

Community concept drawing

Application of a participatory tool for analyzing empowerment across African contexts

Working Paper No. 136

CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS)

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RESEARCH PROGRAM ON
**Climate Change,
Agriculture and
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Abstract

Women's empowerment is a driving concept in feminist and gender scholarship and is seen as an indicator of a woman's agency in social and economic spheres. Yet, there is much debate over what this term actually means, how it should be operationalized as a concept in development research. This has been especially true among scholars and practitioners who use empowerment as a guideline by which to measure and evaluate social dynamics in communities affected by climate change. Most recently, the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index has joined a growing number of tools aimed at measuring empowerment in developing countries. Such indexes however, are unable to account for culturally specific meaning and nuance that shape local understandings of empowerment. This article introduces qualitative and ethnographic methodological tools that provide a means to understand and engage culturally specific, local definitions of empowerment. We seek to first identify those indicators most salient within the village communities participating in the study. We then seek to understand the implications of these conceptualizations in the broader context of climate information accessibility and utilization. This study was implemented in four rural villages located within Kenya and Senegal, each with varying levels of interaction with CCAFS programs. Cross-examination of site specific data yields an understanding of how cultural norms and values shape local perceptions of empowerment in ways that are critical for development practitioners and scholars who to understand how power operates within communities affected by climate shocks. Such analysis is critical to a more accurate understanding of the locally specific context of gender inequity from which to align development-based programs. This article serves to broaden the definition of women's power to include culturally-relevant variations in the concept and provides one methodology for doing so.

Keywords

Empowerment; Gender; Methods; Kenya; Senegal.

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Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CBO	Community-Based Organizations
CCAFS	CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security
CIS	Climate Information Services
CSA	Climate Smart Agriculture
GAD	Gender and Development
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICRAF	International Center for Research in Agroforestry
ICRISAT	International Center for Research in the Semi-Arid Tropics
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
UF	University of Florida
WEAI	Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

Introduction

As the world continues to face the compounding challenges of climate change, particular focus has been given to developing countries dependent upon agricultural economies. Changes in temperature and rainfall have made and will continue to make agricultural livelihoods more difficult to sustain (Bohle et al. 1994). The impacts of these changes may be especially severe for poor farmers who rely mainly upon subsistence agriculture to support their households. Among the farmers at the greatest disadvantage – particularly in low- and middle-income countries – are women farmers. Gender inequities, as demonstrated by high rates of women in poverty and poor literacy rates among women in developing countries, mean that women are often less equipped to respond to environmental shocks and to adapt their agricultural practices to a rapidly changing climate (Dankleman and Jansen, 2010). Still, women compose 43% of the world’s farmers, a number which is likely underestimated due to the invisibility of women’s labor in development research (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2011). Additionally, in the context of a changing climate, agriculture is increasingly feminized, as men migrate to urban centers in an effort to gain alternative sources of income (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2010; de Schutter, 2013)¹.

As many women in developing countries are engaged in agriculture, the improvement of women’s access to and control over resources – including financial, productive, social, and informational resources – can enhance women’s decision-making opportunities and ultimately facilitate their empowerment. Alkire et al. (2012) write, “A woman who is empowered to make decisions regarding what to plant and what (and how many) inputs to apply on her plot will be more productive in agriculture” (Alkire, et al, 2012: 2). In the context of a changing climate, empowered women may be better equipped to respond to climate shocks and adapt farming practices in order to maintain their agricultural livelihoods. Those who are disempowered may experience compounding vulnerabilities as climate shocks continue to

¹ Women are often less equipped to migrate to urban centers for work due to gender inequities in poverty rates as well as illiteracy rates. This is compounded by social norms, which can make it unsafe or impractical (due to child care responsibilities) for women to migrate into cities.

affect environmental, financial, and social aspects of their lives; ultimately, this also compounds upon existing social inequities.

In an effort to address inequities between men and women, development institutions have been working to improve women's empowerment globally. Institutions including the United Nations and World Bank have developed tools to measure empowerment and evaluate its change over time. These tools, however, have drawn criticism from practitioners and scholars who find them lacking in their ability to accurately capture the social complexity of empowerment. This has reignited a debate over how "empowerment" is conceptualized, operationalized, and ultimately interpreted. Many question the economic emphasis of these indices, arguing that they do not account for the disempowering effects that increased labor burdens can cause for women; in many cases, labor through income generating activities compounds upon household roles and responsibilities, ultimately increasing the physical and emotional burdens poor women experience in developing countries (Batliwala, 2007; Kabeer 2005). Others argue that empowerment indices are Western-centric, emphasizing neoliberal values and democratic ideologies that are not always compatible with the global diversity of women and their lived experiences (Sharma, 2008; Syed, 2010). They argue that in applying a conceptualization of empowerment defined by Western standards researchers neglect the diverse ways in which empowerment is understood and expressed in various cultures.

This study attempted to address this concern by employing a participatory research methodology in focus groups in each of four sites located in Kenya and Senegal during the summer of 2014 as part of a larger Climate Change and Food Security (CCAFS) study. In this paper, we first provide a review of the literature debating the conceptualization of empowerment. Second, we present a method for developing a locally derived conceptualization of empowerment, using a tool called Community Concept Drawing. Then we provide an analysis of the data across sites, identifying common themes and differences. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of these interpretations of empowerment and what they mean in the context of gender, vulnerability, and climate change.

The study

This study is the product of a contract between the University of Florida (UF) and the CGIAR's Climate Change, Agriculture, and Food Security (CCAFS) Collaborative Research Project. As part of this contract, UF researchers were charged with improving gender integration into the participatory research methods of the CCAFS (Theme 2) project, which focuses on climate risk management with particular attention to access and utilization of climate information services. In an effort to engage farmers on issues of social equity and climate information services through participatory research methodologies, our team organized a study in Senegal and Kenya.

Four research sites were selected based on their variation in engagement with CCAFS Theme 2 projects on climate information services. Wote, Kenya, the first case, is a community that is highly engaged with CCAFS Theme 2 projects. During data collection in June 2014, CCAFS had just finished a three-year Agromet project, which provided training for farmers on how to access, interpret, and use forecasting information to make agricultural decisions in a context of increasing climate and weather shocks. The second Kenyan case, Nyando, is a site which has experienced a high CCAFS research presence overall, despite fewer and less robust Theme 2 specific efforts compared to other CCAFS efforts in the region, with projects on climate information in their initial phases. The third case, Malem Thierign, Senegal, is similar to Nyando in that the area has been heavily researched by CCAFS, but is just beginning to work on Theme 2 specific projects on climate information. The fourth and final case, Kahi, Senegal, has had little contact with CCAFS and no exposure to CCAFS climate information projects. The geographical, demographic, and cultural backgrounds of these cases will be discussed in further detail below.

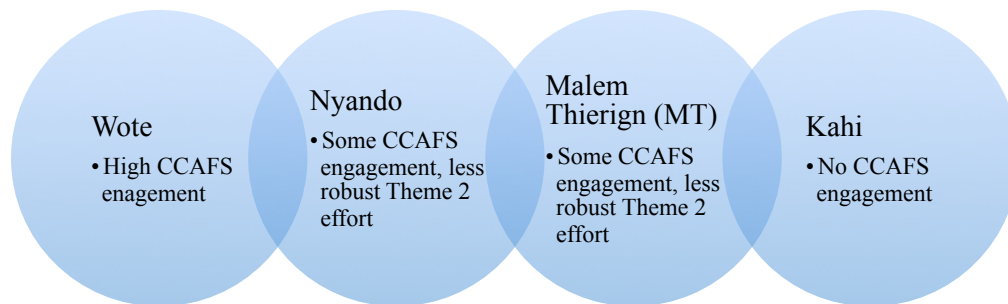


Figure 1. Research sites, from high to low CCAFS engagement.

The field research for this study took place between May and July of 2014 in four research sites: Malem Thierign, Senegal; Kahi, Senegal; Wote, Kenya; and Nyando, Kenya. The research consisted of 100 intra-household surveys and 12 focus groups. Data from the household surveys are not addressed in this paper, but are analyzed elsewhere (Devereux and McKune, 2014). Four focus groups were held in each site and were limited to 18 participants. Focus groups were formed based on locally relevant social divisions. As such, the groups were organized by age (young aged 18-49, and elderly aged 50+) and by sex. The exception to these sampling criteria is that of Nyando, where instead of age, ethnicity was the more appropriate distinguishing social characteristic. Each of the focus groups was held in an accessible location, with advance notice given to potential participants through the enumerators and/or village elders. Each discussion lasted approximately 2 hours and a simple snack was provided for participants. In Wote, the groups met at a local church within walking distance for most of the participants. In Nyando, the Luo focus groups took place at the home of a village elder, and the Kalenjin focus groups took place under the shade of a tree, in a public space that is convenient for participants. In Kahi, focus groups took place in the village center under the shade of a tree, which was within easy walking distance of all community members. In Malem Thierign the focus groups were held under a shade tree along a main path through the village and next to the large women's garden; it was also within easy walking distance for participants. Flooding a couple years prior had destroyed the original village center; as such this location now functions as the village center. It is important to note that, due to the broader intentions of our overall CCAFS study, each focus group contained two

parts: the first, a Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) identification and ranking activity, followed by the Community Concept Drawing. Implications of this approach will be addressed particularly in the context of the Wote site in the discussion section of this paper.

A critical component of the overall CCAFS Theme 2 project is the identification of vulnerable populations who may have inequitable access – for varying reasons – to climate information services. Thus, the overarching aim of the research was to explore if and how access to climate information services affected household food security, specifically investigating the role of climate smart agricultural practices. The study aimed to explain the gender dimension of any results, and, thus, the empowerment exercise was included to better understand the relationship between empowerment and access to climate information services. This required special attention to local conceptualizations of empowerment. While the larger findings of this study are detailed in a CCAFS report (Devereux and McKune, 2014), this paper details the processes by which empowerment was conceptualized, and how it can be useful in evaluating risk, vulnerability, and resilience to climate change.

Conceptualizing empowerment

The conceptualization of “empowerment” has become a central debate within the Gender and Development (GAD) literature. One of the central points of contention in the empowerment debate is that the ways in which development institutions are often framing empowerment do not reflect local understandings, which give it complexity and meaning in various contexts (Mosedale, 2005; Syed, 2010). This approach has been driven by neoliberal ambitions of development institutions, which have historically defined empowerment in terms of an economic framework (Batliwala, 2007; Kabeer, 1999). This is problematic in that it has had the effect of narrowing the conversation to only economic components of empowerment, disregarding or undervaluing the other ways in which power operates at the individual, interpersonal, and collective levels (Mahmood, 2005; Rowlands, 1995). Furthermore, those components of empowerment that are multi-causal, process oriented, or inter-relational are often neglected or misunderstood when applying this approach.

Recently, the International Food Policy Research Institute’s (IFPRI) Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) emerged as an important evaluative tool for scholars and

practitioners working in gender and development. Attempting to account for some of the complex components of empowerment, this tool identifies five domains of empowerment, in which gendered inequalities in decision-making may exist at the household level. These domains are: 1) resources, 2) income, 3) production, 4) leadership, and 5) time (IFPRI, 2012; Alkire et al. 2012). In order to be considered empowered, a woman must attain “adequate achievement” in four of the five domains (Alkire, et. al. 2012: 11). These data are collected at the household level and can be aggregated to illustrate levels of empowerment at the village, region, or country level. In doing so, however, the WEAI explores gendered power relationships within the household, neglecting how those power relationships may be replicated, intensified, or challenged at the community level.

Syed (2010) sees this as a shortcoming of many indices and tools that seek to evaluate empowerment quantitatively and cross-nationally. Tools like the WEAI or the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) do not account for diverse experiences of empowerment among women, taking note of intersectionalities, which may constrain empowerment along age, class, and ethnic lines both within and among communities. Syed writes, “such notion, involving an essential binary of woman and man, tends to portray all women as a homogenous group, depriving non-Western women of their historical and political agency” (Syed, 2010: 283). Norms guided by culture, religion, and colonial experience can shape what factors or indicators are valued as empowering within the global South. Again, attention must be drawn to the complexities of relationships that are often not easily quantified.

These tools for measuring empowerment have, consequently, not resolved problems of conceptualizing empowerment. Cornwall and Brock (2006) argue that, in the effort to quantify the concept of empowerment in terms of economic development, the concept has lost much of its true meaning. In 1993, Batliwala wrote, “I like the term empowerment because no one has defined it clearly yet; so it gives us a breathing space to work it out in action terms before we have to pin ourselves down to what it means” (Batliwala, 1993: 48). However, by 2007, Batliwala speaks to the shift in discourse and the influence of development on the construction of empowerment in the new Millennium (Batliwala, 2007). The complexities inherent in the concept have been reduced to basic indicators, she argues, which ultimately neglect its intrinsic inter-relational, social, and dynamic qualities. According to these scholars,

“empowerment” has become a hollow concept, devoid of meaning in its attempt to capture generalizations about gender inequity and equity globally.

The issue, however, is not that the term empowerment is useless in development research. Indeed, we feel there is much to be gained by investigating empowerment and its relationship with development projects, especially in relation to climate change impacts. Instead, the problem is the way in which the concept has been externally derived and applied, perhaps inappropriately, to communities whose own perceptions of empowerment likely differ in important ways. In what follows, we address this concern through the use of a tool called Community Concept Drawing², which provides a methodology for understanding different interpretations of empowerment in their cultural contexts. In the following section we describe the methodology, including parameters of the study and description of the cases explored.

Methods

With this debate in mind, our team facilitated a participatory research activity in order to understand the cultural nuances of empowerment among the CCAFS sites we were studying. Rather than identifying vulnerable groups based merely on economic indicators, for instance, we developed our analytical foundations of empowerment from the local interpretations of the focus group participants. The method employed is called Community Concept Drawing. In the following paragraphs we describe the application of this method in detail.

The focus group facilitator begins the discussion by asking the participants if they have ever heard of the word empowerment. Careful attention must be given to translation of the term and the implications for that translation. Attention to language is important for several reasons. First, certain language may hold resonance with particular institutional campaigns or development programs, which may shape the way participants talk about the concept; this is not necessarily a methodological problem, but rather something to be aware of when making inference from the focus group activity. Second, if one is comparing results across linguistic groups, as was the case in this research, it is important to recognize that different cultures may

² McOmber, C. “Drawing Empowerment: Community Conceptualization through Drawing” (forthcoming).

use words with differing conceptual foundations for the same abstract term. For example, some cultures may identify empowerment with power and use a word that reflects a political social hierarchy in relation to others. Others may use a verb terminology, such as to be able, which implies a reflexive or self-induced interpretation of power. If the goal is to make comparisons, it's important to translate "empowerment" into terms that are culturally relevant, and when possible, comparable in meaning across contexts. In the study at hand, the local translation of "empowerment" derived from the word for "to be able," thus that translation was used in Swahili and Kikamba (in Wote), in Swahili, Kalejin and Luo (in Nyando), and in Wolof (in Malem Thierign and Kahi). The participants are then asked whether they can identify any types of people who are empowered in the community.

Next, the facilitator asks the participants whether they are familiar with the term "disempowerment." Again, the facilitator asks whether the participants can identify any types of people in the community who are disempowered. Placing a blank poster on a wall or table, the facilitator invites the participants to draw what an empowered man looks like in the community³. Probing questions may inquire as to what his family structure looks like, what his home looks like, what his roles and responsibilities look like in the community. When all ideas about the most empowered man have been drawn, the facilitator asks the participants to draw what the least empowered man looks like. Again, the same type of probing questions can be applied. Finally, the facilitator asks whether there are any middle categories between the "most empowered man" and the "least-empowered man." If there are, the facilitator repeats the exercise for the middle empowered categories (there may be one or more intermediate levels of empowerment).

The next step is to identify which indicators are most important locally in determining whether a person is empowered. The facilitator asks the participants, of all the items drawn for the most empowered man, which are the five most important in determining his empowerment. Lastly, the facilitator asks the participants to think about what would be necessary to move the "least-empowered man" to the intermediate category. This can help the researcher to understand the structural barriers that are preventing empowerment in the

³ While it is best for the community to draw their own interpretations of empowerment, it is sometimes the case (especially in communities with high illiteracy rates) that the participants feel uncomfortable or unable to draw. When this occurs, the facilitator should draw according to the direction of the participants.

community. If more than one item is listed, the community is asked to rank which ones are most necessary in order for the least empowered person to move to the next level of empowerment. Again, this is applied for the intermediate levels of empowerment. Participants are asked to list and rank what is necessary to move the intermediately empowered person to the most empowered status. Once this activity has been completed for the most/intermediately/least-empowered man, it is repeated in its entirety for the most/intermediately/least-empowered woman.

Research sites

As previously indicated, this research took place in four research sites in Kenya (2) and Senegal (2). This section gives background on each of the communities before presenting findings from the Community Concept Drawing.

Senegal

Both of the research sites in Senegal for this study were located in the region of Kaffrine, which is situated in the center of the country and in the heart of Senegal's peanut basin. Peanuts are a major cash crop, driven by both domestic consumption and significant international export. The environment is semi-arid and experiences an annual rainy season between the months of July and September. The end of the Saloum River flows into Kaffrine, in the southern area of the region.

The regional capital is also named Kaffrine and is located in the center of the department on Route Nationale 1. The region of Kaffrine consists of four political departments: Birkilane, Kaffrine, Koungheul, and Malem Hodar. The villages chosen for the study were located in two departments, Kahi in the department of Kaffrine, and Malem Thierign in Malem Hodar. The major ethnic group in Kaffrine is Wolof, with minorities of Sereer and seasonal populations of Fulani herders. Wolof and Sereer dominate the agricultural production of peanuts and millet. Fulani herders migrate to Kaffrine during the dry season in search of grazing pasture and water for livestock.

The Wolof population of Kaffrine is overwhelmingly Muslim, in keeping with the overall population of Senegal. While Sufi brotherhoods are popular in urban centers, rural Wolof

agriculturalists tend not to identify with one specific brotherhood, although they do practice a similar form of Sufi Islam. The majority of rural Wolof families in Kaffrine practice polygamy, with men acquiring up to 4 wives over the course of their adulthood, as dictated by Islamic teaching. Many Wolof, both male and female, attend Koranic school, daara, starting at an early age to learn to recite the Koran and read Arabic. Although the majority of the population does not retain much Arabic literacy, attending Koranic school is seen as an important part in the proper development of a child's moral and social self (Ware, 2014). A former francophone colony, the Koranic school exists alongside the Senegalese public school system, which is a direct derivative of the French school system. Many children do attend French school, however few children continue past the first years of primary school. The poor infrastructure of the school system, a lack of resources and adequate staffing, and the obligation of children to contribute to household and agricultural labor contribute to this low retention rate.

A strong gendered division of labor is valued in Wolof society, with women responsible for household labor and child and elderly care, and men primarily responsible for agricultural production. Women also participate in agriculture, however men are primarily responsible for the cultivation of cash crops, such as peanuts. Women also participate in the cultivation of cash crops although they are not involved in the sale of cash crops to major distributors. Women often maintain individual or shared gardens tended with other women, in which they cultivate delicate produce, such as tomatoes and okra. Women often engage in small-scale income-generating activities, such as the sale of their garden vegetables, and selling snack and beauty products either at a nearby regional market or in the village. Men often partake in exodus, migration, to find income generating labor in the nation's cities and, ideally, send remittances back to the family.

Permission to conduct the focus groups and household surveys were received from the village chiefs and their assistants, first in Malem Thierign and then in Kahi. Originally, the research team from University of Florida aimed to initiate fieldwork in Malem Thierign, but they were postponed due to a death in the village on the first day of data collection. The project proceeded with data collection in Kahi. The sample criteria were given to the village elders, who were charged with calling for participants for the focus groups. The households were

randomly selected by the research team using the village chiefs' lists of households. Detailed information on each of the villages is as follows:

Kahi, department of Kaffrine (site with no Theme 2 activities)

The village of Kahi is located about 10 km from the city of Kaffrine. The village consists of an overwhelming Wolof majority, though at times has a minority population of Fulani herders as seasonal residents. Residents of Kahi had regular access to the city of Kaffrine, by horse cart, motorcycle, and by foot. Residents of Kaffrine did not have prior participation in CCAFS projects or related research.

Malem Thierign, department of Malem Hodar (site with early stage Theme 2 activities)

The village of Malem Thierign is located within the department of Malem Hodar, and is 20 kilometers from Kaffrine. Malem Thierign is situated on the Route Nationale 1. Like Kahi, Malem Thierign has a strong Wolof majority, however unlike Kahi, this village does not have strong ties with mobile Fulani herders, nor do they have seasonal Fulani residents. Malem Thierign has been involved in CCAFS projects and related research in the past, and this study provided an opportunity to follow-up on previous engagements in climate information services. In addition to CCAFS projects, Malem Thierign has also participated in research projects through other development-based NGOs, namely World Vision. Although they did not have one at the time, Malem Thierign also regularly hosts a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Kenya

The research in Kenya takes place in two CCAFS Theme 2 sites, Nyando and Wote. Our team in Kenya worked with in country institutional partners at the International Center for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) in Nyando and the International Center for Research in the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), as well as the Ministry of Agriculture. Unlike the Senegal sites, which were individual villages located within the same region of the country and relatively close together, the Kenya sites were much further apart from one another and had distinct differences other than the level of CCAFS Theme 2 intervention, the characteristic that drove site selection in each country. The Kenyan sites represent two different provinces, which are geographically, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically distinct from each other. The Kenyan sites also differ from the Senegalese sites in that farmers in the Kenyan communities live on

their land, where as in Senegal, household live much closer together and travel a short distance away from the homestead to work their land. In Kenya, this means that households are often 0.5 km to 0.75 km apart from each other. These and other differences will be detailed in the sections below.

Nyando, Kenya (site with early stage Theme 2 activities)

The Nyando region is located along the border of the Nyanza and Rift Valley provinces in western Kenya. There are two primary ethnic groups within this region, the Luo and the Kalenjin. Ethnic cleavages have been a source of conflict in this region and have been especially heightened as resources have become scarce due to climate change. To underscore these tensions, during the period of our study, violence resulting in death occurred between these two groups as a result of cattle thefts.

In Nyando, the Luo region tends to be drier and suffer greater lack of rain and seasonal rainfall variability. The rivers in this region often run dry, requiring farmers to walk long distances for water. Land size averages around one acre. There is one main planting season and many farmers have reported poor crop yields in recent years. The Kalenjin region however, tends to be wetter, with better access to water, two cropping seasons, and larger property sizes – around 5-10 acres on average. They also have more livestock – both traditional and improved – and are more dependent on their livestock for income than their crop production.

Many of the communities within Nyando have been involved as participants in CCAFS research studies. Regionally, there is a high NGO presence focused on climate change, as well as HIV/AIDS- a result of the high HIV prevalence rate in western Kenya and in Nyanza province, specifically. Past CCAFS studies in this region have explored climate adaptation practices and social networks, including the formation and involvement of farmers in community based organizations. They found that 20 self-help groups, under the structure of these CBOs, have grown to include 600 households. The report also finds that about 70 percent of these participants are women. This seems to be indicative of the demographics of this region, which has a high rate of female-headed households. Our own research findings showed an increased number of women headed households in comparison to our second Kenya research site of Wote.

Wote, Kenya (completed Theme 2 CIS program)

Wote is located in Makuene County within the Machakos district of Eastern Province, Kenya. This area is ethnically Kamba, and religiously Christian with a noticeably high number of Catholic churches, and a growing influence of Pentecostal churches as well. While there are women headed households throughout the region, our fieldwork (unintentionally) explored villages where dual-headed households were common.

While Wote is the central town by which the area is known, it consists of many villages. Focus group participants were selected from two villages, Norman and Kiuani. The actual focus group meeting was held in a church in the village of Kasambani, which lies between the Norman and Kiuani villages. As mentioned above, CCAFS recently completed a three-year climate information project in Wote in partnership with the ICRISAT. This project focused on training farmers to receive and interpret forecasting information. As such, we found through our surveys that many of the households had been involved in CCAFS related trainings on climate information. Farmers rely mostly on cash crops, selling citrus and mangoes as well as tomatoes for income. Many households also rely on poultry sales for additional income. Located in an already notoriously dry region of Kenya, climate change impacts in this area have largely been experienced through delayed onset of rains, reduction of rainfall. Institutional support, however, through the Ministry of Agriculture and NGOs have provided resources which many farmers have utilized in order to make adaptations to their farming practices.

Drawing empowerment: findings

Across these various sites, the descriptions of empowerment varied in many ways. Distinctions between age and sex also became important in how the concept was interpreted. In this section, we break down the conceptualization of empowerment by looking at some of the important ways in which each of the focus groups illustrated three levels of empowerment.

Common perceptions of empowerment

The most common recurring theme across all four sites was the importance of assets. This was described in each of the cases in terms of items, such as the size and quantity of houses

and modes of transportation. These assets were juxtaposed across the different levels of empowerment, with the lowest level of empowerment reported to have poor housing conditions. In Malem Theirign it was explained that the most empowered not only has a “nice” home, but also owns many homes. In the case of Wote, this included poor latrine construction in disempowered homes. In the Luo focus group, this meant having no furniture in the house and a leaking grass thatched roof. In each of the focus groups the empowered were identified as owning cars, the least empowered relied on livestock for transportation. In Kenya, the middle empowered person was often reported to be using a bicycle as a means of transport.

Economically related empowerment was portrayed as through physical attributes, possibly an indicator of disposable income to be spent on luxury items or non-essential food. The empowered was well dressed in all four sites. In the Kaffrine cases, the empowered women were described as wearing beautiful dresses and gold jewelry. The middle empowered men and women in the Kaffrine cases had nice clothing but fewer pieces. The least empowered men and women in all four cases had poor clothing. While in all four cases, each focus group used similar characteristics in appearance based on clothing, in Senegal this attention to appearance took on cultural nuances. In Kaffrine, it was enthusiastically stressed that the empowered had more body fat and muscle – meaning a voluptuous hourglass female physique, and a stocky male physique. Certainly for the female physique, this is the aesthetic ideal. In contrast, the disempowered men and women are described as gaunt, with very little body fat or muscle. This indicates that the more empowered had access to adequate or more than adequate nutrition, and were required to conduct less physical labor. So, they are able to purchase or produce additional foodstuffs, and are financially able to either hire farmhands or rely on older children to contribute to most of the food production. The thinness of the disempowered indicated that they suffered from inadequate nutrition, unable to supplement their diets with market-bought foodstuffs, and had to conduct all the arduous agricultural labor, unable to afford hired farmhands.

Another physical attribute that indicates a man’s level of empowerment is facial hair. In Malem Theirign, the most empowered man was described as having a full beard, while the least empowered man merely had “stubble.” The significance of the beard is an indicator of two interrelated aspects. Men are instructed to grow beards in Islam to follow suit with the

prophet Mohammed, as indicated in the Koran. Therefore, a full beard indicates religious devotion and most men who have a full beard hold positions of authority at the local mosque. Hair loss due to inadequate nutrition is a common socially recognized feature in men and women in Kaffrine. This is particularly noticeable in adult men's facial hair, whereas women don fabric head-wraps, thus hiding any hair loss. Likewise, wearing a full beard is difficult for men who engage in daily arduous agricultural labor in the extreme heat of Kaffrine. It is more feasible for men, such as religious authorities who do not conduct physical labor, to be able to maintain a full beard despite the heat. Therefore, a man who suffers from inadequate nutrition or conducts physical labor is unable to fulfill this command of the Prophet Mohammed, calling into question his ability to fulfill religious obligations.

Other economically derived indicators include wealth accumulation, with higher levels of wealth being associated with higher levels of empowerment. But they were also correlated with occupations. In nearly all of the focus groups, more empowered men and women were considered to be business people. Exceptions were in both of the Kahi women's groups and the Wote elderly women's group, where the empowered could also be teachers or government workers. In the intermediately empowered cases, men were largely farmers working agriculture (or livestock, in the case of Kahi). They were rarely identified as wage laborers. Intermediately empowered women were also seen as working in agriculture, however might also engage in small part time work (Kahi and Malen Thierign elderly women's group).

Education level was another economic indicator identified by all groups. However, variation in this seemed to be less important in the Kaffrine cases where the most empowered and the least empowered men were both educated in Koranic and French schools. In Senegal, the number of years of school attendance was not mentioned in the focus groups; the distinction was drawn, instead, as to whether someone completed their education or not. Those who were most empowered completed their education, especially among the empowered men. Those who did not complete their education were usually the least empowered. The importance of education levels and the types of schools were important in Kenya. In all but one of the Nyando focus groups, education was among the top ranked indicators of importance in determining one's level of empowerment (the exception being the Kalenjin men). In both the Nyando and Wote cases, education seemed to be a distinguishing factor between the levels of empowerment. In Wote, relatively high levels of education were

attained by the most empowered, including University degrees. Intermediately empowered men and women were likely to complete high school, while the least empowered did not attend school at all. Discussions about the level of schooling children attained and the types of schools (whether boarding, public, or private) were also important in identifying ones level of empowerment in Wote. In Nyando, similar education levels were reported, with the most empowered man and women both completing secondary school and often obtaining some university education as well. At the intermediate level, some years of secondary school were completed.

There appear to be two underlying reasons for the distinction between levels of economic empowerment. At one level, it is about access to resources. Those who have access to land, to business opportunities, and to agricultural technologies are better equipped to improve their economic situation and thus their economic empowerment. At another level, though, this economic empowerment is based on social relationships. The perceived character of person, least empowered men and women are spoken of in derogatory language, attributed to their “laziness.” In the Luo women explained that the least empowered man takes advantage of people in the community. Another Luo woman explained that the village members “hate and do not trust him”. The Wote focus group spoke at length about social isolation of the disempowered man and women, the young men explained that one becomes ashamed of their situation, depressed, and ultimately turns to drugs and alcohol. This only further compounds the economic indicators, which are already contributing to the disempowerment of himself and his household. Alcohol and drug use were discussed openly and critically, particularly of disempowered men, in the Wote and Nyando focus groups; this was not a point raised in the Kaffrine cases, which is understandable given the context of an Islamic society.

Differing perceptions of empowerment

Each of the communities discussed more or less similar economic indicators of empowerment. However, there were other indicators of empowerment that differed across cultural lines, and gender lines. One example of this is family size. While all sites saw children as being a possible bridge into a higher level of empowerment, the number of children varied. Development literature tells us that higher levels of empowerment correlate with smaller family size and larger spacing between children (Cates, 2010; Joshi and Schultz,

2007; Schultz, 1980). This is often understood to be an indicator of empowerment for women, demonstrating the extent to which she has access to education and control over her reproductive health. These indicators don't reflect the desirability of having large families, something that was explored in this study.

In line with much of the development literature on empowerment, both in Nyando and Wote illustrated that family planning was a central component of empowerment. The most empowered men and women had around 2-4 children to whom they were able to provide equal and adequate care. This included private or boarding school education and nice clothing. The least empowered men and women were described as having as few as 6 and as many as 12 children who they could not afford to feed, let alone provide education and health care. In Nyando, the Luo women explained that the children were often naked because the mother could not provide clothes for her many children.

This was not the case in Senegal. In Malem Thierign and Kahi, the least empowered person was said to have 2-4 children. The most empowered man in all of the Senegalese focus groups was said to have between 10 and 15 children (the exception was the Malem Thierign young women who said the most empowered man usually had about 5 children). In part this can be attributed to the empowered man often having three, four, and in very rare instances five wives. There is a gendered distinction however. Men who had more children were more empowered; however women who had more children were less empowered. This perception was described by both women's focus groups and men's focus groups, however women's focus groups often also indicated that most of the children were very young for the less empowered woman. A way of reconciling this is that women who had many children had to devote much of their time to childcare and could not partake in income-generating and food production activities. Furthermore, it is strongly frowned upon to have children in quick succession, *neff*, and it is assumed that a woman who does have children in quick succession has little ability to negotiate her reproduction with her husband. In contrast, for a man to have many children, this would also entail that he has many wives, and thus the onus is not centered on one person, but spread between many adults. Furthermore, while men did not specify that their children were of a certain age, they usually assumed later in the discussions that some of the children were at least old enough to help in the fields. Therefore both the women and men's focus groups indicate that the presence and participation of more labor-

abled kin – not necessarily adults, but not small children – was necessary for an individual's empowerment. The absence of these labor-abled kin strongly worked to the disadvantage of empowerment, particularly for women.

Another way in which cultural differences were evident in determination of empowerment levels was through marriage norms. In Wote, most households contain single marriage families. In Nyando, this is a little more varied as wife inheritance is still practiced in some communities in western Kenya; in those cases, households sometimes have two wives. This, however, was not an important factor in the Nyando focus groups. What was important in some of the Nyando focus groups was the age of marriage. The Luo men's focus group explained that the girl children of the least empowered men are married at young ages. The Kalenjin men explained that the least empowered women were sometimes married in standard 6- this is equivalent to the sixth grade in primary school in Kenya.

In Senegal, polygamy is commonplace especially in rural regions such as Kaffrine. Islam allows for men to have as many as four wives, however not all men in rural Kaffrine have four wives. The number of wives a man has is often a reflection of his wealth, and is an important indicator of his level of empowerment. In almost every focus group, the empowered man was said to have 3-4 wives. Every focus group in Kaffrine indicated that the intermediately empowered man had 2 wives. Finally, every focus group explained that the least empowered man had only one wife. In theory, a woman who is the third or fourth wife has married into a wealthy household. It suggests that she has access to resources, which may be empowering for her. In contrast, a woman who is the first wife is often married to a young man and not yet independently wealthy. As a result, she also experiences economic hardship and does not have as many opportunities for empowerment as the empowered women.

The focus groups had differing opinions about the impact of multiple marriages on women's empowerment, though. The young women's focus group of Kahi indicated that the 5th wife was the most empowered. It is very rare for men to have more than four wives, and those who do are considered very wealthy and powerful. The young women also indicated that this husband had a car, a rare possession for rural inhabitants of Kaffrine. The Malem Theirign young women claimed that the number of wives was not important for empowerment. The Malem Theirign young men debated over whether the first or second wife were more empowered, discussing the roles and responsibilities each had in the household; they

ultimately concluded that it was the first wife who was more empowered. Ultimately, marriage structure is important for the empowerment of men, often an indicator of his economic empowerment. It is also an indicator for women, but in a different way. For men, acquiring multiple wives enables him to have more children, particularly male children, who can contribute to agricultural production of cash crops. It is assumed that the empowered man is wealthy, either independently or because of family wealth. In Kaffrine, marriage is patrilocal, meaning that women move to her husband's family home upon marriage, and so her wealth is dependent on the wealth of her husband and his family. It does not particularly matter which number wife she is, rather just that her husband is wealthy. The number of wives her husband has however is a strong indicator of his wealth or financial stability. For example, a woman is not empowered because she is positioned as the fourth wife, but rather because she is married to a man who is wealthy enough to have four wives. Finally, the number of spouses can contribute to the number of children within the household who will eventually be contributing to household income. Older men with many children will potentially have more income being generated for the household and thus increasing the economic empowerment of those residing within it.

Empowerment in transition

Perhaps one of the more interesting pieces that emerged from this study was the discussion of transitional factors. In this part of the drawing activity, facilitators asked what conditions were necessary in order for one to move to the next level of empowerment. While the intention of the question was to capture structural conditions necessary for improved empowerment, the responses in each of the cases turned mostly to individual or personal improvement. This seemed to place the responsibility of one's empowerment condition very much on the individual's life choices rather than merely one's opportunities. Consequently, empowerment was viewed as dynamic, and no level of empowerment was depicted as an inevitably permanent condition.

In Wote, the least empowered person was encouraged to interact with social groups, whether in a church group setting or just with neighbors. It was suggested that they work to learn a skill through trainings or literacy classes offered by local NGOs, in so doing they will also increase their social networks. One woman in Wote explained, "Because there are lots of activities in the church which will help her to mingle with a lot of people and she can learn a

lot... And at the adult education classes, she can learn some reading and writing as well as getting some other information.” At the intermediate levels, particular emphasis was placed on saving and investment of income in order to improve one’s economic productivity. In Kahi, this meant investing in “better seeds;” in Wote this meant investing in improved livestock and farming equipment. For Luo women, this meant joining community micro-finance groups. In the Kalenjin community, it meant diversifying crops to include sugarcane. Often the transition between intermediate empowerment to higher levels of empowerment is possible by engaging in multiple income generating activities. A young man in Kahi explained that a person “must do farming and some business at the same time.” The important message across all of these cases is that one’s empowerment is, at least in part, due to individual choices and actions. Structural barriers to empowerment were emphasized less.

One structural factor that did emerge as important for improvement at each stage of empowerment was through the investment in the education of one’s children. A Kahi elderly woman said, “If the children succeed and do well, that can change the situation of their mother.” Another agreed, “If one of his children succeeds, he [the least empowered man] will quickly catch up to the somewhat-empowered man.” As a result, it was suggested that the children be educated. An elderly woman noted, “Her children, all of them, should go to school, or two go to school, and the other learns a profession.” The Malem Theirign participants explained that children’s income can help improve the empowerment level of the household. One person explained that the least empowered man should send his children to work at the home of the most empowered, to provide an income for the family. In each of the Nyando cases, it was recommended that the children improve upon their education as well. The Luo men suggested that a “well-wisher” sponsor a disempowered child’s education, since the parents could not afford to do so themselves. In Wote, one of the focus groups mentioned that the children of the least empowered should leave the home in order to grow in a more healthy and favorable environment. Ultimately, relying on the education of children and their careers was seen as a way of improving the empowerment of everyone in the household.

Another topic that seemed especially important in the transition from least to intermediate empowerment levels was the practice of family planning. In Nyando and Wote, absence of family planning was described as being one of the most important factors in determining the lower levels of empowerment. This can be both a structural and individual factor of

empowerment⁴. The Wote young men's focus group discussed the ways in which planning in all aspects of life were absent in the intermediate and lower levels of empowerment. They explained that, while this requires a personal responsibility at some level, it also requires structural support through education classes and information on family planning be provided at pre-natal/ante-natal doctors' appointments.

Other discussion points of interest

One interesting discussion occurred in the Wote young women's focus group. After listing various attributes about the most empowered man, the conversation became negative. It was explained that the most empowered were not well liked by the community because of their wealth and their disconnection from village issues and events. While it was acknowledged that the village often depended on the most empowered people for resources, including fundraising activities for development projects, they seemed weary of this relationship. Similar sentiments were expressed by the Kalenjini men's focus group where they described the most empowered man as being "arrogant." The Luo men described both the empowered men and women as being "arrogant" and "greedy." In Wote, it was explained in every focus group that the empowered man and woman were mostly living in urban areas and engaged in business and politics at a national level. Some groups expressed that the most empowered man and women were "hardly in the village." This seems to suggest a social separation between the most empowered and those less empowered. While they may be involved in occasional fundraising events, they are not embedded in the village community and engaged on local issues on an everyday basis. This is important because the participants placed empowerment in a context that was not limited to their small village, but extended to urban centers. This indicates an awareness of scale outside the community, and how empowerment can also be influenced by the geographic space one occupies.

Social organizations seemed to be especially important in Nyando. The most empowered were considered to be members of "high society groups." The intermediately empowered women were often engaged in women's groups or merry-go-rounds (microfinance groups). The Luo women identified various groups that empowered women were involved in at the local level,

⁴ The role of children within the empowerment story is complicated, and differs across context as will be described further below.

including a group called “CoSave” which operates as a merry-go-round. Still, the burden of social organization and responsibility seems to fall on the intermediately empowered person. One young man in Wote explained, the intermediately empowered “are the most used in the community... you have to sacrifice yourself.” Another agreed, “They are the most used and misused in the community.” While the Kalenjin women saw the empowered man as being well liked, the Kalenjin men’s group disagreed. They reported that the empowered man “pays poorly when he employs the village members.” In contrast, they describe the intermediately man as “a social person” and “helpful,” engaging in social groups and trainings as well as hiring laborers from the disempowered group. It is, thus, the intermediately empowered man who seems to hold the more important social standing in the community.

Finally, in the case of Wote, the participants in each group seemed to immediately shape empowerment in the context of the Climate Smart Agriculture practices introduced in the beginning of the focus group. Those who were more empowered were more likely to engage in various strategies such as water harvesting, agroforestry, and in keeping improved livestock. In Nyando, similar distinctions were made between those who are using CSA practices (the most empowered) and those who are not (the least empowered) – they were not, however, as predominant a factor in categorizing levels of empowerment as they were in Wote. Practices listed by the Luo men include the usage of improved seeds and livestock. Among the Kalenjin women, the CSA practice of horticulture was listed under the most empowered woman. In all Kenyan cases, the least empowered were not engaging in agricultural production very much, but when they were, they were not using any CSA practices. It is interesting that they made this distinction, while the Senegal sites did not – especially given that every case participated in the CSA identification and ranking activity prior to the Community Concept Drawing activity. This may be a reflection of the familiarity this region had with CSA practices, as participants were able to recognize those in the community who were working with these adaptive practices and those who were not. More interestingly, they made this distinction in the context of an empowerment framework.

Using this tool for improving climate information services

How can this tool be useful for gender and development? First and foremost, it helped us to identify what conditions we should look to improve as development workers if we wanted to analyze marked improvement in empowerment. From the type of transportation people used, to the condition of their homes, to the level of education they obtained, the community provided our team with the contextually relevant indicators by which to measure empowerment. Through our focus groups we learned that economic indicators do seem to be important in determining one's empowerment, but which financial assets were the best indicators of empowerment in each community depended much on cultural values and norms. For example, while marriage structure may be an important indicator to analyze in Senegal, it is not in Wote. And, while a higher number of children is associated with poverty in Kenya, it is not necessarily true in Senegal. With this qualitative insight into culturally defined indicators of economic empowerment, we can modify our scope of analysis to measure change in empowerment in response to development programs or improved delivery of climate information services. We can now use these descriptions to create a profile of the target population and the indicators that are leading to one's disempowerment, as defined by the community.

Secondly, the activity identified structural challenges that practitioners may face when trying to incorporate the least empowered populations into development programs. In regards to the delivery of climate information, if we learn that illiteracy is a common characteristic of the least empowered, outreach tools should be tailored to accommodate that need. Through this activity, the community identified the least empowered groups in the community, their assets, their farming practices, and their engagement (or lack there of) in social spaces in the community. While the disempowered are the most vulnerable to climate shocks, they may not be the most effective target population for disseminating climate information. Certain factors that contribute to their disempowerment, such as illiteracy or lack of communication devices (e.g., televisions, radios, or mobile phones) may present obstacles to the distribution of climate information. Their lack of networks and lack of trust within the community may make it unlikely that information would be shared through them. Perhaps a more effective

diffuser of information would be the intermediately empowered person, who often has some education, attends local meetings and trainings, and is well connected socially. For example, we learned that the poor don't have land. Instead, they borrow or rent land from others. Because they don't have a plow or donkey, they must wait until everyone else is finished working their land before they can use it themselves. Therefore, the least empowered man and woman in Wote may not be able to utilize information about early rainfall, for instance, because they have other structural barriers which prevent them from adapting to climate change, even if they have the knowledge and desire to do so. In this case those structural barriers are land ownership and agricultural tools.

Thirdly, critical to the success of CCAFS initiatives is the development of partnerships with local institutions. This activity facilitated a dialogue about institutional presence within the community. In both Kenya and Senegal there was little mention of government interventions as being important to the transition between empowerment levels. This may be attributed to a strong presence of NGOs in conjunction with a weak state (at least in terms of the state's ability to deliver services). This appears to be the case in Wote, where basic state services like the development of roads is taken on by local volunteers who gather to cut trees and clear their own road ways. In Nyando, too, local CBOs and other institutions are mentioned as supporting community level projects or concerns. With regards to climate information services, it is helpful to know who the active institutional partners are in the community. If state capacity is weak, perhaps government institutions are not capable of sustaining long-term relationships to rural communities. Instead, either community based organizations or NGOs may be a more effective strategy for reaching vulnerable populations.

The study also revealed that the most empowered are disengaged from the community, but for other reasons. While they have the resources to adapt, they are often not engaged in agriculture and rarely in the village. Through this activity in Wote, we learned that there were particular avenues that fostered better relationships with the larger community and were seen as a space where the disempowered could become more empowered. One of these spaces was a local church, which also could provide counseling services as well as literacy classes- both of which were seen as a source of empowerment. These might also be important spaces by which climate information could be disseminated in the particular case of Wote. This is also true in Nyando, where specific CBOs and merry-go-rounds were identified as places where

women could become more empowered. These are social spaces where women meet which can also be a means by which climate information can be shared.

Conclusion

This project has attempted to capture, cross-regionally, locally derived understandings of empowerment. Using participatory methods, our team has identified the defining characteristics of empowerment in each of the four sites explored. In these sites economic wealth was an important component of empowerment, whether expressed through physical presentation or asset accumulation. It was also an important factor in terms of transitional processes as increased investment in income generating activities opened economic opportunities; this enhanced the wealth, and ultimately the empowerment, of both men and women. While economic factors were centrally important across cases, the types of illustrations indicating economic wealth varied by cultural norms, values, and contexts. Indicators such as number of children, as well as social activity and relationships within the community, were reflective of local experiences of power. These indicators, as well as the necessary conditions for transition between stages of empowerment, were framed in their local narratives while, at the same time, sharing many common themes of interest to development practitioners.

This methodology can be used to identify points of entry into the community for researchers and practitioners alike by understanding social relationships within the community. It can also be used as a way of quickly identifying vulnerable groups within a community and underlying reasons for that vulnerability. If information is to empower farmers who are experiencing harsh changes in climate, this information needs to be communicated effectively to those who need it most. This requires a nuanced understanding of how power hierarchies operate within communities in accordance with (but not limited to) age, ethnicity, religion, and gender. In the context of the CCAFS Theme 2 mandate of risk management, this tool can be used to identify who is at greatest risk to climate shocks and what are the best methods to communicate climate information.

Finally, because this is a participatory tool, it allows for community members to take the lead, illustrating – both literally and figuratively – the terms by which empowerment is understood

and analyzed within their communities. It also helps to generate discussion about how empowerment operates in the participants' own lives and relationships. At the end of our Wote focus group, a young woman explained to our team, "I really liked this activity. I never thought that I could move to different level of empowerment, but now I am thinking that it is possible." The discussion that resulted from the empowerment activity not only gave ownership to the community to conceptualize the term, but also provided the space for participants to discuss what obstacles were preventing empowerment, and what opportunities or resources were present in the community in order to help them transition to that next level.

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