

# Gender equality essential to confront climate change impacts

by Sven Harmeling and Emma Bowa

Involving men and women equally in decision-making processes results in more sustainable climate action. CARE's community-based projects prove that through capacity-building efforts, men and women can play complementary roles.

## Climate change exacerbates injustice and gender inequality

Climate change and climate variability threaten the livelihoods of billions of people, while further exacerbating the world's greatest inequalities. People living in poverty, who are the least responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, bear the brunt of climate change impacts. The UNFCCC recognises that women commonly face higher risks and greater burdens from climate change impacts in situations of poverty. In addition, the majority of the world's poor are women; that means that women must play a critical role in addressing climate change.

Climate action should therefore seek to reduce, if not eliminate, inequalities. In CARE's view, climate action needs to tackle differential vulnerability, including gender inequality and contribute to promoting, respecting and fulfilling all human rights. This should happen in addition to undertaking ambitious mitigation action to limit global warming to 1.5 degrees and scaling-up adaptation action. The severity of disasters does not depend only on the magnitude of the event, but also on the socio-economic and political conditions of the affected populations.

## Women as change agents

While general gender gaps can be quantified, gender norms and relations

are very context-specific. Involving men and women equally in decision-making processes brings many rewards. Not only are they able to share their perspectives with each other, but their joint participation in climate change mitigation and adaptation planning also results in more sustainable resilience building.

Through the Adaptation Learning Programme (ALP), for example, CARE has improved the participation of women in adaptation planning and budgeting at the community and local government levels, leading to improved relations between men and women in decision-making processes on climate change adaptation. The improvement is due to a combination of both advocacy and capacity building efforts. In addition to the increasing number of women in decision making processes, the women are able to participate more actively and meaningfully in the processes, because their capacity on adaptation planning, disaster risk management, managing uncertainty and equality has increased through ALP. The models and approaches used in ALP encourage gender responsiveness to ensure increased interactions and engagement between and amongst men and women for more effective resilience strategies and outcomes.

For example, in ALP sites in Garissa, Kenya, during seasonal adaptation planning processes informed by climate information, the men consult the women regarding markets and prices before making decisions on what to plant. This is because women are more involved in trade, while the men are engaged in pastoralist and agro-pastoralist activities. Following advisories from these seasonal adaptation planning forums, some families reported that they are doing more joint decision-making at the household level, because women now have increased income due to their involvement in group savings and loans groups, and their increased access to early warning information. The women reported that they are now able to make decisions to set aside money for buying vaccines for animals or water during anticipated dry spells, instead of having to wait for external support.

## CARE's approach to resilience, development and climate action

The CARE 2020 Program Strategy sets out a vision to fight inequality to overcome the poverty injustice. The strategy has three priorities: increasing resilience, strengthening gender equality and women's voices, and promoting inclusive governance. CARE is convinced that the underlying causes of poverty and social injustice include



Climate Smart Kenya. Photo: C.Schubert/Flickr

gender inequality, poor governance, and vulnerability to shocks that arise from factors such as climate change. Therefore, CARE aims to strengthen poor people's capacities to anticipate, absorb, adapt and transform in the face of uncertainty, shocks, risks and opportunities that come along with climate change.

CARE seeks to identify the drivers of change, adaptive capacity and the changing dynamics among men and women in communities. As climate change impacts are starting to be felt, men and women are changing livelihoods strategies - which requires innovations and risk-taking. This creates new spaces for women and men to engage differently, which in turn alters the expectations and perceptions of their role.

### Engaging in governance and policy influence

The UNFCCC recognises the importance of involving women and men equally in international climate change negotiations as well as in policy processes at

the national level. Within the Paris Agreement, 'Parties acknowledge that adaptation should follow a country-driven, gender-responsive, participatory and fully transparent approach.' The Paris Agreement is going to be implemented at the regional, national and local levels through more localised strategy and policy documents, including National Adaptation Plans and Nationally Determined Contributions at the country level.

CARE engages directly in these processes at the national level to ensure gender responsive planning and budgeting. It also works towards strengthening the technical capacity of women to ensure a stronger level playing field in negotiations and decision-making processes. ■

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