

Awuor focuses on women, gender & climate change



An interview with **Cynthia Brenda Awuor**, Regional Climate Change Focal Point: East and Central Africa

What has impacted you in working on climate change in Africa?

While conducting research on climate-related vulnerability and adaptive capacity among the Somali Community in Southern Ethiopia this year, the old men we interviewed mentioned that the current weather conditions are so bad, they can't imagine what life would be like if things got worse.

According to the entire community, 2009 has been the hottest year so far. They have experienced a prolonged drought. Some of their livestock (their most important livelihood resource) have died, and majority of the living ones are weak and less productive. Many of the community members said they would leave it all to Allah (God): a sign that they are losing hope and are almost reaching the point of total despair.

Can you share your thoughts on gender and women's empowerment?

Gender empowerment bases development and adaptation efforts on the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that the society has appropriated to men and women. Women's empowerment for climate change adaptation focuses on issues to do with adequate access to, and control over critical resources for adaptation and development by women. It also seeks to equip women and men with information, knowledge, skills, resources and services that would enable them to contribute positively to appropriate and effective climate change adaptation.

Why are some women more vulnerable to climate change than men?

Some of the factors that make some women more vulnerable to climate change in some communities, especially in rural areas include:

- Inadequate access to, and control over important livelihood resources.
- Limited or no decision making power at household and community level.
- Limited formal education.
- Limited livelihood options (outside

natural resource-based and weather dependent livelihood activities)

- Limited mobility (especially in the case of pastoral communities)
- In some communities, women are relatively poorer than men.
- Roles and responsibilities (household and farm-based) limit their potential to engage in alternative activities.

Why do women who are more vulnerable to climate change need targeted support?

They need more targeted support in order to reduce their vulnerability and increase their resilience (and that of their communities) to climate change impacts. Vulnerable women often put in relatively much more effort to improve their communities' welfare (although many times, this is not recognized). By providing women with targeted support, their efforts will yield greater results and desired outcomes that will benefit the community as a whole.

How can climate change initiatives be gender sensitive?

People need to recognize how climate change impacts affect men and women differentially in view of their different social roles, responsibilities and activities as defined by society. The initiatives should identify suitable adaptation options that are geared towards increasing the resilience of both men and women to climate change impacts. Adaptation options should be feasible, and should sustainably utilize available resources and positively empower both genders for meaningful change to be achieved.

There is a need to analyze differential vulnerability to climate change impacts between men and women. It is important to identify key resources that most important to coping, as well as similarities and differences in the current coping strategies employed by men and women. Socio-political and economic barriers and

opportunities for adaptation should be identified, and adaptation options designed to build and improve on existing coping strategies as feasible.

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It is very important to engage both men and women (separately in focus groups, and together at later stages of the process) in the process of analysis, identification and validation of selected adaptation options.

Do you have any specific examples of women's empowerment initiatives?

The Resilience Enhancement against Drought (READ) Project implemented by CARE, has worked with women in Borana zone of southern Ethiopia. The project has trained the local women on production and storage of hay. This has reduced the burden of looking for pasture for livestock during the dry season.

In addition, the existing micro-credit self help group (Dara Women Savings and Credit Group), that is engaged in the purchase and sale of concentrated livestock feed and cereals for profit has also benefited through the injection of additional financial capital by the project. This coupled with the training provided to members on auditing, financial management and record keeping will strengthen their capacity to increase household incomes and sustain their livelihood in times of drought.

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