

Chapter 54

Gendered Vulnerability and Adaptation to Climate Change

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is a critical global issue with the potential to cause social, political, environmental and economic hardships. Women and the poor are disproportionately affected by climate change because of cultural norms, their dependence on natural resources; responsibility for water, fuel, food procurement and household care; their greater exposure to risk in crisis and severe weather events and the predominant presence of low technology in agriculture and their lack of resources and power. This chapter concentrates on vulnerability and adaptation responses at the community level and the context or factors that influence adaptation at this level. In particular, this it focuses gender based vulnerability and adaptation and the factors that influence they respond to climate change. It also highlights the importance of collective adaptation efforts in order to guide the design of more inclusive and effective adaptation projects and programs.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the greatest development challenges of our time. Hence, it requires immediate collaborative attention. It has discernible and indeed worsening effects on communities (IPCC, 2007). Since the Industrial Revolution, human activities such as the use of fossil fuels and land use change, have led to an increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere. These gases (e.g carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, water vapour and chlorofluorocarbons) are responsible of trapping extra heat inside the atmosphere and offsetting the earth-atmosphere energy balance. This lead to an increase in the Earth's surface temperature, resulting or expected to result in shifts in the climate system, including sea level rise, changes in precipitation patterns, melting ice, increased frequency of extreme events, and changes in climate variability. This has significant repercussions for human society and the environment. For example, rising temperatures mean an increase in the transmission of malaria.

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Various physiological changes, such as increased exhaled breath and heat dissipation, make pregnant women more appealing to malaria-carrying mosquitoes, leaving them particularly vulnerable to malaria.

Evidence of climate change includes increasing the severity of droughts and floods, rising sea levels, the displacement of large populations and changes to growing seasons. Additionally, climate change will compound existing obstacles to development and exacerbate the divisions between men and women in already vulnerable communities. Evidence also indicates that climate change threatens to erode human freedoms and limit choice, and emphasizes that gender inequalities amplify climate risks and vulnerabilities (Tschakert & Machado, 2012).

Climate change affects people and their livelihoods across the world. However, certain groups are more vulnerable to climate shocks and likely to experience more severe consequences than others. A climate hazard, such as a drought, does not affect all people within a community or even the same household equally because some people have greater capacity than others to manage the crisis. Poor communities, for example, are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of a changing climate given their lack of capacity to prepare for and cope with the effects. Thus, they are expected to be more acutely affected by climate change partly due to their limited access to information and financial resources (Dankelman et al., 2008). This will limit their capacity to adapt to climate change, exacerbating existing inequalities. Many of these poorest areas are in Africa. African nations represent 33 of the poorest 49 countries in the world (UNDP, 2009b). Often, socially constructed roles lead women to be much more vulnerable than men to poverty. Of the 49 percent of people in Sub-Saharan Africa living on less than one US dollar a day, over 60 percent are women (UNDP, 2009a).

Recognizing the unavoidable impacts of the changing climate, international climate efforts have been steadily shifting to include a focus on adaptation. The broad impact of climate change adaptation (CCA) depends on who within the community is able to participate in adaptation strategies. A number of variables, including age, wealth, ethnicity, social status or gender, will shape the ability of community members to participate in CCA strategies. Gender in particular is an important variable given a growing body of evidence indicating that climate change and climate shocks will differentially impact men and women. Further evidence demonstrates that risk is not equally shared between men and women at the household or community levels.

BACKGROUND

Climate change and gender are cross cutting issues that have to be mainstreamed in all programs. Vulnerable communities face constraints that limit their ability to participate in CCA activities. The adverse impacts of climate change are disproportionately harsh for the most vulnerable people and groups, particularly women. Gender disparities increase vulnerability of women and girls to climatic risks. Gender-based vulnerability to climate change calls for the need for a gender-conscious response informed by the differences in needs, responsibilities and unique contributions of both women and men.

Adverse impacts of climate change can be dealt with adaptation and mitigation strategies. While mitigation deals with reducing GHG emissions, adaptation seeks to moderate or avoid harm or exploit beneficial opportunities. Climate change adaptation is an ongoing process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects. It is about reducing vulnerability to current and projected climate risks. Adaptation measures to climate change can be classified based on the timing, goal and motive of their implementation. Accordingly, adaptation can include reactive or anticipatory actions, or can be planned

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