

Building resilience by challenging social norms:

Towards a gender transformative approach in BRACED



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Woman grinding millet in Pella, Passoré, Burkina Faso, November 2016 / Photo: Camilla Audia

The effects of climate change are being felt by farmers throughout the world. Flooding, drought and weather that does not follow typical seasonal patterns have resulted in poor and unpredictable crop yields. To address these challenges Christian Aid (CA) is leading the BRACED consortia, Zaman Lebidi in Burkina Faso and CIARE in Ethiopia, which aim to make people's livelihoods more resilient to climate shocks and stresses. This is being achieved through practical assistance to develop and implement community resilience plans including activities such as irrigation, conservation farming, post-harvest management, nutrition education, market gardening, livelihoods diversification, animal health services and through improving the communication of relevant, timely and accurate climate information, to help decision guide making.

Christian Aid and partners are focussing on engaging directly with women through the project, recognising that they are often disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change due to inequitable access and utilisation of resources such as income, social networks and education. Project

activities include providing women with livestock and holding 'listening groups' where women can gather, listen, and discuss radio broadcast weather information.

This policy brief synthesises Zaman Lebidi and CIARE's approach to gender as a resilience building strategy, defining a gender transformative approach and examining to what extent the project activities align with this approach. It gives an overview of the workshop carried out in Burkina Faso with partners in December 2016, focussing in particular on the lessons learned and action plan drawn from both workshop discussions and the field activity. Finally it provides suggestions for moving forward with a stronger gender component within BRACED.

Building resilience by challenging social norms

The Christian-Aid led BRACED projects in Ethiopia and Burkina Faso are generating opportunities for women, with the aim of challenging gender norms

as a means to build resilience. Current social norms often limit women's and men's full participation in household and community life, and can inhibit opportunities for resilience in the face of severe social, economic, and extreme climate events (Cole et al., 2014; Kantor et al., 2015). Studies have shown that where women own livestock, they have easier access to economic resources; this ultimately improves their ability to cope with emergencies (climatic or other such as illness, social events, etc.) and enables the gradual evolution of a woman's position and importance - including economic importance - within the home (Valdavia, 2011).

However, while a focus on improving women's productive opportunities can promote gender equity in some aspects of life, often the underlying structural and normative barriers to gender equity remain (Hammer and Klugman 2016; Kabeer, 2005; Kristjansen, et al., 2014). In order to strengthen women's empowerment in all areas of life, a more holistic approach to gender equity is needed (Hunt and Kasynathan, 2010; Kabeer, 2005). Consequently, there is now consensus amongst gender researchers and experts that gender programming should seek to trigger long-term, holistic changes in gender norms. This type of gender and development practice is called a gender transformative approach (Kantor et al., 2015).

With the sustainable benefits of a gender transformative approach in mind, BRACED project activities, such as market gardens and listening groups, offer new ways of engaging women in economic pursuits while providing opportunities to increase their empowerment in many aspects of social life. For example, these BRACED project activities provide women with new avenues for accessing markets and they allow for the integration of women into structured group settings which foster strengthened social networks, development of leadership skills, and new channels for the diffusion of information - all of which can provide a foundation for building confidence and leverage in household and community decision-making (Miezen-Dick, 2014). By placing women in the position of 'knowledge broker' within the home, the project's listening group activities in particular may be an important entry point for the transformation of gender norms. These results could eventually lead to a shift in attitudes concerning women's roles, and to ultimately improving gender equity, contributing to a radical and lasting change. In taking this approach, the CIARE and Zeman Lebidi projects can be seen to be initiating a process of transformation in terms of gendered social norms.

Box 1: Gender focused activities in BRACED Zaman Lebidi

Zaman Lebidi partners consider one of the key aims of the BRACED project is to address the inequality existing between men and women - particularly to empower women to play a greater role in decision making both within the household and the village. This will enable them to become central actors in development, ultimately resulting in strengthening the household's resilience. Project activities to promote greater equity include:

- the establishment of Early Warning Committees amongst other groups in which women are members and are provided with training, therefore increasing their capacity, visibility and involvement in village-level activities
- the distribution of small ruminants to women, which can provide them with their own income and therefore give them more leverage in decision making
- the promotion of women-led income generating activities (IGAs) such as market gardening
- the establishment of women-led listening groups during which climate information will be communicated, through radio broadcasts, thus enhancing the understanding of weather and climate and building a base of knowledge to support decision-making.

What are BRACED's gender capacities?

A review of implementing partner's (IPs) gender practices and policies within the two Christian Aid-led BRACED projects was conducted by KCL in 2016 to ensure continued learning by assessing whether a gender transformative approach was an achievable goal within the timeframe of the BRACED project. Findings from the review suggested that to really begin to initiate a transformation of gender norms within those communities implicated in BRACED, a far more explicit understanding of social norms was necessary, followed by the development of a clear action plan, laying out the steps needed to challenge these norms (Learning Paper #4, 2016).

As a first step, implementing partners required a space for communication between themselves and with communities, where perceptions, goals, findings, challenges, and best practices could be shared. To address the IPs needs, Kings College London and Christian Aid organised a gender workshop in Ouagadougou from December 6 to December 8 2016. The workshop, called "Vers une approche transformative de genre dans le projet BRACED" ('Towards a gender transformative

approach in BRACED') involved and actively engaged 24 participants from across the Zaman Lebidi consortium, including representatives from Action Against Hunger, ATAD, Christian Aid, Internews, ODE and Oxfam. The workshop aimed to facilitate conversations on gender while providing support for integrating gender research methods and approaches into project activities.

Day 1 was built around participative and engaging activities that presented transformative approaches to gender through examples, case-studies and by examining existing project monitoring data. The reflections arising from the first day underpinned the main activity for day 2, namely focus group discussions in two villages in the Oxfam International - ATAD intervention zone, in Sanmatenga. Day 2 saw participants divided across two villages with small groups leading focus group discussions with women, men and young people. The discussions revolved around livelihoods activities carried out by each of the groups.

Workshop fieldwork methodology

A field exercise took place on the second day of the workshop to triangulate findings from project monitoring and evaluation and to test reflections, conclusions and assumptions of the participants. This exercise used the methodological tool of qualitative focus groups with a directed focus on the different livelihood and domestic tasks carried out by men and women and the variation in the ways they prioritise these tasks.

An important part of this exercise was to show how qualitative methodologies can be a useful tool for evaluating gender equity in stakeholder communities. Important data can be gathered from the content of discussions within focus group settings or through interviews, whilst important insights into the social dynamics that shape gendered norms can also be gained by observing participant interactions and behaviours. Consequently, field researchers should be accounting for both explicit and implicit cues on gender during their field work.

The field work took place in two villages, Nioko and Tallé Mossi in Sanmatenga, coordinated by BRACED partner ATAD, who work in these villages implementing BRACED activities, including the establishment and strengthening of early warning committees, distribution of water conservation and land rehabilitation equipment and provision of improved seed varieties.

In each village, focus groups were convened with three groups of 8 - 10 people: a group of women, a group of men and a mixed group of young men and women (identified by the villagers as 'youth'). These were each led by three workshop participants. Simple ranking exercises were used to determine which household tasks and livelihood activities took the most amount of time in rainy and dry seasons, and secondly, which activities were seen to be the most important. The focus group participants used pebbles to indicate their choices.



Ranking exercise with youth group in Tallé Mossi, Sanmatenga, December 2016 / Photo: Frances Crowley

Observations and findings

Power dynamics in the focus groups

This fieldwork activity provided an opportunity to explore gender analysis tools through a qualitative methodology in a practical way. Participants in the workshop were assigned to a group and asked to observe not only what was being said by participants but also the social dynamics within the

group. It was observed in the focus groups that age, education and status play a crucial role alongside gender. In one group it was remarked that older people are more likely to speak up. Partners later confirmed that generally in Burkinabe society older people's voices are heard first.

In one of the 'youth' groups, a young girl dominated the conversation. She was both educated and the daughter of the village chief, traits that indicated a position of power amongst her peers and crucial factors in facilitating her participation. In this same youth group, while participation was strained and hesitant, men tended to speak more openly than the other young women. Again, this seemed to be indicative of gender hierarchies, even among youth.

Division of labour

The focus group ranking activities undertaken with each group (young people, women and men) demonstrate the ways in which divisions in labour and household responsibilities are gendered.

The discussions revealed that women's work is centred mainly on farming activities (tending both to their own and to the family fields), childcare, looking after livestock, cooking and housework and fetching water and firewood. Men, on the other hand, focus mostly on agriculture (the family fields only), selling

produce at the market and, in the dry season, brick making. The ranking exercise highlighted an uneven distribution of tasks, with women's share of labour being significantly greater.¹

Some men may support women with certain tasks, such as fetching wood and water particularly when a woman is pregnant or ill. However, there was a clear taboo around the process of grinding and making 'Tô', (a polenta style cake made from millet, sorghum or corn), which is a task only women will carry out.

Farming

Participants explained that women are expected to prioritise the family fields over their own fields (also used for growing cereal but mainly dedicated to beans, peanuts, cash crops or herbs for sauce) and over market gardening fields (mainly used to grow vegetables to sell). This can mean getting up very early in the morning to fit in this work before the rest of the day's chores. In fact, some women confirmed that they invested in torches to be able to work even before dawn. Young men and women ('youth') have their own fields too, but these are also a lower priority than the family fields.

¹ This finding is consistent with in-depth qualitative interviews carried out by KCL in the province of Passoré, Burkina Faso

Perceived importance/prioritisation of daily activities in Nioko village, Sanmatenga



In line with recent studies (Tincani, 2012), the household's main granary, managed by the head of household, is also the main food reserve; while in some polygamous households women take turns in feeding their family out of their own granaries, or feed their children each from their own granary, with a contribution from the main one; in other cases, women's granaries are only touched in case the household big granary is empty before the end of the season.

The gendered roles and responsibilities explained above have implications for resilience building interventions. If men were able to shoulder more of the burden of women's work, women would have more time to tend to their own fields. Subsequently this could improve the quality and quantity of preserved cereal, reducing the so-called 'soudure' period in which granaries are empty and new harvest is awaited. Women often lack time and specific tools (animal labour, plough) to tend to their own field, therefore they cannot always prepare the land through traditional techniques (such as zai pits, demi-lunes, cordons pierreux) which could retain rain water, strengthen the soil and ultimately allow for a better harvest in both quality and quantity. Finally, women often do not have time for a second sowing cycle of short term crops (beans, peanuts, etc.) which are often used for both household consumption and selling on local markets. This, of course, cannot be generalised and is highly interlinked with other factors such as the number of able bodied members of the household, number of members to feed and the fields' quantity and size. Nonetheless it is interesting to note here how changes in inter-household dynamics might have an effect on the family's resilience.

Another notable finding arising from the focus group discussions was that despite women's crucial role in cultivating crops (both in the family fields and their own), the prominent view is that women are primarily responsible for household tasks. This view was even reflected in women's ranking of household activities, despite the emphasis they placed on their time spent in the fields in the discussion. This perspective may diminish the perceived importance of the role played by women in household production.

Income-generating activities

Another consequence of this division of labour is that social norms and women's workload prevents them from having the same opportunities to carry

out other tasks such as attending the market or producing a craft to generate income. While young people and men stated that income generating activities (IGAs) took a large portion of their days, women recognised the importance of these in terms of income, but were not able to dedicate as much of their time to IGAs themselves (particularly in rainy season, when crops are being cultivated) or have access to the resources needed to carry them out. It is important to highlight that women and men acknowledged some changes in women's ability to carry out IGAs; this comes from a better understanding of how IGAs can be beneficial for livelihoods. It was also noted by Zaman Lebidi partners that income generating activities initiated for women by the project, such as the market gardening, were more likely to be accepted by men since they involve working in a group. It is possible that this is due to a certain amount of peer pressure on the male head of the household to allow their wives' to take part in a collective activity. In addition, men have also begun to support their wives in this activity by managing the upkeep of garden perimeters.

However, according to BRACED implementing partners, selling produce still remains in the male-domain, and partners reported that women would have to ask permission from their spouses to sell goods. In this way, the market place – an important social space – is dominated by men. Due to these social norms and the burden of women's work, women have less time for more social activities which are critical to resilience - including attending community meetings, building social networks, and attending trainings which would provide important information about weather and climate adaptation.

Use of income and decision making

Focus group discussions also revealed gendered information about household decision-making. Household decisions are customarily made by the male head, including decisions regarding seed selection, planting times, and use of revenue. Resources are also managed by the man and, as previously mentioned, it is the men of the households who go to market to sell the household generated produce. Women are reportedly less free to trade outside of their villages. Still, young people, both male and female, may be called upon to make decisions when their parents are absent. In these cases, it is the eldest whom this role falls to, regardless of sex.

Women's responsibilities, however, include care and management of the household's livestock. In fact, one of the project's related activities consisted in distributing small animals to women. This was mentioned several times during the focus groups as an activity that was very much appreciated by them. While a recent report from the Ministry of Agriculture stated that 47.2 % (Ministry of Agriculture, 2016) of women take care of livestock throughout Burkina, cattle is seen to be the property of the head of the household. Where small ruminants were given directly to women in the project it was found that in some households, women were in fact able to choose to sell animals and keep the proceeds, however in others men made the ultimate decision about livestock sales and revenue. In some cases, women informed their husbands that they should sell the livestock, but it was the men who would go to the market; in these cases, husbands usually kept some of the income and but also gave some to their wives. This sharing of income was mentioned as a practice that would not have happened in previous generations (where men would have managed the entire amount), and reportedly occurs more frequently with younger women of the group. In cases where women did keep some or all the proceeds, some said that they then used these to supplement any household expenses (such as school fees, spices for cooking or medicine) or kept some aside for emergencies (especially medical emergencies), thus increasing the resilience of the household. However, it was also reported that the men could at any point take charge of these resources. Despite this, there was recognition both by the women in the focus groups and by project partners that women's ownership of livestock could lead to an evolution (albeit a slow one) of the female position within the household: bringing in income increased their perceived value to the household and meant their opinions are more likely to be solicited and taken into account resulting in more decision-making power.

Access to climate information

The focus group discussions also revealed gender inequities with regards to accessing and utilising climate information. Women reported not having access to climate information for two primary reasons: either because they did not have access to a radio or in cases where they did their work schedules meant that they do not have time to listen to the radio. Project partners confirmed that it is only in the evenings that women can listen to the radio, if at all and that in rainy season (when climate

information is most relevant) this was unlikely due to all the work pressures on women. In contrast, young people said that they did sometimes listen to climate information on the radio (both young men and women).

One focus group reported that it was mainly the older people or the disabled (who are unable to work) who listen to the radio and that they do not necessarily share weather information with the rest of the household or village. Therefore, if women do not have access to radios, and household members who do have access to radios are not sharing information with the household, women are bypassed. As a result, they may not be in a position to engage in decision-making activities in the household over agricultural production because they do not have equal access to information as other household members. Again, this finding helps to shed light on social inequities with regards to access and utilisation of information and communication technologies, which can have an important impact on resilience building capacity within communities.

Box 2: Critique and evaluation of the exercise

When evaluating the three day training, participants were unanimous in their appreciation of the field work component. This was because they felt the qualitative methods enabled a better understanding of the strengths and limitations of different project activities in achieving the overall aims of BRACED. It also brought to life the theoretical aspects of gender covered in the first day. The strength of a qualitative methodology such as allowing space for open ended answers, follow up questions and community dialogue around social issues made it the right tool for this exercise, and a tool which complimented the quantitative data gathered. There are, however, weaknesses to this methodology. As the sample sizes are often very small, the participants may present biases in the data they offer which can skew the information collected. It is important, when designing a focus group discussion, to make sure that randomly selected participants are included from various sectors of society. This, however, may not be enough to prevent bias. Where possible, it is important to identify socially stratified groups where power is organised, and try to make each discussion session as homogenous as possible. In the case of the field exercise carried out during the training, focus groups were disaggregated by gender and age. While this does not alleviate all methodological biases, it does help to reduce their influence in the research. Recognizing these weaknesses in the method and acknowledging them where necessary is the key to developing a strong focus group setting.

Action plan

On the final day of the workshop, the group reconvened to synthesize what was learned from the first two days and discuss future steps towards improving gender equity in the remaining timeframe of the BRACED project. The following areas are those where participants saw opportunities or further entry points for a more gender transformative approach in project activities.

1. Access to and understanding of climate information

General actions:

- Reinforce the role of the Early Warning Committees (EWC) and listening group leaders for the collection, dissemination and use of climate information
- Ensure contacts and connections are made between local radio stations, NGOs and CDCs/animations: Share radio programmes and recordings with the project managers for all the NGO projects, taking into account the difficulties of setting up agreements and frequent changes in scheduling. The role of the CDC should be to enable two way communication between the villagers and the climate information providers and radio stations.
- Train EWCs leads and members to understand the climate information they receive

Gender specific actions:

- Explore the possibility of having climate information air at times when women are able to listen to the radio
- Develop radio shows which combine climate information with themes that link to gender issues
- Use more traditional channels for ensuring climate information is diffused e.g. through the mosques, churches, markets and festivals
- Explore ways to highlight the availability and reinforce the importance of climate information in the villages
- Explore budget options for the provision of radio sets and other equipment to villages
- Ensure women are involved and engaged in committees and groups (with good representation of both sexes to avoid divisions). Ensure that some of the Early Warning Committees members are literate.

2. Interest and use of climate information

General actions:

- Use the Community General Assembly as a forum for exchanges and discussion on climate information and climate change, to deepen understanding of these subjects
- Ensure BRACED Community Development Advisors (community members who play a role in advising villagers on project related matters) remind communities about radio emissions on climate information and organise discussions about the broadcasts

Gender specific actions:

- Use other channels for promoting climate information amongst women, such as ACF's health and nutrition programme
- Mobilise Community Development Advisors to identify and share examples of best practice from amongst farming households where people can be seen to be applying techniques and climate information knowledge to enhance their farming. Such examples should highlight cases where women are carrying out these practices. Examples can be shared both in community meetings and via the radio.

3. Access to resources

Gender specific actions:

- Use project monitoring and evaluation to assess whether the income generating activities targeting women really genuine access to the resources (e.g. resources remain in their charge) and that these are appropriate (do not result in an overburdened workload) and given at the right time. Seek to find out what the impact of these resources are on decision making.
- Use theatre and discussion at community level to present and highlight these issues of access and inequality.

Next steps

The action plan above has also helped to identify important areas for further research, which KCL has begun to implement as part of their research agenda. Through the workshops and focus group activities, it became clear that gender could be an important entry-point for building resilience. In accordance with the holistic and transformative gender aims of the project, the workshop and the focus groups revealed areas in which women's empowerment can be enhanced beyond economic improvements. One such example is the dispersal/localisation of climate information which includes the formation of listening groups, ultimately providing women with an opportunity to increase social networks, community leadership opportunities and advocacy and negotiating power for women. KCL research will continue to explore the ways in which this particular program improves the various aspects of women's lives within the household and the community more broadly.

Each of the three action areas outlined above are components in which KCL can provide research support through an assessment of the impacts of information access and its utilisation on household decision-making, particularly with regards to gender equity at the household and community levels.

The contributions of this research, as well as the

discussions generated during the workshop and focus group activities will help to improve avenues for more transformative gender programming and ultimately gender equity.



Market place, Banfora, Comoé, May 2014 / Photo: Estelle Plat

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