Title: Managing risk, aspirations and well-being: household dynamics and implications for adaptation in semi-arid context

Semi-arid regions across Africa and Asia are characterized by rapidly changing biophysical regimes, structural vulnerabilities, and increasing livelihood precarity. Gender, class, and caste/ethnic identities and relationships, and the specific social, economic and political power, roles and responsibilities they entail, shape the choices and decisions open to individuals and households in managing the risks they face. Unpacking the multiple, intersecting inequalities confronting rural populations in these climate hotspots is therefore vital to understand the ‘how and why’ of risk management in order to facilitate local adaptation actions that are effective, sustainable and inclusive.

Drawing on mixed methods, empirical evidence from six countries across Africa and Asia, we examine how changes in household dynamics, structure, and aspirations, shape risk management with implications for household well-being, adaptive capacity, and sustainable development. Expectedly, household material conditions and social networks differentiate risk management strategies such as livelihood diversification, migration, changing agricultural practices and leveraging social support. 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 behavior are also emerging, especially in peri-urban spaces.

Through this study, we identify entry points into enabling sustainable and inclusive adaptation behavior. Long-term adaptation can be incentivised by increasing the viability of agriculture as a livelihood, recognizing the potential of young men and women as agents of change, and providing appropriate livelihood options and supporting infrastructure for women. Our findings emphasize that interventions should work for both men and women, in challenging inequitable social and gender norms and renegotiating the domains of work and cooperation to maintain overall household wellbeing. Our findings link closely to issues of food security (Goal 2), gender and wider social equality (Goal 5 and 10) and climate action (Goal 13).