

Gender, climate and cohesion

Uncovering the linkages between climate change, human security and gender in Jordan

Research note

BACKGROUND

This study examines the links between climate change and social cohesion, human security and gender in Jordan through examples of approaches to local development, agriculture and management of natural resources that integrate an understanding of the gendered impacts of climate change on human security and social cohesion in Jordan. It offers a series of recommendations to implementers, donors and stakeholders engaged in climate action.

This research note summarises the findings and recommendations of a research paper developed by the Jordanian think tank the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) Institute in partnership with the international peacebuilding non-governmental organisation International Alert, with the support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

OVERVIEW

As one of the most water-scarce countries in the world, Jordan is particularly vulnerable to water-related hazards, such as floods, and climate change.¹ The close interaction between water and climate change continues to have negative impacts on the country and its people, who have weathered a series of shocks, including regional crises and conflicts, which is creating significant challenges for agricultural production, food security, sustainable livelihoods and social cohesion. The impacts of climate change are wide ranging, including effects on Jordan's import-dependent economy, environmental security and people's human security.

Women in Jordan are particularly impacted by climate change facing disproportionate economic, social and cultural challenges, and exposure to climate-related social tensions. Furthermore, women and girls can be at increased risk of gender-based violence (GBV).² Despite these compound challenges, women play a critical, although often overlooked, role in climate action.

Issues relating to human security and social cohesion and climate change, and climate change and gender have only recently begun to be examined in the Jordanian context. However, the intersections between climate, human security and gender are largely underexplored. The framing of human security explored in this research paper involves a holistic approach, encompassing the sense of safety in one's household and community, wellbeing, access to water security, food security, energy security and socio-economic (livelihoods) security, and gender equality. The concept of human security is closely linked to the concepts of social cohesion (relationships between groups and between communities and duty bearers) with climate-related shocks as a compound risk as they threaten to widen social cleavages and exacerbate tensions.

Given the **multidimensional, accelerating threats to human security posed by climate change in Jordan and the disproportionate impact on women, it is critical to act now and support women-led climate action which supports social cohesion.** This research paper identifies a series of entry points and recommendations to enhance the social cohesion and human security outcomes of climate action and mitigation interventions while supporting gender equality in Jordan.

MAIN FINDINGS

Human security involves a holistic approach, encompassing the sense of safety in one's household and community, wellbeing and access to water security, food security, energy security and socio-economic (livelihoods) security, and gender equality.

Human security involves sufficient, fair and inclusive access to water, food and energy resources and economic opportunities, taking into account the specific barriers and enablers experienced by women and men of different backgrounds, ages, abilities, etc. Physical and psychological safety is an essential element of human security. It implies freedom from interpersonal, community and structural violence, a sense of personal safety and security, health and wellbeing. "Human security recognises that people face multiple insecurities and these must be tackled together, comprehensively. Only then will people begin to feel safe in all aspects of their lives, have the income and opportunities to attain well-being, and know that their rights and dignity are fully respected." Integral to the concept of human security is gender equality: "If gender equality is not fully achieved and inequalities between men and women, boys and girls persist, important opportunities that contribute to human security are lost. For example, women's exclusion from the labour market leads to reduced household incomes which in turn threatens economic security, food security, and perhaps also health security."⁴

Applying a gender lens is critical to understanding the linkages between climate change, human security and social cohesion.

Traditional gender norms and roles for women mean women face compound stressors and risks in relation to water scarcity and climate shocks. Women in Jordan are generally responsible for household work, such as cooking, cleaning and the management of water resources, including rationing water. This increases physical and psychological stress when water is scarce.⁵ The burden is heavier on women living in poverty and female-headed households who often lack resources and support networks to cope with climate-related shocks and food insecurity.⁶ Furthermore, recent research has highlighted the likelihood of increased tensions in the home and risks of intimate partner violence.⁷

Women's role in climate action is largely overlooked despite women being most affected. Women are still not fully represented in climate policy-making and formal climate action, despite being invested in and having direct experience of climate action. There are several barriers to women's (especially rural women's) active participation in climate change adaptation and mitigation, including lack of networks and access to decision-makers, restricted access to leadership positions and limited opportunities for skills and knowledge building, information and technologies.⁸ Despite this, women do play an active role in informal climate actions, particularly at grassroots levels.

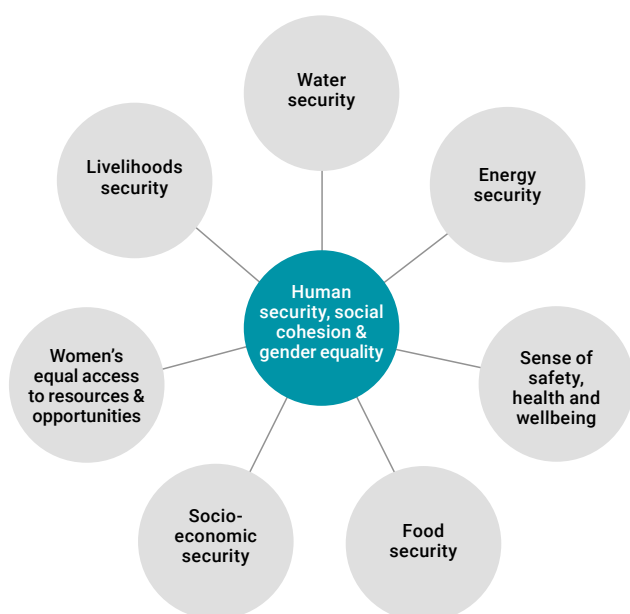
Climate change and associated environmental shocks have an impact on social cohesion and human security.

Cohesion plays an important role in building solidarity to work towards increasing resilience to potential economic, social, political and environmental risks. Social cohesion is important before as well as after extreme weather events. Before such events, the work of identifying groups in local communities with similar vulnerabilities can help determine appropriate measures to increase resilience. After natural disasters, socially cohesive communities can better facilitate recovery processes.⁹

Jordan has shown a level of resilience and internal cohesion in the face of many political, economic and social challenges.¹⁰ However, **given the outlook in terms of climate change, it is critical to reinforce social cohesion.** For its communities to become truly resilient to climate change impacts, their adaptive capacities must be augmented and social capital strengthened. This includes ensuring inclusive development, implementation and monitoring of climate adaptation and mitigation planning, policy and interventions at national and community level, which actively engages women, particularly those most marginalised (such as in rural communities). Climate action which is not inclusive and does not take into account different social tensions and barriers to participation, including those related to gender, risks widening divisions rather than building community resilience.

Seven elements of human security

Interconnected elements of human security, social cohesion and gender equality



Social cohesion approaches and tools can be avenues for gender-responsive climate resilience.

Just as climate change is threatening social cohesion, with the potential to exacerbate social tensions, climate adaptation and mitigation responses that take these tensions into account and ensure conflict sensitivity can build community cohesion and resilience. The full report developed by the Jordanian think tank the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) Institute in partnership with International Alert highlights a number of local and household-level projects (such as faith-based awareness, agribusiness, green technologies, etc.) that aim to build social cohesion, including by identifying and including the gender dimension. Positive outcomes of these projects that supported social cohesion, gender inclusion and addressed climate-related pressures included: improved community trust, tackling of restrictive gender norms and taboos, increased community role in decision-making, inclusion of rural women and increased community resilience. Two examples of such projects are highlighted here.

Project case study: Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM)

IWRM means making the best use of every drop of water. Reclaiming wastewater for different purposes is one approach that, among other outcomes, reduces the risk of competition and conflicts over limited water resources. Adaptation tools such as water conservation devices and non-conventional water for irrigation purposes can provide food, crops and access to healthy organic options through home gardens. Through engaging communities in management and decision-making, IWRM can have the additional benefits of building community bonds and social cohesion, as well as enhancing awareness around climate change and techniques for resilience.

Project case study: Women-led agribusiness in the northern governorates

Agribusiness creates 'off-farm' job opportunities that can improve conditions of vulnerable communities. In Jordan, agricultural production and processing is important for rural women who could benefit from participating in such opportunities.

The "Wadi" project implemented in one of the northern governorates involved capacity development for a group of women from different community-based organisations to enhance technical skills to work in nurseries preparing seedlings. Other trainings included marketing and branding for end products, such as marmalade and vinegar, facilitating their access to the market. The project had two major outcomes. First, it incentivised women to start their own nurseries, providing a food source and income, as well as employment opportunities to other women. Second, the women were able to transfer their knowledge to other areas of the country.

The project also challenged limiting gendered social norms where there was opposition to the idea of women attending workshops. This challenge was overcome by showing the families the details of the work, as well as securing safe transportation. The result was not just the overcoming of a taboo, but also social cohesion was strengthened through the interaction of women from different areas.

Participatory stakeholder involvement at each level of the project cycle supports gender inclusion.

Actively engaging stakeholders in planning, implementation and monitoring projects throughout the project cycle can enhance gender inclusion and social cohesion outcomes of climate action. Stakeholder mapping in project design to identify underrepresented or marginalised individuals and groups can promote a participatory approach that ensures the involvement of stakeholders according to diverse needs, including women's and men's different vulnerability to access water.

CONCLUSION

Climate change, especially its impacts relating to water scarcity, poses real risks to social cohesion, human security and gender equality in Jordan. Water availability is diminishing, while quality and accessibility is worsening. Food production is fluctuating and energy security is threatened by a rising need for heating and cooling. Health security is under threat from the appearance of new diseases and viruses, some related to temperature variations or the deterioration in water quality.

Women are disproportionately impacted by climate-related hazards and disasters. At the same time, given women's role in productive sectors, they can and do play a central role in climate action. Accordingly, initiatives aiming to increase resilience towards climate change and human security should be sensitive and inclusive to gendered pressures, expectations and norms.

As the negative impact of climate change affects people's human security in Jordan, social cleavages are set to rise, threatening social cohesion. This includes significant increases in gendered impacts of climate change and environmental crises, as well as disparities between urban and rural populations, regions and socio-economic classes. This increases the risk of tensions over scarce resources, food and economic opportunities and gender-based violence, thus underscoring the need for climate action that integrates peacebuilding approaches.

Evidence from initiatives covered in this research paper point to **the importance of addressing integrated water resources management, capacity building and knowledge transfer, green job opportunities and faith-based environmental awareness, which prioritises building social cohesion and promoting gender equality as a common denominator.**

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends the following to implementers, authorities and donors:

On programming and implementation:

- **Ensure easy access and safe transportation methods to food markets for women:** Women in poor rural areas are suffering from a lack of affordable and efficient access to food markets due to the lack of transportation means, the dynamics of which are further exacerbated by environmental stressors and climate change. Creating reliable and safe transportation networks (that ensure the physical safety of road users especially for women when travelling alone) to and from food markets would result in better food security for women and their families to increase their resilience towards the effects of climate change. This could be a joint effort from the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and could include creating bus stops and safe bus routes. Another approach could involve creating food markets in areas close to women in rural areas, following appropriate research.
- **Empower women to increase their knowledge of resource management and environmental ownership to increase community resilience, and involve men in this process:** Women do not have sufficient knowledge on environmental issues and their effects on their livelihoods. Capacity building should also include men to build their support for women's leadership on environmental issues. This can help create enabling environments for women and men to become aware of their rights, the specific issues and challenges facing women, and to address tensions related to women's role in climate action, thus enhancing community cohesion.

On policy-making:

- **Include the participation of vulnerable communities, in particular rural women and women heads of households in decision and policy-making:** The inclusion of different women in vulnerable areas in decision-making can ensure their perspectives are taken into account when decisions are made concerning them. It is essential to understand the roles and responsibilities of women and men at the household level and how resource scarcity and other environmental pressures impact them differently to enable them to effectively voice their opinions on matters that affect them and affect change.
- **Develop policy to protect informal labourers:** Most female workers are seasonal temporary employees who are paid less than men while being exposed to harsh environmental conditions, have limited employment protection and are subject to other risks (such as harassment). Work to ensure their rights through legal frameworks and support local businesses to provide for different needs of employees and ensure their rights are protected.
- **Include the health sector in the nexus considerations around water, energy, food and environment:** When assessing climate change impacts, it is vital to assess effects on health (physical and mental health) and wellbeing. This is often neglected but is at the core of people's concerns about food, water and energy security, and the associated impacts of climate-related shocks and pressures (poor nutrition, etc.).

On research and evidence:

- **Carry out more research to increase understanding of how women and men from different social backgrounds are affected differently by climate change** and how they can respond to climate change challenges, be it in mitigation or adaptation efforts.
- **Decision-making in climate mitigation or adaption responses needs to be evidence-based**, informed by the different needs and priorities of women and men from different backgrounds and **inclusive**, involving diverse voices and community members.

On funding:

- **Invest in community initiatives, especially those that are women-led, integrating the following intervention areas:** Integrated water resources management, capacity building and knowledge transfer, green job opportunities and faith-based environmental awareness. Ensure initiatives are informed by a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics and are designed to foster social cohesion.
- **Increase support for interventions that grow spaces for women's leadership in climate security actions and the green economy:** Capitalise on the tangible opportunities that already exist to grow spaces for rural and urban women of all backgrounds to actively participate in and lead initiatives.
- **Allocate budgets and financial instruments for climate change actions to be responsive to the gender dimension and prioritise women's participation:** Budgeting should be gender sensitive, taking account of the needs and capacities of both genders. This could include, for example, recognising and taking action, such as through financial support, to overcome the challenges that women often face related to the lack of inclusion in initiatives, such as business accelerators, especially in rural areas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research note was authored by Ruth Simpson from International Alert with Dr Majd Al Naber and Eng Reem al Haddadin and Eng Samer Fakhoury of the WANA Institute. The authors would like to thank Camille Marquette and Jessica Hartog of International Alert. Alert and WANA would like to thank the research participants for sharing their insights and experiences. Finally, Alert and WANA would like to thank the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), which has supported the project and publishing of this research note.

The opinions expressed in this note do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of SIDA.

ENDNOTES

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Published 2023

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