

CARE International Climate Change Brief

Adaptation, gender and women's empowerment



Why is gender important in climate change adaptation?

Adapting to climate change is about reducing vulnerability to current and projected climate risks. Vulnerability to climate change is determined in large part by people's adaptive capacity. A particular 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. The inequitable distribution of rights, resources and power – as well as repressive cultural rules and norms – constrains many people's ability to take action on climate change. This is especially true for women. Therefore, gender is a critical factor in understanding vulnerability to climate change.

CARE's approach to adaptation begins with comprehensive analysis that includes an examination of differential vulnerability due to social, political and economic inequalities. This assessment helps us tailor adaptation

strategies to the specific needs, capacities and priorities of impact groups. We work to empower the most vulnerable women and men to achieve climate-resilient livelihoods and reduce disaster risks. We partner with local organisations to develop their capacity for supporting household, community and government adaptation efforts. We aim to tackle the underlying causes of vulnerability to climate change, including gender inequality.

CARE's 2008 *Gender Policy* defines gender as "social differences between females and males throughout the life cycle that are learned, and though deeply rooted in every culture, are changeable over time, and have wide variations both within and between cultures." Gender – along with class, race and age – contribute to shaping the roles, power and resources available to women and men in any culture.

For more information on CARE's approach to adaptation, please go to: www.careclimatechange.org/adaptation.

CARE seeks a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security. Due to its impacts on the lives and livelihoods of poor and marginalized people, climate change poses an unprecedented threat to achieving our vision.

This working brief is part of a series that provides insight into CARE's climate change initiatives, experiences and approaches. It was released October 2010.



How does gender influence vulnerability to climate change?

The examples below illustrate some of the ways in which gender can shape women and men's differential experiences of climate change:

	Women	Men	Link to Climate Change Vulnerability
Roles	Stay home to care for children, as well as sick or elderly family members	Can migrate to access economic opportunities	Their ability to migrate in search of economic opportunities makes it easier for men to deal with crisis, and may result in benefits for the family as a whole. However, male migration often increases women's workload, as they are left behind to manage the household in addition to usual tasks. It can also increase women's exposure to other risks, such as gender-based violence and HIV infection.
	Produce household-oriented crops and livestock products	Produce market-oriented crops and livestock products	Both crops and livestock are affected by climate change, and this has profound consequences for household food security. Men often claim safer/more fertile land for growing market-oriented crops, leaving women to grow household-oriented crops on more vulnerable/less fertile land.
	Are responsible for food storage and preparation	Are responsible for selling valuable produce and livestock	In addition to the challenges described above, climate change has implications for food preparation and storage (in terms of water for food preparation and the vulnerability of food stores to extreme events, such as cyclones and floods). Harvests may be reduced or even wiped out by floods or droughts. This affects market prices and the availability of surplus to sell – placing pressure on both men and women to identify other sources of income and reduce major expenditures (e.g. school fees). In times of food shortage, women are often expected to feed other members of the family before attending to their own needs.
Resources	Have lower incomes and are more likely to be economically dependent	Have higher incomes and are more likely to own land and other assets	Men typically have more money and other assets than women. Men's savings provide a "buffer" during tough times and, along with other assets, make it easier for them to invest in alternative livelihoods.
	Have less access to education and information	Have more access to education and information	Managing climate-related risks to agricultural production requires new information, skills and technologies, such as seasonal forecasts, risk analysis and water-saving agricultural practices. Men are more likely to have access to these resources and the power to use them and are therefore, better equipped to adapt. At the same time, women often have traditional knowledge that can inform adaptation efforts. Both new and old information is important in the context of adaptation.
Power	Have less power over family finances and other assets	Have more power over family finances and other assets	Without the power to decide on family resources and finances, women's ability to manage risks by, for example, diversifying crops, storing food or seeds or putting money into savings, is limited.
	Have limited engagement in community politics	Have greater involvement/decision-making power in community politics	Men are likely to have more influence over local governance-promoting policies and programmes that may not support women's rights and priorities.
	Face many cultural restrictions/prohibitions on mobility	Face few cultural restrictions/prohibitions on mobility	Mobility is a key factor in accessing information and services. It is also critical for escaping the danger posed by extreme weather such as floods. Therefore, women are often at higher risk from these events.

The inequitable distribution of rights, resources and power – as well as repressive cultural rules and norms – constrain the ability of many women to take action on climate change. However, poor and marginalised men often contend with similar constraints. Therefore, CARE’s approach to adaptation includes “empowering” both women and men to challenge and change deeply rooted inequalities. As such, our strategic approach to adaptation explicitly incorporates activities contributing towards gender equality. Whether addressing agency, relations or structures, we characterise these activities as “gender-equal.”

How do we incorporate gender-equal activities in adaptation strategies?

By incorporating gender-equal activities in adaptation strategies at all levels, we actively strive to examine, question and change rigid gender norms and imbalances of power in order to increase people’s resilience. Gender-equal activities encourage critical awareness among men and women of gender roles and norms; promote the position of women; challenge the distribution of resources and allocation of duties between men and women; and/or address power relationships between women and others in the community, such as service providers or traditional leaders.¹

For CARE, adaptation that incorporates gender-equal activities:

- Is based on a comprehensive, participatory and gender-sensitive analysis of vulnerability to climate change (including the social, economic and political determinants of vulnerability);
- Recognises differential vulnerability within countries, communities and households; and it targets adaptation strategies accordingly;
- Builds on the existing knowledge and capacities of men, women, boys and girls;
- Aims to empower vulnerable women and girls to build their adaptive capacity;
- Is planned and implemented with the participation of both women and men, including the most vulnerable groups in the community;
- Promotes adaptation policies and programmes at local, national and international levels that meet the specific needs of poor women and men;
- Supports men and women to access the resources, rights and opportunities they need to adapt to their changing environment; and
- Promotes gender equality as a long-term goal.



Gender equality refers to the “equal enjoyment by women, girls, boys and men of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards. Equality does not mean that women and men are the same but that their enjoyment of rights, opportunities and life-chances are not governed or limited by whether they were born female or male.”²

How can we apply a women’s empowerment framework to incorporate gender-equal activities in adaptation policies and programmes?

CARE’s experiences in reducing poverty have proven that women are central to lasting solutions. When women are able to earn an income, their families benefit. Research indicates that income is more likely to be spent on human development when women control the cash.³ In the Philippines, for example, the greater the share of household income earned by women, the greater family members’ consumption of calories and protein. In Ghana, the greater the share of cereals under women’s control, the greater family members’ consumption of calories. As well, research has shown that women are more risk averse than men and are, therefore, more likely to take decisions that minimize risks. It has also been found that women are more open to advice and are more willing to change their strategies in response to new information.⁴

1 CI’s Climate Change Strategic Plan, 2010-2014. Adapted from: *Gender Perspectives Improve Reproductive Health Outcomes: New Evidence*, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the International Gender Working Group (IGWG), December 2009, and *CARE International Gender Policy*, December 2008.

2 *CARE International Gender Policy*, December 2008.

3 *Human Development Report*, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), 1996

4 Patt, A.G., Dazé, A. and Suarez, P. *Gender and climate change vulnerability: what’s the problem, what’s the solution?* In: Ruth, M. and Ibarbaran, M. E. (Eds.). *Distributional Impacts of Climate Change and Disasters: Concepts and Cases*. Edward Elger: Cheltenham, UK, 2009.

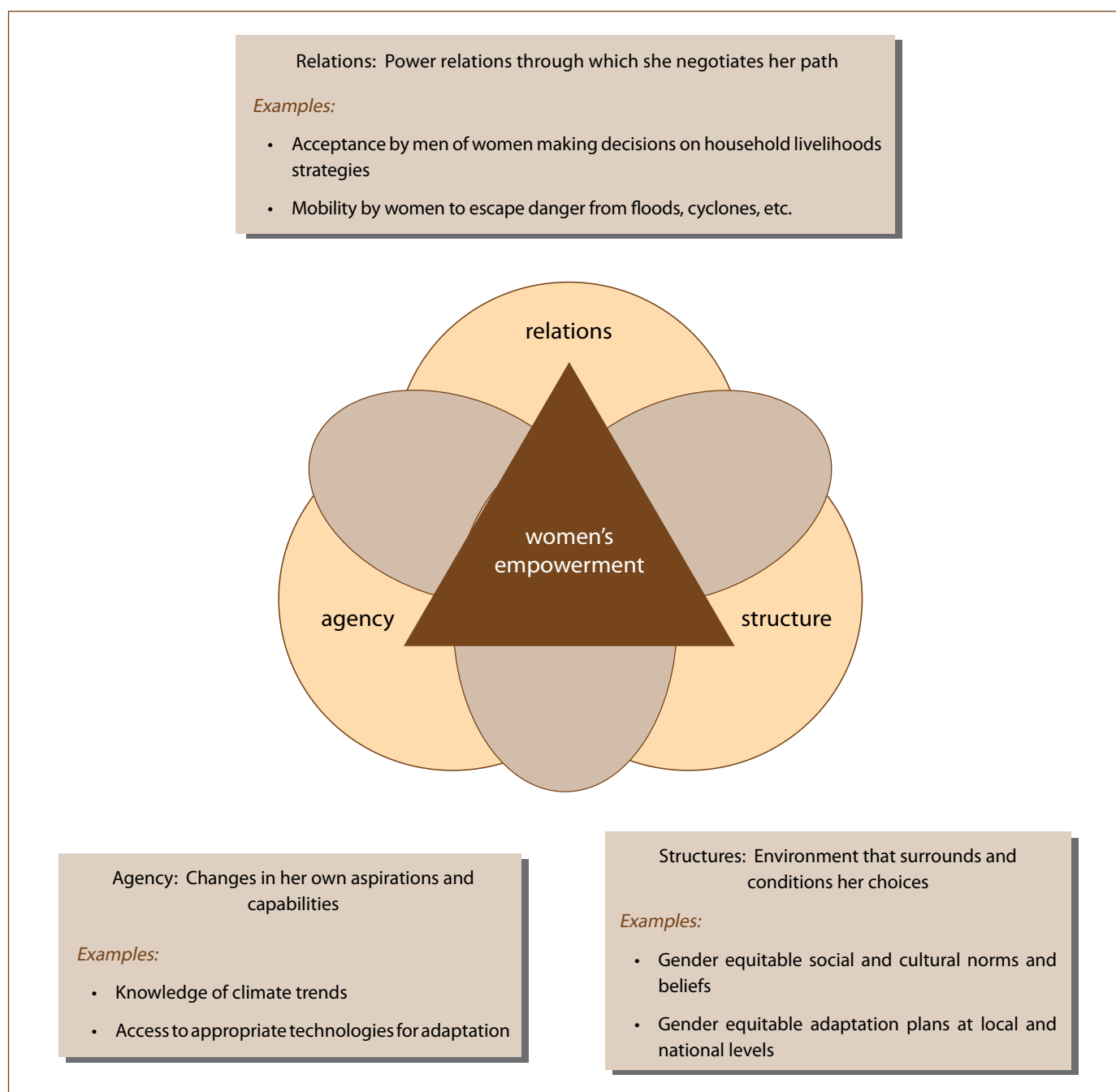
These qualities suggest that empowering women in household and community affairs is likely to yield decisions that strengthen adaptive capacity. This is a major reason why gender-equal activities, including efforts to empower women, form a fundamental part of CARE’s approach to adaptation.

CARE defines women’s empowerment as “ the sum total of changes needed for a woman to realize her full human rights – the combined effect of changes in her own aspirations and capabilities, the environment that surrounds and conditions her choices, and the power relations through which she negotiates her path.” We refer to these dimensions of empowerment as agency, relations and structures, respectively. In order to achieve the sustainable empowerment of women, we need to address all three dimensions.⁵

It is important to note that our focus on women’s empowerment does not mean CARE only works with women. To change unjust structures and relations, we need to work with women and men, as well as with policy- and other decision-makers at all levels.

CARE’s women’s empowerment framework and climate change adaptation

The following diagram applies the women’s empowerment framework to climate change adaptation, providing concrete examples of how we can address agency, relations and structures. CARE’s shift to a “programme approach” provides new opportunities for the comprehensive approach needed to achieve women’s empowerment.



⁵ Women’s Empowerment at CARE, SII Women’s Empowerment Framework Summary Sheet, Elisa Martinez and Diana Wu, CARE, 2009.

Women's empowerment in CARE's adaptation work

The following examples demonstrate one or more elements of the women's empowerment framework, showing how empowerment and adaptation can be mutually reinforcing. However, it is important to acknowledge that

none of these examples fully addresses agency, relations and structures. In other words, CARE's adaptation projects may already be gender-sensitive; but we still have a ways to go before they are effectively incorporating "gender-transformative" approaches.



Tajikistan: Increasing women's agency for adaptation to climate change

In a high mountain community in Tajikistan, food security was an increasing challenge due to shifting seasons that were negatively impacting women's kitchen gardens. In dialogue with local men and women, CARE helped design a simple technology to adapt to the changes. Cold frames (small, greenhouses) were constructed to start vegetable seedlings earlier in the spring and extend the growing season into the fall. This resulted in increased household production, crop diversity and nutrition. The project also worked with women to promote food preservation so that surpluses could be safely stored for consumption during the winter. While this is a positive example of increased women's agency (particularly with regards to food security), more analysis would be needed to determine if the project had any impact on inequitable relations or structures.

Bangladesh: Improving gender-relations to strengthen adaptive capacity

South-western Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to floods, waterlogging, and increasing salinity – all of which are exacerbated by climate change. Participatory vulnerability assessments have highlighted the particular vulnerability of women, in part due to cultural norms that limit their mobility and decision-making power. In addition to improving women's livelihood security through climate-resilient income generating strategies (such as duck rearing), CARE and partners have tackled underlying constraints on women's power. As a result of project activities, women's participation in community organisations and local government institutions has increased. Women involved in the project reported greater confidence to speak out in public and negotiate important household decisions with their husbands.



Ghana: Promoting gender-equitable structures for adaptation

In northern Ghana, CARE is working with local communities and district officials to promote the integration of climate change adaptation into participatory development planning processes. The project is supporting women to assume leadership roles in community and local government organisations by providing training and mentoring, as well as by strengthening the capacity of women's organisations to advocate for women's rights. These efforts, alongside district-level action to reduce vulnerability, are reducing systemic inequalities that prevent women from fully contributing to the resilience of their households, communities and society.



Key messages

- The inequitable distribution of rights, resources and power – as well as repressive cultural rules and norms – constrain many people’s ability to take action on climate change. This is especially true for women. Therefore, gender is a critical factor in understanding vulnerability to climate change.
- Climate change is making it even more difficult for many women to realise their basic rights, and it is worsening inequalities since they are often more vulnerable to its impacts than men. Moreover, many women are denied access to new information about climate change and participation in important decision-making processes despite having unique skills and vital knowledge to contribute. For all these reasons, and because equality is a fundamental right, CARE is incorporating gender-transformative activities, including women’s empowerment, in our approach to adaptation.
- CARE promotes an approach to adaptation that supports poor women and men to access the resources, rights and opportunities they need to deal with the impacts of climate change. Adaptation activities must reach and empower the most vulnerable people, as identified through comprehensive, participatory and gender-sensitive situational analyses.
- Gender-equal activities involve working with both men and women, as well as policy- and other decision-makers, to promote gender equality.
- CARE’s approach to adaptation is guided by our Gender Policy and Women’s Empowerment Framework. To achieve sustainable results, we address individual agency, as well as relations and structures.



For more information:

www.careclimatechange.org