POLICY BRIEF 3
August 2017

CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS: GENDER- AND HEALTH-SENSITIVE RESPONSES

Adaptation for Food Security and Ecosystem Resilience in Africa

Integrating Results, Building Capacity and Implementing Adaptation Strategies

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Cover page: Small-holder farmers carrying out a participatory mapping exercise on climate risk areas in the Taita Hills, Kenya. Photo: AFERIA Team

Overview

The UNFCCC Paris Agreement (2015) states that climate change is a common concern of humankind which needs to be urgently addressed with actions that respect, promote and consider the Parties' obligations on human rights, the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and people in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender equality, empowerment of women and intergenerational equity.

Climate change impacts through increasing temperatures, variability of rainfall, and extreme events are not uniformly distributed across the globe but are projected to affect mostly the marginalized communities in the Global South. Smallholder farmers who depend on rain-fed agricultural production for their livelihood are generally considered as being more exposed to climate risks and their realizations, climate shocks which unexpectedly cause welfare losses and simultaneously reduce food security of households.

The impacts of climate change on agriculture have affected the food security of marginalised communities which rely mostly on agriculture for their livelihoods. Rainfall variability, land degradation and increased incidence of crop pests and diseases are some of the causes of reduced agricultural production. Photos: AFERIA

Components of climate vulnerability in households

Climate vulnerability consists of three components which are interrelated: exposure, sensitivity and adaptive capacity. Exposure means the degree of climate stress upon a household or population, or other particular unit. Sensitivity means the degree to which a household or population or a system will be affected by or is responsive to a climate stimuli. Adaptive capacity means the potential or capability of a household or other particular unit to adjust to climate change, variability and extremes, in order to moderate potential damages, to take advantage of opportunities, or to cope with consequences.

Actions aiming at reducing vulnerability should adopt a holistic approach because vulnerability consists of a set of conditions of people that derive from the historical and prevailing cultural, social, environmental, political, and economic contexts. In this sense, vulnerable groups are not only at risk because they are exposed to a climate hazard but as a result of marginality, of everyday patterns of social interaction and organization, and access to resources (Watts and Bohle, 1993; Morrow, 1999; Bankoff, 2004).

Women and girls are usually responsible for fetching fresh water, food and fuel for cooking for their families in households and communities, but at the same time have unequal access to social and physical goods, income, education, agricultural resources, land and decision-making processes which places them in disadvantaged position against addressing climate change impacts.

However, women as stewards of many environmental resources in the farm often have plenty of knowledge, skills and expertise that can be harnessed in climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Promoting the participation of women in climate change adaptation activities such as this women group in Kilimanjaro, Tanzania working in the community based indegenous tree nursery. Photo: AFERIA

Cardona, et al. (2012) point out that vulnerability can also be understood in terms of functionality related to communication, medical care, maintaining independence, supervision, and transportation. Thus individuals considered vulnerable in health context include children, senior citizens, and pregnant women and those who may need additional response assistance including the disabled persons.

A specific consideration should be given to these individuals' capacity needs and constraints/barriers to development when planning climate change adaptation in order to avoid decisions that further increase their vulnerability.

Building the capacity of small scale women farmers through training on climate change adaptation strategies that they can use in their farms.

Recommendations for policy makers

- Facilitate multi-stakeholder forums to plan, design and implement climate change adaptation and mitigation in the communities. Make sure that women, youth, senior citizens and disabled people are adequately represented and have an active role in the forums and that their voices and opinions are heard.

- Develop gender-sensitive and health-sensitive responses to climate change at different scales. Keep in mind that households in the same neighborhood may have different levels of vulnerabilities and adaptive capacities.

- Equal involvement of women and men in all aspects of climate change adaptation, including technology transfer and capacity building, is important. Modern, easily adoptable technologies must reach out and to be targeted to those groups, the poor and vulnerable who need those most.

About AFERIA

The Adaptation for Food Security and Ecosystem Resilience in Africa (AFERIA) is a two-year project to disseminate and communicate research results, insights and interactions of climate change and food security developed from a previous research and development project (CHIESA-Climate Change Impacts on Ecosystem Services and Food Security in Eastern Africa).

The project is funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland and coordinated by the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (*icipe*) in Nairobi, Kenya.

The AFERIA project disseminates research findings on climate change impacts and implement adaptation technologies such as drip irrigation, roof rain water harvesting, conservation agriculture, farm forestry and insect pest management to the partner organisations and beneficiary communities in different agro-ecological zones in the highlands.

The project cooperates closely with national and local organizations in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania to reach out to the smallholder farmers, especially women and special needs groups.

In addition, through communication and advocacy, AFERIA supports policy decision-makers in making rational and evidence based decisions on climate change adaptation to enhance food security and ecosystem resilience in the target areas.

Objective: Improved food, nutrition security, and livelihoods of small-scale farmers in Eastern Africa.

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Adaptation for Ecosystem Resilience in Africa

For more information about the AFERIA project ,Please contact:

The Project Coordinator - AFERIA

icipe – African Insect Science for Food and Health

P.O. Box 30772–00100 Nairobi, Kenya

Email: chiesa@icipe.org

Telephone: +254 (20) 863 2000

Website: http://chiesa.icipe.org

AFERIA Lead Partners

University of Helsinki (Finland), University of York (United Kingdom), University of Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania), Jimma University (Ethiopia), Pangani Basin Water Board-PBWB (Tanzania), Taita Environmental Research and Resource Arc -TERRA (Kenya)

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