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WORKING PAPER

WHO'S GOVERNING COMMUNITY FORESTS? GENDERED PARTICIPATION IN LIBERIAN FOREST MANAGEMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Highlights

- This paper examines how power relations, authority, and competing interests converge to shape both resource access and the ability to participate in forest governance for different individuals in two forest-dependent communities in River Cess County, Liberia.
- Conventional attitudes favoring male leadership, a lack of time, and restrictive social norms limit women's ability to contribute meaningfully to forest governance. Women with the lowest socioeconomic status are least likely to have the time and influence needed to engage in forest governance, thereby exacerbating existing inequalities and limiting the ability of forest user groups to make informed decisions.
- Many men also face challenges to participation based on their natal status, their socioeconomic status, and difficulties with group cohesiveness.
- Shifting perceptions of women's role in forest governance and management, together with gender quotas in forest user groups, leadership development for women, and changing the dynamics of forest decision-making can have a positive impact on the health and stability of community forests in Liberia and beyond.

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About This Working Paper

This paper examines how power relations, authority, and competing interests converge to shape both resource access and the ability to participate in forest governance for different individuals within a community. World Resources Institute (WRI), in partnership with the Humanitarian Response and Development Lab (HURDL) at Clark University and the African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests (REFACOF), undertook this study to understand the nature of women's engagement in forest governance at the community level in Liberia. The study sought to identify patterns of engagement in forest governance, explain these patterns, and identify pathways through which women's participation in forest governance might be improved (see Appendix, Research Methodology). Field research, conducted with the support of the Foundation for Community Initiatives (FCI) in Liberia, provides evidence suggesting that community forest management should more broadly engage women in decision-making. However, regulatory and social changes are needed to achieve this goal. The paper underscores that a deeper understanding of local social dynamics and power relations is needed to foster gender and social equity and avoid risks to already vulnerable people, as well as the forest resources upon which they depend.

The Research Problem

Across sub-Saharan Africa, women play a significant role in managing forest resources in support of their livelihoods and their households, yet they are often excluded from decision-making processes affecting the resources upon which they depend. Without women's input, decisions neglect their need for access to forest resources that bring nutritional, medicinal, and livelihood benefits to their households and ignore their wisdom for sustainable management of these products. Given that evidence from South Asia indicates that when women are engaged in forest governance, forest and human well-being outcomes improve, this paper set out to understand these connections in the African context, specifically Liberia. However, initial exploration of the study area revealed that women were not engaged in forest management. Therefore, the focus shifted to identifying pathways through which women's participation in forest governance might be improved. Liberia's current forest code has significant shortcomings with regard to promoting women's engagement in forest governance, and the country is expanding the decentralization of forest governance. To effectively design laws, regulations, and enforcement mechanisms that shape meaningful participation of women in forest governance structures, an in-depth understanding of local livelihoods, social dynamics, and power relations is critical.

Key Findings

Livelihood vulnerability is a key determinant in forest management committee participation.

Engagement in forest management committees is time consuming and fraught with political and power struggles. Our livelihoods analysis identified three groups, based on shared vulnerabilities and livelihood activities: severely limited asset livelihoods (SLAL), those with low asset livelihoods (LAL), and those with adequate asset livelihoods (AAL). Those comprising the SLAL and LAL groups struggled to provide sufficient food for their households, suffering to different degrees from labor and resource shortages. Across these groups, female-headed households faced severe hunger, particularly during planting season. This vulnerability necessitated that they prioritize farming and income-generating activities over community activities. Only those in the AAL group had the reserves to allow for the time away from farming and income-generating activities needed to participate in forest management committees. Through this participation and the benefits derived there from, the AAL group's vulnerability was further reduced, and the gap between them and those in the SLAL and LAL groups widened.

Social norms are more rigorously upheld when determining who may participate in forest governance than around roles and responsibilities associated with other livelihood activities.

Women and men from all vulnerability groups cited similar behavioral expectations for the genders, which included restrictions on the types of forest-related livelihood activities in which they may engage. Further, these expectations were policed through various locally legitimate means, with consequences for those who transgressed expectations. However, women from SLAL and LAL groups faced less severe consequences when they stepped outside of those norms. These women were both exempted from restrictions on participating in forest activities and were more likely to challenge norms restricting their participation in forest-based activities

as these activities were one of the few avenues through which they could earn a livelihood. This resulted in their heightened knowledge of the forest and its products, which would make them valuable informants in forest management decisions. Paradoxically, however, they were most likely to be excluded from forest management committees.

Women's participation in forest management committees is restricted by attitudes about their abilities and beliefs about their role in society.

Complex social norms about women's participation in activities outside the home, particularly if it will bring them into contact with other men, were a greater barrier to participating in forest management committees than time and social constraints. For example, women are often shy about speaking up in meetings due to a long history of being shunned when they speak in public. Women who were able to overcome these challenges to participate in forest group activities were perceived by men as not educated enough about the forest to make decisions. As a result, men did not engage women in such decisions, even when they attended forest management committee meetings. Further, some men believed women's rights to and decision-making about the forest should be limited for fear that they would marry someone outside of the community who would take the community's forest resources.

Tools of coercion serve to maintain social order and to maintain women's limited and subordinate role. Families and communities enforced adherence to social norms in all aspects of life, including forest governance, through an escalating and socially legitimate set of sanctions. A progression of nonphysical consequences within a household ranged from a man's refusal to eat his wife's food, avoidance, turning her over to female elders to be advised or fined, sending her back to her parents' home, domestic violence, and divorce. Community sanctions included avoidance by other women and expulsion from community gatherings and organizations. Male transgressions, including the inability to control one's wife, could result in disrespect and isolation. If the undesirable behavior continued, men faced the possibility of eviction from the community.

Recommendations

Context-specific, intersectional gender analyses should be used by forest project implementers to inform the design of interventions to mitigate against the perpetuation or widening of social and gender gaps, as well as to ensure that the approaches used advance social and environmental objectives to achieve their goals.

- Transforming the nature of women's participation in forest governance will be a political process that addresses entrenched social norms that men and women have a stake in maintaining. Without careful consideration of the mechanisms through which gender roles are socialized and legitimated, efforts to increase the participation of women and marginalized men in forest governance could result in negative consequences for the very constituencies that such initiatives are meant to assist.
- Because the participation of women in public life is defined in very particular ways, there is a need to change the perceptions of communities to include the knowledge and skills that women can bring to forest governance initiatives as a starting point for longer-term, more transformative goals and outcomes.
- Different strategies must be used for engaging women based on the specific barriers to participation that they face, which include time and resource constraints, as well as legitimacy in public meetings. These interventions must also pay attention to how well men are able to meet expectations to provide for their households as that is a factor in their standing in the community.

Policy advocacy to increase the number of women required to participate in forest user groups, as well as to broaden participation of men from across the vulnerability groups, may help to facilitate greater women's access to forest benefits.

- Regulations about forest management participation appear to be followed at the community level and therefore may be a means through which women's participation, as well as that of marginalized men, may be increased and enhanced.
- Awareness-raising of the value of varied perspectives for forest governance may help male leaders and elite men to be more open to broadening participation in forest governance.
- Leadership development may improve the effectiveness of women and marginalized men as actors in forest management and decision-making.

INTRODUCTION

Between January and August 2017, World Resources Institute (WRI), in partnership with the Humanitarian Response and Development Lab (HURDL) at Clark University and the African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests (REFACOF), undertook a study to understand the nature of women's engagement in forest governance at the community level in Liberia. The study, conducted in River Cess County, also sought to identify pathways through which this engagement might be improved.

Purpose of the Study

While much attention has been paid to forest governance processes among communities and other actors (SDI 2009, 2010; Mukpo et al. 2016; Siakor 2010, 2011; Altman et al. 2012; Lomax 2008), our aim here is to further efforts to improve forest governance in Liberia by focusing on community-level participation, scale and social dynamics that remain largely unexamined but merit attention. This paper considers several dimensions that impinge on forest governance at the community level: participation and transparency in management and decision-making over forest resources; equity and fairness in access to and use of forest resources; and the ability to hold other users in a forest system accountable—for instance, in relation to benefit sharing or following socially accepted rules of access. Although the focus of the study was on understanding women's engagement in these various arenas, theorizing women's engagement in forest governance requires that we understand the livelihoods and motivations not only of women but also men. This study considers how various levels of power, authority, and competing interests converge to shape the social vulnerability of community members (including, for instance, resource access and the perceived legitimacy to participate in public forums) and how this, in turn, affects the ability to participate in forest governance processes within the community. Although forest use and forest governance are embedded in relationships and processes that transcend the local, from global markets for timber products to the impacts of climate change, this study only considers the role of extra-local processes and actors insofar as they have a direct impact on forest governance at the community level.

Gendered Roles in Forest Use and Resource Management

Across sub-Saharan Africa, women play significant roles in managing forest resources (Sunderland et al. 2014), and forest products are an important source of subsistence and income (Vodouhe at al. 2009; Dovie 2003). For example, women use gathered wild foods as an integral component of a diverse and nutritious diet for children and their households (Ickowitz et al. 2014). Although African men make contributions to fuel wood and fodder collection (Wunder et al. 2014), in many communities the primary responsibility for these tasks falls on women (Sunderland et al. 2014; Blackden and Wodon 2006). Women also collect medicines for household use and act as repositories of traditional healing knowledge (Nelms and Gorski 2006; Cunningham 1993). Overall, cross-country studies in sub-Saharan Africa find that the purposes for collecting and using forest products for women and men are quite nuanced and negotiable (whether for subsistence, income generation, or gifting). Moreover, the types of products that women can access, manage, and have decision-making power over often significantly differ from those available to men (Sunderland et al. 2014; Kiptot and Franzel 2011). For example, in Malawi, women's decision-making power over tree products depends on the part of the tree in question (Chikoko 2002), while in western Kenya, women have a right to collect fruits but cannot harvest fuel wood from high value timber trees (Bradley 1991).

Differences in product choices, risk behavior, and knowledge about or skill in tending to different products and resources make the participation of both women *and* men in forest governance essential for sustainable management practices and household well-being. However, research shows that women are usually underrepresented in forest management institutions (Sunderland et al. 2014; Das 2011; Kelkar and Nathan 2003; Sarker and Das 2002; Agarwal 2001). Women's direct participation is important because it cannot be assumed that men consider women's needs and priorities or that they can access women's knowledge and insights about the forest and forest products in their decision-making and management practices (Larson et al. 2016). There is evidence, primarily from South Asia, that when women are engaged in forest governance, forest and human well-being outcomes improve. In India and Nepal, community forest user groups in which women had

executive office performed better in regenerating degraded forest lands (Agarwal 2009), and higher proportions of women in forest committees helped regulate illicit activities through the drafting of more widely accepted rules (Agarwal 2009). According to Acharya and Gentle (2006), the participation of women in forest user groups in Nepal improved their functioning, including better management of finances and increased budget allocations to poorer households. In their study of natural resource management groups in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, Westermann et al. (2005) found that women's groups had a higher capacity to mitigate conflict and manage differences within the group.

Based on this kind of evidence, as well as on international pressure to recognize and uphold women's rights, donors, host country governments, and civil society organizations have increased their efforts to engage women in forest management through the reform of customary or traditional governance mechanisms and through setting up forest user groups (Larson and Springer 2016; FAO 2013; Kazoora et al. 2006; Agarwal 2001).

Although reforming customary institutions and setting up user groups have potential for improving the involvement of women in decision-making, monitoring, and enforcement processes, women's presence in these bodies does not necessarily translate into influence and an effective voice (Larson et al. 2016). Forest governance at the community level, by necessity, is a public and political process. However, entrenched claims and control over community structures can take on gendered dimensions, making it difficult for women to participate (RRI 2017; Agarwal 2001). For example, segregated public spaces may exclude certain groups from effectively participating in decision-making processes. In forest-reliant communities in sub-Saharan Africa, gendered norms pertaining to speaking up in public meetings mean that men often have more of a say in publicly made communal decisions, including those related to the management of forests (Sun et al. 2011; Kazoora et al. 2006; Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997). Social norms and dynamics also affect formal user groups that have considerable numbers of women members, resulting in what Agarwal (2001) terms "participatory exclusions." For instance, women may have only nominal group membership, or they may engage, passively informed of decisions, present when decisions are made, but without participation in the decision-making process itself.[1] Even where there are active efforts at inclusion and community members are, in theory, able to freely express their opinions, they may not have any real influence on how forest governance functions, or they may not be able to effectively advocate on behalf of their needs.

Gendered social norms, values, and ways of thinking about livelihoods produce and reproduce relations of power and define individual roles and responsibilities for members of a given community. They circumscribe acceptable behaviors and activities and therefore have a profound influence on the ability of women to engage in traditional institutions of forest governance and in forest user groups. For example, the ways in which people speak about livelihood activities, including what activities to undertake, how they should be undertaken, and who should undertake them, mobilizes aspects of individual identity and connects aspects of identity like gender to particular activities and behaviors. The connection between these discourses of livelihood and identity are very strong, and can produce social facts, which are unquestioned understandings of the world that make these relationships appear natural and beyond question (Carr 2013, 2014; Gidwani 2001). In this way, women can find themselves excluded from forest governance and see such exclusion as natural or unquestionable, while men can use such constructions of identity to argue against the inclusion of women in forest governance.

Understanding how the connection between livelihoods and identity produces gendered patterns of engagement in forest governance is important. If women are not seen as legitimate participants in forest governance, inclusion projects can be ineffective or produce negative outcomes when men or others in authority move to enforce the expectations of identity and activity defined by this connection. This enforcement takes place through tools of coercion, culturally legitimate means of regulating behavior and enforcing expectations (Carr 2013, 2014). These can range from disapproval by community members to gender-based violence and isolation. Tools of coercion play a role in defining to what extent women engage in public life and act as powerful incentives for self-censure. In addition, women may not have the self-confidence, experience, or capabilities to fully engage in the public sphere even where these sanctioning norms do not exist or are weak (Mai et al. 2011).

Gendered Norms and the Impact on Different Kinds of Women

Gendered norms regarding participation in forest governance do not affect all women within forest-reliant communities in the same way. As a result, women often are not able to advocate for the interests of other women, simply based on gender. Further, the outcome of women's engagement in forest governance varies by place. For example, Coleman and Mwangi's (2013) cross-country analysis of forest user groups in Bolivia, Kenya, Mexico, and Uganda found that forest user groups with higher proportions of women participating resulted in groups with fewer disruptive conflicts. In another study comparing data from sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, Mwangi et al. (2011) found that male-dominated and more equally mixed user groups performed better than female-dominated groups. The variability of these outcomes is not surprising, as status, social position, interests, roles, and responsibilities of women vis-a-vis other women and men in the community can diverge considerably. Consequently, there are significant differences in the strategies and pathways through which different groups of women can mobilize and improve their engagement in forest governance. Therefore, it is not merely the presence of women in a group or governance process, but a specific ability to build coalitions and represent the interests of different kinds of women that is most impactful on decision-making and other processes of forest governance (Agarwal 2009; Kabeer 1999).

Given its centrality in structuring local forest rights and tenure relations with respect to use, access, management, and the sharing of benefits from forest resources, gender fundamentally shapes local forest-based livelihoods and forest governance institutions. Therefore, the consideration of gender in forest governance is critical if efforts to assure equitable, participatory forest governance institutions are to succeed. Moreover, a fragmented understanding of gender in forest governance distorts the perception of the human impacts of policy and regulatory decisions that only partially include gender considerations. This creates missed opportunities to improve both forest-based livelihoods and environmental outcomes (Mai, et al. 2011; Agarwal 2001).

Regulation Changes and Overcoming Exclusion

As countries move to decentralize natural resource management and strengthen local forest governance mechanisms, they appear to do so under the assumption that participatory decision-making works in favor of gender equity and leads to greater responsiveness to citizens and therefore improved decision-making and efficiency (Bandiaky and Tiani 2010). Often, where changes have led to the effective inclusion of marginalized people in governance processes, central governments have imposed mandates or adequate provisions to overcome local inequalities (Domingo et al. 2015; Meynen and Doornbos 2004). However, there is evidence that even where countries have implemented laws, regulations, and enforcement mechanisms to encourage the engagement of women, the entrenched barriers mentioned earlier can be difficult to overcome (Keene and Ginsburg 2017). The lack of an in-depth understanding of local social dynamics and power relations means that efforts to meaningfully include women in forest governance fall short; and in practice, as Domingo et al. (2015) observe, forest user groups rarely overcome local power dynamics and social norms that exclude women, the poor, and other marginalized groups.

Liberia as a Case Study

Liberia is a particularly appropriate setting for the study of gender and forest governance. As part of the Upper Guinea ecosystem, which contains significant endemic plant and mammalian diversity, Liberia's forests are considered a global good (Siakor 2017; Myers et al. 2000; Bakarr et al. 2004), and efforts to create protected areas to conserve biodiversity are increasing. Forests are also an important source of food and livelihood sustenance for rural communities (Siakor 2017). On the other hand, industrial logging is one of the few export revenue earners for the country (Siakor 2017; Owadi et al. 2010; Lebbie et. al 2009). Consequently, there are pressures for increasing protected areas, while at the same time the extraction of forest resources remains critical for economic growth and the survival of rural households. The inherent tensions between conservation goals and income-generating strategies at the community level make the character of local forest governance mechanisms and processes used to equitably engage women crucial. This is particularly so if the conservation benefits women might bring to forest governance are to be achieved, to assure access to forest resources with which to improve livelihoods and as a way to strengthen local forest governance institutions against external exploitation.

As indicated before, much of the attention to forest governance within the country has focused on extra-local processes. The legacy of Liberia's civil wars and a record of political interference in the forest sector

fostered corrupt and patronage-driven institutions (institutional characteristics that persist in the present) and made the sector susceptible to uncontrolled exploitation and unsustainable use (World Bank 2017; Siakor 2017; Harwell 2010; TRC 2009; Doe 2004; Global Witness 2002; Global Witness 2001). Initial reform efforts necessarily focused on increasing transparency by restructuring the regulatory framework governing relationships among the commercial forestry sector, the government, and communities (Siakor 2017). More recently, partly due to the failure of earlier regulatory reforms to assure benefits for local communities, attention has shifted to creating participatory forest governance that is inclusive of communities (Siakor 2017). However, reform efforts have paid little attention to the role of gender at the community level in forest use and management (Weah 2012) and how to improve the participation of women in particular. Whereas the constitution and statutory law extend women rights in land and forest use, as well as management and benefit sharing, legal provisions do not identify specific mechanisms to increase women's representation and participation or to measure whether representation meets the expectations of the state. Where such mechanisms exist, provisions to ensure participation are weak. The Community Rights Law (CRL) with respect to forest lands, passed in 2009, allowed for the creation of community forest management bodies (CFMB) and acknowledges the need to include the interests of women and youth in forest issues. However, the law only requires that one member of a CFMB be a woman and leaves it up to communities to ensure that all community segments are otherwise represented (ROL 2009; Weah 2012). There are no gender provisions for membership in the Community Assembly, the highest decision-making structure for communities in relation to forest matters (ROL 2009). In practice, therefore, the CRL does little to ensure women's equal representation and participation in forest governance.

As Liberia moves forward with reconciling older policies and regulations regarding forest governance with newly enacted legislation, it is important to understand how these changes may potentially affect rural women. This study builds on the work of Weah (2012) by acknowledging that there is a need in Liberia to address the exclusion of women from local forest decision-making processes, expand women's livelihood options to facilitate their participation in forest governance, and build the capacity of community-based organizations to demand representation and participation in forest governance.

STUDY AREA

The study was conducted within the Gblazeo and Neezuin Communities in River Cess County. River Cess County is located 220 kilometers southeast of the country's capital, Monrovia (see Figure A1 in the Appendix). Gblazeo and Neezuin are physically isolated due to the lack of an all-weather road connecting the county to other parts of the country. The communities practice subsistence swidden agriculture on permanently farmed or secondary forested areas. Cassava is the primary food staple with rice as a secondary staple. Households also harvest food from a variety of wild sources. There is little differentiation in the range of major livelihood activities for wealthy and resource-poor households in the county, partly due to the isolation of the district (River Cess County Development Committee 2008) but also a product of the continuing impact of Liberia's civil wars. According to the chiefs of Neezuin and Gblazeo, at the time of the study, 14 years after the end of the last civil war, the two communities, although resilient, were still struggling to rebuild their livelihood asset base to pre-war levels. However, additional animal assets, and income-generating activities such as petty trade and casual labor, can make a difference in the wealth profile of households. Formal wage employment is rare within the county. The Liberian government is the largest formal employer although there are a few nongovernmental organization (NGO) jobs (River Cess County Development Committee 2008). Gblazeo and Neezuin are located within a commercial logging concession area: forest management contract area B (FMC-B).[2] FMC-B was originally issued in 2008 for an area of approximately 57,262 hectares to a Liberian owned firm, EJ & J Investment Cooperation (FDA 2009).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data for the study were collected over a period of seven months through individual and key informant interviews, as well as participatory observation of livelihood patterns. Data were collected from two distinct types of organization in Gblazeo and Neezuin: community-based organizations (CBOs) and customary-based institutions (CBIs). CBOs are groups that were formed through the collective action of a segment of the community or with the support of civil society organizations. CBOs, relative to CBIs, had a narrower mandate within communities. For instance, they were focused on increasing incomes or advocacy around a particular forest governance issue, such as advocating for payments from miners prospecting within community forests. CBIs were customary social structures and

mechanisms through which a wide range of community matters were discussed and decisions agreed upon. All community matters related to forest resources and land were discussed by the elders, with youth and women's groups providing input.

Conversations with CBOs and CBIs relied on an open-ended questionnaire to understand the following factors:

- The role of the CBO and CBI in formulating and shaping rules of forest use for the community and for other stakeholders
- Their role in managing and monitoring the use of the forest in the area
- The nature of men's and women's engagement in forest governance through the CBO or CBI: this was to establish an understanding of the nature of engagement in forest governance
- Whether the CBO or CBI perceived any advantages in increasing the participation of women and men in forest governance

A research team composed of Liberians and HURDL staff conducted individual interviews and observations. The team conducted a total of 181 interviews with individual community members. Ninety-three community members (46 women and 47 men) were interviewed in Gblazeo community. Eighty-eight community members (43 women and 45 men) were interviewed in Neezuin community.

During the first phase of data collection, the questionnaire guide for individual interviews elicited an overview of livelihood activities and why people undertook these livelihood activities. In the second phase of data collection, we sought to identify which roles and responsibilities were attached to individuals and explore the consequences for individuals who acted outside of expected norms. The aim was to provide insight into the logic of livelihood decision-making and to reveal how people organize and order their world in pursuit of various goals. This information illuminates the rationales underlying people's choices to participate or not in local forest governance.

Note that conversations and interviews are quoted in English throughout the paper. Although individual interviews were conducted in Liberian Pidgin English, interviewers' notes were written in English, with careful attention to retaining the integrity of interviewees' comments.

A detailed description of the research methodology can be found in the Appendix.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Forest Governance: How It Happens at a Local Level

Four CBOs with a presence in both communities were included in the study: the Community Forestry Development Committee (CFDC), the Youworwin Environmental Empowerment Development Group (YEEDG), the Land Governance Council (LGC), and the District Development Committee (DDC). Additionally, four CBIs that were functional within each community were included in the study: the elders' groups, men's groups, women's groups, and youth groups. These community governance institutions are found within many communities in the country. They are recognized change agents within the country's national development strategy (World Bank 2013).

The Role of CBOs

At the time of the study, the CFDC was the most engaged CBO in forest governance, serving as the interface among the communities of Gblazeo and Neezuin, EJ&J logging company, and government agencies. The Gblazeo/Neezuin CFDC was one of a national network of CFDCs designed as mechanisms to allow the participation of forest-dependent communities in the management of public forested lands and through which monetary benefits from concessions flowed to the two communities. The CFDC was also the primary official structure that connected the communities to subnational and national forest governance processes. For instance, Gblazeo/Neezuin CFDC representatives participated in annual meetings with other forestry sector stakeholders to formulate an annual operation plan and consult on proposed forestry sector reforms. The CFDC was composed of ten elected community members serving five-year terms. At the time of this study the Gblazeo/Neezuin CFDC membership included one woman (the minimum number of women mandated in the CRL) and nine men. (See *YEEDG Interview #1* below.) At the time of the study, community members participated in the CFDC through quarterly three-day town hall meetings, monthly meetings where the CDFC updated the community and heard grievances, and ad hoc meetings in the case of urgent issues.

YEEDG was an advocacy group with the main purpose of championing the rights of the community to receive fair benefits. An official of YEEDG provided examples of the organizations' advocacy efforts:

> Whenever there is a particular benefit that is supposed to come to the community for development purposes and has been stopped along the channel by some government official . . . we try to move into such a situation to advocate for our community. . . . After a particular group, either pit sawyers or people who want to do mining come to the town, [have] gone through the regular process and have been given the go ahead . . . if they try to crock us . . . where they ha[ve] already mined gold and completed but refusing to let us know or be sincere to us that they've collected minerals, refusing to [pay] the community what is due, we check behind them. So now once we find out the truth we file a complaint straight to the clan chief. This is done by our CBO not the community. If this is not settled at that level, then we take it to the commissioner or [a] higher authority (*YEEDG Interview #1*).

YEEDG was also engaged in additional ventures outside of forest governance. The CBO owned a plantain farm and used proceeds from the farm to pay for tuition for female students who had to drop out of school. The CBO also sought income-generating opportunities for members, for example by securing contracts from local pit-sawyers to porter logs from the plank-making site in the forest to the transportation site (*YEEDG Interview #1*).

The LGC was created with the primary purpose of addressing land governance issues but was also secondarily engaged in forest governance. For instance, at the time of the study, LGC was leading an effort to limit small-scale agricultural activity to young bush areas, which are areas with secondary rather than primary forest growth, as a way to preserve the potential of income generation from the forest:

> I will describe our role in managing the community forest as having meetings. After these meetings we make the announcement to the community members by telling them that they shouldn't destroy the forest. When we talk about destroying the forest this means they should not make farm[s] in the hard forest but instead should make their farm in the young bush. This is because it is hard forest that the companies see and decide to invest into a particular community forest. So once the hard forest that carries these different types of forest species has been damaged that means that no company will have the interest of coming to do any investment. For this reason, we make a strong announcement that no one should fell trees in the hard forest for any farming purpose (*LGC interview with official #1)*.

The DDC's main aim was to educate the community on their rights based on the Land Rights Act. However, the DDC was also involved in advocating for more accountable and transparent use of benefits from logging (*Interview with DDC official #1*). This included efforts to increase community oversight over other forest governance CBOs. A DDC office bearer provided an example of the role played in pressuring the CFDC to be more responsive and transparent.

> For instance, there is a plank committee in Yarpa town which the government superintendent appointed [his] people [to] this committee. So many community members are saying that the committee needs to be dissolved. . . . We had a meeting on the 25th of June and [we] recommended that the CFDC needs to make a report back to the community. This is because since this committee was last put in place, there has been no report made *(Interview with DDC official #1*).

The Role of CBIs

In both communities, women's and youth CBIs were formed to address specific concerns. There were also customary women's, men's, and youth groups. These groups were started with the blessing of the elders and reported relying heavily on the elders for support and advice. Women's CBIs were primarily engaged in activities to generate income and to assure a safety net for members, for instance during times of bereavement or illness. In both communities, the youth groups' main responsibility was to provide labor whenever needed for various community projects. The involvement of these groups in forest governance was mainly through participation in town hall meetings organized by community elders.

Elders' groups were the institution with the broadest authority over community life. Respondents could not remember exactly when the groups first came into existence but indicated they were formally recognized

in the 1940s (*Interview with Neezuin elders #2*). They consisted of elected men and women perceived to have the appropriate life experience and wisdom to impart to the rest of the community:

"We as the elders sitting before you today, we are considered elders because we have aged well. We are well with experience. That is why our community look[s] to us for wise decisions" (*Interview #2, Gblazeo elders*). At the time of the study, the Gblazeo elders' group was composed of 15 men and 15 women. The Neezuin elders' group was composed of 16 men and 5 women.

Elders mediated access to agricultural land and forest resources within both communities. Although they had final authority over land and forest use, these decisions were ideally arrived at by community consensus.

> We are elders to guide [and lead] the process. Anything that has to do with the community and its forest is everyone's business. Before a decision is made or concluded upon it must meet the consensus of everyone. First thing a general town hall meeting is called to have everyone informed about what the issue or situation is. Afterwards . . . everyone goes into their own smaller groups: youth, women, men, quarter chiefs, and then elders for discussion . . . then each group spokesperson all meet with the elders and gives out what each of their groups concluded and with that the elders [accept] and agree with what the majority has said (*Interview #2 with Gblazeo elders*).

Challenges to Community Participation

Although we did not exhaustively survey forest governance groups within the communities studied, our initial interviews with CBOs and CBIs did provide an overview of the overall structure of forest governance within the communities of Gblazeo and Neezuin. The interviews show that there was a robust range of stakeholders and mechanisms (including civil society backed groups, community advocacy groups, and customary-based institutions) through which community members could, theoretically, participate in forest governance. However, *all* officials interviewed acknowledged that they faced significant challenges in engaging community members, especially women, in activities and processes related to forest governance. This was true even within elders' groups where women were represented in significant numbers.

To understand the patterns of engagement in forest governance observed in these communities, we conducted a livelihoods analysis with the goal of understanding the structures of decision-making that produce different configurations of identity, activity, and responsibility within these communities. HURDL defines livelihoods as "ways of living in particular places," a more holistic definition than their instrumental framing as activities under frameworks such as the sustainable livelihoods approach (Carr 2013, 2014; Scoones 2009). This analysis, which considers the relationship of observed activities and outcomes to people's identities and understandings of the world, explains existing patterns of women's engagement in forest governance while highlighting opportunities to increase this engagement in a manner that produces better livelihoods and forest outcomes.

ESTABLISHING THE LOGIC OF LIVELIHOODS

1. The Vulnerability Context

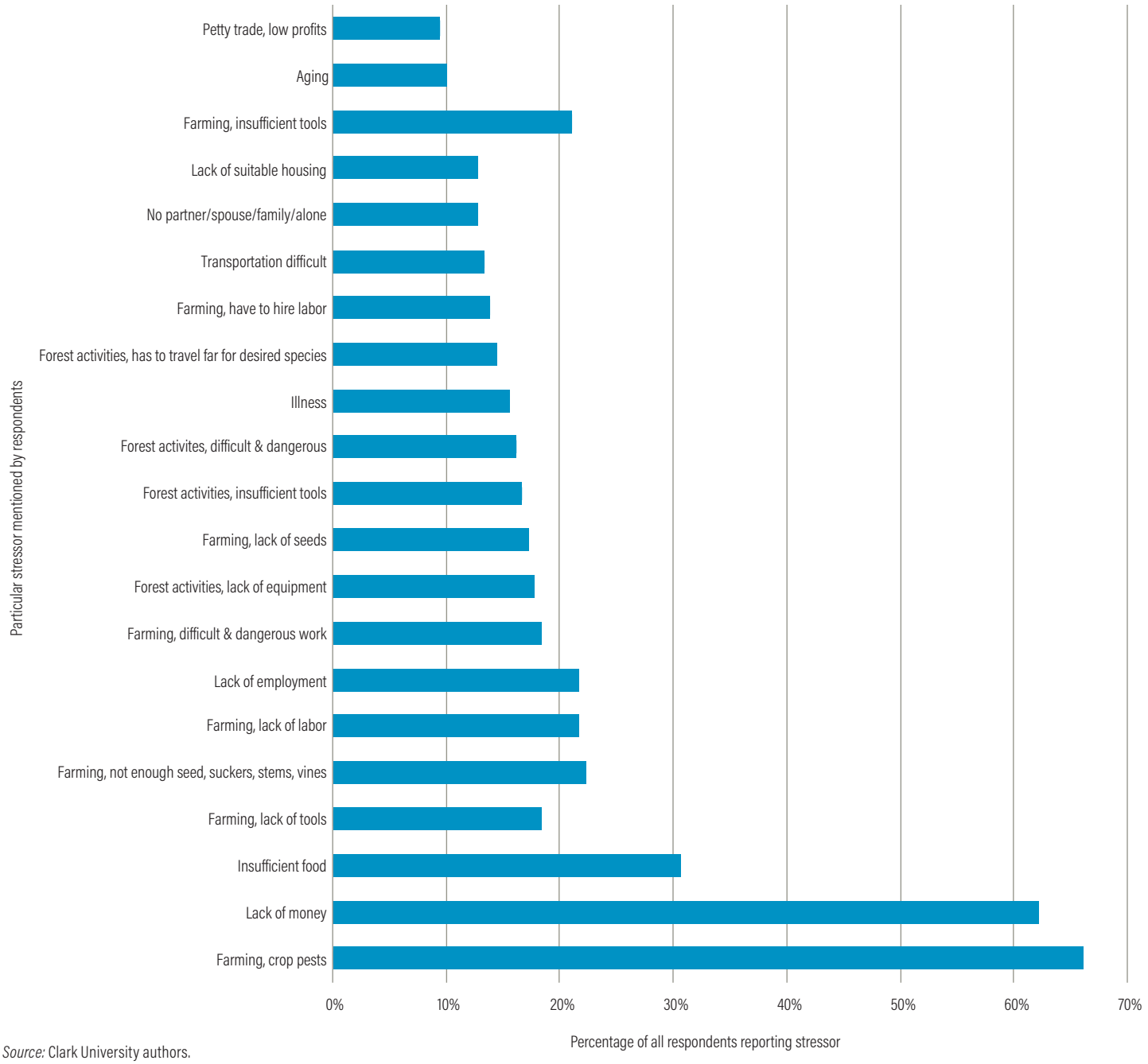
The livelihoods analysis began with an examination of the stressors that different community members, in both communities, prioritized in an effort to manage their social and material worlds. Figure 1 shows major livelihood stressors (reported by 10 percent or more of the respondents). Stressors related to farming (crop pests, access to tools, seeds and labor, and the physically demanding nature of farming) dominated the vulnerability context of respondents. This was closely followed by stressors related to forest-based activities (including lack of needed equipment and the physically demanding and dangerous nature of these activities). Lack of money and food insecurity were also major stressors.

Although these livelihood stressors resemble those one would expect to find in the area (Browne and Diop 2017), we determined that an analysis at the community level over-aggregated the experience of these stressors, potentially obscuring critical differences in the experiences of community members and consequently decision-making processes (see description of livelihood stressors in Liberia Livelihood Zone 4 in the Appendix). As can be seen in Figure 1, even the most commonly mentioned stressors were not reported by all the respondents interviewed. For instance, while 65 percent of respondents indicated that crop pests were their major livelihood concern, 35 percent of respondents did not perceive pests as a major concern. This indicates that different community members, although embedded within the same environmental and social context, experienced livelihood stressors in significantly different ways.

Disaggregating Vulnerability

Examining stressors prioritized by different people in the community shows not only how they may experience the same physical and social context in different ways, but how these experiences cluster among particular groups of people within the community. Looking at who reported which stressors, our analysis further disaggregated respondents into three groups with shared "assemblages of vulnerability." These groups represented individuals reporting similar experiences of the vulnerability context (stressors and livelihood activities) and access to resources

Figure 1 | **Livelihood Concerns Reported by 10 Percent or More of the Interview Sample**



Source: Clark University authors.

Table 1 | **Vulnerability Groups**

GROUP	LONG NAME	MAJOR LIVELIHOOD ACTIVITIES	OFF-FARM ACTIVITIES
SLAL	Severely Limited Asset Livelihoods	■ Primarily engaged in agriculture, forest-based livelihood activities	■ Men less likely to be engaged in off-farm activities ■ Women's capital for petty trade severely tenuous
LAL	Low Asset Livelihoods	■ Primarily engaged in agriculture, forest-based livelihood activities	■ Men likely to rely on self-employment ■ Women engaged in petty trade but at smaller volumes than those in AAL
AAL	Adequate Asset Livelihoods	■ Engaged in agriculture, forest-based livelihood activities ■ Highest reported rates of animal ownership ■ Some male respondents engaged in growing tree crops	■ Off-farm, salaried employment for men likely ■ Some households receive substantial remittances from relatives ■ Women engaged in petty trade

Source: Clark University authors.

which they employ to address these stressors. This allowed us to move from a general overview of vulnerability (as represented in Figure 1) to more specific experiences of vulnerability that capture differences in decision-making. The three groups were, from most to least vulnerable, Severely Limited Asset Livelihoods (SLAL), Low Asset Livelihoods (LAL), and Adequate Asset Livelihoods (AAL).[3] (See Table 1.)

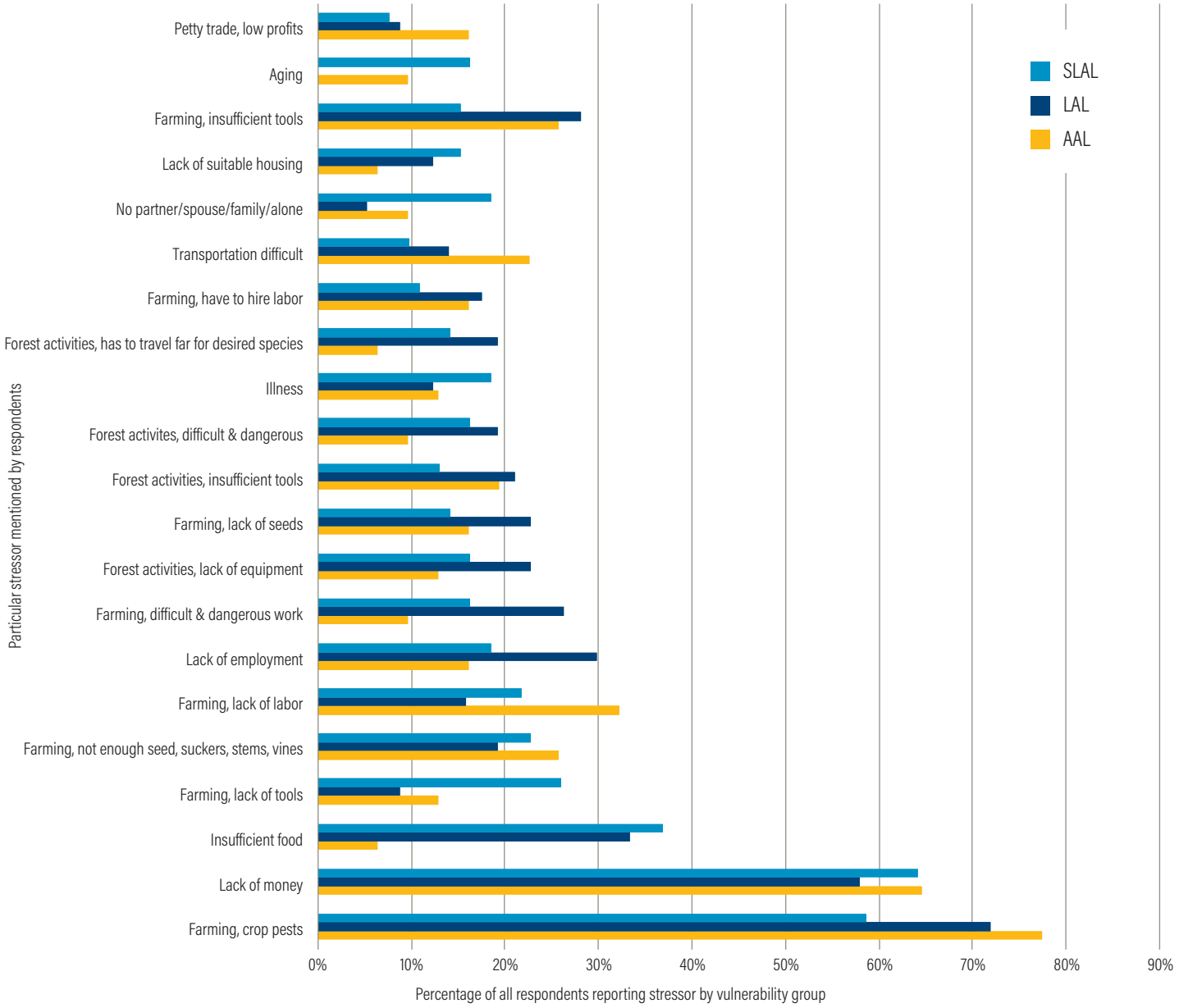
While respondents from all three vulnerability groups were engaged in agriculture and forest-based livelihood activities, their engagement with other activities varied by group. Women respondents across the three vulnerability groups participated in petty trade (vending activities done in small volumes). For SLAL women, petty trade was a tenuous activity as their capital was severely limited. Women with LAL had a more stable capital basis than those from SLAL households, which enabled greater engagement in petty trade. However, this was at a smaller scale than those with AAL. Similar to SLAL women, income from trading activities for LAL women was irregular. Men with SLAL were less likely to be engaged in off-farm activities and were more reliant on subsistence activities. Men in the LAL group were likely to be engaged in non-salaried, self-employed, off-farm activities. Unlike those in SLAL, LAL respondents had the resources to consistently hire needed labor to support agricultural production. AAL male respondents were likely to have tree crop plantations and/or off-farm salaried employment. Similar to respondents with LAL, those with AAL were consistently able to hire needed labor to support their agricultural activities. Figure 2 shows the different assemblages of vulnerability for the three groups.

A Closer Look at Some of the Main Stressors for Different Vulnerable Groups

SLAL HOUSEHOLDS

SLAL respondents, who belonged to the most resource-poor households, had the highest rate of concern for food insecurity (see Figure 2). This was a product of the serious difficulties that SLAL households faced in securing the labor, equipment, and other resources needed to engage in farming and other livelihood activities in the first place. SLAL households were more likely to be female- and single-male headed households, households with older members, and households with a sick wife or husband than those in other groups. Their tenuous hold on needed labor is reflected in the fact that those in SLAL households reported the highest rates of concern over stressors

Figure 2 | **Vulnerabilities Reported by Each Vulnerability Group**



Source: Clark University authors.

influencing household labor, including illness, not having a partner, and aging. Many other SLAL respondents lived in complex households because they were unable to build their own homes as they lacked the resources needed (GB11; GB21; GB83; GB88; NE24; NE36; NE40; NE61).

For female-headed households especially, the absence of male labor[4] greatly diminished the household's ability to engage in farming (GB04; GB05; GB24; GB33; GB52; GB57; GB59; NE04). For example, a 30-year-old woman belonging to a SLAL household explained that although she was married, her husband had migrated to Monrovia, taken up with another woman, and did not provide any support to the household. His absence made it very difficult for her to feed the household. "Since my husband's departure to Monrovia, I'm left alone . . . to struggle with our children, even daily meal[s], we don't have easily" (GB21, see also GB04). For some women, not having a male spouse was so disadvantageous that they could not engage in certain farming activities. As

a 34-year-old single woman stated, "I can't grow rice because I do not have a husband" (GB06).

For single-male headed households, the absence of female spouses normally responsible for planting, weeding, harvesting, and cooking was also a disadvantage (GB43). This is exemplified by a 42-year-old man who complained about the disadvantages of not having a wife during the planting season: "Since I'm a single man, I have severe hunger during this period [cassava planting season]" (GB17). Another, 18-year-old man desired to expand his farm but, when asked why he was unable to do so replied, "Yes, I want to make a big cassava farm, but I am not able because who will plant the cassava for me?" (GB96). In other SLAL households, men who were sick or aged themselves also recognized that their diminished physical capabilities significantly affected the capacity of their households to farm or pursue forest-based activities (GB12; GB61; NE08).

Lack of money was a major livelihood stressor for SLAL households. Given the shortage in household labor for agricultural production, SLAL female-headed households reported using cash to purchase their basic needs directly or to secure temporary labor for farming and forest-based activities (GB02; GB24; GB67; GB89). The mention of lack of money as a stressor was also related to the lack of capital to conduct petty trade. A 69-year-old SLAL woman highlighted this link when explaining why she was food insecure:

> "My grandchildren and I are almost starving daily from hunger . . . my daughter *(referring to the interviewer),* you are from the city. . . . As long as you live in the city and you are doing your petty trade, you hardly lack anything. But in the village here things are so different. And life is so unbearable. No money to even get a daily supply or meal regularly" (GB59).

LAL RESPONDENTS

From a material perspective, the situation of LAL respondents was very similar to that of SLAL respondents. Although more secure than SLAL households, many LAL respondents also struggled to feed their households, particularly during the planting season, before the harvest and when the other household resources have been depleted (GB02; GB89; GB91; GB93; GB44; GB51; GB79; GB91; NE33). However, these households had additional resources, such as animal assets and income-generating activities, that provided somewhat of a buffer during severe hunger periods. However, the key difference between these groups is one of orientation toward agricultural production. LAL respondents reflected a greater concern with insufficient agricultural equipment. This is different from the concern for no tools among members of the SLAL group. This concern suggests these residents were seeking to improve production rather than suffering from fundamental barriers to engaging in agricultural activities.

SLAL AND LAL RESPONDENTS' FOREST-RELATED VULNERABILITIES

In the context of forest-based activities, SLAL and LAL respondents reported very similar vulnerabilities. They were most affected by stressors related to the lack of equipment and the dangerous nature of these activities. Many SLAL and LAL respondents lacked essential equipment, including cutlasses and ladders, wire for setting traps, and guns and ammunition for hunting. Respondents described how a lack of safety equipment added to the risk of "death or everlasting back pain" (GB 57, see also GB23; GB39; GB57; NE52). For example, a 42-year-old SLAL man described palm cutting in this way: "It is a very risky process. The trees are long, sometimes we borrow reed [unsupported ladder] to climb the palm. If you are unlucky, the cutlass can cut you or you [c]ould encounter [a] snake and fear can make you fall [and] end up in perpetual back pain" (GB17). Being crushed by felled trees (GB39), attacked by wild animals (GB23; GB52), and injured from sharp equipment or brush (GB21; NE03; NE85) were cited as additional risks. SLAL and LAL respondents also lacked processing or storage equipment, such as drums for cooking palm oil. As a result, they were forced to delay their activities until they could borrow equipment from other community members. SLAL and LAL respondents also cited as a stressor having to travel long distances to find suitable plants and preferred animal species (GB37; GB39; GB44; GB57; GB60; GB79). This lack of equipment, risky nature of forest activities, and time spent searching for desired species made it impossible for SLAL and LAL respondents to expand their activities much beyond basic subsistence levels.

AAL RESPONDENTS

AAL respondents had a different profile of forest-related vulnerabilities. This includes the lowest rates of concern for a lack of essential equipment, the dangerous nature of forest activities, and having to travel far to acquire desired species. This difference is related to the character of the respondents' forest-based activities. When compared to

those with SLAL and LAL, AAL respondents engaged in different, higher-value forest activities, such as pit sawing or mining. AAL respondents were also less dependent on subsistence forest-based activities (palm cutting, hunting, and gathering) than were SLAL and LAL respondents. Those AAL respondents who participated in subsistence forest-based activities, such as hunting and palm cutting, were likely to rely on laborers to carry out these activities. As such, the dangerous nature of forest-based activities tended to be a secondary concern for AAL respondents. AAL respondents had the highest rates of concern related to crop pests and the lack of labor for farming.

These concerns reflected households that were secure in their production but were looking to expand their farming activities. The main challenges to achieving such an expansion for these households was a shortage of household labor or money to hire needed additional labor. This is in contrast to those in SLAL, who lacked money to fulfill their basic needs. For example, when asked about the problems he faced in pursuing a livelihood, a 41-year-old man from an AAL household described his livelihood stressors in this way:

> Insufficient funds to hire daily laborers. Due to the environmental protection agency law to protect the forest, there are some trained laborers that brush the forest without cutting down some trees, so we hired them to do the work. But it is cost intensive. . . . We sometimes go out to search for additional seed to plant, which also delays the process if you're not fortunate to get the seeds on time. . . . Palm planting—we lack formal training as to when to plant the palm. Because of lack of proper training or knowledge, we mostly work by guessing and sometimes work in vain. So, we need either a geologist or agriculturist to guide us through the process. Lack of sufficient farming equipment (GB001).

Therefore, for AAL households concerns for a lack of money were related to their desire to improve their lives, for instance through the expansion of agricultural activities or engagement in activities with high cash returns, such as palm plantations (GB15; GB29; NE04; NE28; NE34), building a new house (NE06; NE10), or paying school fees (GB60; GB82; GB90; GB91; NE26; NE64).

ACCESS TO FOREST RESOURCES

Although those interviewed across the three vulnerability groups did not volunteer access to forest resources as a significant livelihood stressor, when asked about access, 38 percent of all respondents believed it was limited. Additionally, there were gendered dimensions to access to forest resources. Women in both communities stated that they did not "just" go into the forest (GB24; GB76; GB88), and that they did not "really use the forest as men" (GB55). As a 46-year-old woman explained, "To have sufficient access to forest resources you need to be a man, or a citizen, but most likely a man, because access to the forest resources depends on your sex" (GB05). Most women saw gender as the main factor shaping their tenuous access to forest resources.

Women's access to forest resources, as in farming, was strongly mediated by the presence, health, and age of adult males (spouses in particular) in the household (GB11; GB29; GB33; GB 36; GB38; GB52; GB80). As one woman explained, "I don't have access to forest resources because it is my husband who does a lot with forest resources" (GB011). Women also perceived access to agricultural land as more assured than to forest resources. A 57-year-old woman belonging to a SLAL household explained: "I don't have sufficient access to forest resources. Though, I have some access to the land [to use for farming] as a traditional asset" (GB19).

Where women were concerned with their physical ability to conduct forest-based activities and the ways in which men might restrict their participation in these activities, for men the principal stressor shaping their participation in forest-based activities, aside from access to equipment and health, was their status as natal citizens or strangers. As one man noted, "I do not have sufficient access to the forest resources because I am a stranger. I can't just go in the forest, except if I ask the people permission before working there" (GB 64; see also GB16; GB78). For all community members, farming and forest-based activities were also restricted to areas not under commercial logging (NE63; NE83; NE84).

Clearly, livelihood activities and the ways in which residents spoke about and conducted these activities varied across groups and genders. To explain this variation, we turn to the ways in which livelihood activities in these communities mobilized aspects of individual identity to define what should be done, how it should be done, and by whom.

2. Developing a Context-Specific Understanding of Identity

In this section, we outline the relationship between identity and roles and responsibilities, with particular attention to gender. We first outline conceptualizations of ideal women and men within the two communities and then the roles and responsibilities and decision-making attached to these identities.

The Ideal Woman

In Gblazeo and Neezuin, livelihood activities took shape at the household level. Gender was an important aspect in shaping identity, roles, and responsibilities as well as decision-making within this social unit. Both men and women saw obedience and deference to husbands as fundamental parts of women's identity. A good woman was described as someone who was obedient and respectful to her husband (GB09; GB32; GB93; NE01; NE13; NE27; NE55; NE75) in everything (GB35; GB53; GB55; GB67). Ideally, women were expected to listen to their husbands' advice (GB79; GB27; NE64) and obey decisions without argument (NE03; NE25; NE61; NE71). Women were also associated with the domestic sphere and expected to manage and spend a majority of their free time within the home (NE09; NE15; NE17; NE30; NE41) taking care of children, husbands, and various relatives and visitors (GB58; GB66; GB76; GB88; NE19). They were expected to contribute to the welfare of the household by helping their husbands feed the household, including during periods of economic hardship and illness (GB34; GB74; NE23).

Expectations of obedience for women went beyond spouses to include obedience to elders and local authorities (GB06; GB69; GB85; GB87; NE30). In this regard, women were expected to support their communities, follow community norms and take part in community activities (GB07; GB15; GB33; GB87; GB91; NE30; NE50). In addition to the characteristics mentioned above, good senior women were expected to be kind, welcoming, and loving to all community members and respect and listen to people's views. (See as examples GB54; GB68; GB84; GB96; NE21; NE30; NE56; NE 60; NE64.) They also were held up as role models for young people and looked to for life advice, particularly by younger women. (See, for example, GB 22; GB32; GB52; GB96; NE41; NE79; NE97.)

Women's Roles and Responsibilities

These constructions of ideal womanhood translated into specific roles and responsibilities and therefore specific decision-making capacities. In addition to taking care of domestic work and providing labor for livelihood activities, women contributed to the provision of food and helped meet other household expenditures, such as school fees, medical care, and small consumer goods like salt, sugar, and clothes (GB 05; GB33; NE14). As expected, women in female-headed households reported that they were solely responsible for the provision of all needs for their families. Wives reported contributing a significant portion of the money to build a family home (GB15; GB83). Women commented that they provided "motherly care" for their families by gathering firewood, cooking, cleaning, fetching water for domestic needs, preparing bathing water for their husbands, watching over children, and assuring the general happiness of their households. They carried out farming tasks, such as planting and weeding. Even when husbands paid for agricultural laborers, women were still responsible for supervising their activities (NE38; NE50; NE70). During the planting period, women were also responsible for hauling water to farms until crops were established. Although they participated in harvesting, no women reported primary responsibility for this task.

In relation to forest-based activities, women participated in trapping and were primarily responsible for preparing and setting these traps.[5] Women grew or harvested from the forest various vine and bush species needed to make snares. Some women hunted using dogs. However, women reported relying on men to check traps and carry home the catch. No women reported hunting with guns. Bush meat caught from hunting and trapping was consumed within the household or sold by women in local markets. Those who engaged in fishing also harvested various forest vines and bamboo for making fishing baskets. Women were also responsible for cooking palm oil for the household and for its sale on a small scale, and they dried and sold country spice *(Xylopia aethiopica*). A few women bred hunting dogs.

Beyond their responsibilities for carrying out domestic tasks and the provision of labor for livelihood activities, women's roles were defined by expectations of participation in community life. The notion of being a responsible and dependable community member was particularly important and was tied to their domestic roles and responsibilities. In this regard, women acted as custodians of medical knowledge within communities.

All the traditional healers interviewed for the study were women. With the exception of one woman, all women interviewed were part of various women's groups and committees that were obligated to do good works within the community. For example, in Neezuin a women's committee saw part of their responsibility as welcoming strangers visiting the town with love and care, making sure that they were provided meals, bathing water, were conversed with, and had other needs taken care of. Committees that were composed of younger women in both communities were responsible for keeping the town and watersides (wherever women fetched drinking and cooking water) clean. *Sande6* elders women's groups in both communities worked with young women, advising them on how to care for children and family. They also claimed to advise all women on how to conduct themselves appropriately within the community. Only 15 women admitted that they had been to *Sande7* bush school and were members of the society. This, however, is likely to be an under-representation of the actual numbers of women who belonged to this secret society. Yet another women's committee organized games among surrounding towns and villages to promote peace and unity. In addition to customary ways of engaging in public life, women in both communities were also members of various women-only CBOs. The primary aim of these latter groups was to raise income for members to deal with emergencies or to be able to expand petty trade and other livelihood activities.

Decision-making for women was directly linked to the social constructions of women as obedient and deferential to their husbands. (It is important to emphasize that this deference does not necessarily apply to other men within the community unless they hold positions of authority.) Although they were expected to be obedient members of the household and family, this did not require that women surrender all decision-making autonomy. Both men and women agreed that women had joint decision-making authority with husbands over the use of grains and tubers within the household. However, women had the freedom to decide the use of vegetable crops, such as bitter ball, okra, and pepper. Women could also make decisions over certain farming equipment, including hoes, as well as over some assets that they themselves owned, particularly livestock. This was especially so when such decisions served the needs of the household. This decision-making authority also extended to where women could keep their livestock assets. Some women reported keeping their goats with relatives in other towns. Women also retained significant decision-making authority over the sale of bush meat and palm oil, as well as over income from their petty trade activities. It is clear, however, that overall women's agricultural, animal husbandry, and forest-based activities were subsumed under the authority of adult men in the household and that any major decisions had to be made with the consent of men. In addition, although women had substantial decision-making power over income from trading, men controlled the extent to which women could participate in petty trade. For example, one woman, when explaining her livelihood preferences, said, "I want to only do my business and forget about the farm work, but my husband does not agree" (GB44). Another woman explained that she wanted to expand her business "but my husband does not allow me to do it" (GB74).

In female-headed households, decisions over the use of land, farming equipment, and food were made solely by women. As a 34-year-old woman explained, "I can decide how to use these resources, because I do not have a husband" (GB06). It is important to note, however, that even though these women made decisions and were responsible for the provision of their families' needs, most preferred normative arrangements (as an act of self-censure) where men took care of the family's needs. A 38-year-old woman described how she would prefer to do the work meant for a woman within the household: "The main work I can do as a woman, if I have a man, I can wash his clothes, cook for him, take care of the home. . . . I do not have a man, so I can decide what to do. But if I had a man, he can decide" (GB20).

The Ideal Man

Men's identities were framed around their ability to provide for and take care of their families, as well as the ability to demonstrate leadership skills. Men's roles and responsibilities and their decision-making authority were strongly tied to the intersection of their gender and roles as the head of the household, husbands, and community leaders. A 41-year-old man described his role in this way: "As a man, husband, I provide food, security, and protective care for my household. I also implement orderliness and control [within the home]" (GB01, see also, GB 09; GB23; GB43; GB49; GB67; GB77; GB95; NE08; NE15; NE41; NE46; NE76; NE80; NE84). For men, striving to fulfill these expectations was more than simply providing material goods to their families. It was how men showed care, gained respectability, and maintained their reputation within the community. Those who played these roles well demonstrated their character and gained esteem. As such, men sought to

meet these expectations for their extended families as well, even when this disadvantaged their immediate household. A 27-year-old man demonstrated this when explaining why his household faced food shortages: "As a young man, my mother and my family depend on me for nearly everything. With my low income, we always have insufficient food. Especially our kids don't have sufficient food to eat" (GB77). As another respondent remarked, "It is only myself that struggles to do all of the work. To be a man is not easy. You have to be strong" (NE50). The respondent was articulating how the condition of the household, whether it was resource limited or secure was directly attributed to a man's efforts and abilities.

Men's Roles and Responsibilities

As providers, men were responsible for ensuring there was adequate food and that all major family expenses, including school fees and medical bills, were met (GB43; GB87; GB77; GB87; NE26; NE68; NE76; NE84). In order to feed their households, men cleared land to "make a farm for their wives" (GB42) and provided labor for household farming (NE50; NE61; NE79). They were also responsible for carrying out most of the tasks associated with forest activities, including hunting and trapping of wild game, cutting palm, and harvesting country spice (GB22; GB23; GB62; GB82; GB84). In some cases, men provided for women's personal needs: "As a man, I provide for my household, I take good care of my wife, I give her money to buy clothes for herself" (GB66, see also GB60; GB62; GB84; GB94). In most cases, however, wives met their own personal needs. To provide "protective care" for their households, men were responsible for building a suitable home for their family and for the physical security and safety of their household members (GB09; GB23; GB37; GB49; GB67; GB95). Older men who could no longer engage physically in livelihood activities contributed to the security of their households by watching over their family compounds during the day (GB61; GB65). There was also an emphasis on the ability of men to maintain orderliness and control within the home (GB01).

As with women, men were also expected to be responsible community members and actively participate in community life (NE41; NE67; NE97). Senior men had the broadest set of expectations in this regard. The most mentioned desirable characteristic for these men was wisdom and the capacity to give good advice and educate other community members. These men were also expected to participate in town affairs (NE50; NE56; NE60; NE64) and make good decisions for the community in fairness (GB19; GB50; GB69; GB95; NE41). Senior men were also expected to be helpful, kind, and loving to everyone (NE60; NE71). Young men were expected to obey community authority (NE60) and, at the same time, strive to demonstrate leadership.

The decisions men made aligned with these responsibilities. Men had ultimate control over productive assets and made decisions over resources related to farming and forest-based activities for household members. Both men and women agreed that male household heads made decisions about the use of land and agricultural equipment (GB009; GB10; GB15; GB18; GB25). This was the case even though community members acknowledged that land, as a communal asset inherited from past generations, rightfully belonged to all citizens of the community. A 46-year-old woman illustrated this point when asked if she had access to agricultural land. She explained that it was her right to use agricultural land as "the land is a traditional possession from our forefathers, so it's every citizen's right to farm it" (GB05). Another 35-year-old woman went further and identified not only her rights over the use of land but also that it belonged to her: "I inherit[ed] land from our forefathers." But when asked who made decisions over the use of this land, she replied, "My husband decides on how things are being used" (GB35, see also other interviews with women about land, GB02; GB04; GB06; GB15; GB19; GB72; GB88; GB90).

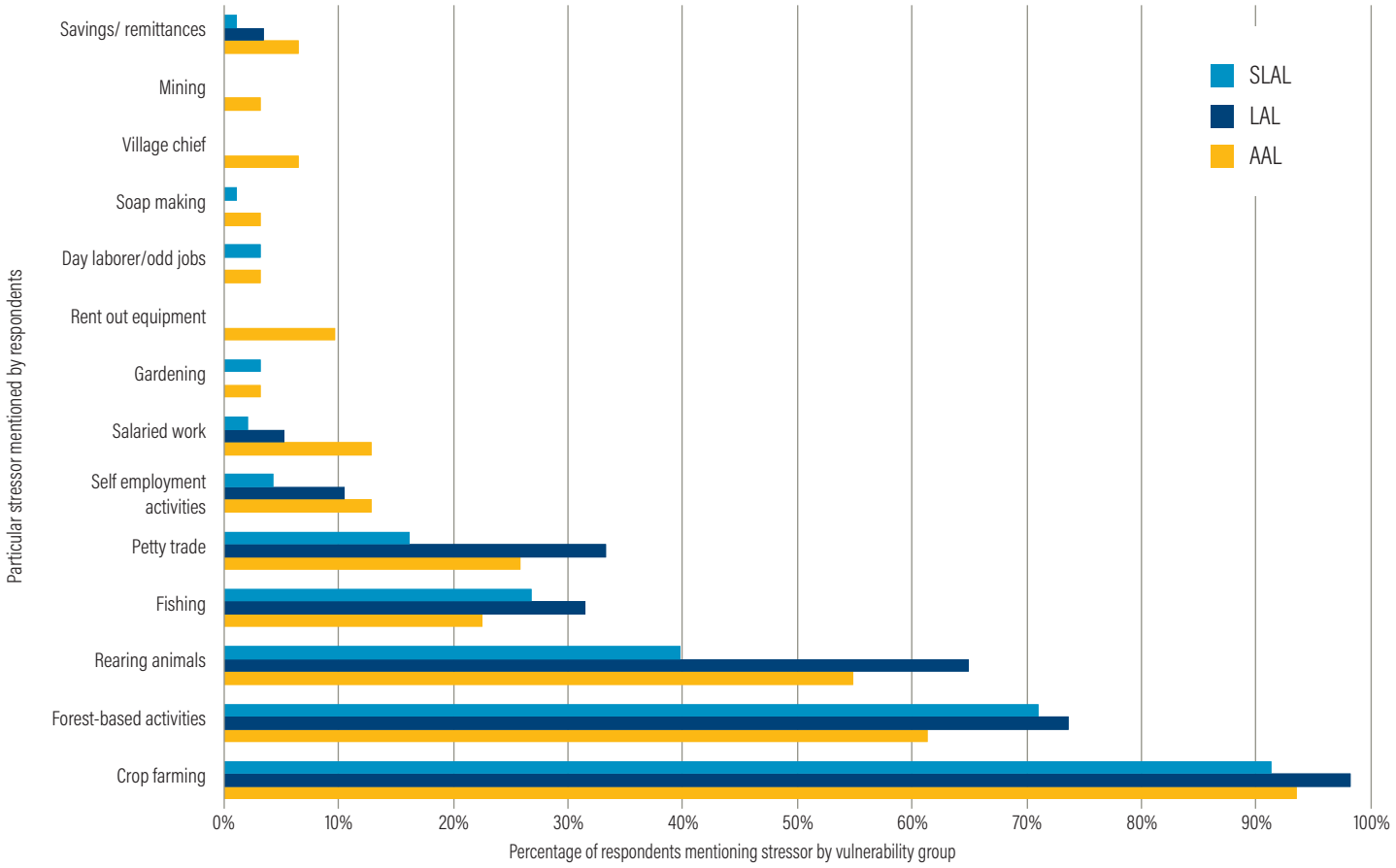
There was no indication that decisions over productive assets were linked to seniority status with regard to age. Rather, the right to make these decisions was linked to the man considered the head of the household by the community and the household itself. We found several cases where decision-making over land and agricultural and forest equipment was shared among adult men. For example, there were cases with young men, who had not established their independent households, in which more senior men (fathers, brothers, brothers in-law) made decisions about the use of land and any equipment for the former (GB13; GB17). In other cases, senior men ceded decision-making to junior men in cases where the latter were the head of household. A senior man who resided with his son-in-law indicated that the latter made decisions for the household (GB65). In another case, a 74-year-old man who lived with his son deferred decisions on the use of land and equipment (GB61). Men also often made decisions over the use of grains (including rice, cassava, and plantain), palm oil, and bush meat and over

the use of livestock within the household (GB18; GB22; GB42; GB50; GB58; GB62; GB66; GB70). However, the rights of men to make decisions about the use of grains and food within the household were not as strongly defined as those about land and farming equipment.

Senior men had myriad ways to participate in community life and demonstrate leadership. A focal point of these men's participation in community life was as elders who, as indicated before, advised people, mediated disputes and access to communal resources, represented the community in dealings with external groups, and provided information on matters that had an impact on the community (GB01; GB32; GB49; GB51; GB 61; GB65; GB94; NE36; NE54; NE64). Some elders served additional special roles as advisors. One elder served as an advisor to the youth group (NE46), another as an advisor to a pit sawing group (NE50), and another claimed that he acted as advisor to-the elders council. Outside of their roles as elders, senior men also had other opportunities to demonstrate leadership and to act as advisors. For example, some men served on the chief's council (NE41); others served as speakers on behalf of the men in community meetings (GB50). One man valorized such leadership, saying, "I am an opinion leader in my community. I am respected. My views are of concern to many people" (NE81). Young men were part of customary youth groups and occupied most of the leadership positions for these groups (GB64; GB58; GB70; NE21; NE34; NE100). Youth groups included both male and female community youths.

For many men, balancing the desire to fulfill their household responsibilities and the need to act as leaders within the community was a difficult undertaking. This is demonstrated by one of the chiefs, who described the difficulties in balancing his role as chief with his roles as husband and farmer. Being chief provided him with prestige, respect, and the blessing of his kinsmen, and, because all community projects were implemented in consultation with him, the job was occasionally lucrative. However, this did not excuse him from his farming duties:

Figure 3 | **Livelihood Activities across All Vulnerability Groups**



Source: Clark University authors.

> With this pro-bono service [being chief] there is always some level of misunderstanding in the home between my wife and me. She feels that, as a man, I must be on time with my farming activity rather than sitting and judging cases all day, which I'm not paid for. This is a problem, which I try to cope with (GB01).

3. Discourses of Livelihoods

Building on the previous section in which we explored gendered roles and responsibilities, here we consider why particular livelihood activities were taken up within this community and explain why those who participate in specific activities do so by exploring which activities fit into the specific roles and responsibilities described above. As can be seen in Figure 3, respondents from across all vulnerability groups engaged in five major livelihood activities (farming, forest-based activities, livestock keeping, fishing, and petty trade).[8] We focus particularly on farming and forest-based activities, which were the main livelihood activities for respondents.

Farming

Community members with natal rights (both men and women who could trace their ancestral lineage to the community) had free access to forest land for farming. "Stranger" men and women, individuals who themselves or their parents had relocated to the area, did not have the same land rights. In the words of a 27-year-old man, "I do not have land because this area is not my home. I lived in Cestos city. Because my mother died, my father naturalize[d] himself here. Therefore, I left Cestos" (GB08). Even where access was granted for stranger men and women, access to the land was not guaranteed over the long term (GB57). For example, a 26-year-old man explained that he had to request land from the elders every planting season (GB78).

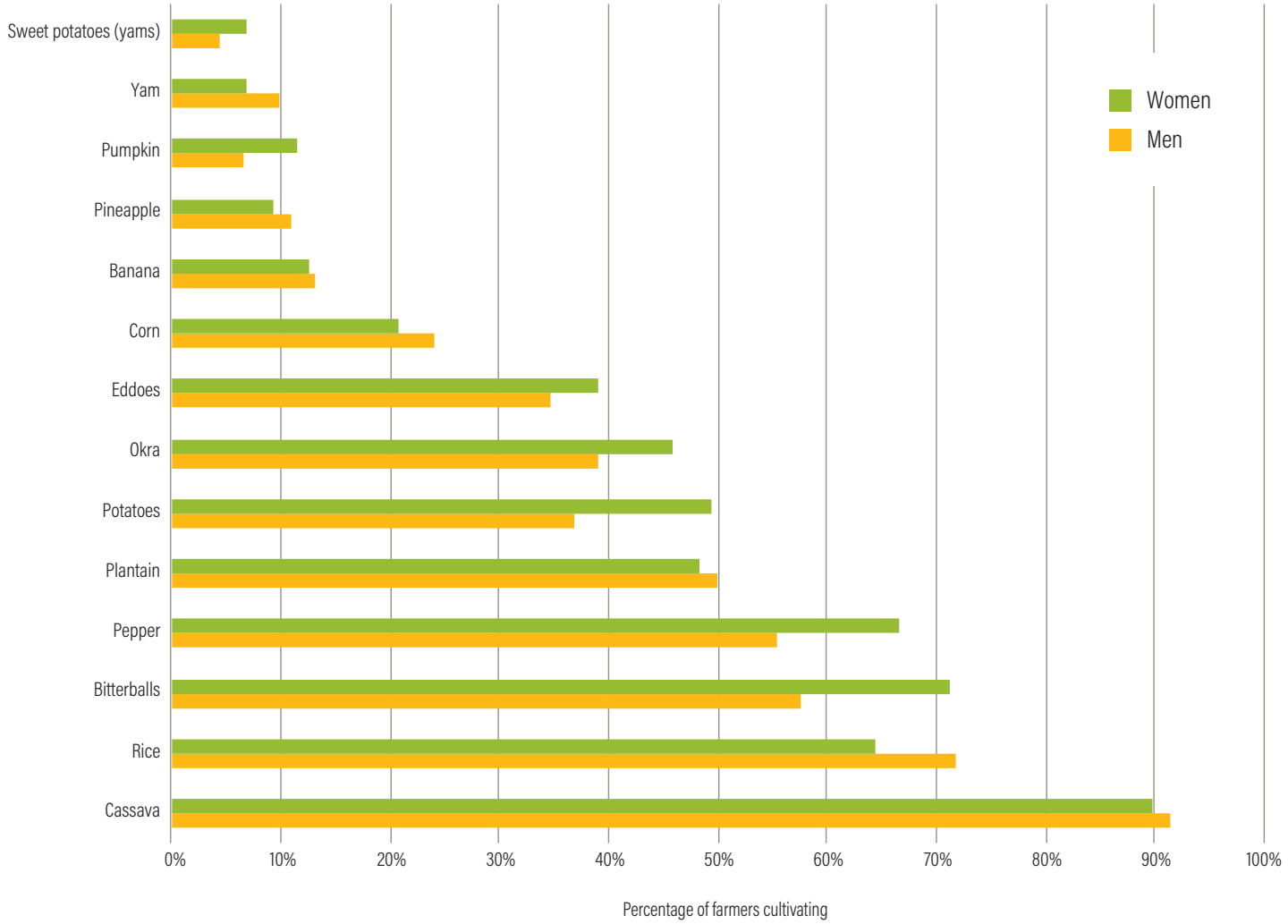
While shaped by natal status, in practice farming was not highly gendered in these communities. Overall, women cultivated a larger average number of crops than men. This was also true in AAL and SLAL households, though in LAL households men cultivated a slightly larger number of crops than women. While AAL households may have been the most secure, among men it was those living in LAL households who cultivated the largest average number of crops on their farms (6.1), while those with SLAL averaged 4.5. Among women, those with AAL cultivated the largest average number of crops (6.7) while those with SLAL cultivated the lowest average (5.7).

There is little difference in the crops cultivated by men and by women in these communities (Figure 4) and relatively little difference in the crops cultivated across the groups. This is a pattern of unusual consistency, suggesting that the relatively limited suite of livelihood opportunities in these communities has produced somewhat homogenous opportunities for the residents, and differences in relative wealth and authority are relatively small across these groups. Discourses about farming centered on the role that the activity played in feeding families and providing income. Rice and cassava were the primary staple crops in both communities. Ninety-one percent of those respondents who reported on the utilization of rice consumed most of their rice production within the household. Forty percent of those who reported on the utilization of cassava ate most of their cassava production, and another 47 percent consumed approximately half and sold the other half. Subsistence crops were selected by their suitability for household consumption, as based, for instance, on their taste or versatility to be prepared in various forms. Crops were also selected because they reduced the hunger period. Cassava, for example, was grown because of its ability to last for a long period in the field without rotting, meaning it could be harvested during the lean period. Crop sales were an important source of income to meet household needs, such as school fees, clothes, food, and medication (NE004; NE44; NE58). Plantain and sweet potatoes were the most commonly grown crops to earn cash. Seventy-eight percent of respondents sold most of their plantain harvest, and 65 percent of respondents sold most of their sweet potato harvest. Okra and bitter ball (African eggplant), the crops over which women had the most decision-making authority, were utilized both for consumption and as a source of income. For example, 50 percent of those reporting on the cultivation of okra ate most of the harvest, 25 percent sold most of the harvest, and the remaining 25 percent sold half and consumed half of the harvest. Finally, crops, whether cultivated primarily for consumption or for sale, were an important source of gifting among relatives and friends.

Forest-Based Activities

Forest-based activities were an important source of household food and medicine, as well as a significant source of income for both men and women. Across the community, these activities were particularly important in helping respondents meet their responsibilities to maintain the household. There was a distinction between primarily subsistence- and commercially-oriented

Figure 4 | **Crops Cultivated by More than 10 Percent of the Sample, by Gender**



Source: Clark University authors.

activities. Snails, mushrooms, poles used for construction, thatch, reed, firewood, and medicines were more likely to be consumed within the household with negligible sales of surpluses (with the exception of herbalists who sold most of their medicinal harvest). Meats from hunting and trapping, timber from pit sawing, and palm oil were used within the household but were mainly conceptualized as activities to earn money. Respondents reported selling 60 percent of their bush meat, 70 percent of their country spice, 100 percent of their timber, and 70 percent of their palm oil. Community members who intended to begin pit sawing or mining operations in forested areas were compelled by social norms to consult elders. For those from outside the community, such consultation was obligatory. In both cases, a fee was negotiated between the elders and the entrepreneur as a thank-you to the community. These fees then funded various collectively agreed-upon community projects. If private companies were seeking to establish concessions, elders represented community interests during the initial negotiation process (*Interview #2, Gblazeo elders*). Charcoal production occurred on a small scale (only two respondents reported burning charcoal). This was partly because of the isolation of the communities from urban areas, which are the potential market for charcoal. Households within the community relied on firewood for their own fuel needs. Because of this, we were unable to draw conclusions about this activity. However, there is a potential for charcoal to become a major commercial activity if the road networks connecting the communities to urban areas improve. As with farm produce, plants and meat harvested from the forest were an important source of gifting to relatives and friends.

Many forest-based activities were considered traditional legacies from the forefathers and, partially because of this, were conceptualized as most suitable for men. Some forest activities in which men participated, including charcoal burning, pit sawing, mining, and hunting with guns, were not easily available to women. Interestingly, discussions with women about forest activities focused not on exclusionary social norms, but on the fact that these forest-based livelihood activities were physically demanding. Women emphasized that, because of their limited strength relative to men, they could not undertake the hard labor needed for most forest-based activities: "Due to my status as a woman I am unable to brush well, fell trees, climb tall trees, and many other things that I do not have the ability to do" (GB21). A 54-year-old woman further illustrated this conception of forest-based activities when she quipped, "As a lady, I am so limited in strength that I can't access many forest resources (GB85, see also, GB21; GB05; GB29; GB41; GB89; GB81; GB85; GB69; GB55; GB53; GB75; GB83; GB91; GB93).

This perception of women's strength was rooted in the social facts, mostly unquestioned framings of the legitimacy, boundaries, and possibilities of people's behaviors in relation to the strategies employed to pursue livelihoods (Carr 2013, 2014; Gidwani 2001) that emerged in these communities at the intersection of discourses of livelihoods and the ways in which they mobilized individual identities. Thus, although the notion of a woman being too weak to do forest work might be a social fact supported by particular constructions of identity and appropriate work, it was not a reflection of physical reality. After all, some women did engage in forest-based and other livelihood activities that required significant physical strength, including gathering firewood, cutting bamboo for basket making, harvesting country spice, and trapping. Moreover, despite the conceptualization of forest activities as male activities, because forest-based activities were an important source of food and were more lucrative than farming, women in female-headed households sought to engage in these activities independent of adult males.

Other Livelihood Activities

While engagement with other livelihood activities varied by group, this variation is linked to the assets and other resources available to individuals in the different groups. For example, while women in all three groups engaged in petty trading, women in SLAL households had the lowest rate of engagement because there were few resources with which to seed such an activity. Thus, residents of these communities had a shared understanding of how to conduct such activities, their desirability, and who should be conducting them, even if their rates of engagement with these activities varied across groups. Animal keeping was limited mainly to fowl, goats, and dogs. Goats and fowl were consumed within the household, used as a source of quick income in case of emergencies, and gifted to friends and relatives. Dogs were particularly important for hunting. They were kept and bred by both men and women, and breeding was an important source of income in both communities. Dogs were also invaluable in keeping animal pests away during the growing season (GB08; GB72; NE06; NE15; NE38). Fishing was primarily a subsistence activity with 72 percent of respondents who reported eating all their catch. Petty trade (including the sale of food, grains, poultry, nonfood household items, and clothes) was strongly associated with women. For women, trading was an important activity since it was one of the few ways in which they could legitimately generate their own income and attain financial independence. As one woman explained, she traded because she could spend her money at will (GB55). Women who engaged in trade described it as their highest source of independent income, generating more money than farming or other forest-based activities. Women also described trading as a way of life and saw trading as rewarding work.

4. Tools of Coercion

The mobilization of roles and responsibilities by discourses of livelihoods that define the appropriate conduct of livelihood activities, including who engages in those activities, created a set of compelling expectations for men and women. These expectations acted as social facts but were not necessarily sufficient to regulate conduct, as they produce different levels of benefit and opportunity for different members of the community. Tools of coercion, locally legitimate means of regulating behavior of enforcing expectations and behavior, were critical to ensuring that community members adhered to expected norms of behavior even when these norms created disadvantages or other challenges. These tools are legitimate insofar as their use ensures that individuals play their roles and thus maintain the safety and certainty that existing livelihoods provide, however unequal the outcomes might be. In this section, we outline which tools were employed to reinforce desired behavior, and who had the power to wield these tools should individuals fail to meet expectations.

Identifying who is a legitimate target for tools of coercion requires understanding what sorts of behaviors are seen as transgressions that move people outside the roles and responsibilities associated with their identities. Not surprisingly, the behavior most often mentioned by a woman was arguing with or disobeying her husband's decisions, expressing anger or disagreement with her husband in public, and refusing to conform to community norms or to submit to local authority (GB13; GB23; GB37; GB66; GB67; GB69; GB76; GB77). Those who did not "keep their home well"—meaning those for whom most of their time and energy was not seen as expended toward the motherly care of their family and house—were described as undesirable women as they did not sit at home (GB10; GB15; GB20; GB79; GB93; NE 23; NE29; NE70; NE18; NE43; NE64). Women "who wanted to be men" (those who participated in traditionally male activities or did not participate in community activities in the prescribed ways) caused problems for their husband in the community through their bad behaviors and were also seen as behaving inappropriately (GB57; NE43; NE64). Senior women who did not share their things or give good advice were considered as behaving inappropriately (GB05; GB06; NE19; NE43).

Women who displayed inappropriate behavior faced an escalating set of sanctions from their spouses and the community. Non-physical sanctions were likely to be employed after an initial transgression. Some men refused to eat their wife's food (thus harming her status as a domestic provider) or would avoid her for some time. Women could be turned over to female elders to be advised (GB42; GB64), fined (GB001), or could be sent back to their natal home for a time of reflection (GB55; GB57). If a wife's disrespectful behavior was blatant enough to be observed by others in the community, then her husband lost respect within the community (GB05). This loss of respect was explicitly mentioned as a sanction against the woman rather than the man: "When a woman is considered a bad wife, her husband is looked down upon because of his wife's attitude" (GB15; see also GB51; GB91). This quote illustrates the pressures not only for men to be seen to have control of their households, but also for pressures of household members to conform to the authority of the man. A woman's behavior was not only sanctioned by men and elders but also by her peers. Women disassociated from distrusted women and avoided others who were behaving in undesirable ways (GB15; GB81; NE41). If the woman in question encountered a problem, other women did not offer any assistance (GB34; GB38; GB74; GB94). Although it was a tool most likely to be employed against children, if wives were not fulfilling their responsibilities, men saw physical violence as a legitimate course of action. Several heads of household indicated that if anyone within their household disobeyed their decisions, they risked being whipped or confined to the house for a day. If a husband physically disciplined his wife and it was determined that it was justified, then community members did not intervene on behalf of the woman. Finally, if what was deemed as undesirable behavior persisted, men also left their wives and divorced (GB31; GB67; NE41; NE60). Outside of the household, if women were seen to be behaving badly within the community, they were excluded from activities with other women, women's gatherings, and women's community organizations and could not take part in any major decision-making at the community level (GB09; GB17; GB20; GB43; GB93; GB87; GB83). The potential consequences for challenging social norms for women, therefore, were severe: "When a woman is considered a bad wife in the community, she's turned over to the leadership of the community women. Every action taken there is carried out by the entire town against her" (GB01). There were no formal sanctions against women elders (senior women). However, instead of being revered, bad senior women were likely to be ignored and isolated within the community and did not receive any help from community members (GB17; GB20; GB58; NE47).

The most mentioned behavior of men that drew sanction was the inability to take care of their responsibilities by providing for their households. Men seen as inconsiderate and disrespectful toward their wives also attracted sanction, as were men who were alcoholics, did not listen to advice from elders, and were loners. As with women, men who were behaving in undesirable ways faced the threat of isolation and abandonment. They were despised, not respected, and their families did not appreciate them (GB11; GB83; GB89; NE41; NE60; NE70). Respondents described these men as "useless" people who were not taken into account when decisions were being made and were avoided by their peers (GB15; GB89; NE41). Community women were afraid of such men, and even children looked down upon them.

Problematic men were also subject to sanctions. They could be referred to community elders and were fined if they did not amend their ways (GB01). If problematic behavior continued, men could be stripped of any privileged role within the community and not allowed to make important decisions about community life, nor could they join any organization within the community (GB06;

GB09; GB53; GB70; GB80). If a man was turned over to male community elders for bad behavior and he did not amend his ways, he faced the possibility of being evicted from the town (NE64).

LIVELIHOOD DECISION-MAKING AND ENGAGEMENT IN FOREST GOVERNANCE

We have framed different livelihood activities and decisions as efforts to order the social and material world on a path toward the achievement of safety and certainty in a manner that preserves the privileges of those in positions of authority. It is now possible to identify the sources (both material and social) of the threats to the residents' well-being reported in the assessment of their vulnerabilities, and use this information to interpret patterns of participation in forest governance. We can also distinguish potentially useful pathways for enhancing the engagement of women in forest governance.

1. Participation in Management and Use of Forest Resources

Discussions with CBO and CBI officials revealed several dimensions related to the influence of gender and livelihood decision-making on participation in forest governance. As indicated before, all CBOs and CBIs interviewed pointed to significant challenges in getting women involved in forest governance. This was partially related to the construction of forest activities as male activities, possibly contributing to the conceptualization of public forest governance processes as a male domain. From the analysis of livelihood decision-making we saw that differences in livelihood assets, stemming from the distinctive position of men and women as social actors, produced different abilities to execute desired forest-based activities. Also, perceived physical ability governed forest access and subsequent livelihood choices. While both men and women noted that forest activities can be dangerous, the data did not indicate that men adjusted their behavior. Men assumed the danger or risk as an acceptable part of meeting their responsibilities, whereas for women the perceived danger or risk worked to exclude them from accessing certain forest resources.

CBO and CBI officials also indicated that women faced limitations in time and labor due to domestic and farming responsibilities that constrained their ability to participate in any activities outside of the home. In line with the expectations of the roles and responsibilities that women should play within the household, a male member of the CFDC explained why women were not engaged in the committee in this way: "Women have a lot to do at home, such as taking care of children, their husbands, and preparing food for the entire family as well" (*Interview #3 CFDC*). However, CBO and CBI respondents suggested that limited time and labor were not insurmountable challenges in and of themselves. During a conversation with male elders from Neezuin, one male elder quipped, "Most times, women always give excuses [for not coming to meetings] that they have things to do—take care of the home and children" (*Interview #2 Neezuin elders, also Interview #2 DDC*). It is important to note that the elder was not denying that the limitations on women's time and labor were real, but rather, alluding to the fact that the participation in public life for rural Liberian women is based on a complex negotiation of familial and societal expectations and responsibilities (as seen in the context of livelihood decision-making described in the previous sections). This is exemplified by the acknowledgment of CBO and CBI officials that there was an unwillingness for husbands to give wives permission to participate in committees and forest user groups if this included the prospect of working in close proximity with other men (*Interview #2, DDC, LGC, CFDC, and Neezuin elders group*). This was reinforced by a member of a women's group, who when asked about major obstacles for women to participate in groups, replied, "We women face challenges such as our husbands refusing us to form part of some committee due to jealousy (*Interview #2 Help Yourself women's group*).

For men, the pressure to earn an income was cited as a main reason limiting time available to spend in group activities related to forest governance. In an interview with a women's group, a CBO representative explained it in this way:

> The challenges men face in becoming part of forest committee[s] is that our husbands have to hustle, work, to feed our families. [There is] not enough income so [they] have to do different things to bring money home. Because of this, there is no extra time for such activities (*Interview #2 Help Yourself Women's Group*)

This expectation to earn an income underlies a reluctance by men to join any groups not explicitly engaged in income generation. According to a respondent from the CFDC, it was difficult to engage men in the committee because "most men want financial benefit. Once there is none . . . they stay away" (*Interview #3 CFDC*). Moreover, there was a perception that benefits accruing to communities

(from the logging company as well as from pit sawyers and miners) were appropriated by certain members of the community, primarily men with high status within the community, and, therefore, many men elected not to join forest user groups or committees. When one youth member was asked why forest governance groups face challenges engaging men he replied: "Special benefits always go to particular people. For this reason, they [men] decide to stay away" (*Interview #2 Neezuin Youth Group*). This reluctance of men to participate in forest user groups affected women. Wives from households where the husband did not participate were unlikely to also participate in user groups.

Power struggles were also mentioned as a deterrent to the participation of men in forest governance groups. Some respondents pointed out that men are reluctant to follow rules or implement practices that have been put in place by other men, perceiving it to be a sign of weakness (*Interview #2 LGC*). This was not particularly surprising as there were strong social expectations for men to demonstrate leadership within the community. At the same time, shifts in the organization of communities in the post–civil war period transformed relationships contributing to and intensifying these power struggles. A member of the CFDC provided an example of such a situation:

> Sometimes the situation of who becomes the head of a group [is an issue]. For instance, if there is a situation where, for example, John was the head of a certain group during the war and where Paul was an under man for him, and now Paul is the head of the committee that has been formed where John is now under Paul. John is not going to be part of this committee. Reason being that he was a leader for Paul during the time of the civil war and they [may have] had some clash for a woman and because of his leadership power he took that woman and now he can't allow Paul to be head over him. For this reason, John decided not to be a part of this committee. So, these are some of the challenges men face in becoming part of forest committees (*Interview #3 CFDC*).

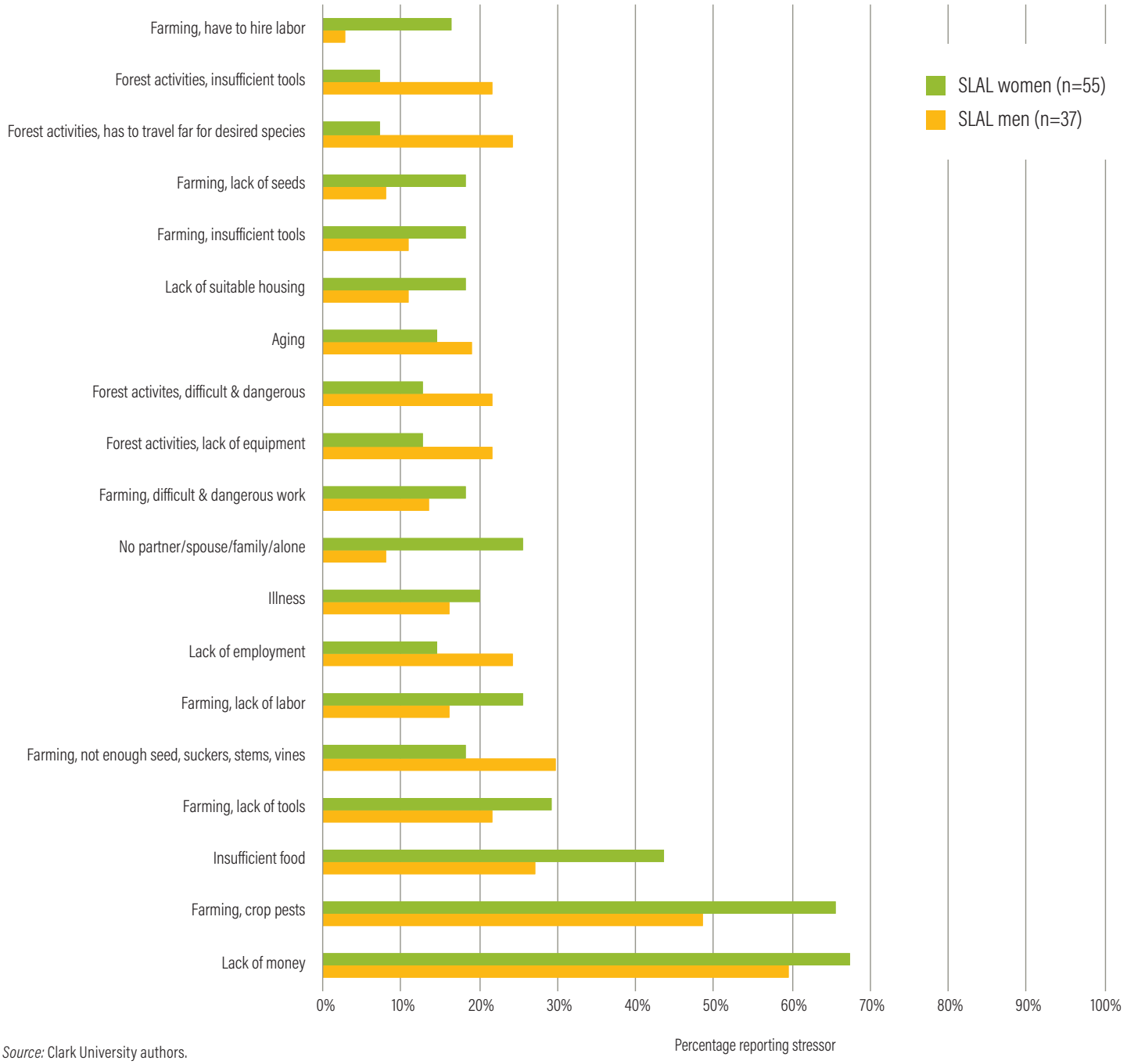
The result was that groups with a large male membership, regardless of the presence of women in such groups, often struggled with the unwillingness of male members to follow rules (*Interview #2 Land Governance Council*).

Disaggregating by Vulnerability Grouping: SLAL

Those living with SLAL reported a broad, diverse set of stressors, with none reported by a substantial majority of the group (Figure 5). Unlike other groups, a lack of money was a more common concern than pests that attacked crops. Men were also much more concerned about food sufficiency than women, reflecting their responsibility to feed their household. Looking across the suite of stressors reported by this group, one has the sense of a group of people who experience a wide range of stressors as significant threats and have few resources with which to address those threats and thus improve their situation. While all women within the community faced time and labor burdens resulting from expectations attached to their roles and responsibilities, the examination of livelihood decision-making shows that these limitations were especially likely to have an impact on SLAL women. SLAL women lacked the social connections and labor that adult household males can provide. In a context where access to resources and tasks was heavily dependent on gender and on the presence of a male spouse, this presented serious challenges to engaging in most livelihood activities. Although many of these women were heads of household and could, theoretically, make their own decisions as to how to spend their time, they had to meet their domestic responsibilities while at the same time providing for their households. As such, women in female-headed households from SLAL were likely to have the least amount of time and capacity to engage in forest governance initiatives. This is despite the fact that SLAL women, in the absence of resources to engage in petty trade and family labor to engage in agriculture or other livelihood activities, were the most dependent on forest activities for subsistence and as a means of earning the cash. For instance, a 59-year-old woman, when asked why she participated in harvesting country spice, remarked, "When the spice is stored till it is in demand, I make lots of money, which gives me financial satisfaction" (GB75). She went on to explain that this cash was critical for purchasing labor and household needs directly.

SLAL women challenged the notion that women were too weak to participate in forest-based activities. As can be seen in Figure 4, forest-based livelihood activities among SLAL respondents remained gendered, with men participating at higher rates than women. However, SLAL women participated in forest-based activities at a much higher rate than women from LAL and AAL. Eighty-four percent of SLAL women reported participating in forest-based activities in comparison to 50 percent of

Figure 5 | **Livelihood Stressors for Those with SLAL, by Gender**



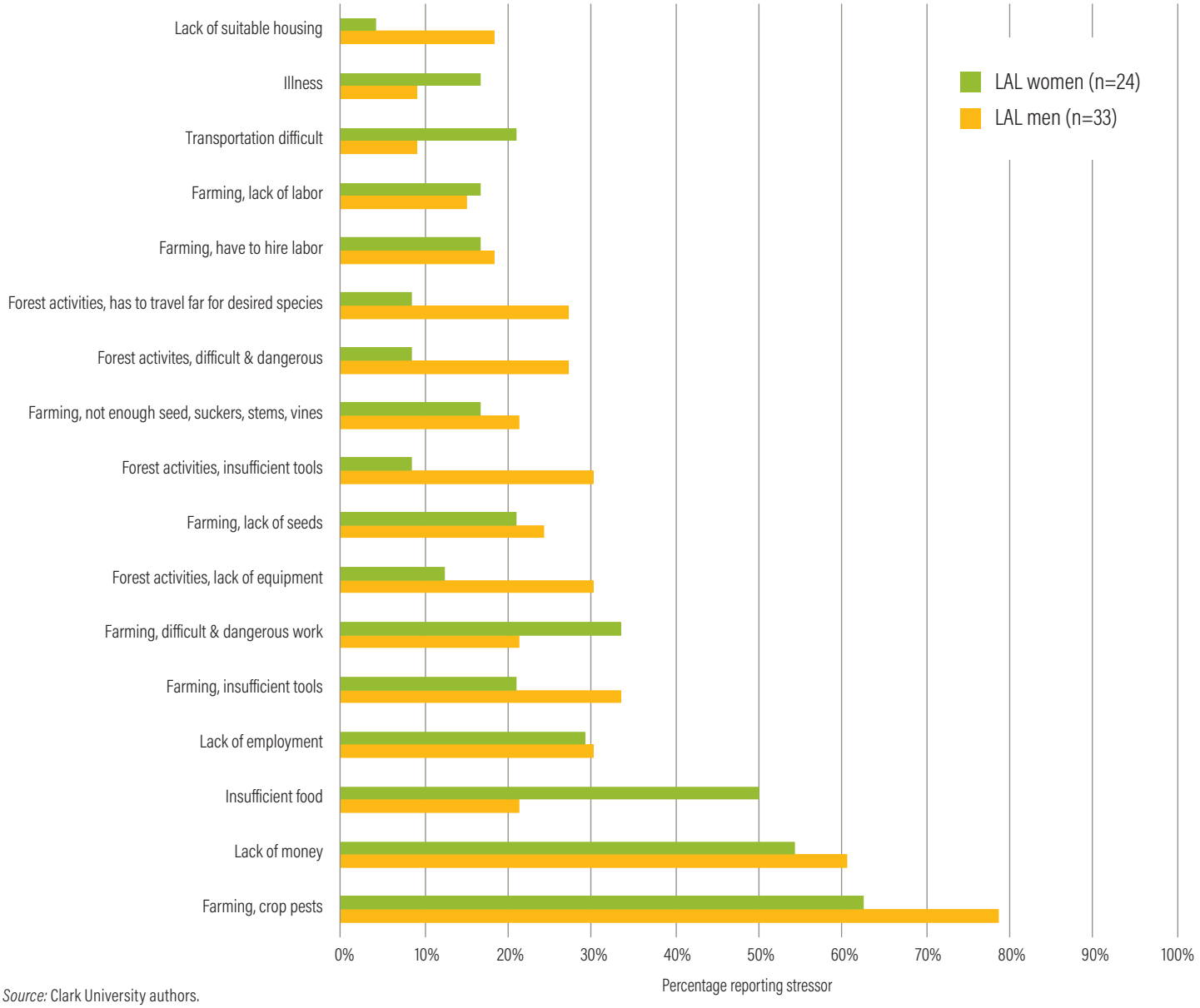
Source: Clark University authors.

LAL women and only 33 percent of AAL women (See Figures 6 and 7). This rate of participation in forest-based activities led SLAL women to begin to challenge notions that limited physical strength excluded women from engaging in particular forest-based activities. An example is provided by a 20-year-old woman from a SLAL household who participated in the harvesting of country spice, traditionally a male forest-based activity:

> Because of this [food] insecurity, I join with my friends to cut the country spice trees, which is hard work. Sometimes it takes days, and I get injured at times with the axe. But I still have to do it. After cutting the tree, we then cut the branches into smaller ones and begin picking the spice. We package it into a 25kg bags and bring them to town and sell them for 125.00 LD for each bag (GB21, see also GB25).

A substantial reason why the rate of women's engagement in tasks related to forest activities was so high in this group is because many of these women were in female-headed households and in severely economically challenged households. For other women in this group, the barriers to engaging in forest user groups and governance

Figure 6 | **Livelihood Stressors for Those with LAL, by Gender**



Source: Clark University authors.

processes specific to women in SLAL households were compounded by the need to obtain permission from husbands to participate. These challenges were directly linked to the organization of livelihood decision-making within households and the community. Able-bodied men with SLAL faced the possibility of being seen as failing to meet their responsibilities to provide for their households and, as a result, may have had very limited leverage themselves within communities to advocate for change, including in forest governance issues (as can be seen from the tools of coercion). These men were unlikely to want to participate in forest governance activities themselves. They were also unlikely to allow their wives to participate in meetings as this could be considered a loss of control and orderliness within their homes.

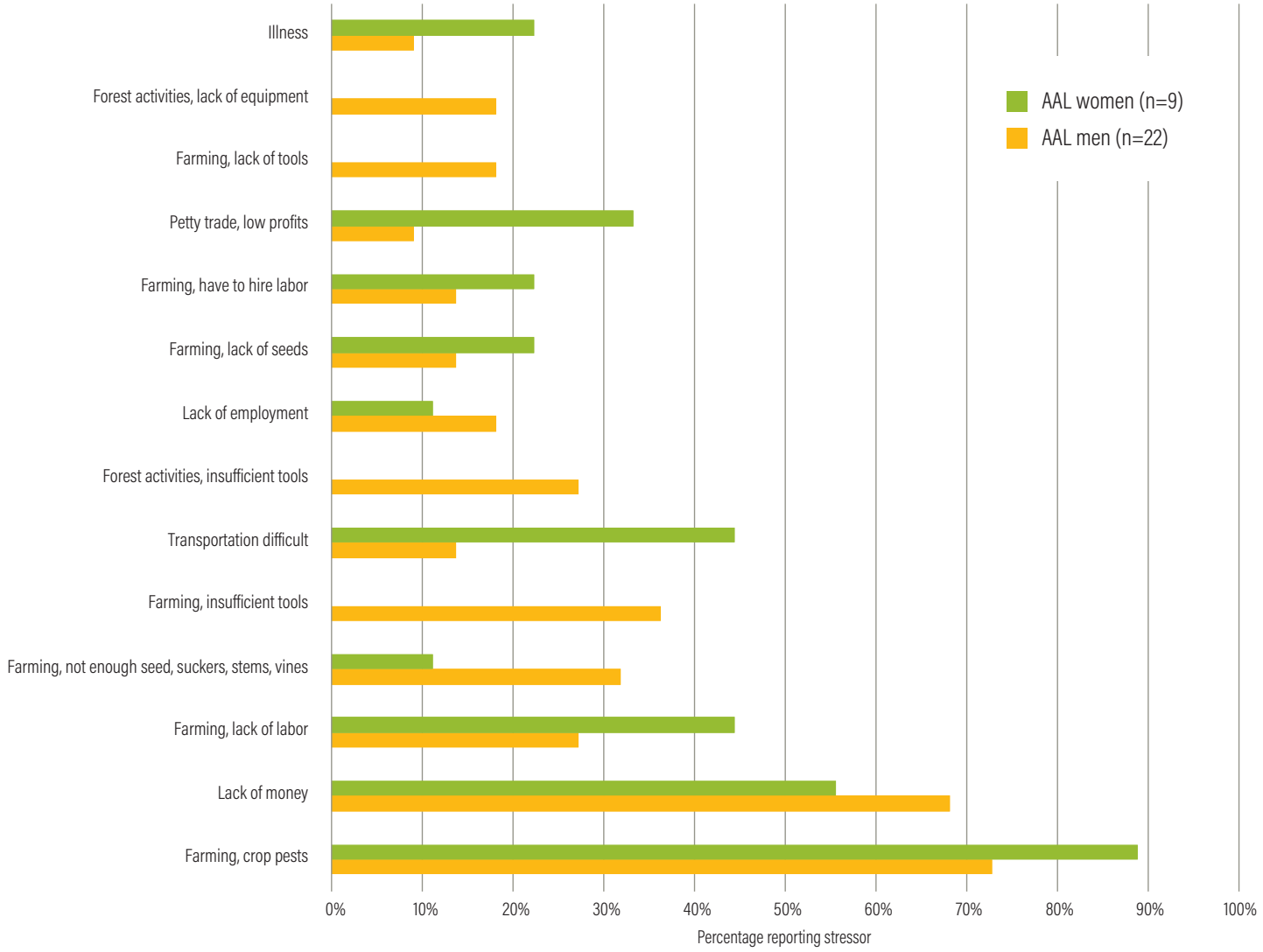
Disaggregating by Vulnerability Grouping: LAL

The vulnerabilities of those with LAL reflect a group of people facing a very different situation, even if they live in the same place. Specifically, their vulnerabilities suggest a group of people who, while stressed in a manner similar to those with SLAL, are concerned more with barriers to the improvement of their situation than existential stressors. In LAL households, concerns for pests that attacked crops was the most commonly reported stressor, with lack of money the second most-reported. The rate of concern for a lack of money was slightly lower than among those with SLAL, while the rate of reported concern for insufficient food was very similar to that reported by those in SLAL households. LAL men were much more concerned about food sufficiency than were women, which again reflects their responsibility to feed their household. In these stressors is also a reflection of this group's aspirations, as much as their vulnerabilities. Members of this group have the highest rate of concern for employment opportunities, access to tools for forest work, and adequate access to farming tools. Further, those in LAL households were the most likely to complain about farming as difficult and dangerous.

The different aspirations of those in LAL households produced different opportunities for and barriers to participation in forest governance. Specifically, members of these households faced significant, if somewhat different, time constraints than did those with SLAL. For women in LAL households, major gendered stressors were related to insufficient food and the difficulty of farming. (See Figure A3 in Appendix.) These concerns reflect the fact these women did not have sufficient financial means to independently contribute to the provision of food for their households and also that that they provided significant amounts of labor for household farming. In relation to livelihood activities, women had higher rates of engagement in petty trade than men. This engagement in petty trading reflects the difference in the particular situations of women in LAL and SLAL households. As can be seen in Figure 6, LAL women engaged in petty trade at more than twice the rate of those with SLAL. In addition, forest-based activities and fishing were less important for LAL women than for SLAL women. The strong preferences of LAL women for engagement in petty trade as a livelihood strategy, with direct involvement in forest-based activities as an essential but peripheral activity, reflects the fact they had more resources than SLAL women. SLAL women would have engaged in trade and forest-based activities in a similar manner, but they did not have the means to acquire sufficient capital to enable petty trading. As one SLAL women noted, "I want to do trading because the bush work is very hard, but I have no money" (GB52*)*. We found that LAL women who wanted to participate in forest-based activities but lacked male labor often bought harvested forest products: "The little money or remittances I get from my other children in the city is used at times to purchase the palm and then produce oil from it and cook some of the butter as soup. The oil produced is used for food, and I sell some to buy other food items" (GB59). LAL men had much higher rates of engagement in forest-based livelihood activities than women. LAL men's concerns were centered around agricultural labor, a lack of money, and insufficient tools, reflecting the desire of these men to expand and stabilize their livelihood activities so as to reliably meet their responsibilities.

Outside of time and labor challenges, the ability of women in the LAL group to engage in forest governance was directly dependent on whether their husbands were able to expand and stabilize their livelihood activities, thus making women's participation in forest groups less threatening to their status. Also, for LAL women, participation in forest governance activities offered them opportunities to expand their trading activities, providing a means through which they could fulfill their responsibilities for providing food and assisting with the provision of other household needs.

Figure 7 | **Livelihood Stressors for Those with AAL, by Gender**



Source: Clark University authors.

Disaggregating by Vulnerability Grouping: AAL

Those with AAL were the most secure members of the communities we sampled. On one hand, the fact that they report very similar rates of concerns for pests and a lack of money suggests that even these more secure individuals experience stresses similar to those of their less-secure neighbors. On the other hand, those with AAL were least concerned about insufficient food, distance to forest activities, lack of housing, and the dangers and difficulties associated with farming. Instead, they were the most concerned with a lack of farming labor and transportation issues and had one of the higher rates of concern for access to sufficient farming tools. In short, this is a group of relatively secure and successful individuals looking to expand their success. Perhaps because of the relative security of these households, forest-based activities were also likely to be important for AAL women. Although the number of AAL women is too small to make conclusive observations, fishing seemed to be a lower priority livelihood activity for women in AAL households, while petty trade was at the same level as for those with LAL (Figure 7).

AAL women also had the highest rates of concern related to low profits from petty trade, reflecting their desire to stabilize and improve their trading activities. (See Figure A3 in Appendix.) This also reflects that AAL women experienced pressure to obtain the resources to facilitate trading and had high expectations of the return on their investment of time and resources. Even more than LAL women, AAL women's interest in participating in forest governance activities was likely to be heavily moderated by the potential of these initiatives to offer a way to improve trading activities.

This point was reflected in the fact that women's groups engaged in forest governance were also likely to be engaged in other activities to generate income and assure safety nets. This is evidenced by the women's group called "We Are Looking for Something." Although the group participated in forest management, respondents were also proud of their micro loan scheme and additional ventures, which were critical in helping sustain membership in their CBO.

> One of the accomplishments we are proud of is that from the loan that Foundation for Community Initiatives gives us, there is 10 percent interest, which comes directly to our organization. That 10 percent is given to another person to accumulate, which is later put into our own savings account. Another thing is that we made a cassava farm. Through that we are trying to build a Palava hut (*Interview #2 We Are Looking for Something Women's Group*).

Both men and women with AAL had the lowest rates of engagement in forest-based activities (see Figures 5, 6, and 7). This was partly due to the ability to assure their subsistence and income through other livelihood activities. AAL respondents had the most diversified livelihood activities of the three vulnerability groups. Those AAL households engaged in forest-based activities did so by hiring day laborers (GB41; GB75). For example, a 45-year-old woman explained how she was able to participate in harvesting and selling country spice: "My husband, as the town chief, is sometimes sent to attend workshops from which he's able to earn small money. And the sale of country spice also enables us to get petty cash to be able to pay daily laborers" (GB41).

Women in AAL households, more secure than those in SLAL and LAL households, were most likely to have the time and freedom to participate in decision-making bodies at the community level as their participation was unlikely to challenge the respect and status of their husbands within the community.

2. Effective Voice in Forest Governance

Even when women managed to transcend the challenges presented by time and labor and their husbands did not object to their engagement in forest groups and committees, their presence did not guarantee meaningful participation in decision-making processes. In conversations with all CBOs and CBIs in the study, both men and women often mentioned that women felt shy voicing their opinion in public meetings. This unwillingness or inability to speak up was shaped by deeply held social norms that dictate whose opinion is recognized and taken as a serious contribution during public discussions, as reflected in women's roles and responsibilities. Women's roles and responsibilities take shape around a construction of women as providing motherly care, whether for the household through domestic duties, or for the community through engagement in community organizations focused on medical knowledge, sanitation, and the greeting and care of visitors. Forest governance does not fall into this framing of women's roles and responsibilities, which reinforces the perception that many forest activities are male activities. As a Neezuin elder explained:

> In our Liberian culture we all believe, and our women know, or feel, that decisions made by men are always final. So, for that reason, once there is a gathering with men, they [women] normally decide to stay away because they cannot make [a] decision amongst men. They know that whatever they say may not be taken into consideration. . . . During our ancestor days, women were not [even] allowed to be in any gathering with men. For this reason, women [currently] still have or are carrying that mentality (*Interview #2 Neezuin elders*).

Some CBI members claimed that because Liberian communities are patrilocal, the inclusion of women in forest governance would disadvantage the community. When discussing in what way greater inclusion could improve forest governance processes, a Neezuin elder explained:

> There will be a great difference if women were more involved in forest management in that women may go out of our community to marry, so for this reason we will not want their husbands to come in to take our forest. So, for this reason women are not more into forest management. We believe that women's rights are or should be limited (*Interview #2 Neezuin elders*).

CFDC members indicated that while there were some attempts to encourage the participation of women in public decision-making processes, there was disagreement on whether these efforts had achieved success. In an initial interview with Gblazeo elders, a male elder who was also part of the CFDC, maintained that "women are always part of the decision-making process. We never leave them behind" (*Interview #2 Gblazeo elders*). In subsequent interviews, other respondents thought that these efforts have not been particularly successful.

> There *could* be [a] difference if women were more involved, but the issue is that most of our [women] here are not educated, so even if they attended or formed part of these committees, they won't give any contribution. For instance, even for those ones that we have presently on the committee, [they] are not actively involved because they don't have anything much to contribute. So, the bulk of the work is resting on we, the men on this committee. We, at most times invite or [attempt] to include them, but they shy away because they feel they will have no input. So, for this reason, we as men also feel that there is no need for such. But these days, in recent times, there [is] a lot of advocacy to include women on these committees, so there are always women in these committees no matter what (*Interview #3 CFDC*).

The gender composition of groups was another factor affecting the success and longevity of women's groups engaged in forest governance and therefore the maturity and long-term contributions women could make to forest governance. Conversations with women's groups in both communities reveal that they experienced difficulties sustaining members. According to one female respondent, this challenge was because "we don't have men among us. We women don't want to listen to each other" (*Interview #2 WLFS women's group)*. In another interview, a member of a women's group pointed out that groups with higher male membership may be more influential even when they are only tangentially connected to forestry issues. As women's roles and responsibilities generally speak to caring for the household and community through domestic activities, their opinions about forest use fall outside local constructions of their roles and therefore have limited legitimacy. For example, while referring to a male agricultural labor co-op that provided day labor for farming tasks such as clearing land, she said:

> Women[s] groups could be of little impact on livelihood, forest access, and use if they see something going wrong. The farming group could have much impact . . . since men are given more ears and [that] group has more men than women (*Interview #2 Help Yourself Women's Group*).

Women's groups also described different entry points and varying levels of influence on forest governance processes. For instance, members of one women's group, Women's Wings, indicated that the group did sometimes participate in community meetings where decisions about the forest were made, but identified themselves primarily as forest users. Another group, We Are Looking for Something, began as part of an NGO initiative to enable the participation of women in natural resource management. The group acknowledged that they had more influence on decisions related to forest management primarily because they had representation on the CFDC. "Th[is] organization has gotten opportunities a little bit more [than other organizations] in that we have ideas now about how our forest is being managed, what is legal, and what is not.

This is because we have a representative on the CFDC (*We Are Looking for Something Women's Group Interview #2*).

3. Transparency in the Management and Use of Forest Resources and the Ability to Hold Other Stakeholders Accountable

Although there were mechanisms through which the community could hold other stakeholders in the forest sector accountable, these mechanisms were weak. Community members complained of the inability to hold the CFDC accountable. For example, at the time of the study, the CFDC was yet to provide a report to community members on how benefits from the logging company had been used. In addition, the power differential between private actors and the communities made forest governance processes susceptible to corruption. As an example, some of the men in Neezuin town had begun a protest against the logging company EJ&J in order to make sure that the company was abiding by the agreements made between the community and the company. In the weeks following the start of the protests, the company allegedly paid the protestors to silence them. The ability of the company to allegedly bribe the men protesting reflects the desire of these men to earn an income and support their families above their desire to hold the company accountable. Finally, although community elders were able to represent the community in negotiations with private actors, once the logging operation was in place, there were no real mechanisms to force the company to abide by agreed terms or to regularly hear the communities' grievances.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our discussions with CBOs and CBIs revealed the gendered dimensions of participation in forest governance in Gblazeo and Neezuin, dimensions that we expect are in play in similar parts of Liberia more broadly.[9] For women, challenges presented by limited labor and time were difficult to overcome. Gendered expectations of women, which frame their roles and responsibilities around caring for the household and community through domestic and health-related efforts, allows them legitimacy in groups and meetings around these topics while marginalizing their engagement in forest governance processes even when present in meetings. Although there were groups with the potential to act as springboards for women to collectively organize and advocate—for example, around rights as forest users—these groups struggled to coalesce around common interests. Finally, efforts to increase the participation of women by NGOs and the government had produced some increase in the number of women present in local forest governance bodies. But these efforts had very little success in overcoming the local social dynamics and norms that prevent women from meaningfully contributing to and shaping forest governance. On the other hand, while men dominated forest user groups both in numbers and in discussions, they also faced barriers to participation. These barriers largely centered on time limitations related to the need to earn an income, a critical aspect of their role in the household, and on difficulties related to ethnic and place-of-origin differences that challenged group cohesiveness.

The persistence of gendered barriers to participation in forest governance within the study communities reinforces the need to develop an in-depth understanding of the social dynamics and norms that structure which individuals can participate in forest governance at the local level and the extent to which their participation is likely to meaningfully shape outcomes. Only through understanding the social dynamics that produce observed livelihood patterns and ways of making meaning within

the local context is it possible to identify and develop realistic pathways to increase the participation of women in forest governance. In this section, we present recommendations based on our examination of the organization of livelihood and logic underlying livelihood decision-making in Gblazeo and Neezuin.

It is understandable that men would be interested in maintaining family structures where the husband's interests are upheld by their ascribed status. It is also conceivable that many women would be interested in maintaining the status quo as existing livelihoods provide a measure of safety and certainty in their everyday lives, and the status and respect of wives is partially dependent on husbands. This is particularly true of an arena like forest governance, where the structure of decision-making is tied to the flow of resources through which men can legitimize their social positions but also demonstrate protective care for their households. Therefore, transforming the character of women's participation in forest governance will invoke processes of political and social change. Without careful consideration of the mechanisms, such as elder councils, local decision-making bodies, and established community groups, through which gender roles are materialized and legitimated in the context of forest governance, efforts to increase the participation of women in forest governance could result in negative consequences for the very constituencies that such initiatives are meant to assist. For example, in the context of a project aimed at improving women's voices in forest governance, women who participate could experience increases in spousal conflicts and gender-based violence as men seek to discipline women into traditionally gender-appropriate roles.

While there are important differences among women in these communities, there are some general factors that must be addressed to facilitate greater women's engagement in forest governance. Because women face time and labor burdens associated with domestic work, the timing of forest governance meetings will be critical to engaging women from resource-poor households. Efforts to reduce household responsibilities by shifting some activities to men and introducing labor-saving devices to free up women's time is essential to ensuring that their engagement in forest governance does not create an additional burden.

Other factors influencing women's participation in forest governance are more specific to individual situations. For example, interventions must also pay attention to how to increase access to forest resources, particularly for women from poorer households who are the most dependent on forest activities for subsistence and their income-earning portfolio. Because wives' participation is likely linked to how well men meet expectations to provide for their households, those women in poorer, less secure households are likely to face greater policing of their roles and responsibilities and therefore greater barriers to participation in forest governance. One means of addressing this challenge is to address such issues as food insecurity and the stabilization of livelihood activities for men as well as women, as such actions will reinforce the status of men and therefore create space for women to take up new roles and responsibilities, such as forest governance, without appearing to threaten the authority of their husbands and other family members (for discussion, see Carr 2019). This indicates that forest governance initiatives should use social change approaches, perhaps even aligning with development partners and/or practitioners, to ensure that the human dimensions of forest governance work are identified and addressed appropriately and that social risks are mitigated.

Understanding the gendered roles and responsibilities that shape life in these communities presents opportunities to identify these human dimensions of forest governance and pathways to address them productively. For example, there exist opportunities to draw on the concept of women as providers of motherly care to construct viable ways in which women can legitimately engage in forest governance. One such

strategy, which may be employed in the short term to have progressive effects leading to longer-term social changes, is to build on knowledge of forest activities that are widely understood to be acceptable for women, including collecting country spice, medicine, gathered foods, and vines and herbs, as a stepping stone to bringing their views into the forest governance public arena as legitimate contributors. Building on this, efforts could be made to harness women's knowledge about these products for better cultivation and conservation. This may open up the potential to deepen women's engagement in community activities, decision-making, and leadership.

Regulatory and leadership development changes at the community level will also be an important element in increasing the participation of women. Women's participation on the CFDCs is less than ideal, with the forest code mandating that only one woman participate on the committee. Because these committees are a focal point of forest governance, it is critical for regulations to increase the number of women representatives expected to serve on the committee. Given that the mandate for one woman on the CFDC is abided by, there is potential to increase those numbers through a mandate in the forest code. Reconfiguring the way people engage in forest user groups may also allow for broader input. It is also important to develop mechanisms through which young women can serve in leadership positions, such as via subcommittees or by leading the implementation of an activity. This will create a track record of leadership through which women can, in the long term, position themselves as elders who are able to participate meaningfully in decision-making related to forest governance. However, such regulatory change will only have lasting impact if it is accompanied by the sorts of behavioral changes around roles and responsibilities discussed earlier.

Unless there are both short-term and long-term strategies to build up women's legitimacy in the arena of forest governance, their participation is not likely to lead to their meaningful participation, nor will it increase their ability to hold other actors within the forest landscape accountable. The result would be the creation of opportunities for those women who want to be involved in forest governance while, at the same time, leaving open opportunities for the eventual reversal of social norms.

APPENDIX. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

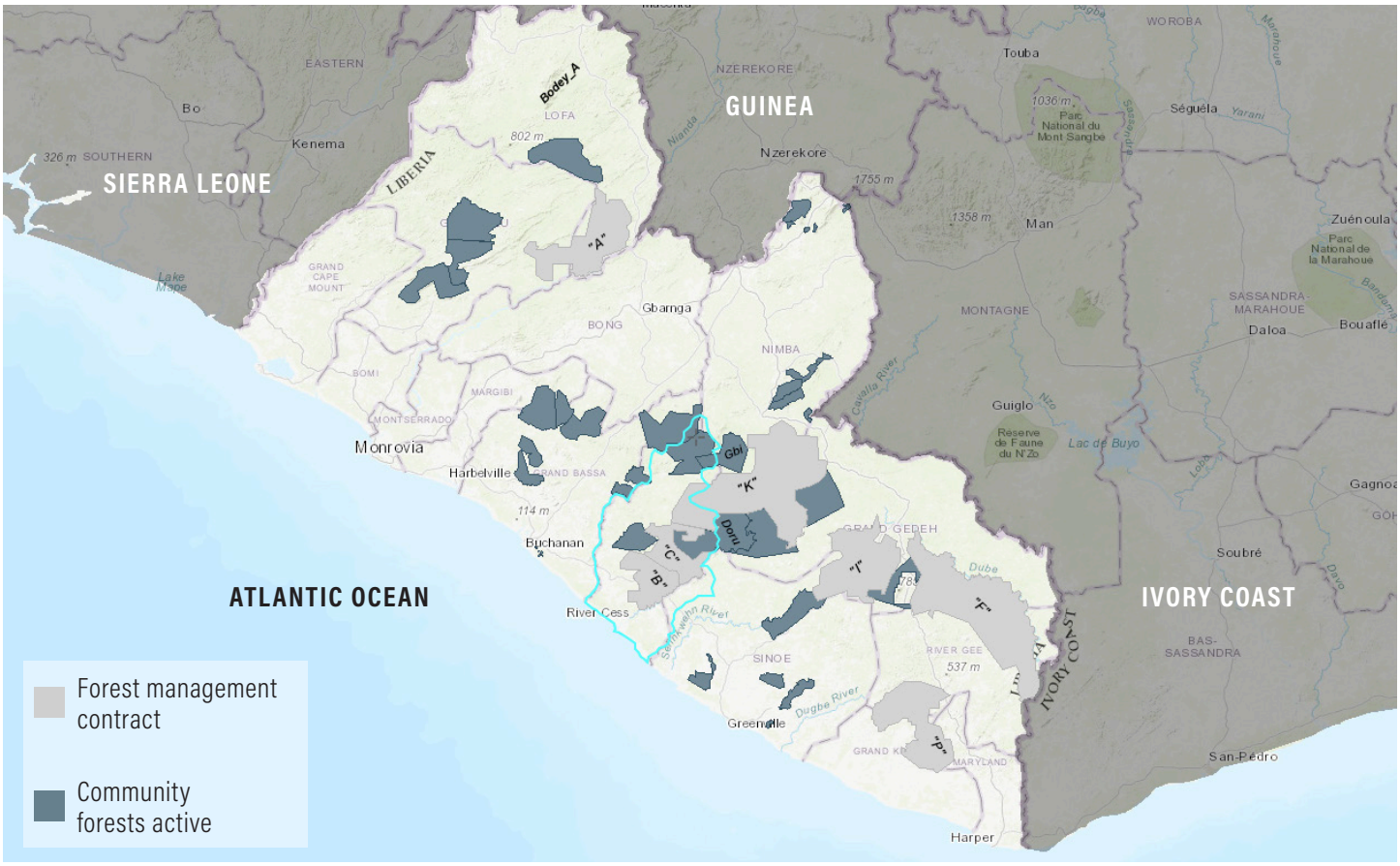
The Study Area

The study was conducted in two communities in River Cess County: Gblazeo and Neezuin.[10] River Cess is part of Liberia's Livelihood Zone 4: Coastal Plain Cassava with Rice and River Fishing (Browne and Diop 2017). The livelihood zone has mainly lowland topography with very high rainfall. Annual precipitation averages 3,588 mm, with the heaviest rains falling between August and October. Because of the heavy rainfall and the low-lying topography, a network of small rivers and streams crisscrosses the livelihood zone. Temperatures range from 25 to 32 degrees Celsius. Inland communities in River Cess County are subsistence oriented and forest reliant. Most residents of the zone practice subsistence agriculture, primarily swidden agriculture on permanently farmed or secondary forested areas. Cassava is the primary food staple with rice as a secondary staple. Inland fishing forms a significant secondary source of food. Households also harvest food from a variety of wild sources including bush yam, coconut, and wild palm. Animal husbandry is generally limited in this livelihood zone, partly due to the forested landscape. Browne and Diop (2017) document waterlogging on farms, flooding and crop pests as the major shocks and hazards to livelihoods in the zone.

Commercial logging in the area, however, has a contentious history as the company has been accused of not remitting money to local communities (FDA 2017; SDI 2009). This is particularly important in this context, as revenue from logging fees from the two commercial logging operations are a major source of funding for local development projects in the county.

Most of the communities in River Cess were displaced during the Liberian civil war and returned to resettle after the end of the war.[11] Since then, households and individuals displaced from elsewhere during the war and in-migrants have contributed to more diverse communities, especially in Neezuin. However, the social structure and household composition of the two communities has largely remained the same as during the pre-war period, as migrants from elsewhere generally adopt local social norms and customs (*Conversations with community members*). Both Gblazeo and Neezuin, typical of other rural communities in the country, are each composed of several villages, known as towns, which then form clans (clans are administrative units and are not based on kinship ties). Towns are both organically established and administratively defined social units. Typically, they were established through one family or a group of families settling in a previously unpopulated, usually forested area. Since 1984, the government has also sought to establish new administrative units (including towns) in the county. As administrative units, towns are governed by elected chiefs, but in actuality chiefs govern collaboratively with elders. The latter hold considerable authority and decision-making power in rural Liberian communities.

Figure A1 | **Map of Liberia Community Management Contracts and Community Forests**



Source: Forest Atlas Liberia.

The Data Set

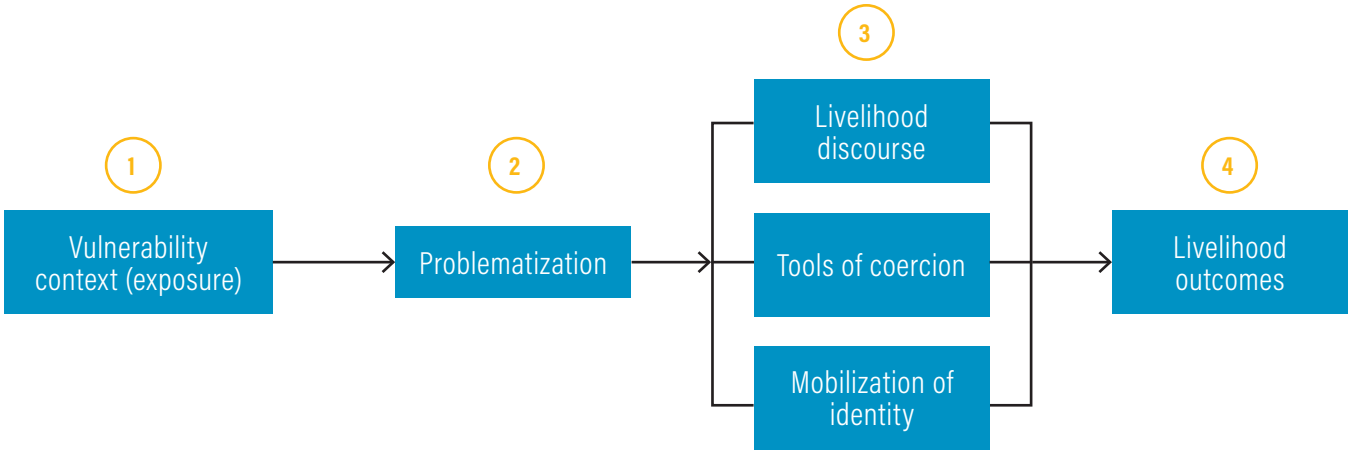
Data for the study were collected in three phases from community institutions and organizations, as well as through individual interviews with community members. The first phase of data collection was conducted over a period of three weeks between February and March 2017. The second phase of data collection occurred over a period of four weeks in April 2017. Final follow-up conversations were conducted in July and August 2017. Data collection was preceded by training for the local research team, customizing the interview guide for local language and nuances, and pilot testing and refinement of the data collection tools and methods.

Data collected from customary institutions and community organizations

Data were collected from community-based organizations (CBOs) and customary-based institutions (CBIs) in Gblazeo and Neezuin. CBOs are groups that have recently come into existence through the collective action of a segment of the community or with the support of civil society organizations. CBOs, relative to CBIs have a narrower mandate within communities. For instance, they are focused on increasing incomes or advocacy around a particular forest governance issue. CBIs are customary social structures and mechanisms through which a wide range of community matters are discussed and decisions agreed upon.

Conversations with CBOs and CBIs relied on an open-ended questionnaire to understand the role of the CBO and CBI in formulating and shaping rules of forest use for the community and for other stakeholders, their role in managing and monitoring the use of the forest in the area, the nature of men's and women's engagement in forest governance through the CBO or CBI so as to establish an understanding of the nature of engagement in forest governance, and whether the CBO or CBI perceived any advantages in increasing the participation of women and men in forest governance. During the first phase of data collection, information was collected with the aim of identifying how CBO and CBIs were involved in various aspects of forest governance. During the second phase of data collection, follow-up conversations were held with community leaders and office bearers of CBIs or CBOs engaged in various aspects of local forest governance. Here we sought to further explain why these patterns exist, ways in which they were

Figure A2 | **Conceptual Diagram of the Livelihoods-as-Intimate-Government Approach**



Source: Carr 2014.

reinforced and legitimized, and how they vary across different kinds of men and women. Final follow-up conversations, conducted in July and August 2017, were conducted to clarify and deepen findings.

In total, we had conversations with 37 office bearers in the two communities. Eight of these individuals (seven men and one woman) belonged to CBIs or CBOs that are present in both Gblazeo and Neezuin. Thirteen individuals (10 men and 3 women) belonged to CBOs within Gblazeo Town, while 16 individuals (10 men and 6 women) belonged to CBOs in Neezuin town. This gender distribution was reflective of the overall gender balance of office bearers at the time of the study in that there were more men than women in positions of authority.

Individual interviews with community members

Individual interviews were conducted by a research team composed of Liberians and HURDL staff. A total of 181 interviews were conducted by the research team with individual community members. Ninety-three community members (46 women and 47 men) were interviewed in Gblazeo community. Eighty-eight community members (43 women and 45 men) were interviewed in Neezuin community. The majority of the respondents (116 of those interviewed, 68 in Gblazeo and 48 in Neezuin), belonged to complex households (extended families with more than one household head and their families living within the same house). Sixty-four respondents belonged to single-head households.[12] One female respondent in Gblazeo did not provide any information on the number of household heads in her household.

During the first phase of data collection, the questionnaire guide for individual interviews elicited an overview of livelihood activities and why people undertook these livelihood activities. In the second phase of data collection, we sought to identify which roles and responsibilities were attached to particular individuals and explore the consequences that individuals who did not conduct their livelihoods as expected might face. The aim was to provide insight into the logic of livelihood decision-making, which in turn reveals how people organize and order the world in pursuit of various goals. This information illuminates the rationales underlying people's choices to participate or not to participate in local forest governance within their communities.

Data Analysis

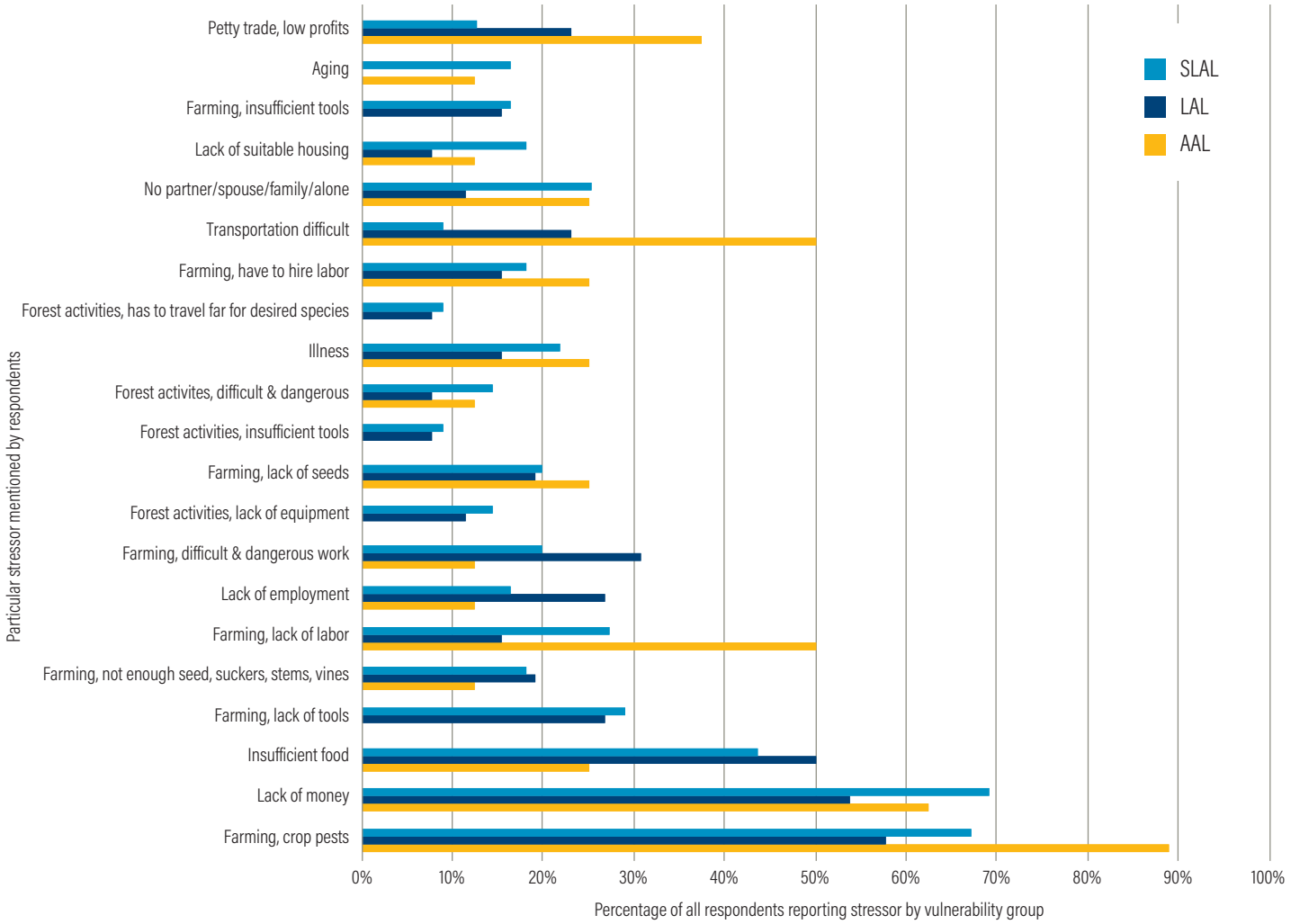
Data analysis was structured by the livelihoods-as-intimate-government (LIG) approach (Carr 2014). LIG conceptualizes livelihoods not merely as the ways in which people make a living, but as ways in which people order and make meaning in the world through their everyday lives. Decisions people make to pursue various livelihood strategies (including their engagement in forest governance) are efforts to govern their world through the reconciliation of social, material, and cultural demands so as to achieve goals that are dynamic and often contradictory in the face of material and social stressors, which orient and prioritize which goals they pursue. Within communities, groups of people can be clustered by shared shocks and stressors and similar access to resources that can be used to address these stressors and shocks (assemblages of vulnerability). These assemblages of vulnerability groups become the primary means of stratifying communities into locally relevant analytic units.

People's efforts to govern their world occur at the intersection of three spheres: discourses of livelihoods, the mobilization of identity, and tools of coercion (see Figure A-2). In the course of everyday life, discourses of livelihoods—ways of talking about and acting in the world—serve to define appropriate activities and ways of undertaking them and necessarily mobilize the roles and responsibilities associated with different identities. Taken together, these discourses and the identities they mobilize create locally specific social facts, which define, bound, and set the course of possible action, legitimate alternatives, and consequently observed livelihood outcomes (Carr 2013). The logic produced by livelihood discourses and mobilization of identity, however, do not adequately explain the regularity and ubiquity of observed livelihood patterns in a particular place. After all, livelihood strategies produce variable outcomes across members of a community or household, outcomes that can result in frustration and potentially fuel resistance among those less rewarded (Carr 2013, 2014). Furthermore, the physical, environmental, and social contexts in which people are embedded are complex and dynamic. As a result, the legitimacy of livelihood logic is always under stress as the world exceeds its utility or as individuals challenge the logic to better their own positions (for instance, as during a period of civil unrest that uproots communities, significantly changing social norms). These stressors and potential deviations from expected roles, responsibilities, and identities are managed through locally legitimate, widely agreed upon tools of coercion that are employed to shape behavior and choices through reward or punishment.

The diagram in Figure A-2 outlines that in (1) identifying current challenges to well-being and livelihoods (the vulnerability context), there are moments (2) where particular stressors become identified as problems by particular individuals, which produce instances where the logic and legitimacy of livelihood strategies are called into question when it becomes clear that what is a problem for one person might not be for another (problematization). This contestation (3), in turn, provides a point of entry into understanding how livelihood decision-making emerges at the intersection of the mobilization of identity, livelihood discourses, and tools of coercion. This (4) then forms the basis for interpreting livelihood strategies and outcomes.[13]

The LIG analysis undertaken for this project involved several steps. As an initial step, we entered data into a qualitative data analysis software, MAXQDA, and coded for critical themes that were broadly structured by the LIG approach. The coding process generated 17,449 reference points in the data. After the codes were cleaned and refined, data from CBOs and CBIs were analyzed for themes related to the nature of the engagement of women and men in forest governance. This was followed by an analysis of the interviews conducted by individual community members. We identified respondents' livelihood stressors and shocks, allowing us to understand the vulnerability context of the community and how this context oriented people's behavior. This formed the basis for the final stratification of respondents into groups that shared assemblages of vulnerability (See Figure A-3). We then sought to establish the relationship between identity and roles and responsibilities in order to explain how and why certain roles and responsibilities were attached to particular individuals. Under discourse of livelihoods we explored why community members characterized the activities they were engaged in as desirable, appropriate, or inappropriate. We also sought to understand who within the community had the legitimacy to discipline or reward other community members. In the last step of the analysis, we examined how the vulnerability context, roles and responsibilities, discourse of livelihoods, and tools of coercion created a logic of livelihoods at the local level that explained observed variable levels of engagement in forest governance.

Figure A3 | **Livelihood Concerns Reported by Female Respondents by Vulnerability Group**



Source: Clark University authors.

ENDNOTES

1. Agarwal's typology includes other forms of participatory exclusions: consultative participation where engagement may be superficial where opinions are sought but not necessarily considered; activity-specific participation where opinions are only taken into consideration in relation to certain activities.

2. The Forest Development Authority (FDA) issues several types of permits for commercial activities. The Forest Management Contract license is issued for forest exploitation for land 50,000 to 400,000 hectares for 25 years; the Timber Sales Contract license for land areas smaller than 5,000 hectares usually for 3 years; the Forest Use Permit license for small-scale exploitation, research, NTFP activities, or other uses with no specified land size or ownership type. These license categories are regulated by Ten Core Forest Regulations. Other licenses include the Community Forest Management Agreement issued to communities for community-based forest management on areas smaller than 50,000 hectares and regulated by the Community Rights Law. The Private Use Permits license is issued to private landowners (individual, group, and community) to extract wood. There are no specific regulations for these permits.

3. The lack of a category of high asset household reflects the fact that the communities in the study are resource-poor communities still struggling to rebuild their livelihoods following the second civil war in 1999–2003 and the Ebola epidemic in 2014–2015.

4. This absence was either because the man was deceased, had abandoned the family, or was ill. Some women also had lost their children during the civil war and therefore had no adult children on whom they could rely.

5. Respondents made a distinction between hunting and trapping where hunting involved stalking with a weapon (guns or arrows) and/or dogs, often at night. Trapping involved making and setting snares with wire, ropes, and sticks.

6. Zo are traditional priests, priestesses, or elders of the Sande and Poro secret societies.

7. The Sande (for women) and Poro (for men) societies are responsible for initiating girls and boys into adulthood through imparting a cultural code of conduct to members (Bledsoe 1984).

8. Crop farming, livestock keeping, fishing, forest-based livelihood activities, and petty trade were the principal reported activities. Farming was the most frequently mentioned livelihood activity (94 percent of respondents engaged in the activity). This was followed by forest-based livelihood activities with 72 percent of respondents participating. Fifty-one percent of respondents reared animals, 28 percent engaged in fishing, and 23 percent in petty trade. For other livelihood activities, less than 10 percent of respondents reported engagement.

9. Work by HURDL (Carr et al. 2019) suggests that the findings of the livelihood analysis presented in this report are generalizable to the livelihood zone, what FEWS-NET defines as an area in which residents have similar activities, social organizations, and assets.

10. Although there are various spellings for Gblazeo and Neezuin towns, this report uses those that are most common.

11. Skirmishes between rebel forces and government forces in the area during the civil war forced civilians to flee into the forest for weeks or months at a time. Civilians were also often subjected to forced labor, including portage for the rebel forces. Property was often looted, and sexual violence was widespread.

12. Within the context of the communities in the study, households comprised socially and economically interdependent individuals, residing under the same roof, and who shared daily responsibilities to ensure the reproduction of the social unit. Like other parts in SSA, households in the study area were not discretely bounded but, rather, open social units. Members had significant responsibilities to relatives and kin outside of the household and could also draw on their social networks outside the household to access resources, influence decisions, and change the power dynamic within the home.

13. As Carr et al. (2014) note, this conceptual diagram of LIG is a summary and does not address the feedback loops between the various areas of livelihood decision-making.

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ABOUT THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AND DEVELOPMENT LAB (HURDL) AT CLARK UNIVERSITY

HURDL brings rigorous, innovative research to questions of development policy and implementation. Bringing together faculty, students, and research staff to address some of the world's most pressing challenges, HURDL embodies Clark University's mission to educate undergraduate and graduate students to be imaginative and contributing citizens of the world and to advance the frontiers of knowledge and understanding through rigorous scholarship and creative effort.

ABOUT THE FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY INITIATIVES (FCI)

FCI's mission is to promote community-based initiatives, especially women-led actions for sustainable, community-driven development and natural resources management. FCI's interventions are focused on forest governance and natural resource management in Liberia, with a specific focus on increasing the participation of women and youth groups in decision-making, benefit sharing, and other management practices.

ABOUT THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S NETWORK FOR COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF FORESTS (REFACOF)

The African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests, established in 2010, is a network created by 45 women from 8 countries in West and Central Africa. From a regional scale, the REFACOF is dedicated to the collective action of African women to address social challenges and political, legal, and economic issues related to forest management in Africa. In this process, particular attention is given to limitations on the participation of women.

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