

GENDER AND ADAPTATION IN AGRARIAN SETTINGS



Photo credit: Edward R. Carr; Kenieroba, Mali.

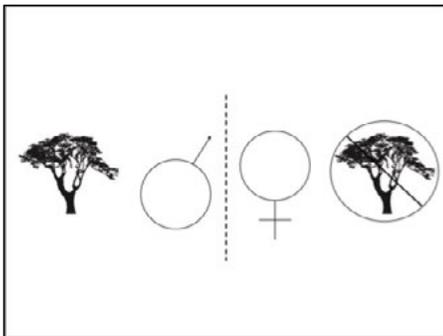


Figure 1

The vast majority of work on gender and climate change adaptation treats gender as a simple either/or binary with men on one side and women on the other. This report, however, illustrates that approaching gender analysis through such a binary approach alone is out of step with the current state of knowledge on gender and adaptation. Further, using empirical evidence drawn from field research in rural agricultural settings in Ghana, Mali, and Malawi, the report demonstrates the challenges that binary gender analyses have in properly identifying (and therefore addressing) the problems vulnerable populations are facing. Instead, the research in this report suggests that adaptation interventions would benefit from a more nuanced approach to gender that examines how gender identity intersects with other social identities, such as age, livelihood/class, and ethnicity to produce vulnerabilities to climate variability and change.

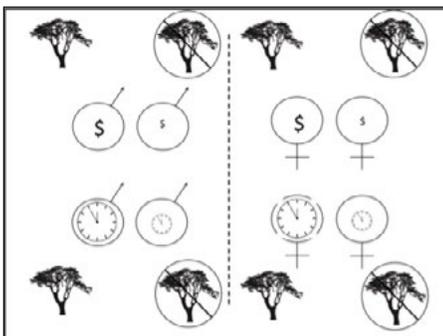


Figure 2

Binary gender approaches, which are commonly employed by USAID and other development organizations for gender, tend to treat both men and women as homogenous groups, and assume that women are generally subservient to/less powerful than men. Such assumptions tend to overgeneralize about the opportunities and challenges that men and women face with regard to the impacts of climate variability and change. This leads to the report's first major finding: when we disaggregate these binary gender categories by other relevant identity categories (such as age/seniority, ethnicity, or livelihoods/class), we find that challenges and opportunities occur in much more complex patterns than captured by gender alone.

In Figure 1, we see a hypothetical agricultural system in which it appears from a simple, binary gender analysis that men control tree crops because they cultivate such crops in much greater numbers than women. Tree crops are often more resilient in the face of climate variability and change than rain-fed staple crops, and therefore this might appear to show that women are more climate-vulnerable than men in this case. However, when we consider the intersection of gender with other aspects of identity, the control of tree crops becomes a more complex story (Figure 2). In this example, the actual control of tree crops, while influenced by gender, is more heavily shaped by an individual's seniority and income. Thus,



Selenkegny, Mali
Photo credit: Edward R. Carr; Society, Environment, Economy Group, LLC, and University of South Carolina
In the village of Selenkegny, approximately 50km southwest of Bamako, Mali, a group of men discuss their livelihoods calendars.

access to a climate-resilient resource that can reduce vulnerability is determined in complex ways that, in the absence of information on seniority and income, are impossible to discern.

Figure 2 also illustrates the second major finding of the report: gender should not be assumed to be an isolated, or even primary, cause of vulnerability. In this example, there are men who lack access to tree crops, and women who enjoy access to tree crops. Thus, gender is just one of several factors shaping the vulnerability of individuals to climate variability. Further, the right side of Figure 2 illustrates the report's third major finding, that women should not be assumed to be either a homogenous category or the most vulnerable. In short, **vulnerability to climate variability and change is shaped by the intersection of gender and other identities.**

The final major finding of the report is that there are distinct and differentiated vulnerabilities to the impacts of climate variability and change. A **distinct vulnerability** is one that emerges from exposure to different stressors: for example, in the report's Ghana case study, married women gain access to farmland through their husbands, while women headed households have no direct access to land. Therefore, women headed households experience distinct (different) vulnerabilities. A binary gender analysis would likely identify distinct vulnerabilities.

Differentiated vulnerabilities are those where individuals in the community have different sensitivities to the same stress and/or different means of addressing that exposure (i.e., adaptive capacity). In the Mali case study, there were instances where women conducted irrigated gardening, while their husbands focused on cultivating rain-fed staple crops, such as millet. While these men and women lived under the same climatic conditions, women's access to management tools, such as hand irrigation, greatly limited the impacts of climate variability on their agricultural activities. Their husbands' tools for managing climate variability include altering crop and variety selection, but their agricultural activities are fundamentally dependent on variable and uncontrollable rainfall. While both men and women are exposed to the same climate variability, they have differentiated means of addressing its impacts on their agricultural production.

Both distinct and differentiated vulnerabilities are possible outcomes of any impact of climate variability and change. Both types of vulnerabilities are important shapers of livelihoods decisions and outcomes. However, binary gender analysis tends to identify distinct vulnerabilities, while missing subtler, but often equally important, differentiated vulnerabilities in a particular place. Not fully understanding all aspects of vulnerability is likely to lead to adaptation interventions that fail to appropriately address vulnerability, don't deliver the maximum possible benefits, and may even leave some members of society worse off.

PUTTING THESE FINDINGS INTO PRACTICE

This research suggests that adaptation interventions would benefit from taking a more nuanced approach to gender in design as well as implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Such an approach would go beyond traditional binary gender approaches that only look at men and women and would undertake a more comprehensive social analysis that would examine important social identities, such as age, livelihood, and ethnicity.

Since the specific benefits or improved overall outcomes that would result from taking this more nuanced approach have not been documented, USAID is planning to conduct focused pilot efforts over the next few years that put these findings into practice and provide evidence that taking a more nuanced approach to gender produces tangible benefits. Building this evidence base is important because, without it, adaptation practitioners may not be willing to make potentially costly and time-consuming investments in more nuanced approaches. These pilot efforts will also identify the most effective means of incorporating these new understandings of gender and socioeconomic identity into the design and implementation of adaptation interventions, and help inform new tools and guidance, speeding the adoption of these findings.



GENDER & ADAPTATION

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To view the full report “*Gender and Climate Change in Agrarian Settings*”, visit the webpage: http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/pa00jngs.pdf