

RESEARCH BRIEF

It is important to understand the impact that social status (associated with gender and age) has on farmer vulnerability and willingness to adopt adaptation measures in Ghana.

WHAT WAS DONE, AND WHAT WAS NOVEL?

When trying to understand vulnerability and adaptation to climate change, growing attention globally is being placed on the socially-differentiated experiences of stakeholder groups.

We sought to fill a knowledge gap in Ghana by assessing the perceptions of vulnerability to climate change, and the adoption of adaptation strategies, by different groups of smallholder farmers in the Lawra district in the north-west of the country. To this end, we used focus group discussions and questionnaire surveys, we explored the impacts of gender and age intersections among smallholder farmers.

Our shows that smallholder farmers are not homogenous in term of vulnerability to climate change. Rather, males and females, and youth and the elderly differ in their perception of vulnerability and their subsequent adaptation strategies. The results highlight the need for adaptation interventions that pay attention to different stakeholder needs.

KEY FINDINGS

We found that vulnerability among social groups was largely dependent on gender and age. When asked to rank risks for smallholder farmers, men ranked drought, soil fertility and inputs as the most pressing risks, while women ranked drought, water stress and food security as the greatest risks. This means that efforts to reduce vulnerability and improve the wellbeing of smallholder farmers should be targeted at an individual level..

In relation to adaptation choices, we found that people differ significantly in their adoption of sustainable land management practices, including using compost and changing planting dates. Regarding the use of modern inputs, women use improved varieties more often than men.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

To reduce vulnerability of farmers, development interventions should focus on reducing vulnerability to drought through the provision of accurate and timely rainfall information. Soil fertility enhancement strategies that include precise applications of agro-chemicals should be promoted. Organisations should improve access to credit to eliminate or reduce problems associated with inputs purchase. The Savannah Agricultural Research Institute (SARI) should develop drought-resistant crop varieties that are suitable to local conditions and that address the socio-cultural aspirations of farmers.

To promote climate-smart agriculture in Ghana's northern savannah zone, and to sustain and improve policy adoption, policies should work to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of sustainable land management strategies. Specific interventions should be targeted at improving water-harvesting techniques among smallholder farmers in the Lawra district to help reduce vulnerability to drought – identified by all social groups as the most pressing hazard.



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