

The Crawford Fund Annual Conference

Progress and Prospects for Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems: Actionable Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners

11-12 August 2025

Parliament House, Canberra,
Australia, and online



Australian Government

Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research



Australian
National
University

Cultivating Resilience: Feminization as a Pathway to Climate Adaptation in Cambodia's Agriculture

Sonia Akter

Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU

Crawford Fund's Annual Conference, August 2025

This study has been funded by the Australian center for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).

Cambodia: Agricultural Economy & Climate Risk

- In 2021:
 - 21.9% of the national GDP from agriculture
 - 38.85% of the workforce employed in the sector
- 66.3% of employed women in Cambodia work in the agricultural sector.
- Predominantly subsistence farming
- Crop production contributes over half of agricultural GDP
- Ranked 13th (1995–2015) and 12th (2020) on the Global Climate Risk Index
 - Floods and droughts are the most common disasters



Challenges

What We Know:

- Women assume greater agricultural responsibilities as men out-migrate
- Climatic hazards are becoming more frequent and intense across the globe

What We Didn't Know

- To what extent are women gaining agency in farm-level decision-making?
 - Is feminization accompanied by greater influence over agricultural decision-making?
- How is climate change adaptation influencing women's roles in agriculture?
 - Are women taking on more responsibilities or authority as part of household adaptation strategies?
- How do climatic hazards drive agricultural feminization?
 - Are women stepping into key agricultural roles due to extreme weather events?

Our Methodology

- Data: Cambodia Agriculture Survey 2019, 2020 and 2021
 - Scope: over 40,000 nationally representative agricultural households
- Measurements:
 - Feminization:
 - (1) Women's participation in agricultural decision-making;
 - (2) Women's participation in agriculture as family and hired labour
 - Climate change adaptation:
 - (1) Diversifying crop species;
 - (2) Extending portfolio of activities;
 - (3) Producing more food groups
 - Climatic hazards: whether households experienced any climatic hazards

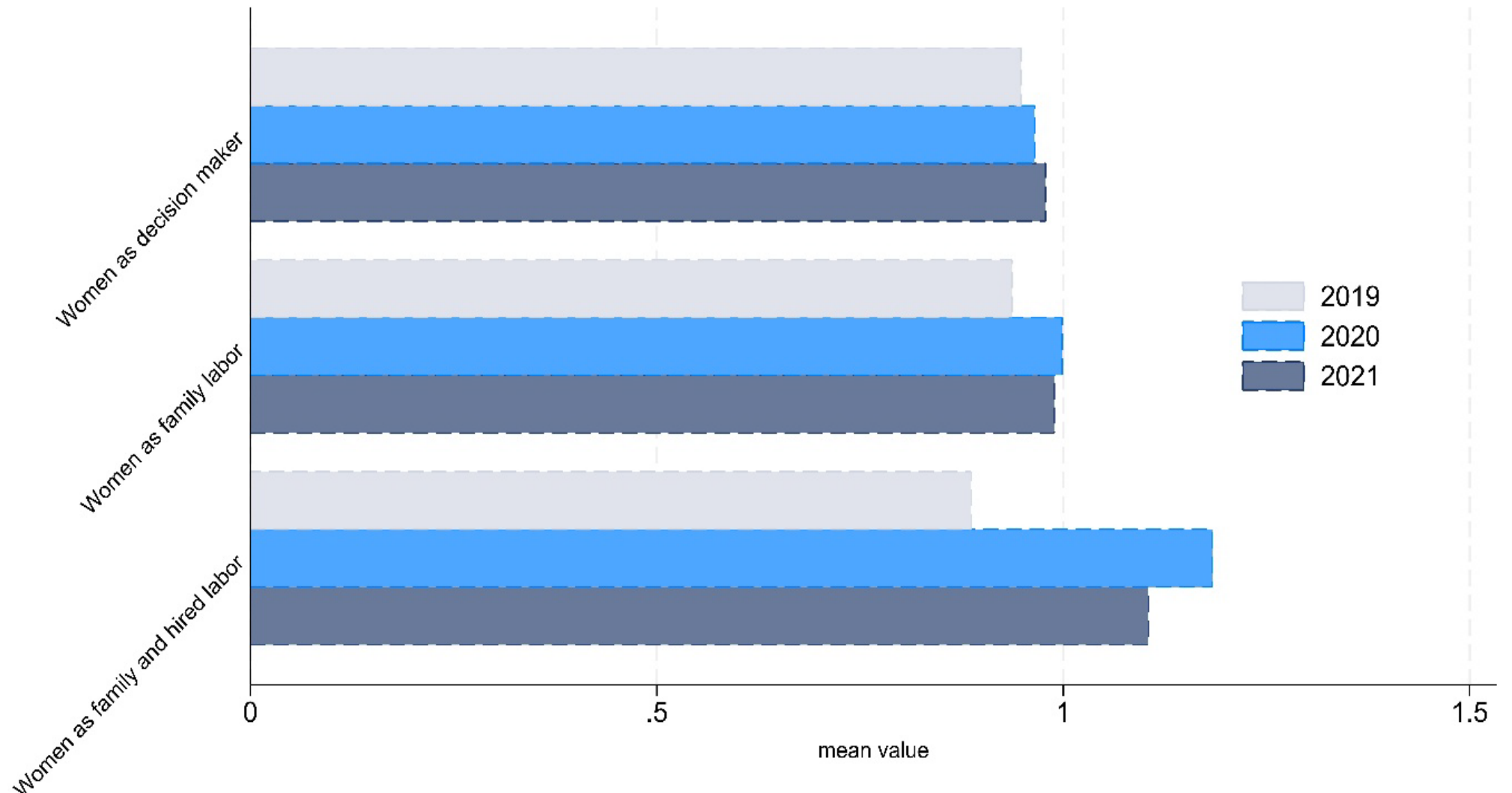


The Crawford Fund Annual Conference
**Progress and Prospects for
Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems:
Actionable Recommendations for
Policymakers and Practitioners**
11-12 August 2025
Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, and online



Agricultural Feminization in Cambodia (2019–2021)

Figure 1 Mean values of agricultural feminization scores in Cambodia 2019–2021.



Source: Authors' calculation using Cambodia Inter-Censal Agriculture Survey 2019 and Cambodia Agriculture Survey 2020, 2021

Figure 3: Agricultural Feminization and Household Headship

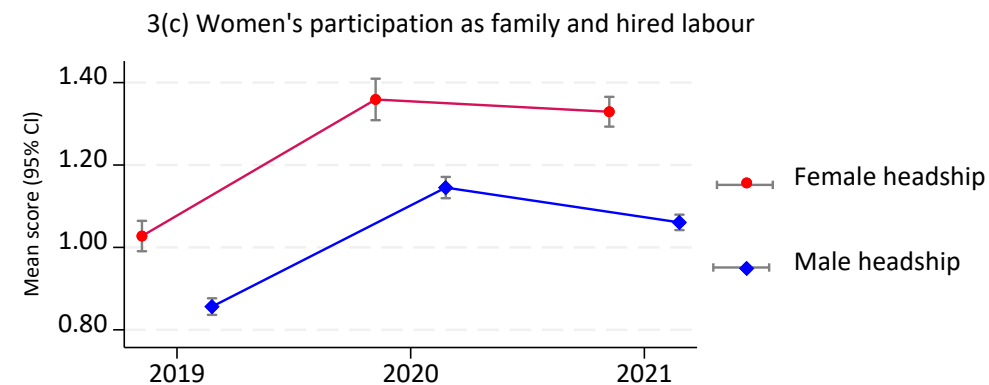
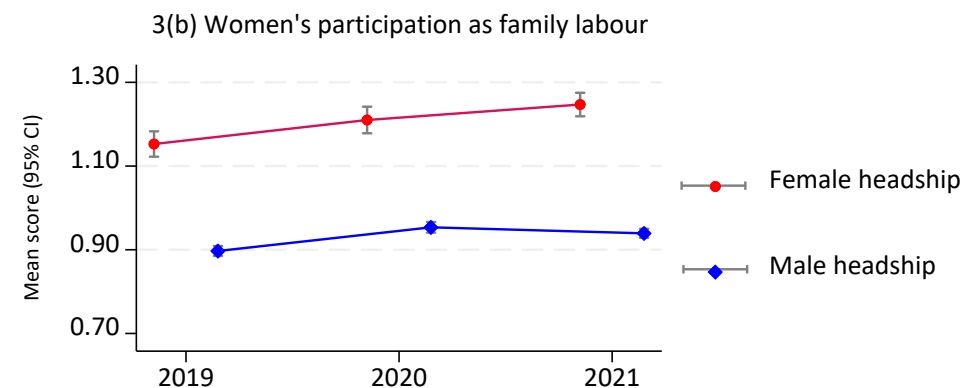
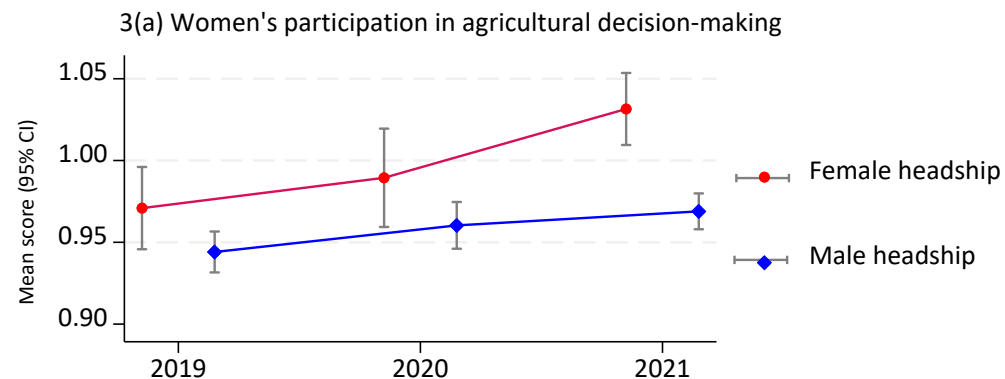
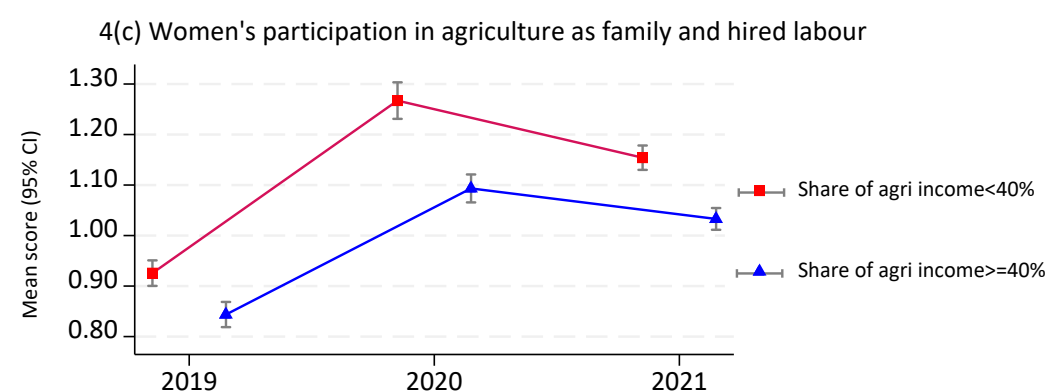
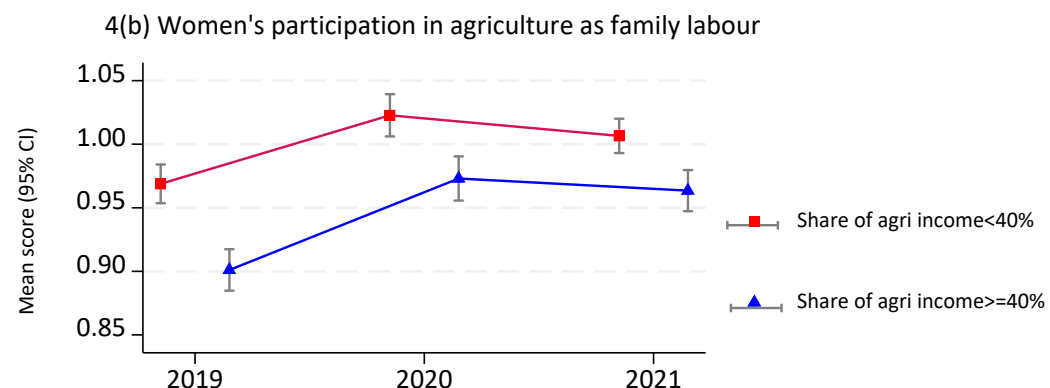
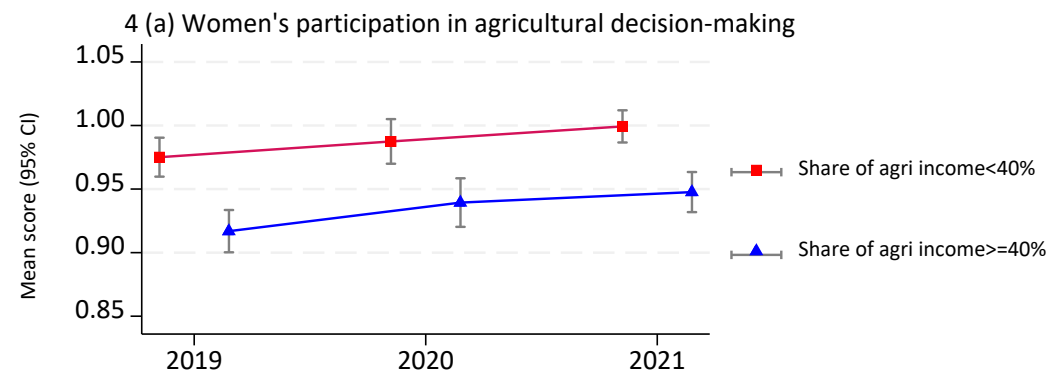


Figure 4: Agricultural Feminization and Share of Agricultural Income



Agricultural Feminization & Climate Change Adaptation

- Diversification is an effective adaptation strategy to climate change.
- Households can diversify by
 1. Growing more crop species
 2. Producing more food groups
 3. Diversifying livelihoods
- Agricultural feminization was higher in households doing at least one of the three strategies compared to households that were less diversified.
- Reasons
 - Diversification requires more labour.
 - Women have a comparative advantage in diversifying livelihoods
 - Greater flexibility to engage in home-based income activities
 - Can combine income generation with caregiving roles
 - More likely to take up small-scale ventures like vegetable gardening, handicraft making, food processing or home-based services



Photo source: <https://www.oneearth.org/projects/improving-rural-cambodian-lives-through-organic-gardening/>



Photo source: <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/blog/2021/03/05/turning-tide>

Agricultural Feminization & Climatic Hazards



Source: <https://www.todayonline.com/world/asia/flooding-cambodia-claims-least-30-lives>



Source: <https://www.jackkurtzphotography.com/image/1000DyhdgCTg3Ew>

- Climatic hazards adversely affected household welfare
 - Reduced reliance on agricultural income
 - Reduced commercialization
 - Reduced savings
 - Increased borrowing
- Women's participation in agriculture as labourers and decision-makers was higher in climatic hazard-affected households
- Households with a greater degree of feminization were more food secure in the face of climatic shocks
- Drivers
 - Climate shocks foster solidarity and gender equality
 - Facing climate crises, households often experience increased solidarity, with women gaining greater decision-making power and more equitable roles.



Key Findings

1. Cambodia's agriculture is becoming feminized.
 - Women are assuming larger roles in agricultural labour and decision-making, reflecting a clear upward trend.
2. Climate change adaptation strategies, in particular diversification, are reshaping gender roles.
3. Climate shocks are adversely affecting household welfare.
4. Climatic shocks have led to greater female involvement in farming and household decision-making.



The Crawford Fund Annual Conference
**Progress and Prospects for
Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems:
Actionable Recommendations for
Policymakers and Practitioners**
11-12 August 2025
Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, and online



Policy Recommendations

- ❑ **Promote gender-responsive agricultural policies**
 - Ensure all agricultural and climate policies in Cambodia recognize and support the roles, needs, and contributions of women.
- ❑ **Advance gender inclusion in climate-vulnerable areas**
 - Prioritize women's participation and leadership in regions most exposed to climate risks.
- ❑ **Support women through climate-smart extension services**
 - Develop extension programs that empower women to lead in crop diversification and climate adaptation efforts.



The Crawford Fund Annual Conference
**Progress and Prospects for
Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems:
Actionable Recommendations for
Policymakers and Practitioners**
11-12 August 2025
Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, and online



THANK YOU!

For more information, please contact Sonia.akter@anu.edu.au



Photo source: <https://borgenproject.org/women-leaders-in-cambodia/>



The Crawford Fund Annual Conference

**Progress and Prospects for
Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems:
Actionable Recommendations for
Policymakers and Practitioners**

11-12 August 2025

Parliament House, Canberra, Australia, and online

