

GIRLS' RIGHTS AND RESILIENCE:

Gender Equality, Climate Response and the Potential of Integrated Programs

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*Girls transport produce from their floating farm by boat on Inle Lake in Myanmar.
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01

INTRODUCTION

A. CONTEXT

The effects of climate change are being felt worldwide and are likely to worsen rapidly as ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss accelerate due to climate disruption.¹ Rising temperatures, erratic seasons, worsening droughts, unreliable harvests and intensified storms put development investments in most sectors at risk and jeopardize long-sought social change goals.² Climate disruption threatens regional economies and stresses political systems, posing threats to important basic rights such as personal safety, health, food and livelihood security.³

The implications for girls and women—including for their health, livelihoods, food and nutrition security, personal safety and migration—make climate instability the most serious gender equality, rights and environmental challenge the global community faces.⁴ Growing awareness about this reality is shifting perspectives in the gender equality and environmental communities, and the need to strengthen climate resilience is

“Existential threats focus people’s minds: threats to the economic lifeblood of the community.”

—Laurie Mazur, *Island Press*

quickly becoming a priority for many development and social change agents.⁵

Socially marginal and economically vulnerable groups—including girls and women in most contexts—are most at risk from both the immediate and longer-term impacts of climate change.⁶ The vulnerabilities that women and girls face in everyday life interact with climate disruption to hamper efforts to improve their well-being and security.⁷ The scale and complexity of climate change require multi-sector, “all-hands-on-deck”

responses, yet the continued marginalization of populations and communities whose engagement is essential to addressing the climate crisis works against the chances for success.

Within this context, Kendeda Fund and GreeneWorks began a series of informal conversations in 2016 about persistent challenges to gender equality and girls' rights in climate change programs. These exchanges touched on the state of play in integrated climate resilience programs and the urgent need for more equitable and effective strategies to address climate disruption. Several key themes emerged:

- Gender and rights have generally played secondary roles in climate change responses, and more effective resilience-building must recognize that a gender and rights focus is essential to any effort's success.
- Traditional disciplinary hierarchies tend to favor a limited number of technically oriented "legacy" disciplines and to limit more holistic responses. The resulting emphasis on technical and economic responses has often superseded social justice, gender-relational, norm change and environmental priorities in shaping responses to climate change.⁸
- Prevailing climate paradigms slow the emergence of integrated alternatives. Sector-focused disciplines and expertise have dominated development and climate response efforts in recent decades. More integrated and systemic perspectives can help transcend the siloed technical frameworks that have generally prevailed.
- Knowledge gaps limit our understanding of the status and direction of integrated resilience initiatives, and they limit social change agents' and practitioners' ability to learn from others' experiences as they try to strengthen resilience programs. These gaps also limit the effectiveness of advocacy with decision-makers, who may be unfamiliar with integrated gender, rights and resilience approaches. Better program data could inform shifts to more strategic programs and policies that work across sectors.

GreeneWorks and Kendeda were curious as to whether practitioners in areas such as gender equality, rights, environmental sustainability, climate resilience and economic development had similar perceptions and experiences. Kendeda Fund invited GreeneWorks to follow these issues in a review of the intersection of rights, gender and climate resilience, and to identify promising strategies for integrating gender and rights.

B. METHODOLOGY AND OVERVIEW

GreeneWorks then undertook a literature review charting the main current and emerging trends in resilience efforts, selecting reports and articles focused on integrated research or programs addressing climate resilience, gender and girls' rights. One team member identified key publications in the girls' rights and gender equality space that addressed climate change; the other identified key publications in the climate change and resilience area that emphasized women's and girls' rights. We also reached out to 23 experts in research, policy and programs to request interviews. The resulting 17 semi-structured interviews elicited their views on the factors and forces shaping this large and loosely organized field. During initial interviews, we asked these experts to identify other important practitioners and influencers in their areas, and then expanded the interviews we conducted accordingly. (See Annex 1 for the complete list of the interviews that informed this paper.)

Working across these interviews and published materials, we built an outline of the prevailing ideas and approaches that characterize this area. This report, *Girls' Rights and Resilience*, assesses the potential benefits of multi-sector collaboration for addressing girls' rights, gender and climate resilience. It then discusses why such collaboration is currently limited and how to encourage more collaborative work.

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WHY IS MULTI-SECTOR COLLABORATION ESSENTIAL?

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Against a backdrop of rapid environmental, social and economic shifts, the appeal of integrated or multi-sector programs became clear over the course of this review. A widely shared understanding has emerged among practitioners in the gender, rights and climate change arenas that well-designed, integrated programs are often more effective than single-sector alternatives. Additionally, integrated approaches are intuitively compelling and hold promise for being the most effective way to amplify programs' impact and scale.

The literature and interviews also found an important understanding among development practitioners and local communities: climate and development issues are inherently interconnected. Thus, climate change is inherently multidisciplinary, and responses to it should be similarly cross-cutting.⁹ For many practitioners and researchers, this logic means greater reliance on systems analysis and integrated or cross-sector interventions. It also means finding opportuni-

“[Climate justice and social justice] are problems that don't have short-term solutions.... Many times, the sector-specific impact is short-lived... So, you can see how you can win one battle but still need to keep on struggling. Unless you build up a powerful movement across sectors, change is not possible.”

—Nikhil Aziz, *American Jewish World Service*

ties to work across skillsets and approaches that have tended to operate independently.

Traditional sector-based approaches, by contrast, were seen by our informants as of limited effectiveness and sustainability for social change and environmental protection, as well as sidestepping

the complex, cross-cutting nature of climate resilience and social change. This review also found that relying on a limited range of expertise and disciplinary viewpoints tends to result in reductionist framings of development challenges and incomplete, less durable responses.

However, clear differences of opinion emerged from this review on the purposes and outcomes of integrated programs. A significant number of reports state that the purpose of cross-sector work is to accelerate desired outcomes in a specific sector (e.g., improved reproductive health or faster adoption of new productive technology). Other materials reflect an understanding that integration advances multiple development needs in more cohesive interventions.¹⁰ Each variant on the continuum between single-discipline activities and multi-sector integration seems confident that its preferred strategies and activities best align with the nature of development challenges.

B. HUMAN RIGHTS AND GENDER EQUALITY AS GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Most of the practitioners interviewed for this review identified human rights and gender equality as compelling moral principles that should cut across climate change responses. That understanding informs efforts in policy, advocacy and programs, and is an influential conceptual frame in this area of work. Supporting vulnerable populations in building climate resilience is also important to protect critical gains from earlier development; this seems increasingly well-understood among the donors, policy advocates and practitioners interviewed for this review.

“Adverse impacts from climate change impact vulnerable groups first, and women and children fall into that group first. They don’t have voice, but identifying all of the contributing deficits hasn’t been easy for us. They don’t have equal power or access to resources.”

—Alice Thomas, *Refugees International*

The literature is also loud and clear that the poor, and women and girls, are more at risk from climate changes than wealthier groups and men. The threat to women and girls from the interplay of climate change and gendered power disparities was cited pervasively in the literature and in our interviews as a major risk to their well-being and security. The literature is also clear that the disadvantage faced by girls and women has direct implications for environment, climate resilience, food security, health and other development domains.¹¹

A related observation is worth mentioning: A significant number of programs that have rights-friendly components do not self-identify as “rights initiatives” in their descriptions or stated objectives. However, tacit support for climate, gender and rights work may be expressed using other descriptive terms such as empowerment, voice, participation, ownership, roles in decision-making, education, leadership, engagement or climate justice. At face value, this constellation of related terms seems to reflect the “scatter” of paradigms and approaches—described more in the following sections—that characterize this area of work.

Yet these word choices are not always intended as markers of difference. Many of the programs reviewed led with terms other than “rights”; however, when asked, interviewees from those programs also indicated that their work is “at least consistent” with rights values and frameworks. Without stating a commitment to rights pathways or outcomes, for example, many groups signaled that a key purpose of their work is to make fundamental changes that improve the life circumstances and prospects of girls and women.

Our interviews also suggest that programs may not explicitly position the achievement of girls’ and women’s rights as a primary objective but may still have desired outcomes they view as consistent with achieving these rights over time. A number of interviewees pointed out that rights goals are often tacitly understood as longer-range and more complex objectives, which means these goals may be less likely to attract donor support. Some noted that objectives other than rights may represent worthy milestones on a potentially shared path toward more fully realized rights. One rights-oriented observer noted that descriptive terms about projects are often chosen with donor priorities and preferences topmost in mind and that chosen descriptive keywords are often tactical. Thus, gender and rights programs may have potential allies that identify or classify themselves using other descriptive labels. A lens too narrowly focused on a rights approach may inadver-

“We should focus on girls’ and women’s well-being for its own sake. But if we can connect it to other issues, it helps people understand the connections between these things and encourages them to have more appreciation for girls’ rights.”

—Robert Engelman, *Worldwatch Institute*

what are nonetheless usually referred to as “gendered” strategies and interventions.

A worthy emphasis on tackling the social biases faced by girls, women and other disadvantaged groups can sometimes divert attention away from men’s pivotal roles in facilitating or blocking shifts in values, social roles and economic status. Our findings echo an increasingly wide understanding: that gains for women—as well as for boys, men and societies generally—rely on norm changes related to gendered male social roles. A relational framing of gender implies that women’s subordinate status and roles occur in socio-cultural contexts shaped by patriarchy, which imposes a range of negative consequences. However, overall, the review found very few strong, integrated models of gender-responsive male engagement in its core areas of rights, resilience and equity.

tently overlook strategically aligned change pathways that could facilitate shared longer term and multi-sector objectives.

C. SHIFTING NORMS REQUIRES WORKING WITH GIRLS AND WOMEN, AND ALSO BOYS AND MEN

The advantages of engaging women and girls centrally in rights, gender equity and climate resilience came across clearly in this review. Women and girls’ participation across the full cycle of development activities is vital not just on the basis of rights and equity but also to improve programs, strengthen local capabilities and build human capital. Development and climate discourse has often underplayed the implications of patriarchy and male prerogatives in shaping

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WHY ISN'T THERE MORE MULTI-SECTOR COLLABORATION NOW?

A. DISCIPLINARY SILOS AS A LEGACY THAT SLOWS INTEGRATION

In the gender, rights and climate arenas, discourse and practice have frequently remained siloed. Responses to climate change have been framed by disciplinary expertise and worldviews that fragment complex realities into “manageable” traditional thematic sectors. Environmental issues, including climate change, present a fundamental challenge to these disciplinary bubbles.

At the strategic and program levels, traditional disciplines and expertise have not grappled as effectively as needed with cross-cutting drivers of climate change and strategies to build resilience. The tendency to rely almost exclusively on traditional technical domains—economics, agronomy, hydrology, weather forecasting, plant protection, animal husbandry and soil science, for example, in addressing climate resilience in agriculture—leads to less effective responses and reduced climate resilience than more inclusive disciplinary mixes.

Perhaps most debilitating is that traditional approaches to environmental issues tend to sideline practice areas such as social and political sciences, gender, community development and rights.¹² These perspectives can provide information and insights that deepen and facilitate resilience-building efforts while helping local communities grapple with other unaddressed challenges.¹³

Additionally, much of the discussion on “integration” versus “sector-driven” approaches reflects cultural assumptions, intellectual history, and economic, educational and professional systems

“As people who had a mandate of potable water said to us, ‘We don’t have time to focus on integration; we need to get water to the masses.’”

—*Nanette Barkey and David Bonnardeaux, PACT*

from the Global North. “Northern” development experts have traditionally enjoyed considerable privilege in defining the agenda, diagnosing problems and prescribing solutions. Even locally driven programs are shaped by these ideas, many of which are not evolving as intentionally and rapidly as the climate crisis requires. The assumptions and technical understandings about climate resilience held by many donors, stakeholders, local implementing organizations and program managers reflect the precedence given these disciplinary worldviews. Despite the keen interest on the part of institutions based in the Global North and Global South, girls’ rights remain peripheral to development in general, and to work on climate change and resilience.

This legacy presents challenges for more integrated and coherent community-based resilience approaches.¹⁴ Our review suggests that an important priority for climate, gender and rights practitioners should be facilitating greater collaboration across sectoral programs.¹⁵ The need to innovate quickly to address the magnitude and scope of climate disruption, and any choice to use current sector paradigms should be weighed against the potential of more holistic, comprehensive strategies.

But while holism, systems approaches and integration are appealing in principle, interviewees described applying them as a complicated management challenge in practice. Practitioners and advocates face interwoven social, cultural, economic and political frameworks that can be difficult to understand and are often resistant to change.¹⁶ Additionally, multi-sector interventions can assemble a broader range of information than single-sector efforts, but this richness then challenges managers, staff, communities and stakeholders to assess and respond appropriately to the sheer volume of data. On top of that, mapping a suite of project interventions onto ambitious, multi-dimensional change agendas—and reporting on the work to donors—can be a conceptual and logistical challenge.

Holistic assessment and response to complex problems may seem to encourage progressively expanding combinations of sectors and activities, and the range of issues for consideration in integrated approaches is intimidating. As integrated interventions become more ambitious, they tend to require longer time frames and more diverse competencies. Questions arise about the sequence, duration and adequacy of various activities in responding to the particulars of local contexts, and the causality and the dynamics of change can become tougher to understand and document as the elements of complex integrated efforts

unfold. Tracking the rights and experiences of girls, rarely a priority in simple sectoral projects, becomes even less likely.

B. LOW LEVELS OF INVESTMENT LIMIT CROSS-SECTOR WORK

This review set out to gather information on the level of investment in cross-sector work girls’ rights, gender and resilience to indicate the scale, trends and prospects for integrated work. Our efforts to find even rough numbers were sharply limited by major information gaps, including non-comparable budget and investment data, as well as limited time series data. These data weaknesses made estimating investment levels an uncertain—and potentially misleading—exercise. However, the available materials indicate that levels of funding for integrated interventions involving women and girls’ rights, gender equality and climate resilience represent a very small proportion of development investments overall, with few signs of an upward trend.¹⁷ In light of generally low levels of total funding for international development, social change and environment activities, the small fraction allocated to integrated programs is especially telling.¹⁸

“To the extent that there’s money going in, it goes to food security or ‘bricks and mortar.’ But there’s not much going to focusing on the potential to leverage girls as part of the solution.”

—Alice Thomas, *Refugees International*

The interviewees noted the general scarcity of funding, especially for integrated work, and some shared reservations as to how it is being allocated. Two said the limited influence of integrated approaches reflects the scant resources they receive. Their formulation of the challenges could be summarized this way: “Gaining credibility without first gaining donor support is difficult; gaining donor support without first gaining experience and credibility is equally tough.”

A strong majority of the informants felt a disproportionate amount of funding has been flowing to climate mitigation as opposed to adaptation and resilience. Much less also seems to flow toward disaster risk reduction than to traditional disaster response in areas such as emergency food assistance. And

despite increased attention to girls, the inclination is to view them as beneficiaries rather than as agents of change who have much to contribute to their communities.

C. GENDER AND RIGHTS PERIPHERAL IN CLIMATE RESILIENCE

One of this review's objectives was to gauge interest in integrated programs within and across the climate, gender equality and rights communities. To what extent do respective sectors seem to be leaning into opportunities for collaboration? Are climate programs, for example, more or less inclined to seek cross-sector partnerships than gender equality or rights?

Straightforward answers to these questions proved elusive in the literature we reviewed. A consensus view seems to be that climate, gender and rights are all, in various ways, cross-cutting issues. Interconnectedness, holism and systems theory as conceptual anchors for these areas of work seem more prominent in the recent literature. This attention reflects growing interest in grappling more directly with the root causes of development and climate challenges.

Yet program examples of strong integration across sectors to address complex, cross-cutting challenges seem few in number—or at least difficult to document. Several interviewees noted the struggle to move from knowing that rights, gender, and climate are interconnected to applying that knowledge, reflecting the messy reality that collaboration often hinges on issues beyond awareness.

The review literature reinforced a view expressed by practitioners that traditional climate response and resilience-building has often pursued strategies that, while mainstream, reflect tacit but influential gender biases and disciplinary hierarchies.¹⁹ Interviews with practitioners in the gender equality and rights arenas indicated a widely shared perception that they have more limited influence, funding and operating space than mainstream climate response. They suggested that as a technical area, climate science enjoys significant advantages in credibility, visibility, policy leadership and support, which tends to make the climate science community less inclined to appreciate or prioritize alternative framing of the issues.²⁰ This dampens forward movement on issues such as building consensus about the multi-sector, multi-stakeholder nature of climate resilience challenges or about the need for resource allocation that fairly reflect the potential contributions of non-traditional stakeholders, community groups and CSOs.

“The ‘women and girls’ community constantly has to make themselves relevant and remind people of their contribution. Gender specialists constantly have to make themselves heard. But in program discussion and in any aspect of the response, governments haven’t prioritized that issue.”

—Alice Thomas, *Refugees International*

Our interviews suggested some gender rights advocates feel that mainstream climate programs tend to have weak gender and rights components and lack the thematic expertise to recognize and improve the situation. Entrenched positioning, the interviewees indicated, helps insulate dominant sectors and programs from the pressure to accommodate alternate viewpoints, acknowledge knowledge gaps or adjust key assumptions. Practitioners described the parallels between the challenges of changing traditional practice paradigms and the complexity and sensitivity in managing community-grounded interventions. These implementers tend to see norms and value changes in the gender and rights arena as more challenging and less predictable than more technical areas of climate response.

Our interviews underscored, for example, how frequently climate resilience and adaptation have been framed in terms of the general population's risks and vulnerabilities. This approach addresses the needs of women and girls as undifferentiated members of societies, but it often misses the specific disadvantages and risks they face as members of an especially vulnerable subgroup. Perhaps unsurprisingly, gender-disaggregated data on the impact of climate and resilience programs is scarce, reflecting its lesser importance in mainstream climate response “whole community” frameworks. The gendered disadvantages that women and girls face in areas such as education, negotiating power, the ability to express opinions, rights to land and control of economic assets, personal mobility, legal redress and social capital (among many) have not until recently been especially prominent in international climate discourse or national agendas for climate action.

“We need hard scientific evidence about the impact of girls’ and women’s rights. Our advocacy is very soft and aspirational. We need to strengthen the case for investing in women and girls. Research is also weak, and we found virtually nothing connecting women and resilience. We don’t have all the evidence we need for advocacy to bring new allies and attention to girls’ and women’s rights.”

— Robert Engelman, *Worldwatch Institute*

In addition, prevailing thematic and disciplinary sectors such as economics or technical areas of climate response often enjoy deference and greater influence than practice areas such as gender equality or girls’ rights. Imbalances in disciplinary status and organizational power are clearly expressed in the relationships that organizations and individuals establish when they seek funding or design interventions. For example, advocates and practitioners in the ‘lower-clout’ areas of gender equality and rights whom we interviewed reported feeling pressure to contribute to technical climate outcomes in order to justify being included in resilience programs. When they manage to be included in programs, the amounts of funding they tend to receive are much less than ‘lead’ program areas. On the other hand, dominant disciplines and ‘climate response’ thematic areas are usually not expected to contribute reciprocally to rights or gender equality outcomes. This frustrates some rights and equality advocates because it reflects that the hierarchical relationship between sectors is generally unexamined and uncritically accepted. In the view of those practitioners, the marginalization of sectors such as gender equality and girls’ rights is not just unfair, but also compromises the effectiveness of programs.

D INFORMATION GAPS ADD UNCERTAINTY AND RISK

Information gaps made it difficult for this review to satisfactorily assess some aspects of integrated work. It is even more challenging to make comparative assessments when the focus broadens from the program level to the sector and cross-sector levels. Even single-program documentation is tough to find

or in limited circulation. Project performance data on the effectiveness, advantages and constraints of multi-sector programs were even more challenging to assemble. At both the policy and program levels, standard practice seems to be to make program decisions—such as determining sectors and disciplines, strategies and technical approaches—with less-than-optimal information.

The experts interviewed generally felt that capturing and sharing program experiences more systematically could improve strategies. The findings suggest a growing recognition among funders, researchers and practitioners that many field activities lack the type and quality of program information needed to make confident decisions about novel sector combinations for integration. In this situation, familiar program strategies and conservative technical approaches may seem like credible, low-risk options.

Additionally, a substantial number of interviewees indicated that few programs can access the comparative assessments or monitoring and evaluation (M&E) data that would inspire and inform new approaches. In their experiences, weak documentation and inconsistent evidence on women’s and girls’ rights, climate response and allied sectors have meant that potentially valuable contributions are not being recognized, appreciated or used by a wider community.

Though this pattern of weak data and information is familiar in other areas, it seems to have provoked a stronger negative reaction in the rights, gender and resilience arena. A number of the interviewees said the marginal status of gender, rights and integrated programs is not the result of ineffectiveness but rather of low investment in knowledge management systems that could inform a careful empirical process of comparison and improvement. Lacking the needed data, integrated programs face greater difficulty demonstrating their benefits, efficiencies and synergies across sectors.

In the girls’ and women’s rights and climate intersection, as in other areas, an important priority should be advancing a culture of assessment, learning and improvement. An emphasis on ongoing review and improvements in strategies, policies and methods within disciplines and across sectors was not at all prominent in the review materials. Most programs seem to rely on “tried-and-true” approaches rather than apply more systematic performance reviews, impact assessments and external evaluation to generate new strategies and approaches.

In this situation, the relative openness with which climate change stakeholders document and share their approaches and experiences will help determine the speed at which collaborative strategies will improve.

Strengthening program M&E systems and energizing multi-sector program research are among the most important steps to advance integrated programs in general and girls' rights and climate response programming specifically.²¹ As in other areas of programming, limited resources for M&E is a significant constraint: A small number of interviewees with expertise in organizational capacity-building noted that

resources for M&E are usually overstretched in supporting core areas of program management and operations, and further budget outlays and staff would usually be needed to support research or comparative analysis. Collaboration to build research on integrated programs represents another area in which shared interests and potential synergies can help reduce organizational concerns about losing proprietary knowledge or competitive advantage through partnerships.

A need for greater capacity

According to the review materials, an important premise of effective and gender-equitable resilience-building is the existence of local organizations that can help catalyze change. With financial, human, social and organizational capital generally in short supply, organizations often feel called upon to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and scale of their approaches. Alongside partnerships, collaboration and more robust program integration, organizational capacity-strengthening is a method to advance those objectives. Yet capacity-building surfaced relatively infrequently in our interviews as a constraint to integrated work. When prompted, however, several respondents acknowledged related challenges, especially at the local levels. Two noted that capacity deficits at the policy level seemed less consequential than at the community level.

Calls for country ownership and community-led development are underwritten by aid effectiveness agreements, signaling that localization has broad support across the development community. A key piece of local ownership is co-leadership of development processes across civil society, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments and the business sector. Yet in many cases, a straightforward assumption of leadership by governments, NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) may not result in the desired or durable development outcomes. The literature indicates that organizational capacity and human capital deficits at various levels challenge many local organizations. Country ownership strategies, while premised on national and multi-stakeholder leadership in social change and development, also recognize that well-designed capacity-strengthening is often needed. This helps fortify capabilities ranging from policy leadership to community engagement and building local resources to deliver key services.

Especially in areas such as reshaping gender norms and power relationships, a blend of local and outside ideas can be effective in realizing change. Organizational capacity-building is an area in which “outside” organizations—whether urban or international—have an important role to play. In many areas of development practice, neither the “expert” nor the “local” approach alone is likely to achieve the range of changes sought by donors or communities. The opportunity to “pool” diverse perspectives can strengthen attention to the holistic nature of problems, while also retaining a focus on gender equality and girls' rights. Hybrid approaches bringing together the strong sector capacities of outside organizations and governments with the credibility and situational awareness of local civil society organizations (CSOs) and communities can be effective and strengthen local capacity.

E. CONSTRAINTS AFFECTING CIVIL SOCIETY

An important precondition for effective locally led development is an enabling policy, legal and regulatory environment for local communities and non-state organizations. In an increasing range of countries, however, states lack the political will to create essential enabling conditions for non-state actors. Additionally, a growing number of governments seek to constrain civil society as a legitimate development actor, and increasingly restrictive or disabling environments for non-state actors reflect worrying trends in civic engagement and participation.

These conditions could perhaps explain why the contractions in civil society space are less prominent in the literature than other constraints of roughly equal importance. Our interviewees did not raise “enabling environment” as an issue; however, when asked, they generally acknowledged an enabling environment as critical for all areas of social change and development. Our interviewees mentioned political sensitivities about the civil society space as a disincentive to work on the issue, along with the lack of resources and inherent risks.

Practitioners in the gender, rights and climate space with whom we spoke generally shared the understanding that governments have a central role in successful policies and programs. Whether governments provide core development

“[In the US, good work] is happening independent of politics, and in places where you can’t utter the words ‘climate change.’ A lot of good stuff is going on, especially where they are really engaging the community.”

—Laurie Mazur, *Island Press*

services or enable others to provide them, their policies, regulations and resources shape the context for local- or community-led development. The climate response literature is replete with inter-governmental and governmental reports that set climate resilience agendas consistent with this vision.

A significant weak point in this model is that in many cases, governments—however well-intentioned—lack the capacity or political will to fulfill that role. In the absence of capable and engaged local government, the prospects seem less encouraging for funders or non-state actors to implement and sustain a localization strategy. For this reason, a telling indicator of healthy enabling environments for civil society and non-state actors is strong mechanisms for consultation and engagement among governments, citizens and non-state actors. But in many settings where local CBOs or NGOs help mobilize local communities or act as implementers, country- and community-level mechanisms aimed at shared priorities tend to be relatively ad hoc, limited in scope and scale, and inadequately supported.

The potential for effective localization through non-state actors often depends on appropriate central government policies and on local government facilitation. Government capacity to define the more effective policies and shared interests to foster engagement across stakeholders is a strategic requirement for successful programs in most sectors. Donors may be able to play a helpful role by endorsing appropriate multi-stakeholder processes to broaden social and resource mobilization that supports national development priorities. Convening stakeholders and community mobilization—though of course adding costs—can also add great value by building personal and social capital through networking, advocacy and dialogue among communities, civil society, advocates, donors and government.

04

WHAT CHANGES ARE NEEDED FOR GREATER MULTI-SECTOR COLLABORATION?

A. SHIFTING MINDSETS FROM “COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE” TO “SHARED BENEFITS”

Organizations gain partnership leverage when they can clearly convey to stakeholders their added value in specific situations and can identify potential shared interests or overlapping objectives with other actors. This approach could provide, for example, a basis for more explicitly aligning the goals of climate resilience-builders and gender equality practitioners. If stakeholders and change agents can illuminate climate-response pathways that contribute to a consensus vision, the chances for cooperation and collaboration rise significantly.

Tangible synergies and replicable mutual benefits make collaboration more worthwhile for all contributors, and a fuller accounting of the advantages and drawbacks of single-sector versus integrated models could inform more confident decisions about cross-sector partnerships. Development stakeholders in most niches could benefit from greater awareness of multi-sector initiatives and strategies to facilitate

them. Accessible analysis and tools to identify how gender equality and rights objectives can enhance responses to climate change and can yield gains for women and girls would help potential participants to prepare and facilitate that outcome.²²

The interplay between rights and gender empowerment practitioners suggests that related, mutually supportive change pathways could provide the basis for collaboration. Organizations working to mitigate gendered social deficits by mobilizing and engaging women and girls, for example, often resonate with rights frameworks. Frequent word choice in the gender empowerment literature—participation, voice, engagement, empowerment, agency, gender-responsive, decision-making, and climate justice—suggest those building blocks can also be or indicators of or precursors for rights-oriented change pathways.

B. IDENTIFYING AND MANAGING RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES

The climate community has generally embraced the idea that addressing endemic risks is a sound

“The communities where we work are vulnerable to shocks and stresses. Many events can derail our efforts to achieve our development outcomes. And it’s important to think about in terms of value for money, since our investments can easily be washed away by these problems.”

—Karen Scriven and David Nicholson, *Mercy Corps*

strategy to help stabilize societies, economies and landscapes against the impacts of climate disruption. Greater use of risk management tools can help transcend a prevailing culture of risk avoidance (for example, relying on traditional paradigms) and risk denial (for example, refusing to acknowledge climate change and thus enabling business-as-usual economies and weak regulations). A shared understanding of the risk environment and accompanying opportunities for mitigation can help organizations more confidently intervene in rapidly changing settings. Assessment approaches that identify ways to transform, or at least reduce, specific risks can support more confident program choices.

A focus on risks can also help gender equality and rights advocates make a case for social change that incorporates active, pre-emptive efforts to mitigate and manage risks. This approach can be more appealing and ethical than accepting the status quo, which in many societies entails unacceptable costs for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups—most consistently, women and girls. For the climate response community, these gendered cultural disadvantages make efforts to mobilize girls and women more difficult and riskier: for example, when women and girls are called upon to advance climate adaptation or resilience goals without changes in the dysfunctional gender norms and patriarchal power that make them chronically vulnerable. Nonetheless, a concern for social and economic stability is not, in itself, a rationale for failing to pursue social change. The impulse to “do no harm,” in its desire to avoid externally induced disruption, can leave unaddressed the ongoing harms and worsening risks inherent in many settings.

This review indicated a strong consensus across the climate response, rights and gender equality communities on the importance of improving food security, economic status and

social equality for women and families. The findings also echo many other voices and literature in advocating urgently for reducing the degradation of rural landscapes and making agricultural production systems fairer and more sustainable. The goal of restoring, regenerating and “sustainably intensifying” marginal subsistence and market-oriented farms is exceptionally ambitious. Yet accomplishing it is, unavoidably, a vital piece of any equation for reducing local and global climate risks.

One of the major social deficits women and girls face is in the social, gender and legal power needed to negotiate fairer sharing of the economic opportunities in agriculture.²³ In many settings, women assume primary responsibility for household caregiving and food security. Though a major source of farm labor, women and girls often have subordinate roles in farm management decisions. They are inadequately compensated in the family division of harvests, market sales and farm profits. In this dependent and vulnerable role, women most directly feel the impacts when climate changes threaten crops, livestock and food security.²⁴

To build climate resilience, women and families in rural settings need help in reducing the environmental risks and economic vulnerabilities inherent to marginal farm settings and to women’s subordinate social status.²⁵ Women farmers who invest labor and resources to intensify small farms can ill afford risky traditional production strategies that may worsen their exposure to climate instability and damages. Yet they often lack ownership or control over houses and farmland, and face difficulties inheriting either. As a result, they often lack the collateral needed to secure loans for agriculture. Engaging women and girls to empower them as farm co-operators and enabling them to become proactive farm resilience managers increases their ability to manage and adapt to looming shocks. Rapidly building the knowledge, personal capital and effective social agency of girls and women will be pivotal. They will need support to adapt farm and livestock management systems to impending near-term stresses, as well as to accelerating longer-term climate disruption.

Addressing risks while getting the incentives right for women in agriculture means creating pathways along which they can confidently invest their labor, capital and scarce natural resources. To secure that confidence, women need the same social, legal and economic enabling factors that farmers need in most settings but that girls and women are too frequently denied. Additionally, failing to decisively engage men in norms change increases the likelihood that as landscape and ecological degradation worsen, climate stresses will overwhelm the resilience of farm and food systems.²⁶

C. FACILITATING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

At the local level, a significant challenge for social change initiatives is facilitating meaningful and lasting stakeholder engagement—especially among women and girls—across program cycles. The difficulty is in establishing viable mechanisms that enable girls, women and other marginal groups to more confidently express their opinions and effectively secure their needs. An important first step is helping girls and women safely express their views about important issues in their lives and their suggestions on potential change pathways. Social change agents and development actors have a responsibility to incorporate those viewpoints into community change agendas. The subsequent challenge is to extend one-off expressions of voice into sustained participation, engagement, agency and empowerment.

Women and girls' ability to exercise their voice, assert their interests and participate in development activities reflects a reallocation of decision-making power towards citizens and communities. Local and outside organizations should incorporate community engagement and stakeholder participation strategies that go far beyond notifying communities and soliciting reactions on planned programs. This would mean shaping programs so that girls and women could participate meaningfully across the cycle—from shaping priorities for change to implementing interventions and seeking accountability for the outcomes.²⁷

It's important to note these kinds of cross-cutting changes could generate unintended consequences or backlash, perhaps to the extent they present an unacceptable risk. From many governments' perspective, the ability of local communities to act as agents in their own development represents a worrying shift in the power allocation and can lead to official overreaction and suppression. From local communities' perspective, transformational programs can be seen as disrupting traditional gender relations and balances of power. Despite these initiative's aim of intervening positively, traditional power brokers may view their attempting to reset gender norms as inherently threatening or destabilizing. In many settings, this can induce unexpected backlash, gender-based violence or further curtailment of women and girls' agency and rights.²⁸

Achieving girl-focused gender equality and rights goals through program models adapted to local cultures, history, aspirations, changing ecologies and climate disruption remains a central challenge and uncertainty for current practice. It also points to the importance of better understand-

ing nuanced local contexts by incorporating social science skillsets such as gender analysis, language competence, community mapping and assessment alongside traditionally prevailing sectors and strategies. Alongside collaborative engagement with local communities, these skills can provide the analysis and insight to help programs be contextually attuned, effective and socially sustainable.

D. USING RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES

Two related but distinct approaches to women and girls' rights and roles in climate response emerged in this review, and each provides tools for mobilizing communities and forming alliances or partnerships.

In what might be called "instrumental" approaches, women and girls' role is typically supporting programs or interventions that yield benefits to communities or wider populations. The assumption is that women and girls stand to gain from the outcomes as members of the community. In instrumental approaches, women and girls represent a demographic needed to boost participation across communities vulnerable to

“Climate change is a key piece of the shocks and stresses, but we made a decision not to isolate a focus on climate change. We could waste so much time thinking about whether an event is a result of climate change—so need to think about shocks and stresses from a broader perspective.”

—Karen Scriven and David Nicholson, Mercy Corps

climate disruption, poverty or other issues. As in many other traditional approaches to women and girls' participation, success is measured in important part by the sex ratio of males and females enlisted in programs.²⁹

By contrast, more socially contextualized and gender-responsive approaches (like rights-based approaches) tend to preferentially include women and girls. The aim is to directly address and offset—at least in part—the disadvantages and power deficits they face in community, family and personal spheres, and to relate those to wider social issues such as education,

patriarchy, violence or child marriage.³⁰ The assumption is that girls and women gain experiences and capabilities they can tap into on their personal paths toward improved well-being, more secure rights and greater resilience to the effects of climate change.

Rights-based approaches often seek positive outcomes for women and girls through strategies to transform social contexts and cultural norms that perpetuate disadvantages. The assumption is generally that the social, normative and legal contexts for securing rights thus improve.³¹ In a positive feedback loop, evidence indicates that empowerment makes girls and women more effective actors across a range of personal, social and development challenges. Gains in areas such as education, health and self-determination, for example, represent assets that girls and women can use to secure other development gains.³²

Our initial assessment had been that instrumental approaches are less likely to deliver equitable benefits than rights-based approaches because they aim for community-wide benefits rather than address the structural sources of gender disadvantages. However, our interviews raised questions as to whether that distinction is useful. As our informants noted, rights outcomes are often significantly tougher to achieve than nearer-term gains in areas such as personal capital, education, income and health status. A significant number of practitioners with whom we spoke view girls' and women's ability to access intermediate benefits from development and social change processes as consistent with—though not the full realization of—rights. A number of our interviewees also noted that engaging women and girls in change processes that affect wider communities and populations, while not solving structural challenges, is often a more meaningful and constructive role than previously acceptable or accessible, and can serve as an important precedent for subsequent steps.

Our interviews also conveyed that intermediate outcomes on pathways that lead to more secure rights are often quite similar to those in more instrumental interventions. For example, rights-based approaches might focus on land rights or access to credit as a way to empower women farmers. For climate resilience purposes, by contrast, land rights may not be a high priority, but more stable rural landscapes could be. Instrumental programs mobilizing girls and women on behalf of resilience strategies may provide them with new knowledge in areas such as farm management, allowing them to make better market decisions while also buffering farm livelihoods

against climate shocks and stresses. Such investments can help reduce food insecurity, improve productivity and make farm ownership, management and investment less risky—all positive outcomes for women and girls.

These findings resonate with our experiences: Efforts to achieve climate resilience in contexts where girls and women lack effective agency, education, health, livelihood skills and so on are inherently more challenging and riskier. Conversely, strategies to strengthen or accelerate resilience-building by empowering girls and women can also provide skills that are effective in other domains. Useful learning experiences and transferable skills can add value to resilience efforts for girls, women and the communities.

E. USING THEORIES OF CHANGE AS COMMUNICATIONS, PARTNERSHIP AND PROGRAM TOOLS

Jointly crafted theories of change (ToCs) can usefully strengthen and communicate a program's motivating assumptions and strategies, and position girls' rights as an element that is core throughout a given program. Strong ToCs

“In terms of girls' rights and climate, per se, girls need to learn to swim, literally. The right to learn skills that enable you to protect yourself is critical.”

—Heather McGray, New Venture Fund

can clarify the causality and sequence of events assumed to lead from program activities to resilience and social change outcomes. They can also help potential allies, stakeholders and donors understand the program being proposed. Sharing draft ToCs enables change agents and planners to gather feedback and incorporate constructive suggestions,³³ and this process can make program planners aware of service gaps and potential service providers or change agents who could boost participation or accelerate a given project. Indeed, a strong ToC can be an advocacy tool to which stakeholders can refer when working to ensure attention to gender equality and girls' rights, for example. Additionally, post-project reviews of ToCs can help shape improvements in current strategies and methods. This cycle can drive learning that



Laxmi, a girl from Hampi, a small town in South India, herds her animals in the morning before school.
© 2016 Sanket Khuntale, Courtesy of Photoshare

broadens programs' reach and effectiveness and reduce the likelihood that questionable or ineffective assumptions will go unnoticed.

Our literature review suggests most programs do not yet use ToCs widely or consistently. Weakly implemented ToCs often rely on selected disciplinary lenses to define challenges and potential solutions along traditional lines. Too much emphasis can be placed on sector strategies and activities that reflect the core competencies and worldview of powerful legacy

disciplines. Opening up multi-stakeholder and community-engagement mechanisms would help forge models that don't assume traditional analyses and technical solutions are best. A key step is strengthening community and stakeholder capacity to think through alternate framings for change and outlining more accurate cause-and-effect pathways than those relied on by traditional lead sectors. Strengthening CBOs' and NGOs' skills and effectiveness in using robust ToCs makes them more appealing partners and helps establish the credibility of alternate paradigms.

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CONCLUSION

This review has identified advantages to multi-sector collaboration on issues related to girls' rights, gender and climate change. At the same time, it's important to underscore that the number and combination of included sectors by itself isn't an adequate indicator of the changes a program may bring about. The specific disciplinary understandings and strategies for change emanating from contributing disciplines—whether a single sector lead or a wide coalition—are equally important issues and should be a priority for analysis. Rights and gender equality lenses on climate resilience can help shed light on the changing cultural and historical content brought together in climate resilience initiatives. Particularly in current circumstances—when disciplinary boundaries and knowledge are open to wider critiques and are shifting rapidly—it's important to understand the implications of changing paradigms for potential alliances and cross-sector collaboration.

To outsiders or non-participants, climate resilience programs often seem siloed—reliant on single disciplines or a small cluster of related disciplines with relatively well-aligned world-views. Internally, however, those same programs seem to cut across traditional single-discipline boundaries through their partnerships. Almost all climate resilience programs assert they seek out and rely on partners who bring complementary skills to address important shared priorities. Most programs—whatever their anchor sectors—seem to participate in what they view as multi-sector collaboration and seem to identify as managing or collaborating in integrated programs. This situation calls for analysis that arrays programs along a progression from “weak” or limited cross-disciplinary integration—for example, between adjacent technical areas—to “strong” cross-sector and multi-stakeholder alternatives.



Women sort chilies at Hatt Fulbari in Bogra, Bangladesh.
© 2017 Md. Akhles Uddin, Courtesy of Photoshare

This review sounds a cautionary note about a tendency in most disciplines and discourse to focus on boundary markers and proprietary claims based on traditional skills, expertise and credentialing. This self-interest tends to highlight distinctions between fields rather than complementary strengths, and to preserve and protect legacy methods and approaches rather than promote their evolution. Entrenched and growing problems such as climate change and gender inequality compel social change actors to collaborate as closely and inclusively as possible to move the needle. Greater acceptance of the cross-cutting complexity and the inter-related nature of major challenges will open space for integrated responses. In this scenario, specific disciplinary assets should be viewed as contributing to a much larger mosaic of contributing stakeholders, capabilities and collaboration.

The magnitude of climate threats and the pervasiveness of gender disparities will test the capabilities of communities and change agents. The prospects for building resilience and gender equality are mutually determined and interwoven. Positive impacts in both realms will depend on greater

sector-wide capability to bring together and activate alliances based on shared interests and complementary skills. Another success factor will be strengthening capabilities at the individual, organizational and community levels while also pushing thematic sectors to improve their practice standards or adopt best practices.

This report has found that girls' rights and climate resilience should be treated as essential and equally influential factors in holistic development. Yet the unequal resources now flowing to each reflect an unbalanced relationship more akin to a helpful bird perched on top of a determined rhinoceros thundering down a well-worn path.

Recommendations

These recommendations aim to help advance collaborative efforts at the intersection of girls' rights and climate resilience. Situational variability makes it essential that they not be taken as a uniform set of recommendations. Many facets of change are needed to accomplish more rights-responsive, gender-equitable and effective climate resilience. These span areas of work that extend from policy, disciplinary expertise, professional hierarchies and problem definitions to funding parameters, country ownership, stakeholder participation and governance.

These recommendations are aimed at development practitioners, researchers and advocates.

Encourage climate adaptation and rights programs that convey mutually beneficial outcomes. It is essential to support climate adaptation efforts organized around integral roles and positive outcomes—including rights—for girls and women. At the same time, the global community must support girls' and women's rights programs that advance equitable, sustainable livelihoods and climate resilience.

Encourage integrated climate, gender and rights programs. This includes supporting integrated programs on women and girls' rights and climate resilience based on the understanding that these issues are interwoven and that solutions should blend both sectors. It also means supporting the generation of a stronger evidence base to document the effectiveness and potential synergies of multi-sector programs; this could involve better operations research, management information and M&E data to underwrite improved program strategic decisions, management and field approaches. The resulting information could be used to expand potential opportunities to blend rights, gender and resilience programs model.

Support local implementing partners and coalitions. Locally led alliances of stakeholders, CBOs and CSOs are essential in the struggle to advance girls' rights, gender equality and climate resilience objectives. Along these lines, partnerships should also transcend the unhelpful binary between "local" and "outside" development actors. Global development actors should support the success of local organizations by building essential capabilities for development leadership and social change through local, regional, national or international counterparts. They should also support CBOs and NGOs in strengthening skills in multi-stakeholder engagement and community outreach, enabling them as organizers and conveners in development processes.

Support donor alliances to address neglected but high-potential opportunities. Donor support should target integrated approaches to rights, gender and climate resilience. This could include co-funding windows that encourage collaboration across disciplines and practice silos with the aim of driving improvements in program approaches, field methods and technical options. Development actors must also support the review and revision of tools for and approaches to community mobilization, partner selection, sector integration, stakeholder outreach and multi-stakeholder convening.

Additionally, donors and donor groups should engage in policy dialogue with host governments on the positive impacts of more gender-equitable and rights-responsive climate change policy. An essential component of this is support for building host governments' capacity in gender assessment and rights-responsive climate resilience. Multi-stakeholder engagement mechanisms can help governments, communities, citizens, the private sector, civil society and other institutions play more active and collaborative roles in social change and development processes.

Improve program frames and rationales. Systems theory can provide greater analysis of the root causes of development challenges and support program strategies to tackle them. To best use this data, political economy and political ecology frames are needed to illuminate the power and patronage relationships shaping the climate status quo. Additionally, greater use of systems analysis is necessary to understand connections between sectors and how interventions in one area can positively affect others.

Development actors across sectors must also emphasize the importance of women and girls' agency, participation and empowerment in facilitating positive outcomes in climate adaptation and rights. Correspondingly, this involves shifting away from using the "vulnerability" of women and girls as a frame for climate response.

Global development actors must also support longer-horizon funding options to address protracted change processes, using vetted ToCs to ensure program strategies are appropriate and activities unfold in a coherent sequence. They must also increase their use of—and encourage others to increase their use of—risk assessment tools in planning and monitoring to ensure endemic vulnerability is reduced and that climate-related shocks or stresses do not jeopardize program investments and outcomes.

Encourage more gender-equitable and rights-oriented program approaches. Gender and rights assessments are necessary to this work and must illuminate the disadvantages women and girls face in everyday life and as active citizens participating in development. Development actors must also build human and social capital for women and girls as a multi-purpose asset enabling them to engage on climate adaptation, gender inequality and a range of challenges.

Along these lines, interventions must address the gendered deficits girls and women face in knowledge, social networks, and participation in the economy, governance and development decision-making. Development actors must support gains in agency and leadership for girls and women, especially in engaging with government to seek meaningful roles and accountability in development. They also need to encourage relational understandings of gender that illuminate patriarchal male attitudes, values and norms as constraints to rights, equality, development and resilience, as well as mobilize men and boys to reset dysfunctional gendered power relationships to lessen the negative impacts these have for girls, women and entire communities.

Strengthen policy-enabling environments, governance, networks and multi-stakeholder engagement. Global development actors must encourage program assessments that include the policy, legal and regulatory environment for community organizations and civil society to serve as development actors. They also need to support civil society networks and platforms in coordinating advocacy for effective development policies, including on rights, gender, climate and the environment. This includes helping CBOs and NGOs gain the capacity to partner more effectively with local government and to advocate for appropriate government services and capacity at the local level.

Promote information-sharing, monitoring and operations research to improve programs. Development actors should support more robust operations research and M&E to better demonstrate the potential co-benefits and synergies of integrated programs. Actors must review, strengthen and expand the use of ToCs to improve the coherence, sequence and effectiveness of program activities.

ANNEX 1. EXPERTS INTERVIEWED

Nikhil Aziz, American Jewish World Service

Alice Thomas, Refugees International

Ursula Miniszewski, Global Greengrants Fund

Kathleen Mogelgaard, Woodrow Wilson Center, consultant

Nanette Barkey, former Director of Results and Measurement, Pact

David Bonnardeaux, Director of Natural Resources Management, Pact

Karine Garnier, Center for Resilience, United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

Laurel Bradley, Center for Resilience, USAID

Karen Scriven and David Nicholson, Mercy Corps

Tzili Moore, Director of the Center for Women and Land Rights, Landesa

Jennifer Duncan, Director of the Climate Change Initiative, Landesa

Heather McGray, New Venture Fund

Susan Gibbs, Wallace Global

A. Tianna Scozzaro, Director of the Gender, Equity and Environment Program, Sierra Club

Robert Engelman, Worldwatch Institute

Laurie Mazur, consultant, Island Press

Maite Smet, Programme Coordinator, Global Alliance for Green and Gender Action

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