Changing culture, changing climate: how is the adaptive capacity shaped by the intersections of gender and ethnicity in a semi-arid rural setting, Namibia?

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INTRODUCTION
Gender research in the context of climate change have demonstrated that climate change vulnerability and capacity to respond to its impacts is socially differentiated. Research that goes beyond gender as a binary view that look at men and women as independent categories (Carr and Thompson, 2014) has recently emerged to highlight the heterogeneity in societies and factors that motivate them (Van Aalst & Holmert, 2016). This study has combined the vulnerability, gender and intersectionality frameworks to analyse intersections of gender and ethnicity, age and marital status highlighting who is more sensitive to impacts of climate change and who has adaptive capacity to respond to impacts of climate change (drought, water scarcity and high temperatures). The case study was carried out in Ongwediva Constituency, Omusati Region, North-Central Namibia using qualitative research methodology. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews were carried out with 78 farmers from the Kolonkadhi, Dhomba and Ndongona ethnic groups. This poster presentation is based on an adaptive capacity assessment study that looked at how gender, ethnicity and other socio-cultural and socio-economic factors shape households vulnerabilities to impact of climate change.

CHANGING CULTURE, CHANGING CLIMATE

- Rain is an important event in the life of a Kolonkadhi, Ndongona and Dhomba farmer. All ethnic groups have observed changes in rainfall and temperatures.
- The duration of rainfall has become shorter and temperature has increased. These impacts both crops and livestock production and output.
- Ethic identity, norms and gender roles are closely linked to rain-fed agriculture. Mahangu crop field is the main and important asset complemented by livestock farming and cash income.
- A Ndongona and Kolonkadhi woman is a “crop field”, she is a custodian of the most valuable asset “crop field and its produce” yet control and decision-making power over its use differs among the three ethnic groups.
- A man is a livestock farmer, for all ethnic groups “a man without cattle is not a man”.
- The value of a Dhomba man is seen in his love for cattle.
- Gender productive and reproductive roles are cultural but differs from household to household depending on the level of patriarchy exercised by the head of household.
- The stronger the influence of post-independent gender laws and adoption of education in an ethnic group, the more egalitarian and relatively equal bargaining power for women in a conjugal family. This is strongest among Kolonkadhi and lowest among Dhomba ethnic groups.

FARMING SKILLS
- Seed management and cultivation skills are important owing to the long history of crop farming in a semi-arid environment.
- Kolonkadhi and Ndongona women are more successful in managing their seeds and have adapted the planting system to the changing climate.
- Seed is managed to reduce crop failure and to secure crops for post-rain season. This drought preparedness strategy is weaker among the Dhomba.
- Seasonal migration to cattle posts is common among men from all ethnic groups. Dhomba and Ndongona are more successful in livestock farming.
- Only recently, livestock farming is seen more important than sheep farming among Dhomba and Ndongona.

IS GENDER AND ETHNICITY SHAPING ADAPTIVE CAPACITY?

- Access to agricultural input, information and finances are crucial for food security and sustained livelihood outcomes.
- The capacity to respond and access to resources is ethnically differentiated due to socio-economic factors also bring out ethnic differences, for instance, the Dhomba who are also marginalised due to education and poverty tend to face more challenges during drought.
- Co-ownership of a crop field and farm equipment is common in a Kolonkadhi male headed household, whereas among Ndongona and Dhomba this is a transitional phase prompted by post-independent laws.
- There are a few Ndongona and Dhomba households whereby couple own separate plots for mahangu cultivation.

SOCIAL RELATIONS

- The Ndongona group has ethnic social relations that are stronger compared to the Dhomba and Kolonkadhi.
- The Dhomba ethnic group display weaker social cohesion, stronger dependency on neighbours and in some cases engage in reciprocal social relations where they work in exchange for food.
- The Kolonkadhi have positive relations with neighbours which is based on what the helper and receiver is able to offer to this relationship. Well-endowed households and neighbours have stronger relations.
- There are variations in the nature of social relations among the three ethnic groups and this clearly demonstrate different levels of vulnerabilities and marginalisation among the three ethnic groups.

CONCLUSIONS

- Comparatively higher levels of marginalisation and patriarchy in a given ethnic group tend to be associated with low levels of adaptive capacity.
- Differences in patriarchy influence decision-making, control over resources and gender equality.
- These levels are further differentiated by gender, household composition and age of household head.
- Overall findings suggest that an intersectional approach highlights how gender, ethnic norms and cultural values mediate differential adaptive capacity.
- Such an understanding is crucial for strengthening farmers’ adaptive capacity in rural settings.

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