



UNDP-UNEP POVERTY AND ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE IN KYRGYZSTAN



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Gender, Poverty and Environment in Rural Kyrgyzstan:

ISSUES OF NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT, BIODIVERSITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION

Information booklet



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Background

In Kyrgyzstan, the availability of natural resources to a large section of the rural population, and especially to the poor, has been eroded severely in recent decades by their growing degradation both in quantity and quality. Inequality in the distribution of what is available persists. Degradation of natural resources in Kyrgyzstan is manifest in deteriorating soil conditions, depleting water resources, disappearing forests. Social impacts of the degradation are enormous for those communities whose livelihoods are dependent upon the use of natural resources. The most vulnerable are poor households and women among them. Understanding about how environmental degradation in the region affects rural women and men needs to be widened. The level of knowledge about inter-linkages between gender equality and environmental degradation in Kyrgyzstan and in Central Asia¹ is unsatisfactory.

The problem:

Within the new sustainable development agenda (SDGs) linkages between gender equality, women's rights and environmental development have special importance given that tight inter-connectedness among those have been long recognized as significant. However, it has been noted that while gender bias, poverty and environmental risks are the elements of vulnerability which are intersecting and each element has received attention individually, little focus has been paid to the interrelationships between them and variations in these links across regions.

The study

This research raises concerns as to how to best bring development in ways that would reduce poverty, save natural environment and bring social justice. Various people will be affected by global environmental degradation, economic struggles inherent for developing world and new policies. Knowledge about current situations, practices, opportunities and barriers that these people encounter in their everyday lives is will be crucial for building up sufficient understanding required to ensure fair and sustainable national programming and planning in parts of the world such as Central Asia.

The general research questions that guide this research are "what are specific areas of inter-linkages among the issues gender equality, rural poverty and environmental degradation in the Kyrgyz Republic?" "What are gender implications for sustainable livelihoods in rural Kyrgyzstan?", "what are gender-differentiated impacts of environmental degradation in Kyrgyzstan?". Sub-questions include pertain to how gendered is natural resource management and access in rural Kyrgyzstan? What are the gendered effects of biodiversity loss and climate change? What risks are involved for women and men as environment continues to degrade? What is the level of knowledge, interests as well as attitudes and practices among women and men about environmental vulnerability and mitigation?

Methods

¹ UNDP's Europe and CIS presentation from March 2014 entitled "Beijing's Declaration and Platform for Action Agenda: Progress in Europe and Central Asia"

Using household survey (n=140), individual survey (n=441) and in-depth interviews (n=30) in two distant villages in Naryn and Issyk-Kul oblasts researchers conducted an analysis in the light of the research questions they asked.

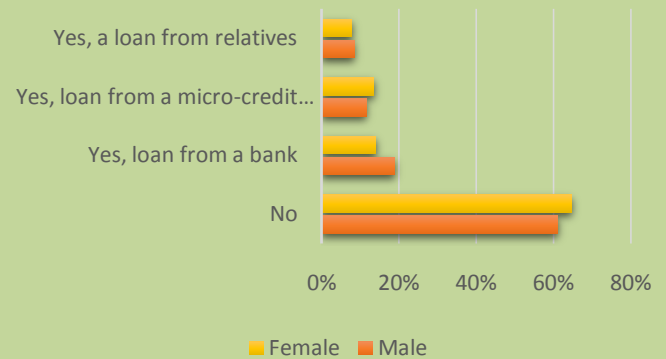
Results

<p>Income:</p> <p>There is an apparent gender gap in income. Comparative analysis shows that significant difference in the maximum total income between women-headed and men-headed households.</p>	<p>Total monthly income of households, KGS</p> <p>maximum minimum average</p> <p>0 20000 40000 60000 80000 100000</p> <p>■ female-headed household ■ male-headed household</p>
<p>Access to land:</p> <p>Households own on average 2 parcels of land with an average total area of 1.33 hectares per household. Vast majority (92 percent) of the households are male headed.</p>	<p>Ratio of male to female-headed households</p> <p>8% 92%</p> <p>■ Male ■ Female</p>
<p>Access to information:</p> <p>Data shows that while women and men experience similar needs in relation to the knowledge about agricultural technologies, men demonstrate a higher interest in information about animal husbandry, whereas women rate as more important information about high yield crops and marketing.</p>	
<p>Women</p> <p>■ agricultural inputs ■ marketing ■ selection of seeds ■ high yield crops ■ pest control ■ animal husbandry ■ other</p>	<p>Men</p> <p>■ agricultural inputs ■ marketing ■ selection of seeds ■ high yield crops ■ pest control ■ animal husbandry ■ other</p>

Access to financing:

Men more often than women take loan from a bank when they need extra financing, while women take more loans from micro-credit companies, comparing to men

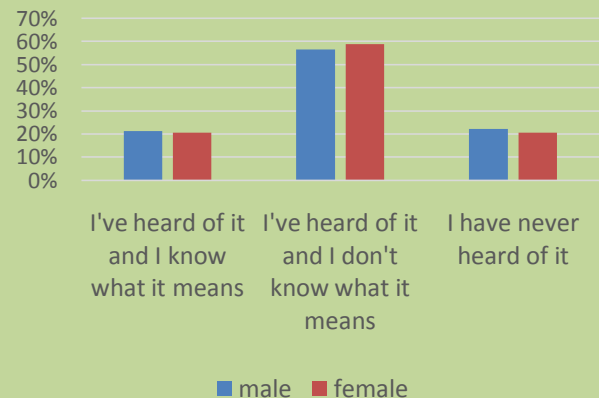
Have you sought external financing?



Biodiversity:

There are no gender differences in the level of knowledge about biodiversity in the researched areas. More than 50% of men and women do not know what the term means although they have heard of it. While about 20% of all respondents did know what biodiversity was, about the same number of respondents never heard of it.

What do you know about bio-diversity?



Role of women in cropped agriculture

Bekzada is a retired woman living a rural area in the southern shore of Issyk-Kul lake. Her kitchen garden produces vegetables in quantities sufficient enough to feed the entire family all year round. Bekzada's poultry provides her family with eggs and meat. This type of farming has important implications for the family budget. Bekzada's regular source of income is her pension of seven thousand som.

"I grow everything in my kitchen garden. My kitchen garden is my own kingdom. I know everything about it, where and what. I have garlic, beetroots, radishes, carrots, potatoes, wheat. I have apples, apricots, pears. When I harvest garlic, I plant radishes on the same spot. So, the day before yesterday I collected all radishes. I also grow cucumbers, tomatoes, cabbage. Everything grows in our garden, it is all ours. I only buy what? (she paused), sunflower oil and sugar. The rest is ours, we bake bread ourselves. We make our own pasta of any type. We also have hens, so we don't buy eggs. After each January we will eat chicken, turkey, etc. Meat in general is our own too. All you have to do is make efforts, make efforts and work with your head. Then everything becomes possible. You can have everything of your own, you can plant anything here, it will grow".

Women and traditional knowledge

Globally women farmers have been largely responsible for the improvement and adaptation of many varieties of plants, animals and poultry². Around the world, women usually oversee small household livestock. They choose and breed for preferred traits based. In south-east Mexico, women keep as many as nine breeds of local hens, as well as local breeds of turkey, ducks and broilers in. In selecting the best breeds, they consider 11 separate characteristics and can easily distinguish the breeds and species based on each of these³. Current research identified similar activities in rural Kyrgyzstan where nearly every household has some poultry. Burul is a member of one of such households and she agreed to share some of her knowledge in this research:

“Women in the village know how to treat poultry, how to receive better breeds and how to feed them. In the spring, for example, one must feed them one type of food in order to increase egg production. You must feed them something different to make sure that hens begin to incubate. In the spring I feed them with yeast-containing food to make them start incubating. I select the best eggs and put them under the hens. An odd number is better. You need 1 rooster per 10 hens. I personally pick the roosters, the largest ones and the most beautiful ones, they are the most slightly, the most combative. You must know when to slaughter. For example, it is better to slaughter them in January”.

Women’s vulnerability to market chain disruption

Zhipar has a garden with apple, apricot and pear trees.

“In the summertime we grow apricots. What we earn from selling apricots is enough for us to survive in the winter. I can say that we live by apricots. For the last ten-fifteen years apricots were the main source of income”.

However, households like Zhipar’s have a very limited access to larger markets to sell their products and face challenges in all sections of value chains. Families in the village use only one marketing channel such as intermediary purchasers. The latter arrive into the village (in heavy trucks) at specific time of the season and purchase all available products from the villagers. This marketing schema has been long established and generally satisfies the local farmers. However, heavy reliance upon it has a high propensity to lack reliability. This is what happened in this part of the village during the current year.

Zhipar tells her story as follows:

“This year we had a big problem. The trucks arrived to our village too late when apricots became overripe. We could not sell all of our apricots. So we had to buy glass jars, make juice and can it for us to drink in the winter. We made forty jars (hundred and twenty liters). Of course, this juice is good for the small children, much better than Coca-Cola or Fanta. But we lost half of our income. We will have to sell our sheep in the winter time this year.”

Using biodiversity

One of the research locales was a village in Issyk-kul oblast. Inhabitants use biodiversity for a variety of purposes including food, medication, firewood and recreation. Below are some quotes:

Gulyaim, 66-year-old, Issyk-Kul oblast:

“Barbary grows very close to us near the lake, sea berries as well. We collect and eat them. It is both food and medicine. Medicinal herbs also grow here. I collect herbs, dry them and store them and we use them during the winter time. I treat cough with these herbs, I also use the for steam baths. Among the herbs are milfoil, taraxacum, rowanberries, and others”.

Dzhamilia, 29-year-old, Issyk-Kul oblast:

“Here we go to swim in the lake; in the forest we collect barberry to make jam, juice and medicine. We, the village women, like to go for walks into the forests”.

² <http://www.unep.org/PDF/Women/ChapterThree.pdf>

³ <http://www.unep.org/PDF/Women/ChapterThree.pdf>

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PIE, the Poverty-Environment Initiative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is a global UN effort that supports country-led efforts to mainstream poverty-environment linkages into national development planning. PIE provides financial and technical assistance to government partners to set up institutional and capacity-strengthening programmes and carry out activities to address the particular poverty-environment context.

