SYNTHESIS BRIEF #3

Social Equity Considerations in Programming for Climate Resilience

A Synthesis Brief for Policymakers

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Key Considerations

- Leave no One Behind
- Avoid Maladaptation
- Recognitional Equity in Climate Policy Pathways
- Procedural Equity in Disaster Governance
- Distributional Equity in Climate Risk Management
- Intergenerational Equity, Climate and Peace

Introduction

Fairness and justice are the fundamental principles of social equity. Ensuring social equity is one of the six primary themes of the CGIAR research initiative on Building Systemic Climate Resilience against Climate Variability and Extremes (ClimBeR).

This policy brief utilizes the research process to create a sourcebook on social equity, inclusiveness, gender, and other foundations of ClimBeR. More than 50 online publications have been reviewed, primarily published between 2021 and 2023, and then categorized according to the CGIAR ClimBeR framework on Social Equity in Climate-Resilient Agriculture.

The objective of this brief is to provide guidance to designers and implementers of rural programs and projects in the public and private sectors who aim to address environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues simultaneously within the context of compounding global crises.

Leave no one behind

Social equity is crucial for fostering systemic resilience, as it ensures that no one is left behind.

Prioritizing social equity becomes especially urgent in 2023 for the agrarian economy, considering the forecasted increase in extreme weather events such as droughts, wildfires, heatwaves, floods, and landslides associated with the El Niño of 2023-2024.

Leaving no one behind is closely tied to just adaptation to climate change. Both involve systematically removing institutional barriers that disproportionately burden certain groups while simultaneously creating opportunities and reducing harm. Climate variability, characterized by changes in rainfall and temperature patterns, and extreme weather events like floods, landslides, droughts, and heatwaves, have the most significant impact on households that directly rely on natural resources for their lives and livelihoods, particularly affecting the most vulnerable individuals within these households.

The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 prioritizes leaving no one behind (LNOB) and prioritizing the most marginalized groups, while also ensuring environmental sustainability within planetary boundaries. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and associated indicators serve as a solid foundation for incorporating social equity into climate resilience programming.

Effective programming plays a crucial role in translating policies into equitable and just actions, enabling the transformation of climate adaptation capacities within food, land, and water systems.

Avoid maladaptation

Program design should proactively consider potential future disruptions to farming activities that may give rise to new vulnerabilities and exclusions. It is essential to prioritize resources at a high level to promote the integration of social equity considerations in project design and implementation, in order to mitigate the risks of maladaptation.

Areas exposed to significant climate variability and extremes, coupled with deep-rooted inequalities, tend to experience the highest levels of marginalization. Vulnerable populations face heightened vulnerability due to limited capacities and skills to access adaptive solutions.

Gender, age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, caste, disability, and/or religion are among the factors that contribute to increased vulnerabilities. When these factors intersect within an individual or a family, vulnerability is further compounded.

Individuals can experience multiple intersecting forms of inequality based on their various social and political identities. These experiences can evolve over time, influenced by changing life-cycle needs.

Women engaged in agriculture often face significant gender disparities in accessing information, technologies, markets, and labor responsibilities, which are more pronounced compared to women in other sectors. Consequently, addressing issues of gender, agriculture, and climate change requires an integrated approach rather than treating them in isolation.

Adopting an intersectional perspective enables the analysis of interconnected socio-environmental injustices that contribute to vulnerabilities.

Intersectionality

Intersectional analysis plays a crucial role in identifying vulnerable groups within agrifood systems and rural development.

To effectively identify groups at risk of being left behind, program designers must examine how various identities, such as class, race, gender, religion, and others, intersect and impact well-being outcomes and experiences of discrimination, particularly concerning food security, agrifood systems, land, environment, and climate change.

This comprehensive understanding of specific issues that influence inequality within vulnerable groups is essential for identifying tailored solutions.

Policies and programs informed by intersectional analysis, accompanied by well-designed indicators for monitoring and accountability, can:

- Address the underlying drivers of inequalities
- Mitigate the factors contributing to differential vulnerabilities
- Acknowledge the political and ethical dimensions of care
- Encourage place-based and place-making approaches
- Foster community resilience building that transcends identity boundaries

Sources: Amorim-Maia et al 2022; FAO 2023

Recognitional Equity in Climate Policy Pathways

Recognitional equity emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and respecting the diversity of human identities, values, social norms, and rights. This recognition should extend beyond personal, institutional, programmatic, and political spheres. Climate resilience programs and policies that aim to bring about changes in practices or technologies need to have a deep understanding of how power relations and worldviews shape practices, food security, and inequity.

Understanding differential vulnerabilities is crucial for accelerating the progress and well-being of the most marginalized populations.

Differential vulnerability can be seen as a practical application of the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities of State Parties outlined in the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The UNFCCC First Global Stocktake (GST) includes a component that reviews whether and how fairness, including equity, has been considered in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) of State Parties.

Promoting recognitional equity in the political sphere involves invoking national and international agreements to garner high-level support. Examples of such agreements include the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN DRIP). These agreements serve to legitimize the attention given to traditionally excluded populations.

Procedural Equity in Disaster Governance

Procedural equity focuses on amplifying the voices of vulnerable individuals in governance and decision-making processes.
In disaster governance and decision-making, vulnerable and marginalized individuals often find themselves excluded, particularly during times when rapid responses are necessary. While climate adaptation planning processes may incorporate the concept of justice, they often fail to prioritize strategies that promote just adaptation or provide sufficient guidance on implementation. Women, in particular, are frequently portrayed primarily as victims of climate change, while their crucial roles as agents of change and contributors to livelihood strategies are overlooked. These gaps contribute to the systemic causes of social vulnerability.

Programs aiming to reduce disaster risks must ensure the inclusion of grassroots voices, as well as the active involvement of rural women, youth, and marginalized groups across all phases of program development and implementation. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems can track:

- The level of influence different groups have on decision-making processes
- The extent to which vulnerable groups contribute their knowledge and perspectives to the program
- The valuation of the environment and non-human species within farming systems
- Various approaches for evaluating the implementation of socially just climate adaptation policies.

Distributional Equity in Climate Risk Management

Distributional equity, which pertains to the fair allocation of resources, costs, and benefits, is often overlooked in climate risk management interventions.

Addressing climate risk and social justice concurrently is essential. However, the challenge lies in effectively translating resilience, transdisciplinary approaches, and equity into practical climate risk management interventions.

One framework that can help tackle this challenge is the social-ecological-technological (SET) systems approach to climate risk management. This framework recognizes the critical role of technological innovations but emphasizes that enabling social, institutional, and governance factors are the primary drivers of transformative adaptation.

Another framework is the climate-biodiversity-health (CBH) nexus, which encompasses three domains: climate action, biodiversity conservation, and community health, along with six subdomains: climate change mitigation, climate change adaptation, habitat protection, wildlife health, physical health, and mental health.

An additional framework that operationalizes distributional equity at the global level is the Early Warning Hunger Hotspots monitoring. For instance, Senegal has been identified as a hunger hotspot for 2023. The lean season in Senegal for 2023 is projected to surpass the five-year average and the same period in 2022, with nearly 1.3 million people estimated to face high levels of acute food insecurity.

Intergenerational Equity, Climate and Peace

Intergenerational equity pertains to the perpetuation and transformation of justice and injustice across generations. It highlights the interconnectedness of intergenerational equity, sustainable development, and lasting peace.

Countries that suffer from poor governance, unsustainable natural resource management, and unfair policies are particularly susceptible to conflicts that may be triggered or exacerbated by climate change, as demonstrated by the case of Syria and the decade-long drought preceding the 2011 uprising.

When food and water resources become persistently scarce and people are left with limited options, conflicts often arise. These ongoing conflicts disrupt lives and livelihoods, including agricultural activities and trade. Individuals may face direct attacks, flee the potential for attacks, or encounter movement restrictions and administrative barriers.

Identifying pathways to climate-resilient peace requires an understanding of intergenerational equity considerations within the context of climate change. This entails not only examining the factors contributing to climate security risks but also integrating social equity considerations into solutions for food and farming systems. These solutions encompass technologies such as genetics, robotics, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and others introduced as part of climate resilience programming. Embedding social equity considerations within these solutions is imperative to ensure effective and sustainable outcomes and impacts.

Social Equity in Climate Resilient Agriculture

Fragmentation is a common concern in climate adaptation approaches. As climate change increases risks for vulnerable populations, sustainable development can help integrate social equity considerations into securing food, energy, and water in rural contexts.

In Guinayangan, Quezon, Philippines, three methods have been employed to integrate social equity considerations in supporting smallholder farmers towards climate-resilient agriculture.

Firstly, social and geographic targeting is utilized to facilitate social equity, along with spontaneous scaling from farmer to farmer.

Secondly, diversification through agroforestry is implemented to enhance the role of women in farming systems.

Thirdly, Participatory Vulnerability and Climate Risk Assessments (PCVRA) are conducted to better understand the factors contributing to community vulnerability and their adaptive capacities.

Integrating social equity in food, energy, and water security involves considering affordability, access, and socio-cultural elements.

To meet increasing resource demands without exacerbating social vulnerabilities, policies focused on achieving food, energy, and water security must take social equity into account.

Considering social equity across different scales can help reduce social risks and vulnerabilities associated with these systems.

Sources: ClimBeR 2023; Stone et al 2023

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CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food-secure future dedicated to transforming food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis. Building Systemic Resilience Against Climate Variability and Extremes, or ClimBeR, is one of the Research Initiatives in its new research portfolio that will deliver science and innovation to transform food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis. ClimBeR aims to transform the climate adaptation capacity of food, land, and water systems in the Philippines and five other countries, ultimately increasing the resilience of smallholder production systems to withstand severe climate change effects like drought, flooding, and high temperatures. For more information, please visit https://www.cgiar.org/

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