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Info Note

Identifying Pathways for More Gender-Sensitive Communication Channels in Climate Services

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Key messages

- Inequalities in access to peer groups and networks, access to ICT and media, literacy, and schooling can impede access of rural women to climate services.
- Understanding the context-specific communication channels that work for rural women can reduce these impediments.
- Using women's groups and trained female communicators may circumvent obstacles to accessing services through other formal groups.
- Adapting media- and ICT-based climate communication to women's schedules and livelihood objectives reduces access barriers.
- Gender-focused local organizations may be effective partners in developing gender-sensitive climate service communication channels.

Access to accurate and useful climate-related information is a prerequisite for smallholder farmers to use and benefit from climate services with respect to both agricultural and livelihood decision-making. Whether or not farmers access particular climate-related information products is determined by the types of information products that the national meteorological service and other providers make available, by access to the communication channels used to disseminate information, and by demand for the information. Gender-based factors can influence differing access to communication channels for women and men. Based on a review of the literature (Gumucio et al., 2018), this brief highlights key challenges to achieving socially inclusive access to weather and climate information, and presents promising pathways for developing gender-sensitive communication channels in climate services. It is important to highlight that women and men do not constitute homogeneous groups, even within the same community. Due to differences of ethnicity, life-stage, and other socio-economic aspects, women and men can experience differing levels of power and privilege, and approaches developed must keep this in mind.

Barriers to group processes

Social groups, networks (on varying levels), and group-based approaches can enable the dissemination of critical climate knowledge. Nonetheless, membership requirements that disadvantage women can limit their participation in key groups wherein agro-climatic information is shared such as farmers' organizations and cooperatives. Sociocultural norms that limit women's extra-communal mobility and public interactions between women and men can also restrict women's access to agro-climatic trainings and extension services. Notwithstanding these restrictions, community-based and female-dominated groups and networks can be important means by which women access weather and climate information. Further, women are likely to trust information that comes from familiar sources and/or at locations they commonly frequent such as prayer meetings and water boreholes.

Differing access to media and ICTs

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are useful for communicating climate and agricultural information directly to farmers, particularly information concerning shorter timescales associated with weather. Women and men can differ in their access to and control of ICTs due to the fact that women are less likely to own ICTs, often because of a lack of financial resources. Even with access, gaps in schooling and literacy (both technical and otherwise) can result in less proficient use. While radio programming is used with increasing regularity in climate services to address these constraints, multiple studies have found that childcare and household duties can potentially hinder women's ability to listen to radio programs. Notwithstanding these challenges to access, in some situations women report that cell phones are a highly useful tool for receiving information. Furthermore, women may be more likely to share phones with others and/or rely on friends and family to provide access to such communication tools.

Educational limitations

Gender differences in literacy and level of schooling influence how climate information is understood and interpreted among women and men. The degree of technical and probabilistic information that comprises forecasts and climate data and the formats commonly used to present the information can present challenges to both comprehension and accessibility. As a result, men can be better prepared to interpret seasonal forecasting, while women may encounter difficulties (Kyazze et al., 2012). Similarly, it can be challenging for women to access agro-climatic information transmitted via SMS due to literacy challenges (Caine et al., 2015); voice messaging can be more accessible to women.

Promising pathways for gender-sensitive delivery of climate information

While research on gender and access to rural climate services is still limited, a review of the data available highlights several pathways forward to develop gender-sensitive communication channels.

Identify context-specific communication channels for socially inclusive delivery. Climate service practitioners should identify an assortment of communication channels that suit the varied needs of local women and men farmers. For example, a case study in Kaffrine, Senegal, used mixed methods research to find that women farmers prefer early warning messages delivered via SMS messaging, village meteorological blackboards, and rural radios, at specific locations (such as the local water borehole) as well as from specific community individuals with influence and reach (Tall et al., 2014). By identifying gender-specific needs and barriers to access, practitioners can ensure more inclusive and effective climate information delivery.

Utilize women's groups to boost information-sharing. The use of women's groups as a communication channel can address institutional biases and gender-based differences in access to group processes that limit women's access to technical information, training and support. Furthermore, women "communicators" and more gender-sensitive techniques in group processes can facilitate women's access to climate information. A study from the Indian state of Tamil Nadu demonstrated the effectiveness of using women's groups as "knowledge providers" of climate information. In one town, women-managed Village Knowledge Centers (VKC), served as intermediaries between women farmers and the formal institutions that would otherwise exclude or overlook them in the dissemination of agro-advisories. Women farmers were more likely to approach the VKC for information and services because of its accessible location and because it was managed by women who were familiar to them (Rengalakshmi et al 2018).

Develop media and ICT-based channels tailored to women's needs. When using ICTs to disseminate climate information, project planners need to acknowledge the methods and circumstances by which women access information using such technology. For women to consider such ICT-based climate services useful, the services must align with women's livelihood objectives and include time-saving mechanisms. An evaluation of an intervention in Tanzania identified one suggestion for improvement: multiple radio broadcastings of weather and climate information throughout the day can increase the likelihood of women being able to hear them (CICERO, 2017).

Ruby Mehla, a young woman living in the Indian village of Anjanthalli, receives regular updates on weather and climate-smart practices via voicemail messages on her mobile phone. She is a participant in the Climate Smart Village (CSV) project. Photo: Prashanth Vishwanathan (CCAFS)

Partner with gender-sensitive local organizations. Climate services providers can partner with local organizations to engage with existing sociocultural norms around gender roles and behaviors. This can be important because increasing women's access to male-dominated groups and environments may depend upon significant

changes in social processes and shifts in power dynamics at different levels (e.g., household and community). Local groups and organizations can assist with facilitating access to extension services and training by those currently excluded from such services in their communities. For example, community listeners' clubs, a program first piloted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)-Dimitra project to encourage more gender-inclusive communication and development in Niger and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FAO-Dimitra, 2011), demonstrates the potential for change offered by this kind of approach. After receiving information through radio programs, participants identify major concerns and develop goals. The group leader, a woman whenever possible, receives specialized training and facilitates the discussion while local radio stations publicize the debates. This initiative has demonstrated a positive impact on existing behaviors, practices, and perceptions related to women's roles in the community. A similar approach could be utilized in the general distribution of climate information to promote inclusivity, identify the types of information desired by members of the community, and facilitate access to resources (e.g., information and training).

Monitor, evaluate and adapt. Recognizing that women experience differing constraints, it will be paramount to monitor, evaluate and adapt approaches over the course of an intervention to ensure that communication channels being used meet the needs of all women in the service area. For example, a women's group may not be accessible to all women, due to differences in wealth, status, and other factors. Furthermore, an individual's preferences and capacities can change over time. For this reason, it is important to make sure that diverse channels accessible to varying types of women are consistently included.

Conclusions

Gender-based differences in schooling received and in access to communication channels result in women and men experiencing differing access to critical weather and climate information, often to women's disadvantage. Recommendations to address these issues focus on identifying context- and gender-specific needs and fostering local connections to establish enhanced communication channels. While differences in capacities to act on weather and climate information require critical consideration as well, addressing gender-based challenges to accessing communication channels can be a key step to achieving gender-responsive climate services.

Further Reading

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