

Addressing Gender in Climate-Smart Smallholder Agriculture

This brief focuses on the constraints that women face to more equitable participation in smallholder carbon and climate-smart initiatives. It highlights the important role that a flexible learning approach plays in advancing equity goals, and offers recommendations for concrete actions that can empower both women and men.



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Introduction

Research shows that men and women have varying abilities to adapt to climate shocks and longer-term climate change because of differentiated access to entitlements, assets, and decision-making; this ability to adapt is further complicated by gender and social differences.¹ At the same time, driven by studies that highlight the urgent need for actions to reduce both greenhouse gas emissions and smallholder vulnerability to climate change, Climate-Smart Agriculture is emerging as a new paradigm in agricultural development.² It seeks solutions that improve agricultural productivity, reduce farm level vulnerability to climate change, and sequester carbon. Recent studies also suggest that if such efforts are to be effective and the benefits equitably distributed, practitioners cannot lose focus on the gender implications of any agricultural interventions.^{3, 4, 5}

Key messages

- Enhanced incomes, access to credit and more fuelwood are significant driving factors behind changes in agricultural practices (e.g. tree planting) for both male and female farmers. These livelihood benefits, particularly short and long-term sources of income, can build and enhance the productive assets to which men and women have access.
- Men's and women's participation and benefits from projects aiming for more sustainable agricultural practices are heavily influenced by social norms and intra-household decision-making and bargaining.
- Both men and women value the non-cash benefits of the project, including improved intra-household communication and new household roles and responsibilities for women.
- To make progress towards a gender equity goal, attention must be given to the interrelated issues of agency, structure, and relations that define the interactions between men and women.
- Providing new spaces for men and women to come together and engage in decision-making can open up opportunities for collaboration and cooperation.
- An iterative and learning project or program approach can produce gains in gender equity and improve outcomes.
- Switching from an emphasis on carbon finance to a climate smart smallholder agriculture model is likely to enhance the benefits accruing to women in particular.

The Sustainable Agriculture in a Changing Climate (SACC) Project's Approach

Sustainable Agriculture in a Changing Climate (SACC) – a partnership of CARE, ICRAF and the CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) with funding from Rockefeller Foundation, began in September 2010. It was originally framed as a project designed to deliver payments to smallholders from carbon markets for carbon stored through the adoption of agroforestry practices. In order to overcome resource constraints and maximize the participation of the resource-poor women, the project also introduced interventions designed to provide immediate short-term income and food benefits, allowing farmers to plant the trees that would generate carbon payments and other substantial benefits in the longer-run. Carbon payments to farmers would on average be no more than \$5 per year whereas the value of fuelwood, building poles and ultimately timber exceed thirty times this amount. Additional interventions included the introduction of early maturing, drought resistant and higher value crops, an emphasis on sustainable agricultural practices, and catalysing linkages with a complementary Village Savings and Loans Associations project (VSLAs, community-based informal financial groups).⁴ As a result of lessons learned in the first phase of this project, SACC is now transitioning into a 'climate smart smallholder agriculture' approach, with an emphasis on research and actions aimed at improved agricultural productivity and farm level adaptation. SACC works in the mid and lower sections of Nyando River Basin in Western Kenya, a mixed crop-livestock farming area with high levels of poverty and significant environmental degradation.

Learning from all sides

SACC has taken a learning approach from the outset, with project participants involved in a range of research, training, and learning activities. This has generated the following key lessons being used to refine and improve strategies for achieving more equitable and pro-poor benefits.

An iterative learning approach can produce gains in gender equity and improve outcomes. From the beginning, the project team has emphasized a learning approach that pays particular emphasis to the potential benefits, costs, and risks to women and other marginalized groups in the communities involved. As a result of this commitment to learning and flexibility, project staff and community members themselves have proposed a variety of changes to better meet the needs of women and the very poor. These are highlighted in the discussions below.

Enhanced incomes, access to credit, and more fuelwood are key motivations for both men and women. These livelihood benefits included both short- and long-term income sources such as the higher value crops introduced by the project, tree nursery sales, and timber sales, as well as the relatively small expected carbon payments. These findings echo the emerging learning from other carbon smallholder projects - they become more attractive to potential participants when they include credit and short-term income opportunities that offset the initial costs of inputs and investments.⁵

Attention to agency, structure, and relations are key. To achieve further gender equity, participant feedback suggests the project needs to address the interrelated issues of agency, structure, and relations that prevent women from participating as equals in the



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project. The ability of individuals to benefit from, and participate in, a project like this depends to a large degree on gendered relationships and social relations between men and women.

Differential access to productive assets and resources has many implications.

- **Land.** Men control access to land through customary tenure, and, as a result, are often considered the main decision-makers in terms of crop management, especially for long-term crops (such as trees) or cash crops. Women may have greater authority over food crops. The project has been trying to address this issue by working with local provincial administration officials to ensure that women's rights to trees and land are recognized and enforced.
- **Tools and labour.** For women, a key constraint to tree planting lies in digging the holes—reportedly because of lack of access to the necessary tools, as well as the labour required to dig the larger holes to better ensure tree survival. This makes it difficult for women to fence and protect investments in trees.
- **Credit/cash.** Some women found the weekly contributions required by the savings and loans groups too onerous, along with coming up with the cash needed to invest in more resource-intensive sustainable agriculture activities or to pay for additional farm labor. In addition, lack of access to credit or economic resources may prevent women from replacing dead trees—necessary to be eligible for carbon finance.
- **Tree tenure.** Both sexes are more likely to plant trees that yield products they use and control - such as fuel and fodder for women and timber (for sale) for men.

Working separately with women may not be the best way and may not overcome male dominated decision-making.

Providing new spaces for men and women to jointly engage in project level decisions has been very beneficial. Such spaces provide opportunities for men and women to work together that did not exist previously. In the project area, this change is helping men see that women should have a greater role in community and household decisions. Initial concerns by SACC that such groups

CARE argues that *empowerment* should be conceived of as both process and outcome that comprises three dimensions—**agency, structure, and relationships**. Agency is: the aspirations, resources, actions and achievements of women themselves; carrying out their *own* analyses, making their *own* decisions, and taking their *own* actions. Structure is: the broader social structures that condition women's choices and chances. Routines, patterns of relationships and interaction, and conventions that lead to taken-for-granted behavior; institutions that establish agreed-upon meanings, accepted (“normal”) forms of domination (who “naturally” has power over what or whom), and agreed criteria for legitimizing the social order. Relations are: the social **relationships** through which women negotiate their needs and rights with other social actors, including men. All three are closely inter-related, influencing and being influenced by, the other elements.⁶



Nyando women's savings and loan group meeting ©CARE 2011

would be dominated by men forced the project to implement quotas to ensure greater gender representation; however, now, many of the elected leaders at the local level are women who actively participate in group decision-making.

Decision-making regarding revenue-sharing and choice of practices still rests with the men. While project staff note that women are more likely to attend meetings and trainings, men are viewed as the natural household heads, with greater decision-making authority and ability to decide both which activities ultimately get adopted at the farm level and the distribution of benefits from these activities. Men may have to be convinced of the value of implementing sustainable agricultural practices—or even of allowing their wives to attend meetings. Involving both husbands and wives in the implementation of these practices has turned out to be key, as other gender-aware agricultural projects have also suggested—improved household participation in agricultural decision-making leads to greater farm level resilience.^{7,8,9,10,11}

Non-cash benefits matter for women and men, a lot. Both men and women value the indirect benefits of the SACC project, including improved intra-household communication and new household roles and responsibilities for women. The SACC project offers both short- and long-term income potential and emphasizes the creation of farm planning and management; through these trainings, husbands and wives engage in discussions about planning and farm management. Women in the project described this as a shift towards working more as a household “unit.” Another indirect benefit included a broadening of the range of roles that different household members could assume. Specifically, men began to see women as “responsible,” and capable of contributing towards household income and caring for farm investments, such as trees, leading to a recognition of women's roles and ability to innovate and seek creative solutions at the household and

community level. Finally, both men and women valued the improved community relationships that resulted from group membership—and the possibility of making new friends and expanding their horizons through exchange visits.

Household, farm, and community level roles dictate participation and benefits. SACC initially encouraged women's participation by selecting activities within women's resource and decision-making authority, such as kitchen gardens and fodder and fuelwood trees. An important lesson is that such activities may actually increase the work burden of women. Trees, especially during the establishment period, require daily watering, a task often assigned to women in addition to all their household and childcare responsibilities. Similarly, attending meetings and trainings is complicated by men's expectation that women should stay home or work as casual laborers.

At the project level, several innovations, that were encouraged by project staff and also arose from the communities themselves, address these roles. Supportive men are encouraging their wives to join the project and village management committees, and are visiting the homes of husbands who refuse to let wives participate. In lower Nyando, village management committees are helping to construct water pans, to reduce women's workloads. Simple interventions, such as changing the timing of meetings and ensuring that women do not have to travel long distances, have helped to overcome these barriers.

Switching to a climate-smart smallholder agriculture approach may help to increase the benefits to women. Placing an increased emphasis on interventions that are likely to be more beneficial to women, including those described above, plus nutrition education and village savings and loans groups, rather than stressing carbon payments alone, is recommended as a strategy for improving women's livelihood benefits from SACC and projects with similar aims.^{4,11} In addition, in order to increase benefits for women, community-based volunteer extension staff may visit women who are not able to, or choose not to attend community meetings. These actions and interventions, however, may increase costs in a project already struggling with financial viability. These interventions also imply a switch from distributing carbon revenues as cash payments to participants, to retaining them at a project level in order to finance activities that maximize the benefits for women and the very poor. At the project level, emphasizing these interventions, which may not lead to increased carbon revenue, becomes easier to manage as the program moves from away from a sole focus on agricultural carbon to a climate-smart smallholder agriculture approach.



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Conclusions and recommendations for moving forward

Taking a learning approach, with a particular emphasis on gender, to a very challenging new type of project has generated recommendations applicable far beyond this project alone. These include:

- Gender and social differences are dynamic and nuanced within communities; a greater understanding of these differences is critical for climate-smart smallholder agriculture programming.¹² Understanding how these differences affect risk perceptions, weather and climate information needs, and communication strategies is critical to reaching the most vulnerable.
- Working with both men and women is essential to the process—and needs to involve decisions that go far beyond simple agriculture issues to address the agency, structure, and relations that govern gender relationships.
- This involves supporting continued dialogue—at both household and community levels—about the roles of women in supporting agricultural innovation, while working to reduce structural deficits (access to resources) and encouraging more male support.
- Initiatives such as SACC are much more likely to achieve their desired outcomes if they emphasize the agency of women to take ownership and implement changes at the farm level, ensure that women have the resources to do so (structure), and work with men to ensure that they value the contributions and ideas of women in regards to this role (relations).
- Local level institutions are central to the scaling up and sustainability of these types of projects in the long-term. Understanding how they are inclusive and exclusive is an important goal; not all collective action institutions promote gender equity nor inclusivity.
- Innovation is a central component of adaptive capacity; thus actions that enhance the ability and creativity of men and women farmers to innovate have a high potential payoff. This could include, for example, pursuing strategies that showcase women's innovations, as well as ensuring that women have equal access to and a voice in platforms that encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences.

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