

Women as drivers of change in Papua New Guinea¹

Between July 2012 and June 2015, CARE implemented a community-based adaptation project in Papua New Guinea's Nissan district – the remote atoll islands of Nissan and Pinepel, home to approximately 7,500 people. The project supported communities to increase their resilience to climate change through food and nutrition security, while reducing disaster risk and building adaptive capacity.

Nissan culture is traditionally male dominated, with limited participation of women in decision-making and clearly defined roles for women and men. To increase gender equality and women's voice, CARE formed community groups that were women-centred, and included training in gender equality to raise awareness amongst women and men of the importance of gender equality to community resilience, and to encourage men and women to participate equally. As a result of CARE's training and support to groups, women and young people are playing a central role in the community-led groups, which support community members to learn about and practice risk reduction techniques.

The community-led groups were devised as a model to promote the adoption of risk reduction techniques within targeted communities. Each community group member – consisting of 20-30 members of equal genders – learned about the fundamental elements of climate change and adaptation and were trained in various conservation farming techniques and nutrition, as well as key gender equality issues and basic principles of disaster risk reduction. Thus equipped, they passed on the new knowledge to fellow villagers and led by example.

Joyceanne Bonnie (Vice-President of the Pinepel Women's group) was one of the first people on the islands to drive the formation of an island-wide community-led group. From her village of Rogos, "it is a long way to walk to the other villages." But together with others, she "picked up all the people who were interested" - from all three villages on the island.



Joyceanne looks at the sky. "For many years, we have often wondered 'this is a really long drought'. It was only when CARE came to Pinepel that we understood what was happening: climate change."

Using the knowledge and skills gained as part of the project, Joyceanne and other group members set up an island

nursery - here, the members learned and practiced techniques such as mulching and "big hills" (a technique that keeps soil moist for longer), and nurtured the seedlings needed to set up

kitchen gardens. She adopted these techniques herself, stressing “it has made my life better.” And she told others about the good results, encouraging them to follow suit. “Today, almost everybody has a kitchen garden and uses mulch”, she says with a wide smile.

“Being in the group has let me learn so many new things. It has let me help my community and I see things are improving now.”

For her, the most significant change is the greater availability of water that came as CARE set up rainwater harvesting tanks across Pinepal. Yet, the droughts and the training have taught her to be water-wise. “We work together to make sure people do not waste water”, Joyceanne points out.



Members of a women-centred farmer to farmer group proudly show off their agricultural produce at a World Food Day Exposition held at Nissan District High School. Credit: CARE

The community-led groups are a strong mechanism for exchanging experiences, as it emerged that group members advise each other on their experiences in using climate-resilient practices. This strong sense of ownership provides a solid foundation for sustained mutual learning within the community. These groups are also likely to sustain as they are not reliant on any one individual, an approach that allowed the project’s activities to be self-replicated across the island and ensured that, while direct training by CARE could only be delivered to approximately 150 people, the benefits of the project were disseminated and enjoyed island-wide.

As a result of the work of the community-led groups and the project more broadly, there has been a significant and measurable increase in gender equality within Nissan District, including improvements in:

- Women’s agency (confidence, self-esteem, knowledge and skills);
- Women’s relations in the community (involvement in formal and non-formal decision making groups such as the community groups and village decision making processes);
- How the community is structured (women are increasingly being seen as leaders in their community).

This has helped reduce women's workloads (through the introduction of kitchen garden and energy-efficient cooking stoves), increase their access to resources (climate-resilient livelihoods), and has changed men's perceptions of them, so that they are increasingly seen as leaders and decision-makers. As a result, women and men are increasingly working together and making decisions jointly.

“More than three-quarters of households across the islands are practicing home gardening; up from just over a third prior to the project. Communities now have more food to eat, and a great variety to choose from.”

Focus group discussions and surveys conducted during the independent evaluation showed that as a result of CARE's gender training and gender mainstreaming efforts throughout the project, women's participation in community activities has significantly increased and women have greater decision-making power within their household and community. Three-quarters of respondents said these changes were mainly due to the project. A key factor contributing to this change was that women were the main drivers in community-led groups, which led to them earning a higher status, respect and knowledge advantage within their community.

Success factors for enhancing resilience through gender equality

- A dedicated and competent management team that promoted a sustained focus on gender equality and women's empowerment
- Committed national staff who were keen to learn about and support gender equality and women's empowerment
- Use of community-based adaptation and disaster risk reduction as an entry point to address gender equality
- Ensuring equal membership of community groups by women and men
- Targeting both women and men in gender and leadership training
- Consistent efforts by field officers to encourage the attendance and active participation of women in project activities
- Separate focus group 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.

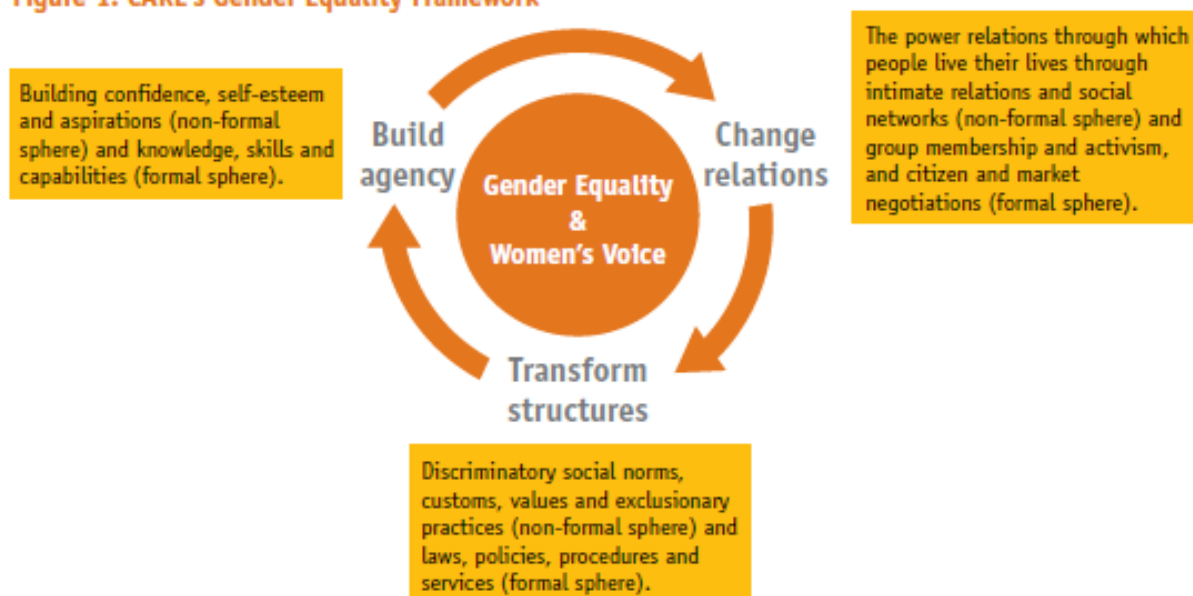
GENDER EQUALITY: The equal enjoyment by women, girls, boys and men of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards.

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This case study was written by Charlotte L. Sterrett and is one of a series of case studies based on learning from CARE Australia’s disaster risk reduction and community-based 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 This case study is based on the end of program evaluation report written by: Patrick Bolte (2015) *The adapting atolls: Final evaluation of the project "Community-based adaptation to climate change in Nissan District, Papua New Guinea*, CARE Australia.