

# Participatory approaches for gender-sensitive research design

## Key messages

- For cross-site comparison, it may not be possible to fully standardise participatory studies when the sites have very different social-cultural profiles.
- To allow for more in-depth probing of issues critical to community members, limit the number of topics covered and tools used.
- Practitioners of participatory research should be rigorous in terms of implementation and interpretation, to limit the influence of bias on findings.
- A gender-sensitive approach requires understanding of site-level socially differentiated dynamics, and a strategy for achieving gender-appropriate targets.

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## About Us ••

The CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) brings together the world's best researchers in agricultural science, development research, climate science and Earth System science, to identify and address the most important interactions, synergies and tradeoffs between climate change, agriculture and food security. CCAFS is a strategic partnership of CGIAR and Future Earth, led by the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT). [www.ccafs.cgiar.org](http://www.ccafs.cgiar.org)

The focus of climate-smart agriculture (CSA) research is often on creating technological solutions to climate problems. Yet female and male farmers differ in terms of their vulnerability to climate change and the ways in which they benefit from technical interventions. CCAFS's strategy is to embed gender in all its research so as to achieve specific gender targets, and to build the gender capacity of its partners. We believe that targeting women with CSA practices, technology and information offers the greatest opportunity to increase the adaptive capacity of smallholder farming communities. To enable gender-sensitive research design within CCAFS, a community-based participatory study was developed to meet two objectives:

1. To inform the design of CSA research, analogue approaches to future climate scenarios, and dissemination systems for climate information.
2. To build the capacity of CCAFS partners to carry out gender-sensitive participatory action research (PAR).

## Methods

The study protocol was standardised for implementation and reporting by partners in three sites corresponding to the CCAFS regions of West Africa, East Africa and South Asia. Field teams were trained using a detailed guide that included instructions for team formation and teamwork, conducting background research, work planning, sampling, communication with the study village, using participatory tools, documentation of results, and reporting.

The participatory tools used included village resources maps, seasonal calendars, daily activity clocks, farming systems diagrams, capacity and vulnerability analysis matrixes, Venn diagrams, institutional profiles, changing farming practices, seasonal food security calendars and climate-related risk management practices.

## Main finding

Gender-differentiated roles, cultural norms, and differences in asset ownership and information access mean that



adoption of CSA will be different for women and men. A gender-sensitive approach requires a clear understanding of site-level gender dynamics and a corresponding strategy to achieve gender-appropriate targets. Such a strategy would include alternative approaches to information dissemination and exposing male and female farmers to new technologies, and to supporting farmers as they test and adopt technologies.

### Lessons learnt

Participatory research assumes equality between the scientific experts that form the research team, and the members of the community itself. Ideally the community is involved in all aspects of the research cycle, including design, information gathering, analysis and reporting. This can be difficult to achieve, as objectives and even methods are often decided upon prior to entering the community. In the case of this study CCAFS's national partners were involved throughout the cycle, including co-training. This allowed for standardisation of the research. However, differences still occurred in implementation and reporting between the three sites.

This raises the question, is it reasonable to attempt standardisation to allow for cross-site comparison, particularly with participatory approaches in very different social-cultural profiles? It may be more appropriate to develop methods and tools that allow for flexibility in terms of implementation depending on the social-cultural setting, and result in case studies for each site that can be qualitatively compared.

In this study, effectiveness may have been diminished by the broad set of participatory tools used to address three different topics. Given the descriptive nature of information derived using

participatory approaches, it is often better to explore fewer topics in more depth by deeply probing critical issues with participants. For example, in the climate analogue approach to helping farmers understand future scenarios and decide upon adoption strategies, farmers are encouraged to visit sites where the climate is analogous to their projected future climate. When exploring related mobility issues, focus groups identified barriers to mobility but were not encouraged to explore incentives for increased mobility. Such information would have been particularly useful to have for women, who are often more restricted than men and therefore less able to benefit from climate analogue approaches.

The partners that implemented this study had different levels of capacity for and experience with participatory research, which may have contributed to differences in implementation and reporting quality. Participatory research is often assumed to be 'less rigorous' than approaches designed to generate statistically significant results. However, the opposite is more often true. Because participatory approaches capture descriptive information that deepens our understanding of a situation or problem, practitioners of participatory research must be objectively rigorous in their implementation and interpretation of results.

This is particularly true in terms of understanding and recording bias in a study and balancing that bias through triangulation of information within and between interviews, and with secondary sources of information. Emphasis should be placed on building greater capacity in CCAFS's partners to understand, design and implement participatory research, and to rigorously interpret and report

results so as to influence both research and policy.

This study highlights the value of including topics in a participatory research checklist such as the current availability of gender-sensitive methods promoted by boundary partners, so as to expose farmers through the focus group interview process to new information and technologies even during the background information gathering process. It supports the value of testing CSA technologies through PAR while simultaneously measuring the development impacts of CCAFS, so as to identify and scale-out adaptation options as rapidly as possible. The study guide<sup>1</sup> helps partners gather information for the design of research related to CCAFS's objectives, particularly in terms of achieving socially differentiated outcomes and gender targets.

<sup>1</sup> FAO (2012) *Gender and Climate Change Research in Agriculture and Food Security for Rural Development – Training Guide*. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome. <http://hdl.handle.net/10568/21790>



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### CCSL Partners:

