

Increasing women's agency in Timor-Leste

Between July 2012 and March 2015, CARE implemented a community-based adaptation project in Timor-Leste's Liquiça district. The 'Mudansa Klimatica iha Ambiente Seguru (MAKA'AS)' project aimed to enhance access to safe drinking water, improve sanitation, promote climate-resilient livelihoods and reduce landslides and erosion.

At the beginning of the project, a gender and power analysis was undertaken to better understand the gender dynamics in the project area and to inform project activities. The analysis also considered CARE's Gender Equality Framework and the three domains of change (agency, structure and relations). As a result, the project supported different approaches to promote more gender-equitable social relations. These included: a) the integration of women into activities of target groups; b) the introduction of a women's quota in (leadership positions of) water management groups; and c) the promotion of gender equality through trainings and awareness raising.

Berta is one woman who has benefitted from the project's focus on gender equality. She became involved when she heard that the project was establishing farmer's groups and running training on home gardens. "I was in the village when I heard one day that CARE was asking for community members to give their names to participate in the farmer's groups and so I gave my name and became part of the group. The group thought I was a hard worker and asked me to be the group leader. I was very happy".

"Through the home gardens we are now able to produce enough vegetables for our families to eat but also to sell at the local market".

Since CARE delivered training in home-gardening techniques Berta has seen many changes in both her own life and the lives of group members. "Through the home gardens we are now able to produce enough vegetables for our families to eat but also to sell at the local market". Being able to sell produce at the local market has meant that Berta and others in the group have started to invest in the future. "With the money from selling vegetables the women in our group have been able to pay children's school fees and make improvements to their houses. I also recently bought some pigs which I plan to raise and then sell the piglets at the main market".

The changes have also been personal for Berta. "I have enjoyed learning new things through CARE's program – group members support me to participate in the trainings and they depend



Berta is proud to be part of the farmer's group, as she uses knowledge gained to help others.
Credit: CARE.

on me to bring that knowledge and share it with them - I am proud that I can contribute to our group this way”.

Although Berta’s group has lost close to half its members since it formed, Berta is confident that she has a strong Farmers’ Group. “I am really happy because I have a strong group of women who all work together. We work in the home garden together – even though we have different plots we all share the work such as collecting bamboo for fencing. We have a sense of unity”. It’s this sense of unity and confidence that has led Berta to try new technologies on behalf of her group. For example, in partnership with CARE, Berta recently built and trialed a fuel efficient stove in her outdoor kitchen. “Before this stove I would spend a large part of my day collecting bundles of firewood for cooking and boiling water – one whole bundle would only last me for one day. Now using this stove there has been a big change – one bundle will last me for a whole week. I have much more time now to work in our home-garden and look after the children”. When asked why she was willing to try a new technology, Berta said, “I have seen what is possible through the home-gardens and I want to be a part of that change”.

“I am happy because I have a strong group of women who all work together. We work in the home garden together – even though we have different plots we all share the work in preparing the land”.

Drawing on existing partnerships and relationships with WaterAid and other technical partners, the project has also been able to foster cross-learning between partners, which has led to greater gender equality. The partnership between CARE and WaterAid has brought significant expertise in their approaches to gender transformative programming. And along with technical expertise provided by the International Women’s Development Agency, it has been able to build the capacity of staff and local partners to facilitate gender dialogue as part of community



Building the capacity of women and men in vulnerable households has increased access to food and water, improving land and water management. Credit: CARE

water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) mobilisation processes with women and men in communities. As a result, 43 per cent of Water Management Group members were women and 50 per cent of leadership positions were held by women.

Through CARE's agricultural and livelihoods work, the project also supported mixed, as well as female-only farmers groups. This provided a space and opportunity to build women's voice, confidence and capacities to meaningfully participate in community-based adaptation (CBA) planning and management processes.

Success factors for enhancing resilience through gender equality

- A dedicated and competent management team that promotes a sustained focus on gender equality and women's voice
- Committed national staff who were keen to learn about and support gender equality and women's voice
- Use of community-based adaptation and disaster risk reduction as an entry point to address gender equality
- Targeting both women and men in gender and leadership training
- Conducting a gender and power analysis to better understanding issues facing women
- Giving careful attention to gendered power imbalances in decision-making and women's workload
- Consistent efforts by field officers to encourage the attendance and active participation of women in project activities
- Separate focus groups discussions for women and men in project activities and participatory activities.

Glossary

COMMUNITY-BASED ADAPTATION: CBA is an integrated approach, combining traditional knowledge with innovative strategies that not only address current vulnerability to climate change, but also build the resilience of people to face new and dynamic challenges.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: DRR is a systematic approach that analyses and manages the causal factors of disasters through: reduced exposure to hazards, reduced vulnerability of people and assets, wise management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events.

GENDER: Attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex.

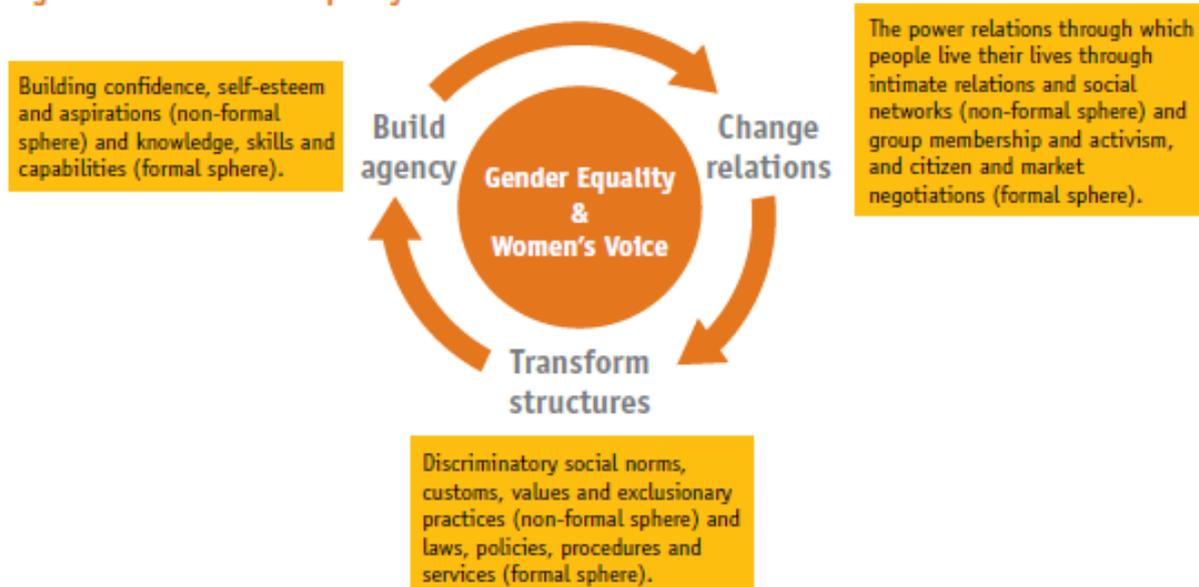
GENDER EQUALITY: The equal enjoyment by women, girls, boys and men of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards.

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This case study was written by Charlotte L. Sterrett and is one of a series of cases studies based on learning from CARE Australia’s disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation programming in the Asia Pacific region in 2011-2015.

The purpose of these case studies is to highlight and provide examples of the practical use of CARE’s Gender Equality Framework in resilience-related programming.

Figure 1: CARE’s Gender Equality Framework



¹ The 'Climate Change in a Secure Environment' project.