

Gender Roles in Urban Climate Resilience: Lessons from Hue, Vietnam

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Policy pointers

- Men and women at a grassroots level have different vulnerabilities and contribute differently to building climate resilience in Hue.
- Women play key roles in sustaining and enhancing the health and well-being of people within their community, and accruing funds for households, and communities. Women also organise mutual support for each other during times of disruption.
- Men are more active in activities relating to safety, security and other continuity plans for communities. Men are also more likely to hold management roles.
- To enhance the resilience of the people living in Hue, there are significant opportunities to challenge gender-based conceptions of capacity and responsibility, and to improve the gender sensitivity of decision-making processes and forums.

There is growing awareness in Southeast Asia about the significance of gender norms and roles in climate resilience. The expectations on, and responsibilities of, men and women differ due to differences in physical characteristics, and local physical, cultural and socio-economic conditions. In this study, we find that Hue has its own special social and environmental identity that significantly influences its resilience to climate change. Gender roles are particularly important in relation to building that resilience. Women are perceived to make a more significant contribution to human well-being, accruing funds and offering mutual support at household and community level, while men are held responsible for safety, security and other continuity plans in communities. Challenging and changing these gender-based expectations will improve the capacity of both men and women to respond effectively to climate change.

Climate change scenarios in Hue

The city of Hue is the economic, cultural and political centre of Thua Thien Hue province. It is located in the transitional climate zone between North and South Vietnam, has a tropical humid monsoon climate and is most vulnerable to natural disasters and climate

change (ISET-International, 2014). In recent years, the intensity and frequency of extreme events has increased and become more unpredictable. According to the scenarios of climate change and sea level rise prepared by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) in 2012, the changes in Thua Thien Hue's climate at the end of 21st century could be as follows:

Climate characteristic	Low emission scenario	Medium emission scenario	High emission scenario
Average temperature increase	1.6–2.2°C	>3.1°C	2.5–3.7°
Annual rainfall increase	>6%	2–7%	2–10%
Seasonal rainfall increase (September to November)	4–10%	10–14%	18%
Sea-level rise	52–63cm	60–71cm	82–94cm

(Source: MONRE, 2012)

Hue's climate change resilience

Using the City Resilience Framework (Arup, 2014), we found that the basic health and well-being needs of urban residents are currently being met. The availability of formal employment is also reasonable, with some job opportunities created in industrial zones and through vocational training programmes run by the government. Public health services have been significantly improved in recent years, with adequate staff, facilities and equipment.

In terms of society and economy, Hue has a special identity because of its ancestral traditions and great natural beauty. There is a respect for the environment due to its economic dependence on revenue from tourism. In recent years, the city government has made a significant effort to strengthen its infrastructure and environmental policy to enhance the city's capacity to cope with natural disasters and extreme events. Urban vulnerability has also been reduced by efforts to improve the coordination and participation of stakeholders in climate change and natural disaster responses. The vertical and horizontal consultation process used during policymaking has created more opportunities for relevant agencies to integrate their plans and for citizens to be heard.

To be more resilient in the context of climate and social changes, there are still some shortcomings that need to be redressed to achieve long-term and sustainable development of Hue. The most significant weaknesses affecting resilience are unstable livelihoods, unplanned urbanisation, poor management of critical ecosystems and weak policy implementation. Many people have unstable livelihoods and do not have enough financial savings to handle shocks or disruptions. Urbanisation over recent years has had unexpected impacts on Hue's resilience due to unsystematic investment in maintenance and expansion of infrastructure. As the local government's awareness of climate change has been raised, some newly built construction has integrated climate change adaptation objectives, but they do not comply with the Master Plan of the city on transportation or drainage until 2020.

Women and men have different roles in building resilience in Hue

Men and women have different advantages in adapting to and coping with extreme events or disruption. Adaptive capacity differs along gender and social lines, and varies among local social and political contexts (Kakota *et al.*, 2011). In Hue, women have significant influence over health, human well-being and the economy at a community level, while men take more responsibility for infrastructure and the environment. Women's roles in resilience building involve routine, day-to-day activities, while men are expected to act only in times of need.

The most pronounced difference between the contributions of men and women to resilience in Hue is in health and well-being. Most livelihoods in Hue are very exposed to both human and natural events, but women have higher rates of vulnerability. Women in Hue are more likely to have jobs and roles that are heavily affected by the weather and environment. According to interviews and group discussions we carried out, there are no significant gender role differences in leadership and strategy. This may be because the participation of men and women in policymaking processes is recognised in terms of quantity rather than quality.

Projects relating to disaster risk reduction and climate change have consulted with women to improve gender equity and respond to the needs of women. But women are involved as a standard procedure, without meaningful consideration of their capacities, needs and interests. Representatives of the provincial Women's Union told us that women are still passive in this kind of consultation so their perspectives are not taken into account in any significant way. This is exacerbated by the fact that the guidelines for gender mainstreaming at local level are limited and so even supportive actors have limited understanding of how to promote gender inclusion and equity.

Women are facing difficulties and barriers in promoting their roles

Women face pressure from their families to increase their food security. This creates a dual work burden of generating income as well as caring for family members. Many have uncomfortable working conditions, with negative effects on their physical health such as headache, backache and colds. Family care is another barrier that limits women's involvement and participation in social activities. As indicated by Kakota *et al.* (2011), compared with men, women often have extra duties in their families—they are responsible for collecting water and firewood, preparing food, doing housework and caring for children and elderly people.

Because of this, women often feel too exhausted after work or lack time for learning. Women are accordingly less informed about climate change and disaster risk reduction, and hesitate to raise their voice in public forums. In addition, women's opinions are less recognised because of gender discrimination and prejudice, which is reflected in the low number of women holding leadership roles. In Hue, the public participation of women is limited by local norms and a long history of male domination in political and public life. Beside the common responsibilities for household chores, traditionally Hue women have been tied up with domestic activities such as cooking and needlework. However, there is growing agreement within both Vietnamese society and in climate change circles that men and women should have equal opportunities to develop critical adaptive capacities.

The extent of gender integration into climate-relevant policies

In Vietnam, the national government has issued several important policies related to climate change responses. Gender was significantly considered in the formal text, but there remains a gap between policy and practice at all levels. According to UN Vietnam (2008), the action plans for the National Target Programme to Respond to Climate Change (NTP-RCC) developed by line ministries and provinces are, as yet, not specifically mandated to address gender equality in climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction. In the action plans developed by provinces, priority actions focused on capacity building for women were proposed (action plan of Can Tho, Hue) but have not been implemented, and so far gender issues are only integrated into some projects by NGOs.

In particular, Oxfam and UN (2009) indicates that the NTP-RCC identifies gender equality as a guiding principle, but the involvement of women in consultations was limited and no gender targets were developed. Therefore, although awareness of gender equality and women's participation in decision-making at a household level has been increasing, this does not always translate to increased gender equality at a community and city scale. The participation of women in local formal political and management structures remains low.

This situation is again proved by a closer examination of the particular case of Hue. By examining gender inclusion in the Green City Programme funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), we found that the implementation in practice was poor even though ADB has a clear gender policy and detailed guidelines for projects. Women at all levels were not fully informed about the project. This meant their participation was minor and not meaningful. This illustrates how important it is to support women's roles in climate resilience by strengthening mechanisms for inclusion and providing adequate resources to ensure women's full and equal participation in decision-making at all levels—both with respect to climate change and on a much wider array of issues (Tschakert and Machado, 2012).

Women's needs for promoting their roles in building climate resilience are not being met

Alston (2013) states that pursuing gender equality in climate change adaptation requires decision makers to promote the rights, responsibilities and opportunities for both men and women. To strengthen the roles of women in decision-making processes, their needs and interest should be given equal weight.

Women's Union representatives told us that women have changed their attitude and behaviours to become change agents in recent years. They are willing to organise or take part in environmental protection activities and want to participate in climate change related policy making process. But their lack of knowledge undermines their confidence when participating in consultations and meetings in general and climate change response-related policymaking processes in particular. In the case of Hue, setting up a quantitative balance between men and women is not enough – particularly if women representatives are not confident and their voice is not heard. When the specific needs of women have not been properly taken into account by policymakers, women will not be significantly supported in climate change response practices.

In the short term, there is a need for women to actively participate in policy-making processes. Institutions need to consider the strategic needs of women (and

other vulnerable groups), create more room for public participation of women and pay more attention to their voices in all stages of climate change resilience planning. As mentioned by Tschakert and Machado (2012), the meaningful participation of different genders needs to be mainstreamed in household decision making, community social activities and local political and management structures. The participation of women will make their specific vulnerabilities, needs and roles better understood, respected and taken into consideration by society and policymakers.

It is also necessary to improve women's resilience by promoting sustainable livelihoods and providing more learning opportunities for women. In Hue, women need more support to access financial resources in communities and from governmental systems in order to increase their opportunities for income generation. Our research found that micro-finance models and loans from social policy banks with low interest rate have helped women develop household-scale business. With secure incomes, women may have more time for educational activities such as training, workshops and practices at the local level. Those activities need to be done systematically by getting women involved from communities in relevant bodies, especially in decision-making processes. It would also help if women could share the burden of family care with other family members. This may require challenging local norms to allow women to participate equally and fully in community activities.

Recommendations

Gender discrimination is still widespread in formal and informal institutions. Vietnam continues to grapple with a lack of meaningful participation of women and weak gender integration in policymaking and implementation at a local level. If women are to become change agents a fundamental change in power relations is needed.

Depending on the local context, strategic interventions must challenge gender-based norms and roles. In Hue, the following actions are recommended:

1. Promote micro-finance funds and other mechanisms that allow women to increase their economic independence and opportunities, so that they can generate more income and raise their position in society.
2. Create more opportunities for women to participate in capacity building across a range of sectors and levels.
3. Create more opportunities for women to participate in decision-making processes, including in policy, community and business contexts.
4. Educate people about the limitations of traditional gender roles, and the importance of unlocking men and women's potential in different spheres.

Aim of Series:

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