



**Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptive Capacity:
Synthesis and Lessons from Ghana, Kenya and Niger.**





INTRODUCTION

Pastoralists herd camels in the arid and semi arid lands of Garissa, northern Kenya. Credit: Joseph Ndiritu/CARE-ALP 2011

Community-based adaptation (CBA) empowers vulnerable women and men and their local governments and service providers to take action to protect themselves, their livelihoods and their communities from the impacts of climate change. Effective CBA is based on a solid understanding of climate change vulnerability and adaptive capacity from the perspective of local stakeholders in the communities involved. This document provides a synthesis of analysis of climate change vulnerability and adaptive capacity conducted by the Adaptation Learning Programme (ALP) with communities and other actors in Ghana, Kenya and Niger. It draws out learning from these processes, focusing on two key dimensions: common themes across the three countries in terms of the dynamics of vulnerability and adaptive capacity; and the value of participatory analysis of climate change vulnerability and adaptive capacity as a foundation for CBA. The document also discusses the implications of the learning, providing recommendations for CBA in Africa and beyond.

Participatory analysis of climate change vulnerability and adaptive capacity: ALP's experience

Participatory analysis of climate change vulnerability and adaptive capacity is widely adopted as an essential step in analysing risks and planning for adaptation. ALP used the Climate Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis (CVCA) tool developed by CARE to engage communities, government representatives and other actors in a learning process about the risks and opportunities associated with climate change, expected changes and potential responses. The results offer insights into the dynamics of vulnerability, including differential vulnerability based on gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status or livelihood strategies. This provides a basis of evidence to inform adaptation planning processes and policy decisions that are responsive to needs, inclusive of the most vulnerable women and men and cognizant of risks and uncertainties relating to climate change impacts.

ALP aims to increase the capacity of vulnerable households in sub-Saharan Africa to adapt to climate change and variability. Since 2010, ALP has been working with communities, government institutions and civil society organizations in Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique and Niger to ensure that community-based adaptation approaches and actions are integrated in development policies and programmes. This is achieved through the demonstration and dissemination of innovative models for CBA, supported by practical tools, methodologies and evidence of impact. ALP is also working to create an enabling environment for CBA by working with civil society groups to influence national and international policy frameworks and financing mechanisms for adaptation. The programme is implemented by CARE International with financial support from UK Aid from the Department for International Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland and the Austrian Development Cooperation

As the initial step in its CBA planning process, ALP undertook participatory analysis in:

- 8 communities in Garu Tempene and East Mamprusi Districts in northern Ghana;
- 6 communities in Garissa County in northeastern Kenya;
- 20 communities in 4 communes in the Department of Dakoro in south-central Niger.

A basic overview of the areas targeted by the program is provided in Table 1.

The analysis engaged communities through a series of participatory exercises that were conducted with focus groups of women and men in a sample of communities across the project areas. The process also brought in other stakeholders, such as district, county or commune officials. Complementary information was provided by quantitative household surveys and other targeted analysis processes, including gender and adaptive capacity analyses and institutional capacity assessments. These took place over a relatively long period of time and in parallel with CBA planning processes and other CBA approaches.

Table 1: Overview of ALP Target Areas

Country	Ghana	Kenya	Niger
ALP Target Area	East Mamprusi District and Garu Tempene District	Garissa County	Department of Dakoro
Landscape	Flat, wooded grasslands with deciduous trees; shorter grasses in Garu Tempene; poor quality soils, but more fertile in Volta River basin in East Mamprusi	Flat, low-lying, dry; more fertile soils near the Tana River along western border	Flat, dense cover of prickly acacia shrubs with grasses underneath; more fertile in Tarka Valley
Primary livelihood strategy	Crop production (rice, millet, sorghum, maize) mixed with small livestock (poultry, goats and sheep) and petty trading	Nomadic pastoralism (cattle, goats, sheep, camels); agro-pastoralism (irrigated maize, bananas, tomatoes, cowpeas, green grams, mangoes, capsicum, watermelons) along the Tana River	Crop production (millet, sorghum, cowpeas) mixed with small livestock (poultry, goats and sheep)
Average temperatures	27.5°C in East Mamprusi, 28.6°C in Garu Tempene	20-38°C	19-22°C in December-February, 29-33°C in March-May
Average annual rainfall	1115 mm in East Mamprusi, 992 mm in Garu Tempene, in one season	435 mm over two seasons	360 mm in one season
Climate change projections - temperature	Increase in mean annual temperature of 1.0-3.0°C by the 2060s, up to 5.2°C by the 2090s	Increase in mean annual temperature of 1.0-2.8°C by the 2060s and up to 4.5°C by the 2090s (likely less in the northeastern part of the country)	Increase in mean annual temperature of 2.6°C by 2050
Climate change projections - rainfall	Inconclusive results for mean annual rainfall, likely decreases during January-June and increases during July-December, more heavy rainfall events	Inconclusive results: national projections suggest an increase in mean annual rainfall of up to 48% by the 2090s, while downscaled projections suggest that the northeast will receive less rainfall but in both cases, more heavy rainfall events	Inconclusive results for mean annual rainfall, likely increase in variability, more droughts and heavy rainfall events
Community observations of climate change	Increasing temperatures; more erratic rainfall; more strong winds; increasing frequency of droughts and floods	Increasing temperatures; more erratic rainfall; less rainfall overall; more frequent drought	Decrease in length of rainy season; higher intensity of rainfall; more frequent flooding; strong winds at beginning of rainy season

A comparative analysis of climate change vulnerability and adaptive capacity in Ghana, Kenya and Niger

By doing analysis with communities and other actors, ALP gained important insights into the drivers of vulnerability and change in communities, as well as the existing capacity to manage risks and work with uncertainty. Collectively, the analyses demonstrate the range of issues that determine vulnerability and adaptive capacity of different communities and different groups within communities. Key issues and particularities of the different countries, communities and groups are described below.

Exposure to climate risks varies with geographic location, meaning that priorities for adaptation may differ based on where people live and work. The ALP areas across Ghana, Kenya and Niger are all affected by droughts, and communities feel that these events are occurring more frequently, which has created strong demand for improved drought management. In Kenya's agro-pastoral zone, the presence of the Tana River provides an opportunity to access irrigation, reducing sensitivity of crop production to rainfall variability, however it also means that floods present a significant risk to communities. This is also the case in East Mamprusi in Ghana, in the Volta River basin. In Niger, strong winds and consequent sand storms and erosion are a concern due to the nature of the soils and the loss of vegetative cover. While some actions (such as improving access to financial services and strengthening early warning systems) are likely to improve resilience to all of these hazards, there is also a need for targeted responses that address specific risks (for example, flood mitigation measures and sand dune protection).

The way in which climate risks affect people depends on how they sustain their livelihoods, which determines the resources that are most important for livelihood security. In pastoral communities in Kenya and Niger, the major concern is the effects of climate shocks on livestock, notably the impact of drought on availability of water and pasture and the consequences for animal health and productivity. Crop farmers in Ghana and Niger, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with the effects on crop yields, agricultural land and farm implements. Livestock are still important, however, as they contribute social status to the household in addition to income and are viewed as a form of insurance for periods of scarcity. Across all three countries, women and men play different roles in household livelihoods, with men typically in charge of livestock or crop production and women responsible for domestic tasks such as food preparation and fetching water. These differences yield differences in both immediate needs and longer-term priorities for adaptation.

People's current responses to climate risks are also linked to their livelihood strategies. Pastoralists living in Kenya and Niger are heavily reliant on mobility to manage fluctuations in water and pasture availability. This is complemented by strategies such as herd splitting and redistribution of livestock to family or community members who have experienced losses. Further, livestock represent a valuable asset, which can be sold to meet cash needs. In the ALP areas of Ghana and Niger, where people rely much more heavily on crop production, sale of firewood or charcoal, consumption of wild foods and migration for paid labour are more common responses to scarcity resulting from erratic rainfall and drought. There are also gender differences in responses, with women more likely to reduce meals or ration water and men more likely to migrate or sell off assets. These disparities are a reflection of the power imbalance within the household, where men typically have more mobility and control over productive assets. Participatory analysis reveals these issues, which may be obscured by vulnerability analyses that focus on particular sectors or livelihood systems. Once revealed, they inform the design of subsequent CBA approaches and support to adaptation strategies.

People's adaptive capacity depends on a number of factors, including access to and use of information and services, ability to innovate to respond to evolving challenges and opportunities and degree of flexibility and foresight in decision-making. These factors are highly context-specific, as they are influenced by social, economic, political and ecological dimensions that are particular to each country and community. Each community studied demonstrated aspects of adaptive thinking and actions, be it saving cash for times of scarcity in Ghana, introducing irrigated farming in Kenya, or storage of crop residues and straw for fodder shortages in Niger. Each community also faces constraints on adaptive capacity, for example limited access to agricultural inputs and financial services in Ghana, policies that place constraints on mobility in Kenya and increasing environmental degradation in Niger. While there is more analysis to be done to ensure a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics, ALP's participatory process has revealed the key opportunities and challenges for enhancing adaptive capacity.

Change is a defining feature of recent life in Garissa County, Kenya. The pastoral community of Shant'abaq provides a snapshot of the dynamics that affect people, their livelihoods and their ability to manage risks. Community members have observed trends of warmer temperatures and drier conditions, and they are very concerned about the effects of these changes on livestock production, citing increased difficulty in finding water for their animals, reduced availability of pasture, increased animal diseases and lower productivity of livestock. In the past, the community was able to manage their livelihoods despite the harsh environment, using traditional systems of rangeland management and weather forecasting. However, in the last few decades these systems have been undermined by recurrent shocks and inappropriate development and emergency response interventions. These challenges have driven some families in Garissa to transition to a more sedentary, agro-pastoral way of life, settling in communities such as Kone along the Tana River. While these households still practice livestock rearing, they keep smaller herds and rely more heavily on crop agriculture for food and income, taking advantage of their year-round access to water from the river. While this transition has generated new opportunities, it has also exposed people to new risks and challenges. New knowledge and skills are required to maximize productivity of crops and protect them from rainfall fluctuations and drought. The river provides an important source of water for agriculture and domestic use, however proximity to this water source increases exposure to flood risks and there is a danger of conflict with livestock needs. Managing risks and changes in ways that are resilient and sustainable is a high priority for the people of Garissa, both pastoralists and agro-pastoralists.



Women's group members selling honey in Garissa, Kenya
Credit: Nicola Ward/CARE-ALP 2013

What have we learned about vulnerability and adaptive capacity?

Alongside the differences described above, several common themes emerge from analysis across the three countries that are useful to inform CBA approaches in those countries and across Africa. In most cases, these themes relate to underlying causes of vulnerability, those issues that are not directly related to climate change but have a strong influence over people's ability to manage climate risks. This means that efforts to support adaptation will only be effective if they address these underlying issues while also directly confronting climate risks.

Limited buffers against shocks and stresses

Across the ALP areas, it is painfully clear that the most vulnerable people are living very close to the edge, with limited buffers to enable them to withstand shocks and stresses to their livelihoods. Many of the ways people are currently responding to climate risks represent short-term coping strategies, which may undermine longer-term adaptive capacity by eroding the household asset base and negatively affecting ecosystem health. Traditional risk management systems employed by pastoralists are becoming less viable as people have fewer livestock to rely on and mobility is constrained by land use change, governance issues and conflict. People are increasingly indebted and struggle to earn income from

agricultural activities, either due to limited production or to challenges in market access and investment capital. In short, people are facing more frequent shocks and have fewer resources with which to manage them.

Crisis-driven decision-making

With few exceptions, households in ALP target areas base their livelihoods on a dynamic mix of crop production, livestock rearing and off-farm activities, including wage labour and petty trade. The relative importance of different strategies varies based on the ecological context, as demonstrated in Table 1. It also varies over time based on availability of resources and in response to shocks and stresses. When people have different options available to them, it can contribute to their resilience, as they are able to invest more or less in particular strategies based on factors such as expected rainfall or market prices. However, the analyses show that decisions around livelihood investments and transitions are not necessarily taken in an informed way, and in many cases are driven by crisis. Ultimately, this may lead to increased vulnerability. With increasing climate change, combined with other pressures, there is a need to help people manage extremes, change and uncertainty in their livelihoods in ways that build resilience and enable adaptation over time.

Linkages between climate change and natural resource degradation

In each context, there are strong linkages between climate change and degradation of natural resources. Climate change is just one pressure on natural resources, occurring alongside population growth, land use changes and poor management of infrastructure. Climate impacts interact with other environmental challenges, for example in Niger, where deforestation and overgrazing have caused widespread land degradation, which is exacerbated by heavy rainfall events and wind erosion. At the same time, responses to climate impacts may have detrimental effects on natural resources. Examples include sale of firewood and charcoal, widely practiced in Niger, Kenya and Ghana when other strategies fail. Traditional livestock grazing systems, which maximized productivity while maintaining the ecological balance, have been undermined by unhelpful policies, conflict and increased pressure on land resources. Given the reliance on agriculture in ALP target areas, the question of sustainable management of natural resources is critical for sustainability and resilience of livelihoods.

Differential vulnerability based on gender

While there are differences based on the religious, ethnic and livelihood contexts, the theme of differential vulnerability based on gender cuts across all of the target areas. In each of the ALP target areas, there are strongly defined gender roles, with livelihood responsibilities clearly divided between women and men. This means that climate risks are experienced differently by women and men. For example, given women's responsibilities in securing water for household use, they may be more concerned by impacts of erratic rainfall on water availability near the home, while men, with predominant responsibility for livestock, may be more concerned with impacts on the quality of pasture and animal health. The options available to people to manage climate risks also differ based on gender, with women often facing barriers that are not faced by their male counterparts. These differences mean that adaptation needs and priorities will also differ, requiring attention to gender in efforts to facilitate adaptation.

Governance and institutional capacity

The enabling environment for CBA depends on the quality of governance and the level of capacity and coordination among local institutions. Community-based organizations such as women's groups, water user associations and health committees are viewed as an important resource at community level, however their capacity to support adaptation is limited by poor planning and coordination, under-representation of vulnerable groups and limited resources to implement priority actions. Local governments are aware of the issues and keen to engage on adaptation-related issues, but they struggle to access relevant information to inform planning, much less resources to implement identified actions. Traditional institutions are important actors across the three countries, yet they are increasingly marginalized by modern governance systems and struggle to remain relevant to their constituent communities alongside changes in aspirations, perceptions and access to new communication technologies and information. While each country is at a different stage in developing national plans and strategies for adaptation, and access to finance for implementation of these plans remains a challenge, there is potential for increased support for communities in the coming years and those that are organized are most likely to benefit.

In the Department of Dakoro in Niger, gender roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Generally, both women and men believe that domestic tasks are women's domain and that economic activities are men's responsibility. Girls are often taken out of school at an early age, either to help out around the house or to be married, and as a result are less educated than their male counterparts and are burdened with child bearing and parental responsibilities at a very young age. Combined with religious and cultural norms and inheritance practices, this leads to reduced mobility for women and power imbalances in decision-making and access to resources. All of this has implications for vulnerability to climate change: women and men experience the impacts differently, and they have differing options available to them to respond. There is some evidence that this is changing, with some men beginning to help out with domestic tasks and women becoming more involved in economic activities, however these changes have not necessarily led to increased decision-making power for women and may ultimately reduce their control over their traditional domains. While there are differences in gender dynamics based on ethnicity and livelihoods group, ALP's analysis in Dakoro has found that women, particularly those who are widowed, divorced or young and unmarried, tend to have lower adaptive capacity because they are disadvantaged in terms of mobility, control over resources and access to information and opportunities.



Farmer displaying his millet harvest from improved seeds in Na Allah community, Dakoro, Niger. Credit: CARE/ALP 2011

What are the implications for strengthening resilience and enhancing adaptive capacity?

The analysis of common themes, as well as the particular issues facing different ALP communities, leads to a few key recommendations for the longer process of facilitating effective community-based adaptation in Ghana, Kenya, Niger and beyond:

Incorporate participatory analysis of vulnerability and adaptive capacity as a fundamental component of CBA processes.

To be successful, adaptation efforts must build on what already exists in communities, which requires a comprehensive understanding of present capacities and the drivers of vulnerability and change. Without this, efforts to support adaptation may be ineffective, inappropriate or inequitable. Participatory processes that are inclusive of different groups and interests are the most likely way to avoid these negative outcomes and maximize benefits for vulnerable women and men and the institutions that support them. Further, participatory analysis processes have been shown to

catalyze locally-driven action by empowering local stakeholders with new knowledge and information that is relevant and addresses context-specific needs and priorities. Participatory processes also reveal important issues that may require further investigation, for example the costs and benefits of migration or other strategies as a response to climate risks and the social and cultural barriers to adaptive decision-making.

Address immediate needs while building adaptive capacity for the future.

For people already grappling with poverty and food insecurity, climate change is just one more challenge to their efforts to improve their livelihoods. It is already difficult to imagine the future and plan for the longer term in the face of climate uncertainty, and even more difficult when immediate needs are not being met. Adaptation efforts must therefore work with stakeholders to identify and address urgent priorities, such as access to drought-resistant seed varieties or the creation of cereal or fodder banks, in order to create a foundation for longer-term adaptation processes. ALP's experience with implementing 'quick win' activities demonstrates the value of this approach, as it was found to create momentum and motivation among community members and other actors to engage with the development of Community Adaptation Action Plans, Participatory Scenario Planning processes and other actions designed to build adaptive capacity for the future.

Support informed and empowered decision-making at the local level.

Flexible and forward-looking decision-making is critical for adaptation. The analyses of vulnerability and adaptive capacity demonstrate the challenges people face in dealing with increasing risk and uncertainty in their livelihoods. To support them in engaging in adaptive decision-making and planning processes, access to climate information is critical. In the ALP approach, climate information comprises information about past, present and future climate conditions, from both local and scientific sources. It also includes information about the effects of these conditions on development, livelihoods and the environment. With access to climate information, people are in a much better position to evaluate risks, weigh options and make decisions on how and when to invest their resources and apply different strategies to protect their livelihoods.

Promote an integrated approach to climate change adaptation and natural resource management.

In rural areas of Ghana, Kenya and Niger, people's ability to improve, sustain and manage risks to their livelihoods is heavily dependent on the quality and availability of natural resources such as farmland, pasture and water. Sustainable management of natural resources is therefore fundamental to strengthening resilience to shocks and stresses and enabling adaptation over time. This may involve a number of different approaches, for example: supporting people with livelihood alternatives that do not place further pressure on the natural resource base; developing capacity of local stakeholders to engage in land use planning and management, including negotiation of conflicts among different resource users; or implementing measures to protect and restore natural resources, such as pasture regeneration or tree planting. While these actions may not directly confront climate risks, they are critical to improve the viability and sustainability of rural livelihoods in the face of climate change.

Ensure adaptation approaches and processes are gender-equitable.

For adaptation efforts to be effective and have a sustainable impact on the resilience of families and communities, they must be gender-equitable. Gender-equitable approaches are grounded in a solid understanding of how gender-based roles, norms and entitlements influence vulnerability and adaptive capacity. With this understanding, adaptation actors can design approaches and facilitate processes in ways that are tailored to the needs and priorities of both women and men, that tackle inequalities that exacerbate vulnerability and limit adaptive capacity and that are empowering to all members of the community, including women, youth and more socially marginalized groups. This is the best way to ensure that adaptation efforts do not exacerbate existing inequalities and thereby undermine the resilience of the family and community.

Strengthen local governance systems and institutions to create an enabling environment for CBA.

Climate change adaptation requires action by a wide range of actors at different levels. At the local level, CBA processes will be most effective if they involve not just communities, but also representatives of local government institutions, civil society organizations active in the area and private sector actors that may have a role in facilitating options for adaptation. Building capacity of these actors to analyze climate risks and engage in adaptive decision-making and planning will also increase their abilities to support communities in taking action on adaptation. Local institutions are also critical intermediaries between communities and broader systems and processes, acting as a conduit for information flow in both directions and bringing local concerns and priorities to higher-level decision-making on policies and resource allocation related to adaptation.



Women's group farm in Kugri, Ghana. Credit: Fiona Percy/CARE-ALP 2011

In Ghana, ALP engaged government institutions at the district and national level in dialogue on opportunities and constraints for CBA. The National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) guidelines from the central government require that District Annual Plans (DAPs) be 'climate-friendly', demonstrating awareness of the need for action on adaptation at the local level. In Garu Tempane and East Mamprusi districts where ALP is already working, officials have gone even further by explicitly integrating adaptive actions identified by communities in their plans. While capacity and resources to implement the DAPs remain a challenge, this represents an important step in the CBA process.



CONCLUSIONS

Women's group savings and loans members trading in Garissa, Kenya. Credit: Tamara Plush/CARE 2011

As the impacts of climate change become increasingly apparent, the imperative for action on adaptation is stronger and stronger. ALP's experience with CVCA analysis in three countries, across different livelihood contexts, demonstrates the value of participatory analysis of climate change vulnerability and adaptive capacity as a foundation for this action. ALP's analysis has revealed that people whose lives depend on dryland resources in Ghana, Kenya and Niger are vulnerable to climate-related hazards, which are increasing, and to more subtle changes in temperatures and rainfall patterns. These changes, and the associated uncertainty, make adaptation a priority for the communities and other stakeholders involved.

People's vulnerability to climate risks is shaped by gender and socio-economic status; by access to information, resources and services; and by the systems of governance and institutions that influence the opportunities and benefits women and men have to secure their livelihoods, increase their resilience and strengthen their adaptive capacity. Comparison of CVCA findings shows that these factors vary across countries, communities and groups within communities, differences that are only revealed through context-specific analysis that is participatory and inclusive of diverse voices. Effective CBA responds to these differences and is built on a basis of understanding the dynamics of risk and change in communities. This enables an approach that addresses immediate priorities while also building capacity for longer-term adaptation. If facilitated appropriately, the analysis process can also represent an initial step in building adaptive capacity of local stakeholders.

Further Reading and References

For the full CVCA reports from Ghana, Kenya and Niger, please see:

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About this brief

This brief provides a synthesis of findings from climate change vulnerability and capacity analyses (CVCA) conducted by the Adaptation Learning Programme (ALP) with communities and other actors in Ghana, Kenya and Niger. It draws out learning from these processes in relation to the dynamics of vulnerability and adaptive capacity and the value of participatory analysis as the foundation for CBA. It also discusses the implications of the learning, providing recommendations for CBA in Africa and beyond.

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Cover image

Dry season farming in Tariganga, Ghana. Credit: Nicola Ward/CARE-ALP 2015

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