
GENDER AND CLIMATE ADAPTATION

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Summary

- There are underlying inequalities in every society between women and men, in terms of their roles in the household, and the resources that they each have to deliver them with.
- Climate change – bringing higher temperatures, more floods, droughts, hurricanes and rising sea levels – will exacerbate these inequalities. Why? Because it will put more pressure particularly on women's household roles, while at the same time depleting the natural resources that women in particular depend upon. Oxfam is working with rural, agricultural communities, across Africa, Asia and Latin America, where these effects will be particularly strong.
- Adaptation programmes must be sensitive to the different impacts of climate change upon women and men, and also must ensure that the interventions help to empower women as part of building community resilience against climate change.
- Technology transfer negotiations and programmes must ensure that the technologies involved include those for extending energy access and reducing women's unpaid work (such as household solar electricity, and clean and efficient stoves).
- Gender awareness must be integrated into adaptation, and technology transfer negotiations as early as possible, to ensure that women's needs and interests are at the heart of plans to build community resilience.

What's the issue? Start with gender inequalities...

Forget about climate change for the moment...

There are underlying inequalities between women and men in every society. In rural, agricultural communities in developing countries where Oxfam works, there are strong patterns of inequality. These can be illustrated with the stylised facts shown in the diagram at the end of this brief (the diagram focuses on typical communities in sub-Saharan Africa, so would need to be adjusted for different regions).

Explaining the diagram:

1. Women and men have different roles in the household (inside the pentagon)

- Women's roles focus around the unpaid reproductive economy (providing most food; providing fuel and water; cooking, caring, raising children). It is time-consuming work which is paid nothing, so they earn cash as and when they can.
- Men's roles focus on providing the home and security, providing some food and cash. In doing this work, men can accumulate assets like property, and savings.

2. Women and men have different physical, natural, financial, human and social resources to deliver their roles with (the edges of the pentagon).

You can think of the pentagon of resources as a five-sided boxing ring: when women and men are 'hit by poverty', they need strong ropes round the edge of the boxing ring so they can 'bounce back'. Those ropes are their resources, and the stronger those resources are, the better women and men will be at bouncing back from a shock.

As the diagram shows for sub-Saharan Africa, women and men have very different types of resources to bounce back with. It's particularly clear that women have:

- More dependence on natural resources – like water, reliable rainfall, firewood but...
- Fewer physical resources – they lack irrigation to manage rainfall, and have fewer productive assets (like machinery, or a bicycle) to make money from or sell.
- Less powerful social resources – social norms that limit their mobility and authority, reinforce their household roles and block their voice being heard in community decisions
- Fewer human resources – less education, training and access to official information
- Fewer financial resources – little savings, cash or access to credit, or markets for selling

3. Women are more likely than men to invest in their children (through nutrition, healthcare and education), in part because women depend more on their children's support later in life. As a result, investing in women effectively means also investing in their children.

4. So, promoting women's rights makes sense for two main reasons:

- a) for equality's sake: women and men have equal claim to get the resources and opportunities they need to get out of poverty, and women need a boost!
- b) for efficiency's sake: investing more in women raises household incomes overall, and improves the development prospects of the next generation.

What's it got to do with climate change?

Climate change impacts – like higher temperatures, more floods, droughts, hurricanes and rising sea levels – directly affect the natural resources available to rural women and men, and may lead to disease outbreaks. But the effects for women and men are different because of their different roles and resources.

Taking the example of more frequent and severe droughts in sub-Saharan Africa:

Droughts make crops fail. Women's crops may fail faster (they are grown on less fertile, common land, and without irrigation) so women quickly have to find alternative ways to feed their families – they may turn to finding wild foods. Water scarcity means diseases like cholera and diarrhoea may intensify (especially for children and pregnant women) increasing caring work for women. Since women spend longer hours collecting water and caring for sick children and parents, they also risk their own health due to fatigue, and they have no time to voice their interests in community planning meetings.

Men often migrate away from the drought area to sell their labour in town for cash, leaving women to take on men's immediate roles but often without the resources that they had to draw upon (sometimes this process can empower women, but not always). They may return some months later with cash, but may also have contracted the HIV virus. Women and girls cannot migrate for work like that (they have childcare roles, and no social mobility) so they may resort to brewing and selling beer locally, or even selling sex. In parts of Zambia, researchers have found that when a new drought begins, the HIV infection rate rises for precisely these reasons.

We can actually go further in disaggregating how impacts can affect households at four stages of climate impacts: creating risk-aversion before the event; coping in the event; recovery and adaptation; and the long-term legacy.¹ In the case of drought, here are some stylised facts on how women and men may cope at each stage.

Stylized facts on drought in sub-Saharan Africa		
Stage of impact	How women may cope	How men may cope
1. Risk aversion before the event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plant drought-tolerant crops with a lower yield 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plant drought-tolerant crops Invest in irrigation
2. Coping in the event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Huge stress of providing food, fuel, water, and health care. May resort to selling sex for cash. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Protect physical assets best as possible. Sell labour for cash. Sell off livestock for low price
3. Recovery from the event	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin farming again when possible Take girls out of school to help with housework 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Migrate to find cash work Sell labour in town
4. Legacy and long-term impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children may be stunted by malnutrition. Girls miss out for life on an education – lost opportunity Women cannot build assets and household power 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men may return to the community with cash but also with HIV virus.

Given these impacts and response to climate change, it's clear why adaptation policies must take account of the different impacts on women and men, and must be designed to build both women's and men's resilience to climate change. Gender-sensitive policies must be designed to suit the local context, but in the case of drought they could include:

Interventions before the event:

- Raising women's and men's awareness of climate impacts
- Putting women at the heart of community-based disaster planning
- Improving early-warning systems networks that reach women and men
- Investing in research to make women's subsistence crops more drought tolerant
- Extending irrigation schemes to women's crops
- Training women and men farmers in conservation tillage techniques
- Securing women's rights to land so they can get agricultural credit, but also have a physical asset to rely on.

Interventions during the drought:

- Cash for work programmes during droughts, offering work and equal pay to both women and men.
- Providing emergency food, water and fuel to reduce women's workload
- Providing basic healthcare for common diseases

Support for recovery from, and adapting to, drought:

- Providing cash for work to help families rebuild assets
- Purchasing livestock at stable market prices (de-stocking programmes)

¹ These categories come from UNDP's latest Human Development Report.

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- Extending access to renewable energy to reduce women's work gathering fuel by introducing appropriate energy technologies and irrigation schemes
 - Investing in research on women's crops, and train women and men in conservation techniques, as above.
 - Securing women's land tenure, as above.

What's Oxfam calling for?

Oxfam is calling for adaptation policies to be gender-sensitive so that they address both women's and men's needs and interests. Only this way will they help to build community resilience to climate change, in part by tackling gender inequality.

Where are the policy decision-points for gender policies to be integrated into adaptation planning? As a start:

- The UNFCCC should invest in and promote gender-focused climate change research, and promote gender-disaggregated indicators for national reporting to the UNFCCC.
- National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPAs for the LDCs) and National Adaptation Strategies for all other countries should be designed to take account of the different impacts of climate, and climate policies on women and men. This is the responsibility of each country, but can be part of the UNFCCC's reporting criteria (as above).
- Finance channelled through the Adaptation Fund should be directed to the most vulnerable communities in developing countries, through gender-sensitive programmes.
- Local government, donors and NGOs must ensure that any plans for adapting to climate change involve women at the heart of consultations, planning and implementation.
- At the level of communities, women and men must be equally involved in building adaptive capacity, to ensure that both women's and men's interests – their roles and resources – are taken into account. In this way, adapting to climate change can help reduce gender inequalities and so promote development.

Women's and men's roles and resources: stylised facts on rural sub-Saharan Africa

Roles and resources are determined by: legal and cultural norms, state institutions, power and decision-making in households and the community...

Women's 5 sets of resources

Men's 5 sets of resources

Networks:

- Women's groups
- Cooperatives

Norms:

- Dependent, immobile
- Defer to husband
- Lacks voice in decision-making

Networks:

- Voice in committees
- Access to officials

Norms:

- Mobility, independence
- Authority in the home,
- May use violence

