority of participants in FGDs indicated lack of a clear understanding of gender and its integration in natural resource management.

3.3 Policy interventions to integrate gender in natural resource management

Some of the available opportunities where gender integration can be enhanced in natural resource and environmental management include:

- Enabling policies and laws such as the Constitution, the National Forestry and Tree Planting Act and gender policy, among others, which promote equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities;
- The existence of environment and natural resources committees up to local levels where marginalized groups such as women can participate;
- Government programmes such as Collaborative Forest Management (CFM), Farm Income Enhancement and Forestry Conservation (FIEIOC) and Parish Development Model (PDM) promote equal access to, use of, and benefit sharing from natural resources;
- Designated gender focal persons in community development services to spearhead gender mainstreaming in different departments/sectors.

4 Women's participation in existing natural resource and environmental coordination mechanisms

Coordination mechanisms across sectors are structures which ensure that different sectoral stakeholders (both private and state) are jointly responsible for the success of programmes (Sarvašová et al. 2013). Therefore, the purpose of coordination is to ensure consistency and coherence between various objectives and elements of a single sector or within interacting sectors. Women and children constitute a higher percentage of the refugee population. Given their dependence on and proximity to natural resources as the primary providers of water, food and energy, women - especially those in rural settings – have the ability and motivation to effect environmental protection and sustainability (Women Deliver 2017). The United Nations Joint Programme emphasizes that the failure to engage women in natural resource management and conflict resolution is a missed opportunity. To achieve sustainable natural resource and environmental management in refugee settings, close coordination and cooperation among the different stakeholders is required. Interest groups should be consulted because different belief systems of actors can hinder coordination. There should be a deliberate effort to involve women in decision-making processes and give them safe spaces to express their ideas. There is a great need to prioritize the changing of social conditions and attitudes so that women can fully participate in leadership and decision making. There is a need for stakeholders such as technical, political, religious and cultural leaders at different levels to combine efforts and advocate for land ownership rights for women.

4.1 Coordination mechanisms at the district level

Results from a survey conducted by the Belgian Development Agency (Enabel) to assess the effectiveness of existing coordination structures in the target districts indicated that the majority of its respondents (94%) mentioned that natural resource and environmental coordination structures existed in local governments at the district and subcounty levels. The following are the committees that exist in all districts: District Executive Committees (DECs), District Technical Planning Committees (DTPCs), interagency meetings/platforms, and sectoral committees such as production and natural resource committees and land committees. These committees are mandated to plan, enforce policies, monitor, evaluate set guidelines, oversee and take decisions concerning general environmental conservation. However, forest committees and district technical and energy committees were not existing in all districts despite being provided for by the Public Service Act. District technical and elected leaders argued that the roles of these two committees were similar to those of natural resource and environment committees.

4.2 Forms of women's participation in natural resource and environmental management coordination structures

Individual interview results showed that women's representation was high in community activities and meetings, but low in planning and leadership (Figure 4). Although women's representation and participation in the coordination mechanisms were expected to be almost at parity with men, women mentioned that their active verbal participation was often perceived to be disrespectful and a threat to men. On the other hand, men mentioned that women have brilliant ideas but sometimes were shy to express themselves.

Women's representation in coordination and management structures was made possible through reserved positions for them. It was reported in Terego and Madi-Okollo districts for example, that women's representative positions were reserved in all committees formed at the district or subcounty levels. However, due to the low numbers of women with the right academic qualifications in district local governments, some positions in the committees are not filled.

Women's participation in coordination committee leadership, planning and workshops/seminars was also reported to be generally low, and yet these are the core avenues for discussions and decision making. This implies that women's voices are left out during planning and decision-making processes.

4.3 Constraints to active women's participation in natural resource and environmental management coordination structures

As much as there are efforts and opportunities to promote women's involvement in coordination structures, such as affirmative action to have women's representation, there are challenges hindering their participation. The low proportion of women, especially in leadership, was attributable to low levels of education. It should be noted, however, that other data indicates that women's input is not desired or supported, and the burden of domestic chores prevents them from obtaining the levels of education required. This confirms the findings during the baseline survey of this project where refugees reported that the common belief that girls are raised for marriage deprives them the opportunity of attaining education (Save the Children 2021).

The burden of domestic chores was identified as one of the major factors limiting women's participation, with meetings taking place at inconvenient times for women. One female refugee leader had this to say: "I cannot attend a meeting or a workshop that takes the whole day or the time I am supposed to be preparing food for my family. If I delay in a meeting, my husband will not allow me to attend next time". This is closely related to the baseline findings where respondents mentioned that sometimes conflicts emerge at the household level when food is not cooked on time, yet women have to walk long distances to collect fuelwood and water. One female production and natural resource committee member mentioned that sometimes she runs late or misses some meetings when her husband is on leave since she has to first prepare good food and ensure that he is comfortable at home when she is away. The burden of domestic chores was also reported by SCI in a baseline survey (Save the Children 2021) and gender analysis showing that women are expected to do all the household chores even when they are pregnant (Save the Children 2022).

Other constraints identified included low self-esteem mainly associated with prohibitive cultural beliefs and communities' negative perceptions of women's skills and knowledge, which require women to prove themselves. Husbands imposing restrictions was identified as a challenge, with women having to seek their husbands' permission, and their requests sometimes being denied. Similarly, the baseline survey findings indicated some men not allowing their wives to visit neighbours, which deprives them of a social life (Save the Children 2021). Consequently, it would be helpful to address the identified constraints and challenges when implementing policies and interventions at the community level that involve men.

During FGDs, men and women both mentioned women mostly occupying secretary, treasurer and committee member positions, which limits their powers to influence decision making. As women have to deal with such a wide range of discrimination and

unreasonable work expectations, it is not surprising that they lack the time, education and sense of empowerment to take on leadership positions; and under the current conditions they would be subject to harassment and a lack of respect.

Leadership



District	Female	Male
Adjumani	52	37
Kiryandongo	62	56
Terego	42	39
Madi-Okollo	48	46
Yumbe	46	42
Average	49	44

District	Female	Male
Adjumani	62	56
Kiryandongo	57	57
Terego	57	41
Madi-Okollo	57	55
Yumbe	77	49
Average	66	52



Meetings

Planning



District	Female	Male
Adjumani	51	54
Kiryandongo	58	47
Terego	50	38
Madi-Okollo	47	31
Yumbe	55	46
Average	52	43

District	Female	Male
Adjumani	74	72
Kiryandongo	73	63
Terego	69	56
Madi-Okollo	66	63
Yumbe	68	72
Average	70	65



Community activities

Conferences, workshops, seminars



District	Female	Male
Adjumani	53	43
Kiryandongo	61	53
Terego	45	40
Madi-Okollo	60	52
Yumbe	43	48
Average	52	47

Figure 4. Women's participation (%) in natural resources and environmental management coordination structures as perceived by men and women

4.4 Interventions to enhance women's participation in natural resource and environmental management coordination mechanisms

When asked about interventions to address the limitations affecting women's participation in coordination mechanisms, women identified community sensitization to change mindsets that undermine their capacity as the number one priority. Men, on the other hand, deemed this to be the second lowest of ten priorities. Conversely, men identified affirmative action for women in education and employment as the number one priority, while women rated it the second lowest (Figure 5). This difference in priorities needs to be comprehensively addressed when planning interventions. Women clearly perceive the social context, attitudes to and expectations of them need a fundamental rethink if they are to be involved effectively in leadership and coordination mechanisms. For the men in the sample, changing social conditions and attitudes so that women can fully participate was not a priority. This indicates a lack of awareness that some social behaviours may need to be altered if women are to be successful in leadership roles. As long as women cite the "need to cook and

make sure their husbands are comfortable" as a limitation to their participation, success will not be achieved.

Women identified deliberate involvement of women in leadership as the second most important priority, while men identified sensitization on women's rights, roles and responsibilities in natural resource management and utilization, especially land ownership; and functional adult education for women as their joint second most important priorities for enhancing women's participation in coordination structures (Figure 5). Again, we see women focusing on improving conditions for them to thrive, and providing them with specific training, while men are more concerned with access to skills building and less so with the underlying social conditions that prevent such things from happening.

4.4.1 Enhancing women's participation in leadership, decision-making and governance structures

While a step has been taken by availing women of representative positions in different local government committees at the district and subcounty levels,

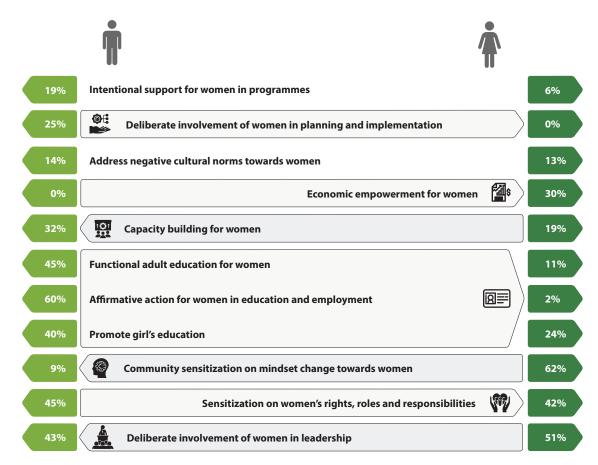


Figure 5. Interventions to improve women's participation in natural resources and environmental management coordination structures as perceived by men and women



increasing capacity for women's participation in formal and informal decision-making structures and governance processes can help amplify their voices and impact in natural resource management. More concerted and deliberate efforts are still required to overcome structural, social and cultural barriers to women's participation in displacement settings. It is important to note that simply adding more women is insufficient to address the greater structural challenges at play. As Staples and Natcher (2015) write, "such an approach only promotes the tokenistic attitude that women's representation is simply a box that can be ticked off a list for achieving diversity". Facilitating women's meaningful participation requires deeper institutional change and efforts to address negative gender norms.

Changes in attitude and views about women will not be achieved overnight. However, systemic incremental changes from top to bottom accompanied by shifting roles and norms that govern how they work can change people's attitudes and views about women's participation in natural resource use, decision making and ownership of land. The Office of the Prime Minister, district local governments and development partners need to conduct regular training, capacity building and dialogue meetings to support efforts to advocate for women's participation in local government committees and organizations.

4.4.2 Protecting women from violence related to natural resource use and management

Adopting proactive measures to protect women from resource-related physical violence and other security risks increases their participation in coordination mechanisms. Women working in conflict-affected settings routinely experience physical, emotional and psychological insecurity, including sexual violence, when carrying out daily tasks linked to the collection and use of natural resources. Moreover, while the impacts of environmental degradation affect all, women and children are particularly vulnerable due to heightened exposure in their gendered roles and responsibilities. Protecting women from these risks is not only important to their health, but also key to ensuring that they are able to safely carry out economic and social activities linked to natural resource management.

There are existing proven interventions that can address specific risks of violence endured by women. For instance, training and material support for multipurpose agroforestry trees on individual plots can provide fuelwood, shade and fruits, while eliminating the need for women and children to search for

fuelwood off-farm. Similarly, individuals can be taught to build more efficient, multi-fuel clay stoves that cook more effectively while reducing emissions. Organic residue and parts pruned from trees can be used to produce charcoal briguettes which, when used with the improved clay stoves, can meet family needs without exposing women and children to violence and indoor air pollution. This study emphasizes the implementation of sustainable and cleaner cooking solutions such as use of heat retaining (fireless cooking) baskets and promotion and use of energy saving stoves which are being implemented as another component of this project by SCI and JEEP. It should also be noted that the current practice of harvesting wood for fuel both increases deforestation and wastes the time of women and children. If a comprehensive system of agroforestry, briquette production, waste recycling and local cookstove production were to be put in place, women's household burden would decrease, potentially giving them more time to become educated and involved in leadership.

4.4.3 Building women's capacity to ensure sustainable and productive use of natural resources

When women are able to use their time more effectively, for instance, through the use of energy efficient cooking stoves, and protected from violence, they are then in position to use their time for income generation, leisure or activities of their choice, and this contributes to gender equity and empowerment.

Addressing barriers to accessing, using and having ownership rights over natural resources, especially land, can aid women's access to credit facilities, technical support and other benefits from natural resource use. Similarly, provision of legal support and education for the enforcement of land rights and other natural resource rights enhances women's ability to use natural resources productively. Achieving this can include consultations with women's groups; men; technical and legal government departments; political, religious, community and cultural leaders; and civil society organizations on the need for women's land rights and ownership, and developing modalities for implementation. Land tenure rights that cater for women require community-based conversations about land transfer norms, including inheritance processes; for instance, special consideration for traditional marriages (cohabitation) that are not necessarily recognized by law, and addressing other concerns to enable women's land ownership in local contexts. This will require a stakeholder engagement and dialogue process.

Prioritizing access to finance, inputs and skills for women and men equally, and upholding human rights

are critical. Further, it is necessary to reduce women's burdens, observe minimum labour requirements and ensure conducive work conditions for women in resource extraction sectors, and involve both men and women in the whole project cycle including environmental and social impact assessments.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

The capacity needs assessment for gender integration in local government-level natural resource and environmental management, and analysis of constraints and opportunities for women's participation in coordination mechanisms/structures showed knowledge of gender and effective gender integration to be limited. This gender integration knowledge gap was addressed in subsequent project activities where government personnel, civil society organizations and other stakeholders developed district-based gender-responsive environment action plans and trained on gender-responsive energy, environment and climate change action programming.

Although some districts have mandatory policies to reserve positions for women's representatives in coordination mechanisms/structures established at the district and subcounty levels, men's authority still dominated decision-making spaces. Therefore, ensuring gender equality in decision making remains a critical area that still requires action.

We found women's participation in natural resource governance was limited by low levels of education, negative gender norms, and a culture that emphasizes their roles and responsibilities in non-paid domestic chores. The latter limits their time for involvement in natural resource management and governance. The negative gender norms also limit women's access to, use of and ownership rights over resources.

Addressing legal, structural and cultural barriers to gender equality, in particular land ownership and tenure, will improve women's participation in existing natural resource and environmental coordination mechanisms. This can be achieved by partnering with government leaders, community leaders, men and civil society organizations, and engaging women in the design, delivery and assessment of interventions aligned with community-identified needs. Existing womenled networks can be leveraged to promote women's engagement in climate change-related issues.

There is a need for stakeholder engagement and dialogue on responsibilities, importance, limitations

and opportunities for enhancing women's influence in leadership and other forms of participation in coordination mechanisms. This will need to consider the differences in priorities identified by men and women in order to inform an integrated approach. Dialogues and sharing of recommendations and best practices where women and men advance ideas that represent their own interests and those of their communities will be important. Relatedly, there is a need to advocate for change in the perceptions towards women that undermine their capacity at the planning level if they are to be fully involved in leadership and coordination.

Gender awareness through a social behavioural change communication (SBCC) strategy in policy and planning requires a prior detailed analysis of the social relations of production within relevant institutions, such as family, market, community and state, to understand how gender and other inequalities are created and reproduced through their separate and combined interactions, and how they can be deployed to guide and build synergies for natural resource management and other complementary sectors.

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