

## MANAGING RISK, CHANGING ASPIRATIONS AND HOUSEHOLD DYNAMICS: IMPLICATIONS FOR WELLBEING AND ADAPTATION IN SEMI-ARID AFRICA AND INDIA

Unpacking inequalities confronting populations in semi-arid regions is key to understanding how and why risk management enables effective local adaptation and affects household wellbeing.

### WHAT WAS DONE, AND WHAT WAS NOVEL?

Drawing on mixed methods empirical evidence from six countries across Africa and Asia, the research examines how changes in household dynamics, structure, and aspirations, shape risk management, with implications for household wellbeing, adaptive capacity, and sustainable development.

The research was developed collaboratively and iteratively, through a process of collective sharing and reflection. A common research question and design was broadly agreed across the study sites to ensure comparability of data and insights.

Apart from contextual information and household surveys, a range of qualitative methods – focus group discussions, in-depth and life history interviews – were used to triangulate the data we collected.

### KEY FINDINGS

This work highlights the key role played by material conditions and social networks in differentiating risk management strategies such as livelihood diversification, migration, changing agricultural practices, and leveraging social support at the household level. These are critically shaped by the ability of individuals within households – differentiated by age, marital status, or education – to manipulate the very structure of the household and the resources it offers.

Our evidence suggests that while greater risks can drive conflictive behavior within households, with women often reporting lower subjective wellbeing, new forms of cooperative behaviour are also emerging. These vary in nature across the semi-arid regions we studied, with support often sought in inter-generational rather than spousal relationships.

### KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY, PRACTICE AND RESEARCH

Our research points to household structure as a key variable that constrains and enhances choices in the face of climatic changes and livelihood precarity. Households are by no means homogenous, but are constantly changing – across locations and generations – in response to risks.

Identifying entry points that enable sustainable and inclusive adaptation behavior is important. Interventions should work for men and women of different ages who are located in different types of households, and should recognise that the household itself is changing, in order to challenge inequitable social and gender norms, renegotiate the domains of work and cooperation, and maintain overall household wellbeing.

Understanding how household dynamics influence risk management strategies and adaptive choices, and questioning the often static assumptions about household composition, are key areas to consider. Household dynamics affect gender relations and women's agency, and in turn wellbeing outcomes.

