

NOVEL INSIGHTS BRIEF

GENDER AND SOCIAL EQUITY



More than one billion people live in deltas, semi-arid lands, and glacier-dependent basins in Africa and Asia, hotspot regions that are the most vulnerable to climate change.

Over 7 years, the CARIAA program supported collaborative research to strengthen resilience in these hotspots by informing policy and practice. CARIAA brought together more than 450 researchers across 15 countries through four consortia, with selected study areas based on geographic and social similarities—with the aim of sharing knowledge and experiences across disciplines, sectors and geographies.

The CARIAA Novel Insights series provides a snapshot of the key insights that emerged from this work, on the most pertinent topics for climate adaptation.

ADAPTATION MEASURES MUST RECOGNIZE THAT VULNERABILITY IS MULTI-FACETED, AND SEEK TO BETTER UNDERSTAND HOW GENDER AND SOCIAL INEQUITY AFFECTS ADAPTIVE CAPACITIES.

CARIAA has advanced our understanding of gender and social equity, recognizing vulnerability comes in different forms and is not limited to women. Impacts of climate change are experienced differently by different people, based on their exposure and capacity to respond to risks. CARIAA evidence speaks to how the gendered nature of decision-making and access to resources creates differential capacities of women and men to adapt to climate change. Capacity to adapt is determined by gender, age, ethnicity, class, and household structure. The remoteness of hotspots also matters, as people living in mountains and floodplains, semi-arid lands, and river deltas face distinct risks and opportunities.

BACKGROUND

Efforts to strengthen adaptive capacity have largely failed to recognize the gendered nature of everyday realities and experiences. Gender roles and responsibilities shape women's and men's access to, ownership of and control over resources, as well as capacities to respond to stress caused by climate change. The existing literature recognizes gendered experiences of climatic change, with poorer women and female-headed households as the most vulnerable. Yet it also undervalues women's agency and ignores other forms of social difference. Empowerment requires taking into account the resources available to people, and how they use those resources. Entrenched social structures and power relations shape women's adaptive capacity in complex ways. People exercise their agency by drawing on available material or social resources, using a variety of strategies.

Past research has shown that gender relations involve both cooperation and conflict across scales from the household and community to markets and the state. Where state social protection is lacking, both poor women and men may be more inclined to cooperate with each other to ensure household survival and growth. This has implications for climate adaptation measures. The UNFCCC Paris Agreement, for example, creates new demand to incorporate gender into climate adaptation, for instance through gender action plans and inclusion of gender in climate finance and adaptation planning. The literature recognizes that people's experiences of climate impacts are also influenced by factors beyond gender, and CARIAA has expanded on this, contributing new evidence from lived experience in Africa and Asia.

NEW INSIGHTS

CARIAA sought to build on existing literature with new research that has allowed us to develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of gendered vulnerabilities and other related topics. Some of the key insights that have emerged from this work are outlined below.

VULNERABILITY COMES IN DIFFERENT FORMS

Gender is one of many factors that influence how people are impacted by and respond to climate change (see Figure 1). A person's vulnerability to the impacts of climate change depends on whether they are a man or a woman, young or old, and on social and cultural status. Policies need to be more sensitive to the gendered nature of everyday realities and experiences. Household relationships help determine whether and how one can—or cannot—respond to environmental pressures. CARIAA sought to recognize the diversity within and across households: the ways in which power is shared, the relationships that exist within them, and how these factors lead to particular risks, outcomes, and levels of wellbeing for different household members. For example, CARIAA evidence suggests:

- In Kenya, gender, marital status, and household composition affect how people manage climate risks
- In Ghana, cultural norms, marital status and education levels shape who is vulnerable
- In India, young men who are poorly educated and lack access to land are among the most vulnerable

Ultimately, adaptation strategies should enhance cooperation rather than conflict within households. It must also be recognized that women are not necessarily victims or powerless: they are often striving to diversify their livelihoods and increase their agency.

WOMEN IN HOTSPOTS

Research into the lived experience of vulnerable communities shows how climate change is pushing women into new roles and spaces, and changing household structures and relationships. These in turn shape the vulnerability of women and men to respond to risk and adapt to stress. CARIAA found evidence of new forms of cooperation between women and men (switching of tasks), a rise of multi-generational households (as women move in with female relatives), and increased asset and labor sharing with other households. Compared to men, women invest more in cooperation within and across kin groups. Vulnerabilities are not just related to sex, but also age, economic class, geographic location. The remoteness of climate hotspots limits access to markets and opportunities to diversify livelihoods. Position within a household also matters, as a youngest daughter or a daughter-in-law often has less power than a female head.

Research in hotspots revealed that adaptive strategies are affected by gender and other conditions, such as:

- In glacier-dependent basins, migration leads women to enter traditionally male roles, such as off-farm labour and commerce, requiring them to deal with moneylenders and government officials
- In semi-arid lands, aspirations shift during drought, as households seek to leave pastoralism by investing in education for children to pursue work elsewhere and eventually look after parents. During rains, farmers instead seek opportunities to shift their agriculture practices to build resilience
- In deltas, women-headed households are likely to move to new locations or construct storm

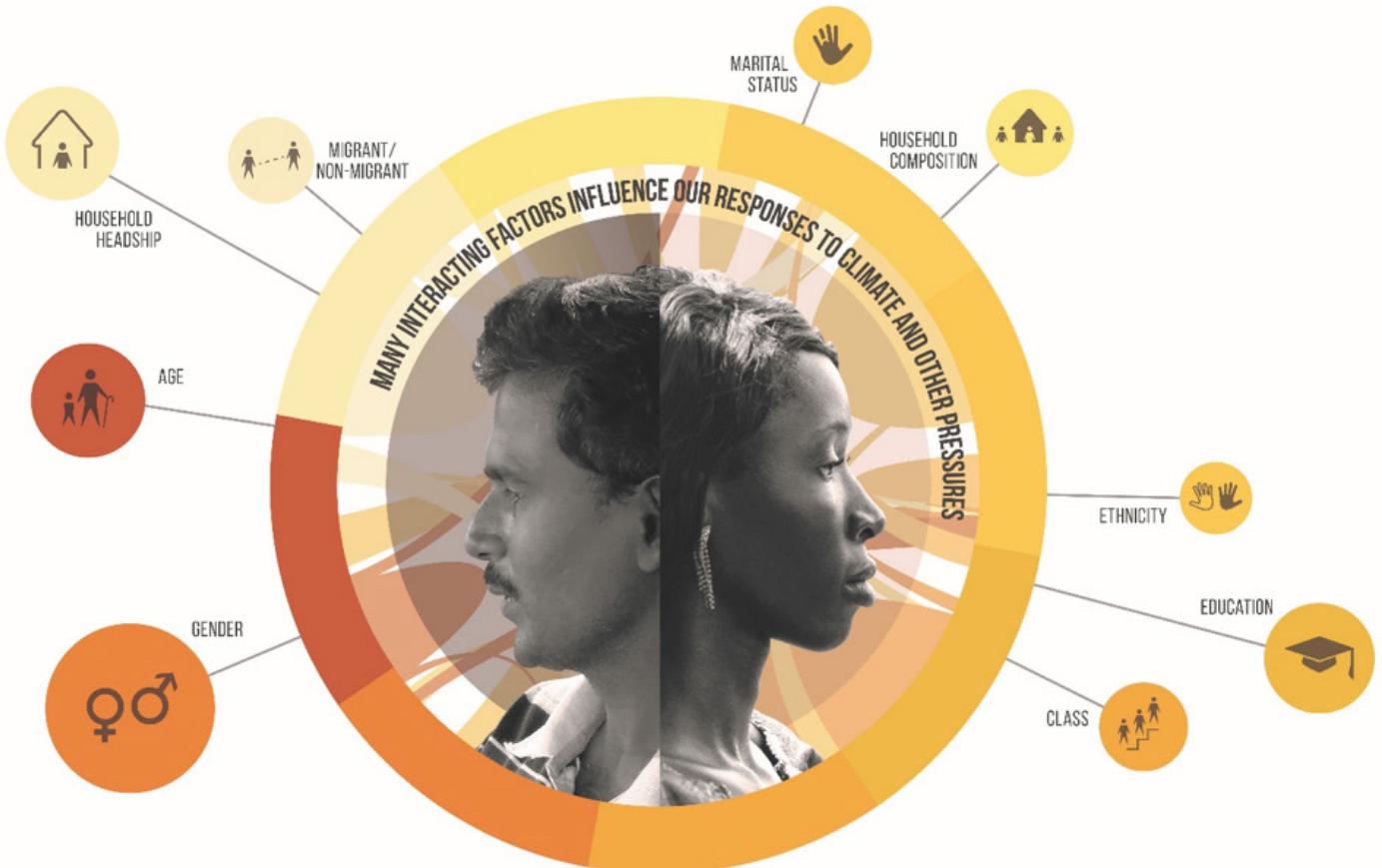


Figure 1. Gender is one of many factors that influence how we are impacted by and respond to climate change.
Image: ASSAR/Another Love Productions

shelters, while male-headed households are likely to take loans or modify homes

CHANGING AGENCY AND ADAPTIVE CAPACITY

Climate stressors and socio-economic changes have increased the vulnerability of families in hotspots. CRIAAC found evidence that climate stress dampens adaptive responses and negates women's agency. Women do exercise agency for sheer survival, but this does not contribute substantively to developing longer-term adaptive strategies. Learning across multiple case studies in Africa and Asia suggests that women's adaptive capacities are influenced by key conditions such as material assets, social relations (trust and reciprocity), and women's working conditions. Analysis suggests that stressed environments, adverse working conditions, institutions (formal and informal), and poverty tend to limit women's agency.

Young men are moving out of villages in search of alternative sources of income to cope with farm

failure and poverty, or to access pastures for their livestock. Across hotspots, migration is often a distress response, as people can no longer thrive where they are. However, migration can improve overall household resilience. Evidence from Senegal and Tajikistan suggests that remittances have helped women develop entrepreneurial skills and to invest in micro agribusiness. Yet the benefits of remittances are seldom shared equitably by all members of the household.

When men migrate, women who remain behind not only face greater responsibilities for household and care, but added responsibilities for farming and 'outside' work that was hitherto the domain of men. Increases in workload sometimes lead to feeling overwhelmed and stretched for time. Yet by being exposed to new roles, women also gain additional skills and negotiate public spaces. Women's increased access to information and new networks can create additional sources of income, and at times increases their agency and voice. This, however, depends on

the presence of adequate support mechanisms to reduce or redistribute women's work burdens. For example, social networks and community groups help enhance the resilience of women-led small enterprises in Kenya and Senegal.

Men often remain in charge of decision making, whether as family members guiding how household farms operate or as officials in the institutions women must interact with. Given the aforementioned changing trends, there is an opportunity for public and private institutions, ranging from government to banking, to better recognize women as leaders at home and in the community. In addition to pushing towards recognition, women must be better equipped to handle their new roles. Efforts to strengthen the adaptive capacity of poor women and men need to move beyond stereotypes to think creatively about a range of resources and opportunities to exercise agency.

ASSESSMENT AND IMPACT: CRIAIA'S EXPERIENCE

Beyond constituting a focus of research and action, the CRIAIA initiative sought to incorporate gender and social equity throughout its work. This experience offers insights for broader adaptation research, planning, and practice, namely to reflect on what is done, how it is done, who does it, and what is achieved.

In terms of what is done, CRIAIA assessed its research activities according to the extent to which they adopt an intersectional perspective, build on the most recent literature, address masculinities, generate disaggregated data, bridge across scales (from households to society), and mobilize appropriate research methods. These dimensions offer entry points for understanding how research addresses social difference, going beyond the simple spectrum of gender aware-to-transformative, to suggest how interventions and support mechanisms address the specific needs of the most vulnerable, empowering them to take decisions that can enhance their wellbeing.

In terms of how it is done, CRIAIA incorporated gender in overall research design. Having sex-disaggregated

data and gender-sensitive methods meant that insights emerged from areas where they otherwise would have remained invisible. For example, CRIAIA conducted a survey of over 6000 households in river deltas (with male and female respondents), and more than 200 focus groups discussions in glacier-dependent basins to gather data on gender roles and responsibilities. Interrogating gender and social differences was not a stand-alone set of activities, but included in all research streams, leading to more robust and informative findings. A number of CRIAIA researchers are convinced that this helped them to do better research.

In terms of who does it, CRIAIA sought to build capacities and engagement across groups, including amongst researchers. A concerted effort was made to ensure participation of diverse groups in the research process. By 2018, peer-reviewed publications generated in CRIAIA had involved over 300 authors, of whom more than one-third were women and two-thirds were affiliated with institutions in Africa and Asia. Moreover, IDRC nominated women scientists as IPCC authors and engaged the Global Commission on Adaptation to strengthen participation from Africa and Asia. CRIAIA also provided training in researching gender, defined as going beyond the physical differentiation of the sexes to include other factors like caste or class, and looking at how these different groups experience environmental change differently.

In terms of what is achieved, CRIAIA identified and engaged with relevant stakeholders to bridge policy demands with research evidence in diverse ways. In India, CRIAIA research inputs to the Odisha State government were incorporated into the Action Plan on climate change 2018-2023, resulting in a separate chapter on gender. In Namibia, Kati-FM's radio show brought public attention to gender and cultural norms that are preventing adaptation, and the ways men and women have adapted in response to climate change.



LOOKING FORWARD

Capacity to adapt is determined by multiple factors including gender, age, ethnicity, class, and household structure. This intersectionality is less understood in climate and gender based research. In addition, vulnerabilities in the context of climate change are an interplay of external factors such as market forces, consumerism, urbanization, globalization, infrastructure development and technological intervention, and geopolitical-socioeconomic factors of social and gender structures.

Moving forward, research and policy must go beyond simple sex-disaggregated data, and strive to understand and address the root causes of vulnerability. Adaptation measures must address gendered issues on the ground in vulnerable communities since women and men have different roles and responsibilities and experience

climate change differently. Proactive policy measures need to be framed and implemented to regulate access and safety of women in markets, financial transactions, and public spaces. In the future, adaptation that addresses gender and social inequities must:

Challenge assumptions: Gender is one of many factors that influence how people are impacted by climate change. How people experience and respond to risk varies depending on factors like age, ethnicity, gender and class. Elucidating such nuances requires evidence, to inform decisions about risk reduction strategies and adaptation options with data on who is most vulnerable, how people respond, and what needs to be done. Effective adaptation eschews universal solutions, and embraces the reality of specific peoples and places.

Recognize women as leaders: Gender relations are changing in terms of divisions of work and responsibilities across scales from the household and community to markets and the state. Beyond interventions to address practical needs, women's economic and productive contributions must be recognized and supported, including access to credit and land. Proactive policy measures need to be framed and implemented to regulate access and safety of women in markets, financial transactions, and public spaces. Ultimately, if adaptation considers gender and other socio-cultural variables, it can better promote equality and help to improve people's wellbeing.

Address masculinities: Foster cooperation between men and women, and avoid stereotypes of men as negligent or absent. Climate change is also pushing men into new roles and spaces, and new forms of cooperation are emerging regarding who is responsible for caring for family, earning income, and managing assets. Migration makes households more networked across different places, yet men

can contribute to adaptation back home, supporting relatives and themselves as they face different risks and opportunities. Engage men in recognizing ways in which power is shared and their actions can enable greater resilience and wellbeing for different household members.

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OTHER TOPICS IN THE SERIES



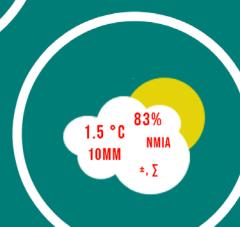
MIGRATION



RESEARCH FOR IMPACT



EFFECTIVE ADAPTATION



1.5°C WARMING

CARIAA
is jointly
funded by the
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