

2. GENDER DIFFERENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS

2.1 COLLECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Men and women in both Africa and Asia, and particularly those from poorer households, can still be highly dependent on the collection of natural resources for fulfilling household needs and as a contribution to food security and poverty alleviation. In Africa this can prove critical in times of drought and other environmental and political crises.

The collection of such resources is gender-differentiated in relation to socio-economical, cultural, ethnic and geographical contexts. For example, in Africa fuelwood collection is dominated by women, whilst in Asia men are also often involved. Environmental degradation and change have limited communities' access to resources. Due to women's greater reliance on the collection of resources on a day-to-day basis, such limitation has had a greater negative impact on them, resulting in the need for increased time and physical input.

Though men are more involved in commercial enterprises, women also sell and trade in natural resources. Such trade can be dominated either by richer groups who have better access to urban markets and transport networks further a field, or by poorer groups who tend to sell to local markets. Women are becoming increasingly involved in the processing of natural resources as opportunities are opened up for the diversification of livelihoods, particularly when such processing can be carried out close to home and/or when spare time is available. Such work is often carried out in collective groups. In some cases men have undermined women's use of resources as they have been further integrated into the cash economy.

In Africa, culture and ethnicity can also play a significant role in defining relationships with natural resources. In Asia, caste can be a more important factor. Religion is also highly influential. For example Buddhism emphasises a strong respect for nature and encourages its protection and many Christian churches protect forests and woodlands. In addition marital status, age, wealth and social status can all play a role in creating divisions within communities and community groups. These differences do not only influence relationships with the environment but also influence engagement in ICDPs and development activities.

Both men and women hold extensive knowledge about the natural resources that they collect and their various uses. Men dominate the hunting of wildlife. However there are examples in both Africa, mainly in areas of West Africa where trade in bushmeat is high, and in some parts of Asia, where women have played a more active role. Women tend to have a greater knowledge about plants, fruits and grasses. Protected areas remain a major source of natural resources.

2.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL INEQUITIES

Women have less access to education and healthcare and fewer economic opportunities. Women are also less mobile and tend to be most active around the household. Though it is usual in Asia for women to be physically responsible for household cash, they still do not tend to control household decision-making. In addition women have an almost total lack of security of resources such as land and financial capital. In Africa in particular, societies confer only secondary, usufruct rights to women. Women are normally entitled to cultivate land controlled by their husband's lineage but not to alienate or inherit it. Men control nearly all the property and decisions relating to it. This is proving increasingly problematic as greater numbers of women are assuming the position of household head in place of their

husbands who are migrating to find better opportunities for work: the women still do not have the power to make many of the decisions necessary for land use management. Without security and control, women are less able or willing to invest in conservation practices.

Women's share of decision-making power at both macro and micro levels remains low: it is still dominated by men. In Africa in particular there is a lack of organised platforms from which to address women's issues. In general, women are compromised by power structures that are heavily loaded in favour of men. Women may be farmers, but they are rarely field managers. This is particularly true in Islamic regions where culture and religion deny women participation in public life. Exceptions do exist however, for example in Bhutan women have a legally protected equal status to men. Many mountain communities also tend to be more egalitarian.

Low self-image and a lack of confidence amongst women are contributing factors to their lack of involvement in decision-making processes. Their contribution to society and environmental protection is highly undervalued. Not only is there a lack of political will to change gender inequities (despite enabling and supportive policy development), but women themselves have accepted their subordinate status. In addition women find less time to attend meetings due to their multiple daily commitments to the household and family.

Women, rather than men, tend to be more willing to form cooperatives and self-mobilise as a group to share responsibilities, provide support, and even to initiate change. Women have seen the advantage of 'group power'. They will often attend meetings *en masse* and sit together in a group where they feel less vulnerable. Single women, particularly those divorced or widowed, tend to be more mobile, confident and able to participate in activities. In many countries there are strong networks of women's groups or self-help groups and/or government supported Women's Associations. Though they offer good opportunities as a foundation for more formal institutions that could be involved in conservation activities and provide space for a focus on women's interests and needs, their contribution has yet to be fully recognised and utilised.

2.3 GENDER, WOMEN AND CONSERVATION

Poverty and pressures to fulfil daily household needs are major constraints for women in terms of finding time or resources to invest in conservation and environmental practises. Women tend to prioritise on a short-term basis. This tends to conflict directly with conservation and environmental objectives that are more long-term in nature. While male and female interests with regard to environmental management and biodiversity conservation may be compatible, this is not always the case. As such, a sensitive institutional understanding of gender relations is critical.

Conservation policy and practice often focuses, at least in the short-term, on a restriction on resource use through protective measures such as the creation of a protected area and the establishment of a group of enforcers. Because both women and men living in rural areas are often heavily reliant on the local natural resources, such conservation measures can have immediate detrimental costs. Women, who are more reliant than men on such resources for fulfilling the everyday needs of the household, can experience more negative impacts. They are likely to bear the costs to a greater extent through the increased effort involved in gathering resources from alternative sites and/or risk being caught whilst attempting to continue collection illegally.

Where consultations have been carried out with local communities concerning the development of protected areas and conservation policies, the discussions tend to have been dominated by those with more voice and power in the communities: the men. Women and their views and/or needs have been marginalised. As a result such views or needs have not been incorporated into conservation developments, which then have tended to have a more adverse impact on women than men. In addition, support for related activities tends to be focussed on male activities rather than female, as most jobs produced as a result of conservation are male dominated, such as community game guards and scouts. This is particularly the case in Africa where in the past community-based conservation has mainly focussed on community wildlife management. This has promoted the involvement of men, whilst marginalising women.

As a result, although community-based conservation and forestry can be beneficial, unless pre-existing socio-cultural inequality is taken into account, they will only serve to widen the gap in terms of access rights and unequal division of labour.