

## PEOPLE NEED SUPPORT WHEN PLAYING THEIR PART IN ADAPTATION.

Often, interventions involve installing infrastructure (such as water points) and then tasking community members with managing it. While this aims to increase ownership and participation in natural resource management, it may result in cases where vulnerable groups are actually worse off if they do not receive the necessary support to properly participate and sustain the interventions. Communities that will be making use of technical solutions can play an important role in identifying, designing, implementing and managing them. It is therefore necessary to work collaboratively during the identification and design stage, and provide continued capacity strengthening and support to enable people to take part in implementation and management. It is also important to consider the needs and agency of traditionally under-represented groups to ensure they are properly, rather than just tokenistically, involved.



### CASE STUDY 4:

VOLUNTEERS STRUGGLE TO RUN WATER POINTS  
IN OMUSATI, NAMIBIA.

In rural villages in Namibia's Onesi Constituency (Omusati Region), local associations **run and maintain water points**. These are headed by locally elected committees who work voluntarily and collect fees for water use. Most of the volunteers have high levels of illiteracy and live in poverty. They lack the technical and managerial skills to run the water points properly, and do not have funds for maintenance and logistics. When infrastructure breaks, volunteers often don't know who to report this to, and aren't equipped to make repairs themselves. Often, government response is slow. Many committee members have relinquished their positions or have gone on strike. Several water points no longer work, or are closed, and poor people cannot afford to get water from private taps.

## IMPLICATIONS

- People living in semi-arid regions can and should play a valuable role in planning for, implementing and managing locally-relevant adaptation initiatives that incorporate technical solutions. To do so they need access to the requisite financial, technical, institutional and political support.
- To be implemented successfully, technical solutions need to be paired with effective participation from different local actors. It is important to understand the feasibility of technical solutions, how the local context affects their uptake, and how to enable people to use them properly.
- New approaches to governance are needed to support effective participation of different groups. Such approaches (e.g. **Transformative Scenario Planning**, **Participatory Scenario Analysis**) require the creation of platforms that enable people, especially those typically excluded, to have their say about decisions that affect them.
- Decision makers need to understand the unique context of each community. There needs to be a clear understanding of all actors who have a stake in making use of an adaptation intervention and a plan for finding a balance between supporting engagement and empowerment.

### Read more:

ASSAR. 2018. *Dreaming of a better life: Let's recognise and value people's changing aspirations*. Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions (ASSAR). Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y738gjko>

Bosworth, B., Hegga, S. and Ziervogel, G. 2018. *When participation is not enough: Lessons from decentralised water governance in Namibia*. Adaptation at Scale in Semi-arid Regions (ASSAR). Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8jkc32r>

Rao, N., Lawson, E. T., Raditloaneng, W. N., Solomon, D., and Angula, M. N. 2017. Gendered vulnerabilities to climate change: Insights from the semi-arid regions of Africa and Asia. *Climate and Development*. DOI: [10.1080/17565529.2017.1372266](https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2017.1372266)

Rivers III, L., Sanga, U., Sidibe, A., Wood, A., Paudel, R., Marquart-Pyatt, S. T., Ligmann-Zielinska, A., Olabisi, L. S., Du, E. J. and Liverpool-Tasie, S. 2017. Mental models of food security in rural Mali. *Environment Systems and Decisions*. DOI: [10.1080/17565529.2018.1442793](https://doi.org/10.1080/17565529.2018.1442793)

Solomon, D. S. and Rao, N. 2018. Wells and well-being in South India. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 53(17). Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/yawfjgu7>



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BY ANOTHERLOVEPRODUCTIONS FOR ASSAR

# ADAPTATION IS ABOUT PEOPLE

WITH JUST 12 YEARS TO LIMIT GLOBAL WARMING TO 1.5°C AND CURB THE IMPACTS OF CATASTROPHIC CLIMATE CHANGE, TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS ARE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE ADAPTATION PACKAGE.

BUT IF THIS PACKAGE FAILS TO ACCOUNT FOR GOVERNANCE AND SOCIO-POLITICAL SYSTEMS THAT DISEMPOWER SOCIETY'S MOST VULNERABLE, THEN IT WILL FALL SHORT, GENERATING NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR MARGINALISED GROUPS AND DIMINISHING THEIR ABILITY TO ADAPT.

ADAPTATION MEASURES OFTEN DISREGARD ISSUES OF

Too often, adaptation efforts focus solely on technical solutions for climate change problems.

Money is spent on infrastructure and engineering.

SUCH SOLUTIONS TEND TO OVERLOOK THE HUMAN ELEMENT AND DON'T INVOLVE THE PEOPLE THEY ARE MEANT TO BENEFIT.

POWER



POOR GOVERNANCE



GENDER



INEQUALITY



AND HOW THESE SHAPE PEOPLE'S ABILITY TO RESPOND TO CHANGE. ADDRESSING THESE ISSUES IS FUNDAMENTAL FOR GETTING ADAPTATION RIGHT.

Meaningfully involve the people it aims to benefit.

Understand the role of power, local knowledge, gender and other types of inequality in shaping people's ability to respond to climate change.

ADAPTATION THAT IS PEOPLE-ORIENTED NEEDS TO:

Explore different adaptation options and their trade-offs with the people these will affect in order to develop appropriate and effective adaptation pathways.



Consider how current and future impacts of climate change on environmental systems combine with people's existing vulnerabilities to put populations at risk.



The five-year ASSAR project (Adaptation at Scale in Semi-Arid Regions, 2014-2018) uses insights from multi-scale, interdisciplinary work to inform and transform climate adaptation policy and practice in ways that promote the long-term wellbeing of the most vulnerable and those with the least agency.

## TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS ALONE ARE NOT ENOUGH.

Adaptation interventions affect different groups of people in different ways. They can lead to unintended consequences if introduced top-down without considering the structural landscape that informs how they will be received. When deciding how to allocate adaptation funding, a first step is to recognise and address the socio-economic dynamics that make people particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. This approach may be disruptive, but it will highlight inequalities around power and can inform adaptation decisions that better serve the needs of vulnerable groups. At the same time, it's important to consider the limits of ecological systems and understand how availability of resources like water affect the sustainability of people-oriented interventions.

### CASE STUDY 1:

WHEN TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS DON'T CONSIDER SOCIAL DYNAMICS, UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES MAY ARISE.

In Coimbatore district, in the water-stressed state of Tamil Nadu, India, the state government subsidised well construction for farmers. Groundwater became the main source of irrigation. Farmers shifted to growing cash crops instead of food crops. Over time, groundwater levels dropped. Small farmers took loans for digging deeper, privately-drilled wells. They went into debt, which they were unable to pay because of bad harvests. To make matters worse, food insecurity increased because of the move away from food crops. Households became increasingly dependent on the Public Distribution System, which gives subsidised grain and essentials.



Women and children lost out disproportionately. As households went deeper into debt, men pawned their wives' dowries, and sold off livestock (a woman's resource) and other assets. This left women further marginalised. Many children had to abandon their education to start work in garment factories. Women had to take off-farm jobs, adding to their burdens. Ultimately, a well-intentioned infrastructure-focused intervention to subsidise water for irrigation ended up locking farmers into debt and increasing women's workloads.

## IMPLICATIONS

- When implementing technical adaptation solutions, there is a need to consider how underlying structural dynamics inform which groups are likely to win or lose, and in what ways. This understanding can be used to inform decisions on the sequencing and prioritisation of technical versus non-technical solutions.
- Technical adaptation solutions need to be accompanied by investments in understanding the social and ecological contexts of the areas where they are needed. Decision makers need to pay close attention to issues of power and vulnerability, while accounting for the resilience of natural systems.
- Decisions on adaptation funding would benefit from taking a more holistic understanding of what can make adaptation efforts more effective. Social and non-technical aspects need to be incorporated into how adaptation interventions are framed and implemented.

## SOCIAL DIFFERENCES INFLUENCE THE OUTCOMES OF ADAPTATION INTERVENTIONS.

Climate risks affect different groups in different ways. People are socially differentiated by gender, religion, ethnicity, age, economic status and socio-cultural values. These factors influence people's ability to navigate climate shifts, and their potential to benefit from adaptation interventions. Within these categories, there are further divisions, which can decrease the availability of adaptation options for vulnerable groups. Therefore, developing a clear understanding of how climate risks impact different groups, and even different members of the same household, as well as people's different capacities to adapt, is a necessary first step for designing adaptation interventions.

### CASE STUDY 2:

WHEN AGE AND GENDER COMBINE TO MAKE YOUNG WOMEN FOOD INSECURE.

In the Koutiala district, in rural Mali, families live in polygamous households (of up to 90 members) that farm collective plots of land. In this context, women of different ages have different levels of food security because of the hierarchical household structure. The household head, usually an elder male, is the primary decision maker. He makes decisions around food production and allocation, and decides on the amount of grains women can use to prepare food. Elder women are responsible for the daily menu. They allocate labour among themselves. Young women, meanwhile, have to prepare food, fetch water, and do farm labour. They often have to perform tasks that other family members decide they must do.



In this scenario, food security is a collective task. Young women have the least say in food security decisions, while other household members can make alternative decisions to adapt to food stress. For example, when there is sporadic rainfall, elder men can adapt by changing the type of crops the household grows. This places food-related stress on the elder women. However, elder women can navigate this challenge by directing younger women to prepare meals using available food. Also, during times of food-related stress, young men can find work away from the household but young women typically can't because of safety concerns and a lack of employment opportunities.

## IMPLICATIONS

- It is essential to have a thorough understanding of how social differentiation affects the ability of different individuals, and groups, to adapt.
- Decision makers need to consider how people can or cannot access adaptation solutions because of dominant power structures, beliefs and socio-cultural values, and address these barriers when designing interventions.
- Adaptation interventions need to integrate socio-cultural differences in a way that strengthens people's ability to adapt but doesn't undermine cultural values. Sometimes, however, adaptation initiatives could modify social norms that are preventing gender equality or violating human rights, thereby serving as mechanisms of change.
- In regions where vulnerable groups, like young women, are disenfranchised, adaptation policies need to focus on their needs and expand their access to resources in order to increase their range of adaptation options. There is also a need to engage with men and boys to address discriminatory norms entrenched by patriarchy.



## ADAPTATION EFFORTS SHOULD CONSIDER PEOPLE'S ASPIRATIONS.

People have different aspirations for their lives and these change over time. Aspirations often determine what is most important for them and influence which potential adaptation responses they will or won't make use of. Understanding aspirations, and how they inform choices around employment, migration, and the adoption of adaptation practices is crucial for effective policy making, adaptation planning, and for knowing where to invest resources efficiently.

### CASE STUDY 3:

CHANGING ASPIRATIONS AND THE MOVE AWAY FROM AGRICULTURE.

In semi-arid regions, people perceive climatic risks as one of various factors that drive their livelihood choices. In some cases, challenging climatic conditions and other risks cascade into aspirational shifts, with people moving into different types of employment to support their desire for a different future. In many regions, the challenging nature of agriculture is driving a shift toward non-farm labour among younger generations.

**Farming is for the old men. We own tractors, do sand mining, or work as plumbers, electricians.**

**Farming is pointless because we don't have any rain.**  
- young man from a rural district in Karnataka, India.

But these aspirational changes do not just apply to young people. Some parents aspire for their children to get an education and find salaried employment in cities, instead of continuing to farm.

**"If you have educated children they send remittances, they uplift their fathers' standard of living, and they even extend that help to extended family and relatives. In the past one could rely on farming but that is no longer the case...because of drought and high temperatures."**

- Elderly Dhemba man, Omusati region, Namibia.



## IMPLICATIONS

- Understanding people's aspirations can give entry points into what motivates them to undertake certain livelihood and risk management choices. This gives insights for designing effective interventions that improve wellbeing while having adaptation co-benefits.
- Recognising how aspirations change is key and can inform design and implementation of adaptation initiatives. For example, projects in the context of large-scale rural-to-urban migration can focus on skills-building programmes and beyond-farm livelihood opportunities that help improve incomes while supporting people's personal aspirations.
- When taking local needs and aspirations into account for adaptation planning, it is important to recognise that there are trade-offs involved. Not all aspirations can be met and there will always be winners and losers. Participatory processes that include the full range of people who will be affected by an intervention can help unearth these trade-offs and consider potential compensation options for those who lose out.

