

Info Note

What We Know about Gender and Rural Climate Services

Preliminary Findings and Guidance

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Key messages

- Differing roles, decisions and control of resources can influence the climate information needs of rural women.
- Meeting rural women's service needs requires attention to communication channels that may differ from those used to reach men.
- Despite obstacles, women farmers who access climate information use and benefit from it.
- Climate services have the potential to empower women; however, they risk reinforcing gender bias if they fail to account for women's concerns and priorities.
- Available research and experience suggest several promising avenues for promoting gender equality when developing climate services.

Climate services involve the production, translation, communication and use of climate information, such as information on rainfall and temperature, including rainfall cessation or onset or likelihood of a dry spell. Within an enabling environment, climate information and advisories allow farmers to better anticipate and manage extreme events, take advantage of favorable climate conditions, and adapt to change. Improvements in the quality and relevance of climate information are expanding the range of options available for making smallholder agriculture more resilient and prosperous in the face of climate risk. Increasing interest and investment in climate services are having similar effects. However, climate service funders, implementers, and researchers are rightly asking about the distribution of benefits, including how to ensure that socially- or economically-disadvantaged groups, and rural women in particular, are able to access, use, and benefit from the growing investment in climate services.

This brief summarizes preliminary findings and recommendations from an ongoing review of literature and CCAFS experience on gender-related challenges in empowering smallholder farming communities through climate services.

Differing roles and resource access affect women's information needs

Women's agricultural activities are often characterized by gaps in information and resource access, with deficiencies in several areas: land, labor, credit, information, extension, and technology (Huyer, 2016). Different levels of resilience in the face of climate risk, and impacts and differences in the decisions that are under the control of rural women and men, lead to gender differences in climate information needs and priorities, potentially reducing women's ability to benefit from climate services (Huyer, 2016; Carr et al., 2016; Carr and Owusu-Daaku, 2016).

For example, women and men may produce different crops or have different agricultural production roles. In Kaffrine, Senegal, where men control draught animals and plows, women must wait to prepare their fields until men have finished. As a result, information provided on the timing of rainfall onset benefitted men but not women (Tall et al., 2014).

Meeting rural women's needs requires attention to communication channels

Context-specific gender differences in household responsibilities, social norms, lower literacy rates, or male bias in extension services can restrict rural women's access to particular communication channels (World Bank, IFAD, FAO, 2015). For example, women's household responsibilities may limit their ability to access radio programs that deliver climate information at certain times (Archer 2003). Agricultural extension services are

often biased toward male farmers, particularly in cultures where women are responsible for household food production and men are responsible for commercial crops. Where context-specific barriers limit women's access to particular communication channels, climate information can be incorporated into spaces and processes that are part of their routines and social networks, such as boreholes (Tall et al., 2014), women's groups (Venkatasubramanian et al., 2014) or health offices (Poulsen, 2015).

While group communication processes have proven to be effective at enabling farmers to understand and act on climate-related information, culture-specific gender norms and power relations often restrict women's attendance in community meetings and contribute to inequitable participation in group discussions (Roncoli et al., 2011).

Actively involving rural women in the design of services, and adapting communication channels to take into account their concerns, responsibilities, constraints and schedules, can reduce the barriers they face to accessing climate services (Tall et al., 2014; Poulsen et al., 2015). Based on experience in other contexts, social networks and community organizations play a crucial role in access to information, but can be combined with new ICT tools to improve women's access to climate services (McOmber et al., 2013).

Women farmers who access climate information use and benefit from it

Some empirical studies show that women who access relevant climate information do use it to change their agricultural management practices, diversify crop production, and change storage and processing techniques (Twyman et al., 2014; Jost et al., 2016). Often, women seek out a wider range of types of information that will support their household activities, such as information on nutrition, reproductive health, education and entrepreneurship (Cramer et al., 2016; GSMA, 2012).

Promising avenues for promoting gender equality in climate services

Although research on gender dimensions of rural climate services is at an early stage of development, experience and evidence suggest several promising avenues for promoting gender equality in climate services initiatives:

1. Consult with women and women's organizations in the development of climate services to ascertain their information needs and priorities.
2. Separately assess climate information needs of women and men farmers, with further disaggregation by male and female-headed households, age, and

socioeconomic status where these may shape roles, constraints and hence information needs.

3. Assess any gender barriers in accessing communication channels available for climate services.
4. Select or develop information channels in consultation with women's and community organizations.
5. Train communication intermediaries to recognize when gender, age or social status adversely impacts the effective participation of some community members in communications processes.
6. Consider providing a range of useful information services tailored to women's expressed interests, in addition to climate information, in order to increase the value of these services to women.
7. Seek to introduce climate information services in a manner that decreases women's labor and time investment in agricultural and household tasks.
8. Assess the value of climate information services to women and youth in terms of rate of access, use, and perceived benefits from use of climate information services.

Conclusions

Rural climate services have the potential to empower women if they are designed to respond to their unique needs and priorities and if climate service providers consult with women to develop communication channels that overcome the obstacles women face. However, if the designers of such services fail to understand and effectively take into account the concerns and priorities of women, climate services could reinforce the damaging gender bias that is often prevalent in formal institutional and household structures.

Further Reading

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