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## Social Development

# FOREST MANAGEMENT & GENDER

## SUMMARY

This briefing note is one of a series, produced by WWF-UK, to help develop understanding and awareness around the importance of gender analysis in natural resource management programmes.

The briefings, include summaries from case studies around the world, looking at lessons and experiences from integrating gender perspectives to a lesser or greater extent in programmes. The format is deliberately succinct and not too technical to enable the reader to access an initial understanding of natural resource-gender dynamics.

Other briefings in the series can be found here:

[wwf.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/making\\_the\\_links/women\\_and\\_conservation](http://wwf.org.uk/what_we_do/making_the_links/women_and_conservation)

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Understanding the different uses and interaction with the forest by women and men should be considered an essential element of designing and planning forest management interventions.

Although women's knowledge and needs often differ from those of men, many programmes continue to overlook these points when it comes to forestry. Ignoring gender issues in forest management isn't an option given that improper management and potential loss of essential ecosystems will have a different impact on women and men.

As a result, the only means to ensure their true conservation is to include both women and men's voices in decision making. By doing so, these programmes will benefit from the knowledge, skills and incorporate the needs of half the population, which are currently not being addressed. The programmes will also avoid increasing drudgery and suffering for women that result from forest degradation.

## BACKGROUND

Sustainable forest management is the environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of forests for present and future generations. In order to design and implement appropriate forestry programmes, it's essential to understand how important forests are to conservation and sustainability, as well as to rural livelihoods.

Forest management needs to recognise that forests are important to the poor, especially poor women. More than 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihoods. Of those, about 60 million indigenous people are almost wholly dependent on forests. Although women have limited ownership of land they often use forest resources for subsistence, as safety nets and even to generate modest incomes. Even though both women and men rely on forest products and services, the way they use and manage forests depends on many factors. Research has shown that women and men have different knowledge of, dependence on, and use of forest goods. They also have different benefits from, access to and control over forests. Women also tend to be more dependent than men on small-scale forest industries for income. In Uttar Pradesh, India, for example, 33 to 45% of women's income was generated from forests and common land, compared with only 13% for men. However, women's needs and concerns in relation to forest management are often neglected, and they have little power in determining development activities. Forest management projects that consider these needs and concerns have a greater chance of achieving a successful environmental and social impact.

## FOREST MANAGEMENT AND THE ROLES OF MEN AND WOMEN

Some of the most common differences between women and men with regard to forest resource management are that:

- They often play different roles in planting, protecting or caring for seedlings and small trees, as well as in planting and maintaining homestead woodlots and plantations on public lands.
- Women are responsible for collecting forest products such as fuel wood, fodder for livestock, other non-timber forest products (NTFPs) and raw materials to produce natural medicine. These help to meet subsistence requirements and increase family income. They spend a considerable amount of time carrying out these tasks.
- Men are more interested in commercial forestry. They tend to play a greater role than women in extracting timber and NTFPs for commercial purposes.
- Forest degradation results in loss of job opportunities, and migration of male members in search of employment. This requires women to shoulder the responsibilities of agricultural operations normally handled by men, which further increases women's workload.
- There's often the misconception that men are the principal, or only, decision-makers with regards to tree planting, management and their use. Women often have a greater awareness and knowledge about trees, shrubs and grasses than men, because they devote more time than men to collecting forest produce to meet family needs. However,



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women are not always given an equal opportunity to apply this knowledge.

- Women and men have different rights to access and control trees and forests.
- Women are often excluded from participation in decision-making for reasons such as social and cultural barriers, logistical barriers relating to the timings and length of meetings, and male bias in attitudes.
- Although forest degradation affects a community as a whole, it's particularly severe on women: the depletion of forest resources increases burdens on them, especially as it increases the time required to gather fuel wood and the cost of purchasing it.
- Paying attention to gender differences benefits efforts, strengthen the contribution from the forest to biodiversity conservation, sustainable development and poverty reduction.

## ACHIEVING POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT – THE NEED TO THINK MORE

### ABOUT GENDER

Incorporating gender issues is an essential way of contributing to the effectiveness of sustainable resource management policies and projects. Success can be enhanced by:

- Having a greater understanding of the knowledge that women and men in different socioeconomic circumstances have. This helps to determine appropriate and sustainable forestry policies.
- Encouraging both women and men to participate in forest management. This is vital to sustainable forestry policies.
- Avoiding potential conflicts among competing uses of forests and their by-products, and ensuring that women and men's traditional and indigenous rights to forest use aren't diminished when new projects are implemented.
- Promoting equal access of women to land ownership and to other resources necessary for effective socio-economic participation (e.g. capital, technical assistance, technology, tools, equipment, markets and time).
- Training both women and men in methods to increase their productivity through new forestry technologies – including nursery techniques, site selection, selection of species, land preparation, planting, weeding and maintenance.
- Training female forestry extension agents so women can play a more active role in forest management and training of other women while increasing awareness of women's roles in the use of forest resources, including their particular needs and





constraints.

- Increasing awareness among men and women of the value of forests and sustainable forestry management.
- Enhancing women's participation and cooperation in community groups or forest resource management committees created for project management.

If gender issues aren't considered, negative environmental impacts could include:

- Women may be forced to collect fuel wood and forest products from other forest areas, which would increase degradation of those areas.
- If only men are consulted, the choice of species and forest management techniques introduced may often not be appropriate for all forest users. Ultimately this could have a negative impact on the forest.
- If training and information aren't provided to both women and men, conservation issues won't be fully understood by all forest users. This may have a detrimental impact on both the project and the forest.

Taking into account women and men's activities in forestry issues, and including both in the related decision-making process, can help to prevent policies being established that criminalise activities such as collection of fuel wood and non-timber products. Understanding and changing behaviour patterns can help to avoid negative environmental impacts.

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# Joint forest management and village forest committees, India

## Background

In 1990, Indian forest management introduced joint forest management (JFM) through a central government order. JFM is a concept of developing partnerships between fringe forest user groups and the Forest Department on the basis of mutual trust and jointly defined roles and responsibilities with regard to forest protection and development. JFM promised rural communities a part in the profits, protection, regeneration and development of degraded forest land. Rural communities are represented through village forest committees (VFCs).

However, despite the potentially positive impact of JFM, the challenge has been to develop processes that recognise and respond effectively to different perspectives and needs of different stakeholders – such as the government and community; women and men.

WWF research undertaken along with other partners has highlighted the benefits of inclusion of gender in programmes such as these.

## Introduction

The primary objective of the JFM programme is the sustainable rehabilitation of degraded forest lands. But in the course of its development, approaches like village resource development and micro watershed development have been integrated into JFM, to reduce pressure on forests. JFM aims to give forest users a stake in the forest benefits and a role in planning and managing the forest. A further goal is to support the equitable distribution of forest products.

However, the success of the JFM programme has depended on establishing dialogue between different stakeholder groups with an interest in forests. As women constitute the most important user group (collecting forest products to meet family subsistence needs) sustainable forest management requires their active involvement. However, in this programme, forest policies and forest management practices haven't considered the difference between how women and men use the forest, and have ignored the intimate relationship between women and forests.

The forest policy envisaged both women and men's participation in the protection of forests. But it's been observed that in many cases owing to social and cultural constraints, the participation of women remains on paper only. In reality, women have played little role in the programme, and the majority of decisions are still made by men.

The effect of forest degradation is particularly severe on women, so they greatly value forest conservation. However, forest policies and management practices such as JFM programmes need to recognise the importance of women's role in forest management if they're to ensure that the impact of the programme is positive.



## Key analysis and environmental impact of JFM

The JFM approach has undoubtedly helped in rehabilitating and improving the degraded forests by regenerating them, helping in cost-effective conservation, and meeting communities' subsistence needs.

However, a critical examination shows how just how much the participating villagers, particularly women, have benefited from the programme, and what environmental impact this had:

- JFM has improved productivity.** Improved productivity of JFM forests has increased quantities of fuel wood and fodder. This has benefited women a great deal. However, the closure of some JFM forests to grazing, and the consequent shift to stall-feeding, has increased women's workload. The women are further disadvantaged because the increased income from dairying as a result of stall-feeding is taken by men who are usually responsible for milk sales. This could undermine women's interest in JFM in the long term.
- Increased collection and sale of NTFPs.** Women greatly benefit by collecting NTFPs from JFM areas, as they collect large quantities. However, the women don't get the full benefit from NTFP collection since middlemen exploit them. For example, the women collecting gum in Gujarat received only one-third of the market price. The major part of the income from NTFPs goes to those who add value through processing. Special efforts are necessary to help women establish and run NTFP-based enterprises. Such an approach is likely to distribute benefits more equitably within communities and families and create more incentive for increased interest in sustainable use of the forest.
- Poor involvement of women.** One aspect of JFM that came under repeated criticism was the inadequate representation of women and the poor on VFCs. The lack of participation by women greatly reduced their opportunity to share information and knowledge and voice their opinions. As a result, numerous activities could negatively impact on both women and their use of the forests. In addition, women's concerns weren't heard at VFC meetings, due mainly to the fact that men decided the timing of the meetings. Even when women were physically present at meetings their views weren't heard. Women are interested in ensuring increased and sustained availability of NTFPs, and men are generally interested in maximising monetary returns. But during meetings, only men's opinions appeared to be taken into account. The limited involvement of women also meant that the choice of species for planting in JFM areas was often decided by men, who chose cash profits over fuel and fodder yields. This reduced women's involvement and interest in the sustainable management of forest resources.
- Shifting pressure on forests and increased work burden for women.** Where some areas of forests have been protected under JFM, the programme didn't make alternative provisions for obtaining fuel and fodder. As a result, these basic necessities had to be procured from other sources. This



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required women to spend longer collecting fuel and fodder for domestic use. It also shifted the pressure to other areas of forest, rather than reducing it.

- **All-women VFCs.** By the end of 1995, all-women VFCs had been established in seven locations, through special arrangements with the Forest Department. The main reason for this innovation was that villages with more progressive attitudes towards women wanted to allow them an opportunity to voice their own priorities and concerns. But other factors played a role. For example, in one village, women decided to form an all-woman VFC because they felt that this was the only way of keeping men out of a particular patch of forest. It gave women a greater incentive to manage the forest more sustainably.

### What can be done to improve the impact results from JFM?

To ensure the success of the JFM approach and ensure a positive environmental impact, women's participation needs to be improved. To achieve this, awareness among women needs to be increased. Participation can also be enhanced through:

- Involving women from the very beginning of JFM programmes. Constant and sustained dialogue should be maintained with them.
- Increasing awareness among women of their rights to participate, and of the benefits if they do.
- Increasing the representation of women in VFCs and other meetings, so that their concerns are taken into account at all levels.
- Employing female extension workers with whom women may talk more freely. Because women may be reluctant to participate actively in meetings in the presence of men, separate meetings for women may be arranged to get their views.
- Forming all-women groups to allow women to voice their opinions.
- Undertaking gender analysis when developing plans, in order to understand the different uses and the different dependence of women and men on forest products.

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## THE BORANA COLLABORATIVE FOREST MANAGEMENT PROJECT, ETHIOPIA

### INTRODUCTION

The Borana Collaborative Forest Management Project was established by SOS Sahel (a UK-based development charity) in 1999/2000. The project aimed to address a set of specific problems related to the juniper forests of Borana. The forests are used by settled and semi-settled agro-pastoralist villages for subsistence, income generation and within drought-coping strategies. Pastoralists also use them as a critical source of dry season grazing.

The primary objectives of the project were:

- Long-term revitalisation and conservation of major elements of the forests.
- Improved and sustainable livelihoods for communities living in and around the forests – through regaining access to and control over forest resources, which were in the hands of local government.
- Development of the Forest Department's capacity to work with communities on collaborative forest management (CFM).
- Development of a replicable process for CFM as a contribution towards more widespread adoption of CFM in Ethiopia.

The project proved very successful in achieving the aims of increasing community rights to the forest resources. It also halted the steady destruction of the forests and the resulting loss of livelihoods. However, the long-term environmental impact of the project, and its overall benefit to the community, was limited as the project failed to address gender issues in any great detail. Information about women and men's different roles and responsibilities was collected as part of an initial stakeholder analysis. And it was recognised that gender issues played an important role in the implementation and success of the project. But no further investigations or analyses took place. The project didn't consider gender issues adequately. As a result, women missed out on many of the project benefits and opportunities. Furthermore, although the project secured 'rights', it is debatable to what degree this improved 'livelihood' security, as often the very poorest sections of the community (usually women with no assets or resources) weren't benefiting from the forest management systems. Nor were they actively taking part, despite being forest users.



## RATIONALE FOR INTEGRATING GENDER IN THE PROJECT

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Without recognising the differences between women and men's roles and responsibilities, the impact of the project was limited, and the long-term sustainability was not ensured. Social and cultural roles determine women and men's responsibilities within Borana society; however this was not taken into consideration when planning forestry interventions. Some of the most common differences are:

- Women manage small animals, dairy production, fetching water and gathering fuel wood. They share other tasks with men, such as working on the farmland.
- Many women rely heavily on the sale of firewood as their only source of income.
- Women have control over smaller livestock and fowl such as chickens. Money raised from these tends to be kept by the women and usually spent on items for the household.
- In many households, women are the sole earners. However, this role is often not acknowledged.
- There is a high illiteracy rate among women and girls. Only 3% of girls attend school, due to tradition and lack of resources. Girls are kept at home to help with chores.
- Household property is under the husband's control. When he dies his family takes over control. In Borana, women's access to natural resources such as water, fuel wood, grass and fodder is key to their families' survival. Women (and girls) have to travel long distances to collect them. Often the sale of such resources provides the only income to the household. The multiple roles played by women have created conditions whereby they influence and are influenced by the environment. As the environment is degraded and the forests are depleted, this relationship becomes increasingly negative: the scarcity of resources increases, demanding more time and energy to secure them. These links between women and the environment needed to be acknowledged, understood and incorporated into project development. Women, as well as men, have a broad knowledge of the forest and its uses, but this knowledge wasn't fully acknowledged and utilised. In addition, women's participation in decision-making is minimal and limited. It's mainly focused at the household level (e.g. women support each other in times of need, such as weddings and funerals). At the community level, their participation in decision-making is almost non-existent. So decisions that affect their lives and those of their families are made without their participation. What's more, the experiences and knowledge that women have accumulated about forest management and the environment is rarely

acknowledged or utilised. And when women do attend meetings they rarely have the confidence to speak.

## PROJECT ENVIRONMENT IMPACT – A GENDER PERSPECTIVE

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- Although the initial Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises involved men and women, men dominated them. Very few women attended, and no ‘women only’ meetings were organised. Hence women’s involvement and contribution was greatly reduced and the project failed to include women’s opinions and perspectives, and was only designed on information gathered from men. As a result the project activities addressed only men’s priorities with regards to forest management, overlooking a key user and manager of forest resources.
- From the beginning, the project recognised that gender was an important component. Women were expected to benefit from access to forest products through the introduction of tree nurseries and modern backyard beehives, and through improved marketing and handling of these forest products. They would also be actively involved in the planning, implementing and monitoring of the forest management agreements and plans. However, women’s involvement and participation was limited and men dominated decisions. So, while the intent was there, in reality the project only provided limited incentives for women to use the forest products more sustainably.
- The project also established co-management groups, which aimed to halt the steady destruction of the forests. The groups were designed to manage and protect the forest from illegal extraction and fire, promote awareness among the local community, and reflect on forest management issues. In general, the groups functioned well and contributed positively to the sustainability of forest resource management and utilisation. However, less visible rights to access natural resources held by women were often undermined by decisions made within these bodies. Therefore, unless gender issues are taken into account, transferring power to the local level could potentially exclude women from their rights to control natural resources. This would reduce their interest in sustainable forest management and the overall success of the project.

## LESSONS LEARNED

A more detailed gender assessment needed to be carried out throughout the project area.

- Project formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation should have fully integrated the concerns and needs of both women and men.

- PRA exercises needed to include a greater number of women. Separate meetings for women appear to be necessary to ensure that the project considers their knowledge, experiences and problems.
- Women must be actively encouraged to participate in the forest management committees set up as part of the project.
- Different data for women and men should have been gathered and utilised. Gender indicators should have been developed as part of any gender strategy.
- Lack of resources, increasing poverty and more adverse environmental conditions are forcing many Borana communities to rethink the role that women play in their communities. Today, education and knowledge are considered important not only for boys but also for girls, as they can find work in nearby towns and support the family. Better education can also provide an entry point for addressing long-term environmental issues within the project.

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