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GENDER RELATIONS IN THE PACIFIC- CASE STUDIES

Lessons learnt from the International Climate Initiative (ICI) capacity building program

Introduction

Climate change affects all members of society and its impacts can be different for men and women. Hence it is important to understand the gender dimension when working on climate change adaptation and mitigation measures, because of the different gender roles that women and men play in their society or community. In the Pacific these different gender roles are influenced by culture, social systems, local institutions and religion, and it varies across the Pacific Islands.

One of the vital factors in society structural system is the gender relations between men and women, to understand the power relations between women and men through the different gender roles they play in their families and community. In general this factor often place a woman in a vulnerable situation compared to men.

Pacific island countries are widely dispersed over the Pacific Ocean and vary in size, geographical conditions, resources, populations and cultures. Many Pacific Island countries are made of hundreds of islands with diverse landscapes, societies, cultures, and economies. Most of the islands are patriarchal societies except for some countries such as Nauru, Republic of Marshall Islands and including some parts of Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands where land ownership also trace through matrilineal line.

In the Pacific, based on the different type of structural society, patriarchal or matrilineal the impacts of climate change and the different response to cope with climate change still found women and children to be more vulnerable. However most adaptation projects and capacity building programmes such as the ICI project have emphasised *“Women are not vulnerable but they are active agents of change and their unique knowledge and skills should be acknowledged and integrated into any projects/policy to develop resilience strategy”*¹

Gender relations in the pacific are traditionally guided by the social relation in family, community, culture and external factors such as economic and political power. This paper provides some case studies on gender relations in the Pacific.

¹ Dr Wendy Annecke, Gender and Climate Change Adaptation- Lessons learnt from CBA in Africa, Adaptation& Beyond

Impact of local institutional framework on gender relations

“Local government in the South Pacific is a complex blend of modern democratic principles and government systems with traditional institutions and practices, and often extremely small-scale”. (Hassall & Tipu 2008). In a traditional village setting, the local institutions are the family unit, clan (mataqali) and the church. These range of institutions gender relations.

Family or households are considered private institutions, a social micro unit. In most Pacific Islands, most households in the villages are extended families compared to those families in the urban. With the process of globalisation, families in the rural areas are slowly moving away from extended family household to a smaller unit (nuclear) household living. Family is considered the principal institution for the socialization of an individual, this is the first institution where we learn our gender roles and understand the gender relations within the family unit. Gender relations within family places a woman lesser participation in decision making on family matters. However these are challenged by University educated women because of their work status and education background they are respected, valued more by their family and husband, hence they have influential role and assist men in making decisions for the family.

Social and culture institutions- are social order governing the behaviour of individuals within a given community. Cultures change over time and are not static. Some cultural practices and beliefs remain unchanged and are seen as essential to maintaining national, ethnic or group identity. (Vasena Griffen, 2006). In most of the Pacific Islands, men may have more decision making power within the household and community than the women; however, women in this case are members of committees and other groups where they make decisions relating to the village. Women are also resource owners through mataqali (clan) owned land. In some communities, women who are married into the family in some cases have lesser decision making power than those from the village, thus this group of women are more vulnerable.

In analysing gender relations in Pacific cultures and their impact on women’s role in climate change adaptation and mitigation. It is vital to understand how culture can positively involve women to be part of decision making in adapting to the impacts of climate change in their family and village. Culture in the Pacific is held dearly to the heart because it forms a Pacific Islander identity; a way of socialises and value of status. In most patriarchal societies, women often encounter limitations to raise their interest and needs or even influence decision making. Whilst for the matrilineal societies, they are able to influence decision making.

Another institution that exists in communities is the churches and within the system informal groups such as women, a youth group exists. This system, even though men are seen as head of the organisation, women and youth in their own groups are able to influence decisions in the church.

The structure of local institutions that denotes the roles of men and women could lead to the increase vulnerability level of women and children to the impacts from climate change.

Impact of projects on productive and strategic gender needs

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines adaptation - “adjustments in ecological, social, or economic systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli and their effects of impacts. This term refers to change in processes, practices, and structures to moderate potential damages or to benefit from opportunities associated with climate change” (IPCC, 2001).

Productive needs are activities that allow women to produce more and better products (for income and social gain). Makes work easier and reduces work load. Productive activities may affect traditional gender relations by improving women’s status in the household. Many women would like to be engaged in productive activities that earn income. Strategic Interest relates to the empowerment of women and men. For example the introduction of advance technologies such as Television, Radio and Internet allows both men and women to access information/knowledge that could be used to enhance their livelihoods and brings about positive changes in their community. Addressing strategic interests aims to transform gender relations to improve women’s and men’s societal position. Women’s strategic needs are generally to do with transformation in gender roles and relations by empowering them to “break through” traditional and take on new challenging roles.

Adaptation measures or projects should be implemented with the focus to reduce the vulnerabilities of individuals or marginalised groups. These measures should aim at addressing productive and strategic needs that will contribute to the modification of traditional gender relations.

Case study: Addressing Strategic Interest for women in Narikoso village, Kadavu, Fiji

Narikoso village located in Ono, Kadavu, Fiji with the population of 100+ is one of the village identified for relocation due to the impacts of climate change (rise in sea level, coastal erosion). At the National Climate Change Summit in August, one of the participants shared that village meetings that used to be conducted in the morning or lunch time are now held in the evenings to ensure participation of women in the discussion of the “relocation” and any other development projects.

Analysis

Changing the meeting times to enable women to participate in village meetings is a process of ensuring women’s strategic needs is also addressed. The changes in the meeting time has engaged both women and men to segregate their traditional gender roles and build mutual support within households and village, develop a workable solutions that addresses both women and men’s practical, productive and strategic needs. This process also empowers women by building their confidence and both groups can develop ideas, skills, knowledge to benefit the household and village. Finally this process will enhance livelihoods of both men and women within their families and village because they will apply and implement a project/initiative that addresses both men and women’s needs.

Source: Participant from Narikoso Village at the Fiji National Climate Change Summit, 12 August, 2013

Gender relations are also influenced by culture. Women are actively involved in the process of performance of traditional dance, traditional clothes e.t.c. In one of the ICI- Project capacity building workshop, one of female youth participant shared the importance of preserving culture and how it can be used to encourage mitigation measures.

Case study: Preserving culture - encourage mitigation measures

At a Community based workshop on gender, climate change and energy in Kiribati, it was interesting to note how the participants used their culture to understand the gender linkages in energy. A representative from the youth group (female) discussed the use of an energy source, firewood from the pandanus tree, to preserve their dancing skirts for a cultural performance: 'With limited firewood on Tarawa, the traditional knowledge on the preservation of dancing costumes will also be dying out.'

Analysis

Energy has an important role to play in the preservation of culture, in income generating activities and in our daily livelihoods. Participants were able to understand and appreciate the different energy needs of youth, people with special needs, women and men. To have abundance supply of pandanus youth (male) villages are planting these local traditional trees to help women preserve their culture and able to hand down that traditional knowledge to their daughters. The youth who is a female is able to recognise the importance of the women's role in preserving this culture and see that the impact of climate change would slowly fade this important role that women play in their culture. Participants at the workshop included this important activity in their Gender Inclusive Community Plan.

Source: Participant at the CBA gender workshop in Kiribati, March 2013.

Economic activity in a community depends on the availability of resources and its ownership. In the case of the Pacific Islands, most resources are communally owned and for male dominance society, women have limited access on these resources, however are able to engage in income generating activities such as selling of handicrafts. With this income women are able to support their family needs, paying for school fees and other social obligation. The impacts of climate change have introduced a new era in male dominance societies, where women are bringing in more income for families and contribution to development projects in their village by selling handicraft artefacts.

Daku women actively participate in economic and development projects in their village

Daku village located north-east of central Suva and close to the open ocean at the end of one of the branches that branched off Rewa river. The village is accessible via gravel road and rely on fish, prawns, mud crabs and traditional woven fans for income.

The impacts of climate change in the village have seen the decline in fish stocks due to coastal erosion and disruption of marine life habitats. Floods have also raised salinity levels in the water, complicating the planting of fruits and vegetables. Men and women in Daku are working together to address these challenges of climate change. Men have resorted to traditional knowledge to address the issues of food security- “depleting marine resources (fish, prawns and mud crabs)”. Traditional knowledge used by men are: “Moka” weaving of reeds and placing this along the coast, during high tide fish, prawns enter the “Moka”, the villagers then only get to choose the big and the right size of fish, prawns for harvest and returned the small ones back to the ocean. These fish, prawns are source of food and also income for the families in Daku.

Apart from relying on these marine resources, women of daku also play a vital role in economic and development activities in the village. A special and unique daku “fan” is only woven by the women of Daku, it was gift handed down from the Vunivalu of Bau (King of Fiji). "For the women of Daku, fan-making is our main source of income and they have managed to meet social obligations for many of the village projects. The income earned from selling the fans, the women are able to feed their families, children's education. "With the change in weather that has brought many changes to their village environment, the women of Daku have this one source of income, to support their family and also help out in village projects such as the church, electrification project for the village.

Source: Virisila, Daku Women Leader, Gender Inclusive workshop, June 2013

Table 1: Analysis of how these interventions shared in the three case studies have address gender relations between men and women

	Women	Men
Addressing Strategic Interest for women in Narikoso village, Kadavu, Fiji		
Role	Care for home, children and elderly	Fishing, farming and work
Resources	Less influence on decision of resources, income	More influence of resources, land owners.
Power	Have less influence decision, limited engagement in community development work/politics.	More power and involvement in community development, work/politics
Current Gender relation	Women roles are mostly household care. Due to culture restrictions, local institutions and its traditional structures restrict women from actively involved in any decision making.	Men are part of decision making and because of culture and social structure, this puts men in more authority over resources and decision making
Climate change adaptation Intervention	One of the villages identified for relocation due to the impacts of climate change (rise in sea level, coastal erosion). Village meetings	

	that used to be conducted in the morning or lunch time are now held in the evenings to ensure participation of women in the discussion of the “relocation” and any other development projects.	
Analysis of gender relation after the intervention (“win-win situation”)	Strategic needs- empowered. Able to be part of decision making of the relocation project and also any development projects.	Men can gain and understand women different needs in terms of relocation and in any other development projects
Kiribati - Preserving culture - encourage mitigation measures		
Role	More involved in the process of preparing traditional clothes	Decision makers on type of dance to be performed and on traditional protocols
Resources	Limited resources- use of pandanus leaves. Limited fire wood. Burden in collecting firewood and pandanus leaves	Resource owners.
Power	Less power to make decisions	More power to make decisions
Current Gender relation	More involve in the process of preparing traditional clothes and also taking care of the families	More power to make decisions and are resource owners.
Climate change adaptation Intervention	Propose Mitigation measures “replanting of traditional trees” to preserve culture and have abundance raw materials for the future generation and also for their handicrafts which is their source of income.	Young men (youth) are engage to re-plant these traditional plants for traditional clothes and preserve culture.
Analysis of gender relation after the intervention (“win-win situation”)	Strategic needs- able to make decision and suggestion of mitigation measures linking it to their roles in preserving culture Productive needs- the pandanus leaves are also woven to make handicrafts and source of income.	Men helping women in their role by re-planting these traditional trees.
Daku women actively participate in economic and development projects in their village		
Role	Care for home, children and elderly	Fishing, farming and work
Resources	Less influence on decision of resources, income	More influence of resources, land owners.
Power	Have less influence decision, limited engagement in community development work/politics.	More power and involvement in community development, work/politics
Current Gender relation	Women roles are mostly household care. Due to culture restrictions, local institutions and its traditional structures restrict women from actively involved in any decision making.	Men are part of decision making and because of culture and social structure, this puts men in more authority over resources and decision making
Climate change adaptation	Weaving of fans for income	Traditional knowledge “Moka”

Intervention	generation and help support family's needs and development projects in the village	for fish and prawns, main source of food and also income
Analysis of gender relation after the intervention ("win-win situation")	Actively participate in economic activity and their role as weavers of these unique handicrafts (Daku fans) are recognised and the main source of income that support family needs and also contribute to village project such as electrification of the village.	Men are still able to provide good healthy food for the family. Also enhance the traditional knowledge and appreciate the women's role in bringing in extra income for the family and development projects.

Capacity building is an ongoing process through which individuals, groups, organizations and societies enhance their ability to identify and meet development challenges. This is a significant teaching method that can be used to slowly change the traditional mind set of gender relations between men and women; and address gender equality to combat the impacts of climate change. The ICI project work with the Small Islands States in providing capacity building programs in mainstream gender into energy and climate change trained a total of 300 women and men in gender inclusion in energy and climate change adaptation activities/programmes in the targeted countries, Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Tuvalu, Kiribati however other countries were included as the need arised, Fiji and Solomon Islands.

The factors underlying the vulnerability of women to the impacts of climate change is gender related. It is due to many reasons; local structure and traditional settings exist in the community, the distribution of resources and ownership. We have also noted from all the capacity building programs, men and women have continued to work together to address the challenges of climate change. However we need more resources to obtain and analyse gender disaggregated data and develop indicators to measure the different response of men and women to the impacts of climate change. This is a method to be used to develop a more workable resilience system which is benefit for all and achieve gender equality.

Recommendation:

- After a 1 -2 years period, it will be good to conduct a study to measure how capacity building programs in these countries has impacted on the gender relations in their respective homes, villages.

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