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INNOVATIONS TO SECURE WOMEN'S LAND RIGHTS AND BUILD RESILIENCE

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Abstract

Although the precise magnitude of climate change is subject of debate, there is growing consensus of its impact on access to resources and livelihoods. Globally, its grassroots women who face the worst effects of climate change on agriculture, with socioeconomic impacts due to lack of coping mechanisms. Tools and processes have been developed to support grassroots women resilience work through securing their access to and control over land, such as the Community Resilience Fund which is a mechanism through which grassroots women invest in collective actions to reduce disaster and climate related risks and vulnerabilities highlighting the importance of local adaptations. Drawing from the country experiences, this paper will provide insights into how these tools could be applied more globally to help mitigate the effects of climate change and foster local adaptation through improving grassroots' women access to and control over land which is considered as prerequisite for building resilience

Key Words: Women's land rights, Resilience building, Bottom up approaches, Grassroots initiatives.



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ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
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Innovations to Secure Women's Land Rights and Build Resilience

Background

Climate change concerns are growing. There is increasing evidence of the impact of climate change on resource and livelihood sustainability. Resource dependent livelihood activities like agriculture are more vulnerable to climate change. As the outputs of agriculture and forestry are altered by temperature increases, land productivity across the planet is being altered. Grassroots women are more vulnerable to negative impacts of climate change as they are most reliant on agriculture and biodiversity, and, as a whole, are least prepared to adapt and cope.

Resource scarcity increases the vulnerability of women in poor communities. The combination of meager asset base, social marginalization, limited mobility and exclusion from decision-making processes compound the vulnerabilities they experience. It is important to recognize that women's vulnerabilities are embedded in social, economic and political processes—and the development gaps that more often than not exacerbate these vulnerabilities. However, if done correctly, development processes can and must empower grassroots women to transform the living conditions of their families and communities and to reverse these vulnerabilities.

In reality, poor women are experts in resilience. They are proficient in adapting to changing social and natural environments, organizing to collectively address problems, drawing on traditional knowledge and improvising skills to face difficulties. Therefore, the role they play in climate adaptation and mitigation should be considered and supported efficiently.

One approach for dealing with climate change is to provide people with appropriate incentives, such as secure land tenure and adaptation strategies, to enhance resiliency. However, current mismatches between standard government-mandated adaptation strategies and local conditions have a tendency to make matters worse. Understanding and capitalizing on locally driven adaptation strategies are therefore crucial. Access to land is a central element identified by grassroots women as a prerequisite for building community resilience either in rural, per-urban or urban areas. This paper uses the Huairou Commission members' innovations in Africa, Latin America and Asia to adapt to climate change challenges.



Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



1. The Huairou Commission community resilience approach

Resilience is a community's capacity to organize itself in order to reduce the impacts of natural hazards and climate change by protecting resources such as lives, livelihoods, homes, assets, services, and infrastructure. A resilient community has the capacities to advance development processes, social networks and institutional partnerships that strengthen its ability to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from disaster. The belief that resilience is shaped by the ability to claim rights, resources and decision-making power is central to a grassroots women friendly approach. Vulnerability could be caused by the lack those abilities. In pre-disaster contexts, resilience includes proactive measures that reduce exposure, vulnerabilities and risks. In post-disaster contexts, resilience includes the ability to organize effective relief and recovery processes. Community resilience depends on more than financial resources. Though technological and financial investments play an important role, an intangible resource—adaptability—is a critical factor in a community's ability to withstand disaster.

The Community Resilience Campaign uses an integrative and holistic approach to reduce risk and vulnerabilities, raise awareness and capacities and advance long-term sustainable development localized in communities and led by organized grassroots women. Within this approach, a framework that encompasses grassroots women's empowerment and the local needs and initiatives to build resilient communities to withstand the increasing climate threats and disasters was developed. This initiative aimed at advocating for more inclusive and equitable public policy and governance, grounded in the initiatives and innovations of grassroots women.

The Community Resilience Framework, is bottom-up and grassroots women led construct around the following four components:

- Strengthen grassroots women's organizing and leadership,
- Promote resilient development through awareness and locally-led initiatives,
- Build constituencies and networks and
- Influence and change public policies and processes

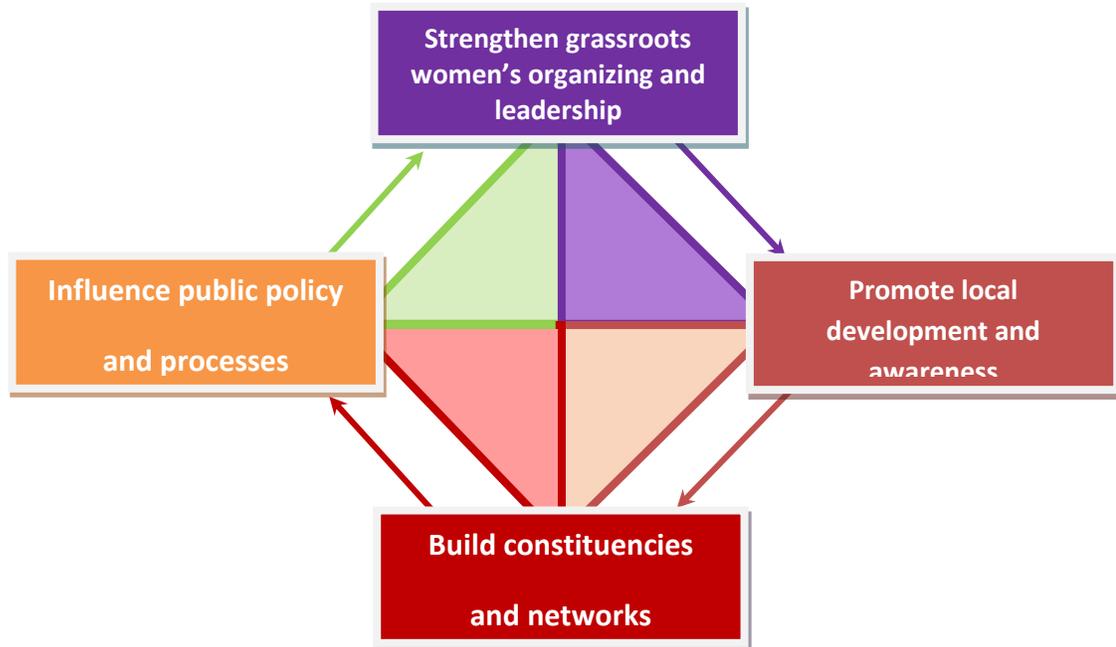


Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



The figure below illustrates the resilience framework designed by Huairou Commission and its members:



This resilience framework is a value added for previous work and offers a new methodology to successfully tackle previous issues like food security, water, health, and sanitation. The core element in community resilience is using the local knowledge or local resources to bounce back from disasters, to adapt, reduce the risks. At its core is the focus on enhancing and capitalizing on local women's leadership and empowerment. The knowledge begins with risk mapping, which is the start of an understanding of existing and potential future risks. Risk mapping in communities is part of organizing and educating communities and allows women to take action and promote resilience priorities inside local plans and budgets through partnerships with local authorities etc.



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ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



2. *Huairou Commission's tools to address climate change impacts*

The Huairou Commission's resilience campaign utilizes two mechanisms to accelerate the consolidation of the resilience practices of the groups and their advocacy. These mechanisms were utilized at the local, national and regional level. The two mechanisms are the (i) the Community Resilience Fund and (ii) the Community Practitioners Platform.

A. *The Community Resilience Fund (CRF)*

The **Community Resilience Fund (CRF)** is a mechanism that utilizes flexible funds for disaster risk reduction and is managed by grassroots women to address their priorities from the bottom-up. The Huairou Commission builds leadership skills, inclusion in climate change planning, and helps women secure funding for grassroots initiatives through a unique community-driven climate finance model. The CRF is based on the Resilience framework. This resilience framework is a value added for previous work and offers a new methodology to successfully tackle previous issues like food security, water, health, and sanitation. The core element in community resilience is using the local knowledge or local resources to bounce back from disasters, to adapt, reduce the risks. CRF is also a political tool to shift power to support women's priorities, organizing and actions.

The CRF was created to debunk the idea that it is not possible to scale up or replicate projects in poor or marginalized communities without the financial investment from the government or donors. Instead, the experience of the grassroots women's organizations illustrated that a small investment results in the multiplication of development initiatives and benefits for their communities.

The CRF addresses the three risk factors: hazard, vulnerability and exposure. This paper will only focus on the vulnerability aspect of risks.

One strength of this work is that it takes into account the whole spectrum of vulnerability and help in understanding risk. The work considers

- Underlying conditions: power and inequality at the macro-level, corruption, how institutions function
- Progression of vulnerability: looking at what causes vulnerability rather than calling people themselves vulnerable



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ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
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- Dynamic pressures: land tenure, land degradation, migration in and out of communities, energy poverty, financial poverty
- Unsafe conditions: how they interact with concrete hazards (hurricanes earthquakes floods droughts) and either construct or lessen risk

Using the CRF as a mechanism to build resilience also has meant to **build capacities and technical knowledge** of women and leadership to implement, transfer and communicate resilience practices and raise awareness in communities to advocate with local governments and other institutional actors. The CRF process encouraged women to become leaders of their communities to find solution to secure access to land in conflicted situation and/or eviction for example.

As the practices funded by the CRF need to have long term sustainability, the implementing groups need to secure not just the survival of the CRF over time, but make it grow to reach more communities and expand the culture of resilience in their countries. The implementing groups have implemented different actions to avoid the depletion of the CRF and have developed strategies to secure its sustainability such as leveraging resources through partnership.

The campaign revealed that the CRF mechanism secured and increased grassroots women's income, assets and food security and protected natural resources. There was also an increased public awareness of grassroots women. This finding re-affirmed the Huairou Commission's coalition's theory of change and demonstrated grassroots women's expertise capacity to innovate and develop new opportunities for partnership, participation in decision-making and opportunities to mobilize grassroots women.

Mapping disaster risk, a prerequisite for planning implementation of Community Resilience Funds, has proven to a powerful tool for strengthening the leadership of grassroots women. In, Kenya, for instance, Shibuye Community Workers, one of our member's organization selected 40 women leaders to participate in a training to identify risks, map opportunities, and strengthen their leadership and networks. Women came up with strategies and plans on how to engage different stakeholders including local government. This tool enables the women to identify their land within the area. The mapping was used as a first step to secure their land use rights through dialogue with the local authorities.



Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



A.1. UCOBAC case study

A practical example is that of a local NGO in Uganda – Uganda Community Based association for Women and Children Welfare (UCOBAC) – a member of Huairou Commission and an implementing partner for the CRF mechanism in Bugiri district in the Eastern part of Uganda. Their CRF initiative aims at promoting grassroots women’s led resilience community development for strengthen food security and livelihoods. UCOBAC has its integrated a UN Habitat - Global Land Tools Network pro poor land tool and approaches in its CRF process. The Social Tenure Domain Model (STDM) has been applied for 100 participating farmers to map and document their land rights. This has led to increased security of tenure and strengthened women’s land rights as they acquired land certificates that clarified their land boundaries and a spectrum of rights and interests on their land. With such clarified and documented land rights, women and their families have been able to invest and adopt more climate smart technologies and practices to increase productivity on their land.

Excessive, under-utilization and unsustainable land use happens when people lack security of tenure, but with secure land rights, farmers are able to adopt more responsive land use practices and are better positioned to lobby and advocate for support in their endeavor to increase productivity on their land.

Further still, through this CRF process, UCOBAC has strengthened grassroots women leadership and capacity to organize, connect, and influence through creation of strategic partnerships and networks at local level to engage in ways that can influence local decision making. As well, they have worked on financing to be more supportive to their locally developed and led initiatives that create community resilience to climate change and disasters for strengthened food security and livelihoods. Through grassroot women led Local to local dialogue sessions between the grassroot women farmer groups and the local authorities, the grassroots women lobbied for support in proper food storage facilities and access to resources, drought resistant farm inputs, credit facilities to boost their farming practices and more capacity building in climate smart agricultural strategies. As a result, 33 grassroot women groups were able to secure food storage Silos and drought resistant seed varieties from Local government production department and World Food Programme. This has led the women to store food in bulk and for longer since the silos are airtight.



Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



A.2. Ntankah case study

Ntankah is a community-based organization that began in 1996 as a collective farming group. It is led by 24 women who are elected to an executive committee. It is centered in a small isolated part of rural Cameroon. The women who are part of Ntankah have recognized the need to move from a model of exploitation of natural resources, to a methodology of farming that is more sustainable and protects natural resources and their livelihoods. They have, together, formed the Grasroots Women Environmental Protection and Poverty Alleviation.

The women of Ntankah have successfully promoted women in local government and even financed the first women from their community to gain a seat on the local government body. Additionally, they farm through revolving farming, each taking turns to collectively farm each others' plots as well as a community plot. The funds from the vegetables sold off of the community plot are the basis for a fund for purchasing new farming needs, such as tools, etc. A revolving loan fund provides members with micro loans to pay for basic necessities or pay for an investment into their farm or business. Additionally, these loans have been used to pay for legal fees after claiming secure rights over land. The microloans have even been used to successfully promote women in local government and even financed the first women from their community to gain a seat on the local government body. These members in office have in turn helped Ntankah members helped gain widow's land rights, and promote exchange with other women in the area to share farming methods and resilient practices.

B. The Community Practitioners Platform (CPP)

The CPP is a governance and power strategy intended to strengthen engagement with public officials and to advance agendas that are:

- Supportive to resilience at the community level
- Position grassroots women in decision-taking, relevant to decisions on how money is spent
- Build the public power of grassroots women
- Feature organizing and leadership of women

The CPP can operated at national, regional and global levels. There are two key notions that are required in order to build and advance the mechanism. First, communities need to mobilize and link with a CPP in order to develop a broader advocacy agenda that only one group cannot develop and sustain on its own.



Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



This means connecting across boundaries to develop joint resilience advocacy agenda. Second, it is necessary to incorporate other actors who want to advance the communities- agenda. For example, local authorities that often experience lack of money to solve community problems or that within the favorable political climate can benefit greatly from joining efforts with communities and other stakeholders that have the knowledge and leverage resources. This multi-stakeholder aspect of the CPP that allows a broader range of people who recognize the value of partnering with communities to advance the agenda of localized and people centered resilient development.

Huairou Commission developed a tool to assess gains and impacts of the CPP and identify opportunities to move forward, using a cross cutting analysis which was called **Governance Mapping**. The use of this tool improved the sustainability of built-in governance mechanisms by promoting longer relationships. It tracked i) Norms, laws, policies that exist in groups' countries regarding resilience issues related to their work, and ii) decision-making structures and partners.

The CPP is a coalition building process whose effectiveness depends on individual country dynamics. The HC's experience is that this platform helps the grassroots women to build up their agency and to strengthen their positioning in terms of securing access to resources particularly their advocacy work on grassroots women's access to and control over land.

B.1. Examples of CPP processes at local level

- Examples from Zimbabwe

Practical examples of the governance mapping are showcased by two case studies from Dema and Domboshawa sub counties in Zimbabwe. The grassroots groups were supported by Zimbabwean Parents of Handicapped Children Association (ZPHCA) to start a governance mapping exercise at community level and better understand the dynamics of decision-making processes in their communities in order to help them secure their access to land and water for gardening purposes.

Twenty grassroots women in Dema Rural with the facilitation of ZPHCA lobbied the local traditional Chief Dema, Headmen and Village Heads to support ZPHCA Resilience Building Members through donation of land and water resources for their group gardening projects. ZPHCA organized leadership and advocacy training workshops for resilience building members where they were equipped with advocacy skills, negotiating skills and stakeholder's engagement skills. Upon being trained the 20 resilience building



Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



members went a mileage in lobbying their traditional leaders appealing for land donation for their Resilience Building Vegetable Gardening Projects. After a series of meetings, consultation and consensus building, Chief Seke donated a 1 Acre of land to the 20 grassroots women. As if not enough, Chief Seke donated an unfinished and unprotected borehole for the purpose of irrigating the gardens. If the borehole dries up, grassroots women were also given water usage rights to access water from a Community Dam within the 100m radius as a backup facility.

In Domboshawa, 20 ZPHCA resilience building members secured Gardening Land from Village Head Nyakudya. The land was donated upon the hosting of the Resilience Building Local to Local Dialogue Forum on Rural Women and Land, Water, Housing and Property Rights. The highly successful Local to Local Dialogue forum was hosted by ZPHCA and was attended by Headmen Mungate, Village Head Nyakudya, community members, Agriculture Extension Officers, Caregivers and other local stakeholders. The hosting Village Head Nyakudya welcomed the Resilience Building Project in his Village and took advantage of the event to donate approximately 10 000 square meters of land to 20 grassroots rural women for their resilience building Vegetable Gardens. The donated land lies within a permanent wet land hence ideal for year-round productivity.

- Examples from Uganda

Led by grassroots communities, the Slum Women's Initiatives for Development (SWID) is committed to building resilience and security in food, health infrastructure and land tenure for marginalized groups. These commitments have influenced several initiatives that have successfully expanded resilience in informal settlements, in all cases, these practices are rooted in a CPP process. For instance, SWID's food security initiative, in which women negotiated with landowners and local governments to build demonstration gardens for other women to learn about cultivating higher yield fruits and vegetables. Through these negotiations for land and extension training services, women increased their family food security and modified extension services to accommodate their needs and interests. Another example is the effort to reduce the impacts of urban flooding in Jinja municipality, where women worked together to promote hygienic practices, improve household solid waste management and dispose of polythene bags to prevent drains from clogging. The women also encouraged Jinja Municipality to deliver on its commitment to the UNISDR's Resilient Cities Campaign, paving the way for local officials to make infrastructure improvements in the informal settlements. Finally, SWID's ongoing partnerships with local governments and land administration officials to secure land titles are key to reducing women's vulnerability to food and livelihoods insecurity. A broad, multi-stakeholder partnership convinced the District Land Board in



Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



Walukuba-Masese Division to create new land titling mechanisms for women, with the dual benefits of reducing their vulnerabilities and boosting governmental accountability and transparency. All of these partnership-based practices have led the women and their municipality to be more disaster resilient.

B.2. Examples of CPP processes at national level

The implementation of the CPP process at national level supported Huairou Commission members to sign agreements with the national governments. In Zambia, Poor People and Homeless Process Zambia (PPHPZ) and its grassroots federations signed an agreement with the National Housing Authority in which land was allocated to the groups and funds were trickling through PPHPZ to the grassroots women to capacitate them to build houses. In Guatemala, Fundacion Guatemala, another Huairou Commission member, was part of the organizing committee for the national women congress. The group was recognised through their organizing of the CPP. Their joint land certification process was adopted by the government. CPP members were included in the gender unit of the Ministry of Agriculture to provide trainings. Seeds supplies were brought in for the 2018 festival of seeds to promote organic agriculture for multiple uses of land.

Conclusion

In this paper, we examine practices promoted through the Huairou Commission's Resilience Campaign, utilized to decrease vulnerability and to increase communities resilience to disasters, both pre and post disaster. In so doing, secure land rights are one of several result or the sum product of their efforts.

In all instances, key to the HC community resilience model is grassroots women's leadership. While vulnerable to disaster risk, grassroots women in all communities throughout the world are at the heart of the community, and work together to improve. The examples shared in the paper provided insights into how the above-mentioned tools was applied more globally to help mitigate the effects of climate change and foster local adaptation through improving grassroots' women access to and control over land which is considered as an asset for them to build resilience. On one hand, the CRF is useful to demonstrate local adaptations and therefore key in the fight against climate change. Leveraging CRF initiatives to increase grassroots access to resilience building resources has been another aspect of successful advocacy. Several organizations leveraged their CRF initiatives with national and sub-national government institutions, attracting both financial and in-kind resources to replenish their CRF and/or advance their resilience



Catalyzing Innovation

ANNUAL WORLD BANK CONFERENCE ON LAND AND POVERTY
WASHINGTON DC, MARCH 25-29, 2019



practices. On the other hand, the CPP helped the grassroots women to build up their agency and to strengthen their positioning in terms of securing access to resources.

In all practices related to resilience, the knowledge that is generated on the vulnerabilities that form the building block for future action, and often is the catalyzing force behind any real change. Women leaders are empowered by the knowledge they gain, through mapping their communities or by learning about new more resilient farming techniques, for example, that is then shared. In so doing, knowledge is empowering for women and forms the basis for partnerships with local and other authorities that lead to negotiations for better risk resilience, in the form of land rights or other. The CRF allows for funding for things like advocacy, and the CPP provides forums where partnerships are developed towards creating resilient communities.

In all cases, strategies on women's empowerment, through knowledge mapping, building a constituency (or mobilizing one) are at the fore. To develop initiatives using this knowledge and building a coalition for influence must begin from grassroots women's knowledge, practices and understanding.