




Changing the climate

Why gender matters to achieving equitable sustainable development

 Achieving sustainable development and food and nutrition security in a changing climate requires addressing the fundamental issue of gender inequality whilst building the adaptive capacity of both men and women¹. Here we review lessons from practical approaches to integrating gender into community-based adaptation and food and nutrition security in Ghana and Bangladesh.

Key messages

- Understanding the interconnected factors shaping the aspirations of men and women, and their capacity to adapt, is critical for designing, implementing and monitoring effective and appropriate adaptation measures.
- Tackling the entrenched drivers of vulnerability and gender inequality that limit women's ability to adapt is essential for achieving equitable sustainable development.
- Investing in women's economic empowerment is a key contributing factor to building household and community resilience.

¹ CARE and Foodtank. 2015. Cultivating equality: Delivering just and sustainable food systems in a changing climate. http://careclimatechange.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/CARE-Food-Tank-CCAFS_Report_Cultivating-Equality.pdf

The problem

While it is believed women produce 60–80% of the food in developing countries, worldwide they only own 10–20% of agricultural land². Rural women are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to limited access and control over resources fundamental to adaptation and limited participation in decision-making processes. Similarly, they lack equal access to productive resources needed for agricultural livelihoods, and are often the last to eat when food is scarce. However, women should not be viewed only as victims; they have valuable skills and knowledge that contribute to successful adaptation and play a key role in ensuring the food and nutrition security of their households and communities.

² FAO. 2015. Why gender: Key facts. Rome: FAO. <http://www.fao.org/gender/gender-home/gender-why/key-facts/en/> accessed September 24, 2015; FAO. 2011 *State of Food and Agriculture*. Rome: FAO.

Context

It is critical that efforts to address women's empowerment are not limited to women-only focused strategies that could add to their workloads without commensurate rights over decision-making or benefits. These kinds of strategies can further entrench gender inequality. A transformative approach recognizes that focusing on women alone is unlikely to result in sustainable strengthening of adaptive capacity; instead it challenges existing power structures and aims to move the bar on inequitable social norms. Without challenging underlying causes of gender inequality such as early marriage and pregnancy, cultural norms of male dominated decision making or restrictions on women's mobility, or the lack of value placed on women's contributions and knowledge, the chances of achieving sustainable development and food and nutrition security are minimal³.

Evidence and experience

To address gender inequality CARE uses the following strategies to integrate an understanding of local gender dynamics and inequalities into its activities:

- Conducting standalone gender analysis exercises at various stages during program activities.
- Integrating gender into participatory analysis of climate vulnerability for effective local adaptation planning. For example, carrying out a climate vulnerability and capacity analysis (CVCA)⁴, which ensures the participation of both men and women, and asks questions about gender issues in climate adaptation.
- Integrating gender analysis information into adaptive management of activities throughout the program cycle.

Ghana – Closing the gender gap to reap economic and social empowerment dividends

In many countries, laws and customs still deny women land ownership or access to credit. In these countries, malnutrition amongst children is between 60 and 85% higher than in countries permitting women and men equal rights and access. If women had equal access to resources (land, education, credit, etc.) as men, 100–150 million fewer people would be hungry⁵. Therefore, both sustained access to productive assets, and good health, are central to climate change adaptation and food and nutrition security in rural areas.

Program interventions

- **Village savings and loans associations** (VSLAs) build women's economic and social empowerment by providing access to credit to support income-generating activities or household costs.
- **Participatory scenario planning**⁶ (PSP) forums provide people with access to livelihoods advisories based on the seasonal weather forecast aiding decision-making.
- **Farmer field and business field schools** provide experiential learning and training on sustainable agriculture practices, market engagement, gender and equity, nutrition, and group empowerment.
- **Community adaptation action plans**⁷ allow men, women and communities to prioritize risk and make collective decisions on new or improved actions they can take to build household or community resilience to the impacts of climate change.

3 ALP. 2015 *Gender dynamics in a changing climate: how gender and adaptive capacity affect resilience*. CARE International <http://careclimatechange.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Gender-and-Adaptation-Learning-Brief.pdf>

4 CARE. 2009. *Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Handbook*. CARE International. <http://careclimatechange.org/tool-kits/cvca/>

5 FAO. 2011. *Women in agriculture: Closing the gender gap for development*. Rome: FAO. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e00.htm>

6 ALP. 2012. *Decision making for climate resilient livelihoods and risk reduction: a participatory scenario planning approach* CARE International. http://www.care.org/sites/default/files/documents/CC-2011-ALP_PSP_Brief.pdf

7 ALP. 2014. *Adaptation planning with communities: Practitioner brief 1*. CARE International. http://careclimatechange.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/CBA_Planning_Brief.pdf

Results/impact

- New respect and support for women's roles and their contribution to the household. An example is men giving women access to land now they realize women are economically and technically able to make good use of it through access to credit (through VSLAs), seasonal forecasts and improved agricultural inputs and practices.
- Diversification into less 'climate sensitive' livelihoods such as handicrafts or petty trading using funds saved in VSLAs.
- Greater social empowerment for women – VSLAs build group solidarity and promote self-confidence and self-reliance that fosters changes in women's behavior. For example, they have an increased voice in decision-making processes, making household decisions collaboratively with men, access to public spaces and use of mobile phones.

Bangladesh – Tackling the twin challenges of food and nutrition security and climate change through women's empowerment

Bangladesh, the world's most densely populated country, consists almost entirely of low-lying shoreline and river delta. It is extremely vulnerable to flooding, drought and climate change. Coupled with this, Bangladesh faces a persistent challenge of child malnutrition, which can permanently impair a child's physical and cognitive development. CARE's interventions in the country aim to tackle both issues while focusing on gender equality – which is central to achieving success.

Program interventions

- **Health, hygiene and nutrition:** promoting more food during pregnancy, exclusive breastfeeding in the first 6 months and increases in immunizations to reduce malnourishment and negative health impacts among the most vulnerable.
- **Agriculture and livelihoods:** agriculture sector productivity or food security training, linkages with local government and the private sector, access to information and new

technology, technical support and capacity building all contribute to building resilient agricultural livelihoods.

- **Disaster and climate risk management:** building awareness and capacity through community-based adaptation and emergency response to prevent the reversal of other development gains.
- **Gender empowerment:** through VSLAs, empowerment, knowledge and transformative action (EKATA) groups and leadership and decision-making training.

Results/impact

- Families' dietary diversity nearly doubled, and the number of children aged 6–23 months who had an adequate diet rose from 8% to 50%. The number of stunted children dropped 13 percentage points, more than double the national average⁸.
- The number of months per year that families spend without enough food dropped from 6.1 to 1⁹.
- Women are three times more involved in income generating activities, 15 percent more likely to control their earnings, and 2.5 times more likely to access ante-natal care¹⁰.

8 Smith LC et al. 2015. *Quantitative Impact Evaluation of the SHOUHARDO II Project in Bangladesh*. Tucson, AZ: TANGO, International.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

Recommendations

- Invest in context-specific analysis to understand the interconnected factors shaping the aspirations of men and women and their ability to adapt in order to design effective and appropriate adaptation action.
- Invest in improving women's economic empowerment in the face of climate change to address the way resources and labor are distributed and valued in the economy.
- Focus on identifying and overcoming the cultural and social constraints, such as limited freedom of movement, which impact on women's ability to adapt.
- Invest in information communication technologies and in addressing women's higher levels of illiteracy as a critical driver of change in gender relations and adaptive capacity.
- Tackle the entrenched drivers of vulnerability and gender inequality, such as poor access to health services and reproductive and sexual health information in order to remove barriers to successful adaptation.

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This brief is number 2 in a set of Gender Climate Briefs.
See the full set here: [CIFOR.org/gender-climate](https://www.cifor.org/gender-climate)



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