

gender in the conservation of protected areas

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Two decades ago, conservation organizations began integrating the human dimension in conservation practice and ecosystem management, calling for the involvement of local communities in conservation (Randi Randi and University of Florida, 2002). This has been essential where people live either inside or in the buffer zones of protected areas in Latin America and the Caribbean, and gender has been one of the critical social variables considered in the process.

Gender refers to the socially constructed differences and relations between men and women that vary according to situation, place, time and context, and which influence structure and decision making within communities, institutions and families. Gender analysis requires “understanding how historical, demographic, institutional, cultural, socio-economic and ecological factors affect relations between women and men of different groups, which partly determine forms of natural resource management” (Schmink, 1999:2).

In relation to biodiversity and natural resources, taking a gender perspective involves understanding and integrating the relations and differences between men and women into projects. This includes the different roles, rights and opportunities of men and women concerning access, use, management and conservation of natural resources. It also involves considering the different ways in which environmental degradation affects men and women.

The purpose of this bulletin is to introduce some important elements for the

integration of gender perspective in natural resource conservation and sustainable use activities. We hope it will be helpful to those searching for ideas and recommendations on how to incorporate a gender perspective into their work. With this in mind, this publication enriches theoretical concepts with information about experiences in Latin American and Caribbean protected areas that have received support from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) through the Parks in Peril (PiP) program.

Integrating a gender perspective into the conservation of protected areas contributes toward the following activity in the Program of Work on Protected Areas, formulated during the Seventh Meeting of the Conference of the Parties (CoP7) of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in 2004: “Carrying out participatory national reviews of the status, needs and context-specific mechanisms for involving stakeholders, ensuring gender and social equity, in protected areas policy and management, at the level of national policy, protected area systems and individual sites.” This activity advances objective (2.2) of “enhancing and securing involvement of indigenous and local communities and relevant stakeholders” (SCDB, 2004) in protected areas management. Including gender also contributes toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals, especially in relation to gender equality and the empowerment of women, as well as addressing critical issues in the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995.



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1. Gender differences in conservation & natural resource use

There are differences between women and men living in protected areas and buffer zones, and it is important that these differences be understood and considered for effective participation in the conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. These differences can be grouped into four interrelated categories.

Gender-responsive conservation policies and programs are those that seek to achieve biodiversity conservation success, while explicitly taking into account both men's and women's opinions, needs, and interests (PiP, 2006).

1. Roles & responsibilities: Generally, men play a greater role than women in the exploitation of natural resources for commercial purposes, since women also dedicate time to domestic activities (i.e., cooking, water and fuelwood collection, child care, etc.). These roles can vary. For example, when men migrate in search of job opportunities, women may assume more roles and responsibilities (Sass, 2002). Agriculture is one of the activities in which both men and women participate. In the Central Selva region of Peru, the entire family takes care of the trees as well as harvesting and processing agroforestry products, although women are mainly in charge of the tree nurseries (TNC Peru, 2006). Often, women have responsibilities related to the management of natural resources, but not rights over them.

2. Access & control over resources: Due to economic, social, institutional and legal factors, the right to access and control natural resources, such as land and forests, is different for men and women. Women have generally experienced greater restrictions, particularly with respect to independent ownership and access to land. This may partially explain why the majority of the world's poor are women who depend on natural resources for subsistence (Sass, 2002). Insecurity regarding land tenure has an effect on how much time women—and men—are willing to spend on sustainable development practices. Lack of land and other constraints mean that women generally have fewer opportunities to obtain credit and support services, unless these are provided for the explicit purpose of overcoming women's disadvantages (Sass, 2002).

3. Knowledge base: As a result of the differences in activities and access, women's and men's knowledge about the use of natural resources can also be different. For example, some women have become guardians of biodiversity by using their knowledge to utilize a wide variety of seeds, maintaining important *in situ* reserves of genetic resources or germ-plasm (Aguilar, et al 2004). This knowledge has been transmitted from mothers to daughters for generations. Differences in knowledge between women and men also depend on their particular social class, age and ethnic group.

4. Public participation in decision making: Generally women have had fewer opportunities to participate in making environmental decisions. As a result, their perceptions and interests are sometimes ignored or excluded when policies are designed (Sass, 2002). The absence of opportunities is often due to cultural restrictions, women's lack of schooling and low self-esteem, while logistical reasons may be the factor in other circumstances. For example, in the Guatemalan Motagua-Polochic System, some institutions are planning to facilitate women's participation by taking care of children while their mothers attend the events.

2. Gender as a tool for protected area conservation

In general, from a conservation perspective, projects that have applied gender equity and promoted women's participation have been more effective and balanced (Biermayr-Jenzano, 2003).

While each case is different, incorporating gender in natural resource conservation and sustainable use:

- Ensures that women's and men's traditional rights over resource use in protected areas are not diminished with the development of projects and programs (Martin, 2004).
- Helps in changing stereotypes harmful to conservation, such as the belief that women are incapable of participating together with men (Hill Rojas, 1999). It strengthens a vision in which men and women can develop the same or complementary activities in relation to nature. In the Motagua-Polochic System in Guatemala, for example, both men and women participate in fire prevention and control in three watersheds of the Motagua River, according to their capacities.
- Contributes to resolving conflicts of interest in the definition and management of protected areas, by recognizing the different interests and priorities of men and women (Aguilar et al, 2004).
- Helps ensure the representation of diversity in environmental management and to identify local organizations responsible for it (Biermayr-Jenzano, 2003).
- Facilitates contact with external sources of financing interested in promoting gender initiatives (Aguilar et al, 2004).
- Increases opportunities for sustainable activities, such as those women have traditionally carried out or in which they have a particular interest.
- Uncovers roles and interests which are usually ignored, such as those of women, who represent slightly more than half the population in Latin America and the Caribbean.



Timothy Boucher

case 1

Artisans in Central Selva, Peru

Partnerships and Technology Sustainability (PaTS) is working with ProNaturaleza in the Central Selva region of Peru. With support from agencies such as USAID and TNC, these organizations seek to improve the living conditions of families belonging to the Yanesha ethnic group in the Palcazú valley, a buffer zone of Yanachaga-Chemillén National Park, the Yanesha Communal Reserve and San Matías-San Carlos Protection Forest. One of the projects that PaTS manages enables men and women artisans to craft products made of wood and cloth dyed with forest products, and then sell them in Peru and other countries.

In this project, it was easy for men to participate, since it was a cultural norm for men to work outside the home. Women had to overcome barriers such as the lack of childcare, or husbands not allowing them to work outside the home. On some occasions, husbands allowed women to go to the workshops if they took the children with them, but this limited the learning process. Nevertheless, 50 men and women are participating in this income-generating project. The benefits for women are reflected in tangible impacts, such as better food, cooking utensils and clothing. According to William Romaní, PaTS field coordinator, many of these women have received other benefits: more control over relations within the family. They are now providers, and their husbands help them with the work. While initially some men were opposed to enhancing these opportunities for women, "once work started and they saw that the small income helped the [family] economy and stability, now they are the ones helping to carve, sand and sell their products." Unfortunately, some men have completely delegated their responsibilities to the women and they make fewer efforts to find jobs to complement the incomes the women now provide.

These women have also overcome the limitations of low educational levels by putting in more effort to understand the contents of training. At the start, sharing their opinions was a new experience for the women, something that only men would do, but they gradually became aware of the importance of participating. Young women are more active and secure about expressing their opinions, and are no longer simply spectators.

According to William, this opportunity for women to participate has been very important. Starting out by working and getting along at the group level in the workshops has given them opportunities for improving their daily activities and relations at the family and individual level. The women have learned to be more autonomous in managing the family budget, putting the children's education as the main priority. They are aware that results depend on their attitude, how they organize, and how they assume responsibilities in their roles, both at home and at work.

Source: Interview with Benjamin Kroll, October, 2006



case 2

Strengthening of existing opportunities for women:

Amboro and Carrasco, Bolivia

In the Amboro and Carrasco National Parks in Bolivia, incorporating a gender perspective into the conservation strategies and specifically involving women is considered essential to success. According to Cole Genge of the TNC/Bolivia, working with the female public is the only way to achieve positive conservation impacts in the long term. “Women are the anchor of the family, and without the anchor, boats are taken away by the tide.” There is a duality in this society; even though women are discriminated against in public spaces, they must be present in order for decisions to be made. This situation is described as a product of the Andean indigenous Quechua and Aymará cultures which dominate this region.

Gender is being factored into education and communication campaigns in an effort to create messages that contain language and content that is meaningful to women and young people. The process has not advanced far enough to measure results, but the purpose is to incorporate a gender perspective from the start. Gender is a topic that must be addressed with tact, education and information. According to Genge, this is not an issue to tackle head on; instead, existing programs can be a vehicle for increasing the influence of women and children, while continually working with men, as well. Building a gender perspective takes time and needs to be incorporated in spheres where women have traditionally had a space. The best setting for children, for example, is the school system.

While drastic changes in power relations between men and women cannot be expected, it is possible to strengthen existing spheres of influence and encourage more women to participate in them as a way to help break unequal patterns that are deeply rooted in the culture.

Source: Telephone interviews with Cole Genge, October 10, 2006 & November 13, 2006

Women have a number of characteristics that benefit conservation efforts. While it may not be easily visible to outsiders, innately women are community leaders, often the ones who organize local environmental events, and have the greatest influence on their children, to whom they can pass on environmental messages. Women are also more predisposed to use income for household expenses and they manage natural resources such as plants and fuel wood on a daily basis (Hill Rojas, 1999).

“As a result of the development of human rights and the global democratization processes, it is unavoidable to work from a perspective that integrates the subject of equity and equality among men and women.”

(Aguilar y Castañeda, 2000).

3. Elements to consider in incorporating gender perspective

The incorporation of a gender perspective in protected area conservation is ensured through women’s participation in specific activities or programs and in defining the objectives and design of conservation activities; this makes the activities or programs consistent with the interests and priorities of both men and women. In order to promote social participation in conservation and sustainable use processes, it is necessary to recognize, develop and revisit the concept of “the community” as a homogeneous group (Aguilar et al, 2002). In addition to discerning the differences between men and women, it is necessary to realize that men and women are not homogenous categories either, since here too there are distinguishing social factors (i.e., age, ethnic group, socioeconomic status, marital status, migratory status, religion, location, and others).

The following are some basic factors to consider when incorporating gender into the design and development of conservation projects.

3.1. Design of Conservation Activities

- Conduct an assessment which includes a social analysis of the area’s inhabitants—men and women. The assessment should identify the needs, interests, knowledge and behaviors by gender which will shape the conservation initiatives. Making gender distinctions helps to clarify the relations between humans and the environment (Sass, 2002). Consider the need to involve men in the gender discussions from the beginning, and keep it from becoming an issue exclusively about and for women. Gender workshops are recommended to raise men’s awareness.

- Facilitate men's and women's participation in the design of conservation activities through the use of easily applicable didactic methods, such as making maps where each person draws his or her use, access and control over the natural resources. Mapping can illustrate the fact that one activity may affect women and men differently (Randi Randi and University of Florida, 2002).

In the Central Selva region of Peru, two workshops were organized in 2006 with project beneficiaries in Oxapampa and Palcazú to identify gender roles in daily activities. The workshops highlighted the inequality existing in decision making and natural resource management. The process made participants aware of the importance of gender, while women gained decision making power and increased possibilities of action on their farms.

- Adjust situations and conditions to make women feel more comfortable about participating. For example, women tend to be more open to talking with other women than with men. In such cases, specific participatory mechanisms should be established, such as contracting women from the region to facilitate these activities.

3.2. Development of Conservation Activities

- Integrating women into existing initiatives is generally more effective than a separate effort directed at women. However, this can depend, especially in cases where there is a tradition of women working together in groups or when they are the head of household (Hill Rojas, 1999).

Board of Director positions in the Federation of Yanesha Native Communities (FECONAYA) of Peru's Central Selva region have traditionally been held by men. However, the Women Issues Secretariat created a few years ago is led by a woman. This advance has been important for women and has also opened space for discussing the possibility of allowing women to become Federation president, a post traditionally occupied by men.

- Depending on the specific context, either create or strengthen women's organizations parallel to carrying out conservation activities. This makes it possible to establish spaces for women's public participation and for assuming responsibilities associated with their gender (Aguilar et al, 2002).
- Accompany activities with training for people who live and/or manage the protected areas, about gender themes and their connection with conservation and sustainable use. It is recommended that training initiate with topics where the gender theme can be applied (Randi Randi and University of Florida, 2002).
- Promote spaces for the exchange of experiences in which everyone has the chance to share lessons, successes and failures
- Hold activities at times and places enabling more participation for women, considering their schedules, the duration of the sessions, closeness to home, format and content of the materials, etc. For example, do not call a meeting at hours when this would interrupt priority tasks at their homes, and try to make sure that women sit in places where they can be heard and seen at the meetings.
- Incorporate a gender perspective into educational materials so that they "will most likely be accessible to women, and may therefore promote capacity building and encourage more equitable relations between men and women" (Rodríguez et al, 2004: 39).

Suggested themes for a gender-sensitive assessment

- Identify the ways women and men learn, what they learn and how they use what they learn in relation to natural resources (Hill Rojas et al, 2001).
- Identify the sexual division of labor. Who does what in productive, reproductive and communal activities? When and how is it done?
- Identify access and control of resources, goods and services, as well as benefit and cost sharing, differentiating by gender, with an emphasis on the resources that protected area activities will have an effect on.
- Identify demographic trends: birth rates, average age that women have children, and significant migratory movements that can influence conservation efforts.
- Identify traditional or contemporary values that influence (either positively or negatively) the way in which men and women use natural resources.
- Include quantitative and qualitative data that illustrate power and subordination relations between the men and women participating in the groups.
- Identify gender-differentiated forms of participation (quantity and quality) in decision-making processes in both community and domestic spheres.
- Identify rules and laws that influence the way in which men and women use, manage and control natural resources.
- Illustrate the needs, demands and priorities expressed by men and women, as well as those expressed by young and older people.

Source: Hill Rojas et al, 2001, Aguilar et al, 2002



case 3

Socio-environmental assessment with gender perspective in the coastal plain of the Loreto Municipality, Mexico

In March 2002, a socio-environmental diagnosis was conducted in the coastal plain of the Loreto Municipality in Mexico. The purpose was, among other things, to illustrate the human diversity of the region's different zones, the various ways in which the cultural diversity uses the resources, and gender differences. This diagnosis justified the interest in incorporating gender perspective since "women are the backbone of local productive and reproductive activities, but are rarely taken into consideration for making decisions in and outside their communities since they have been considered less capable of deciding and guiding, and historically the activities that they carry out have been less valued. However, the success of the sustainable development programs would only be possible if women are given equal opportunities as men, that is, if they are fully involved in their communities' cultivation processes" (Soares, 2002: 5).

Based on an understanding of gender as "an identity construction, and as such, nourishes social institutions like the family, the school, the media and the church," the diagnosis analyzed the different ways that men and women own and use natural resources. Also, it showed how the region's productive activities affect them differently, taking into account inequalities in terms of development opportunities, access to resources, education and participation in decision making. The diagnosis made it possible to identify men's and women's perceptions, socio-environmental problems and needs in the municipality. According to Denise Soares, the diagnosis was the starting point of a sensitizing and training process in which women had the opportunity of being heard. The information was gathered through interviews, workshops and participatory observation of the following: the interviewees' life itineraries, the natural resource and environmental situation, social organization and community participation, productive activities and knowledge about Loreto Bay National Park. From the diagnosis, lines of action were determined to promote equal opportunities for women and men in regional sustainable development proposals.

Sources: Soares, Denise. 2002. *De Gentes y Mares: Diagnóstico Socioambiental con Perspectiva de Género en la Llanura Costera del Municipio de Loreto*. Mexican Institute of Water Technology (IMTA) and interview via e-mail, November 14, 2006.

In Bolivia's Amboro-Carrasco National Parks, an education strategy is being carried out to increase awareness about the environmental benefits generated by the parks. Organizations of women and youth are among the audiences being targeted since they are considered more receptive to environmental issues.

- Involve women in methods to monitor project advances with respect to conservation targets and protected area management .
- Consider including indicators in the monitoring system to record progress toward gender equity, such as changes in power relations between men and women, number of woman participating in activities, or women's access to resources .



- Have at least one person knowledgeable about the gender theme to provide technical assistance to the initiatives or projects. This gives the theme visibility, permanence and the possibility of addressing gender in a professional manner (Aguilar et al, 2002), although ideally, all members of the technical team should have an understanding and awareness of gender. Having mixed and multidisciplinary teams makes it easier to deal with gender themes. Also, it is suggested that the technical team include professionals capable of assessing human values, self-esteem and respect between family members.



Inclusion of a gender-equitable perspective in the design, monitoring, and evaluation of conservation initiatives will have a positive impact on the social fabric of communities living in protected areas. This, in turn, will enhance conservation outcome

(Biermayr-Jenzano, 2003: 3)



case 4

Institutionalizing gender in Podocarpus, Ecuador

The Arcoiris Foundation, TNC's partner, has promoted and supported incorporation of the gender theme in conservation and sustainable use processes in Podocarpus National Park. Directors support their staff's participation in training workshops on this theme. As a result, this knowledge and new ideas about participation and gender were applied in environmental education and community outreach programs, and the theme became institutionalized in Arcoiris. The foundation created a community development area to design and promote projects with an emphasis on organizational strengthening and natural resource management with gender perspective. In addition, community leaders (men and women) have been trained in applying gender perspective, and a network was established for training and discussion of the theme. Several lessons were drawn from these experiences:

- * The institutionalization of gender requires the support of the institution's heads.
- * Institutional commitment must be demonstrated in the form of policies, mandates, actions, and sufficient human and financial resources.
- * A systematic and ongoing gender training program will be important to support field activities.
- * It is important to replicate successful experiences and train trainers [trainees]. This entails allocating the required resources, since adequate training can be expensive.
- * It is better to keep gender and participation aims [focuses] together and not deal with them separately.

Following this framework of recommendations, one of the PiP-supported projects carried out between 1993 and 2001 centered on honey production in San Pedro de Vilcabamba, a buffer zone for the national park. Producers have agreed to pay a tax on the honey production; the Association of Honey Producers uses these funds to support its conservation activities, such as materials, field trips and patrolling of buffer zones. In 1999, the Association assumed complete responsibility for the project and continues working to sell honey under the brand name, "Abejita Longeva," in the local market. As the project advanced, it became evident that women were better suited to managing the bee hives and bottling and selling the honey. Some women also have made honey-based products, such as a fermented beverage, propolis and sweets. Adult and young women have assumed an important leadership role, contributing to greater stability of gender and inter-generational relations within the project. Until 2000, the presidency of the Association was held by a woman.

Source: Arroyo et al. 2002. "Final Consolidation Report, Podocarpus National Park, Parks in Peril Program" and personal communication from Arturo Jiménez of Fundación Arcoiris.



case 5

Balancing work and home: La Amistad/Bocas del Toro, Panama and Costa Rica

In La Amistad/Bocas del Toro International Park, TNC has supported the formation of community networks working on behalf of the park's protection and conservation. One of these is Alianza para el Desarrollo Ambiental de las Tierras Alta (ADATA), which brings together socio-environmental organizations active in a buffer zone area located in the Panamanian highlands of La Amistad Biosphere Reserve. Currently, 10 organizations are part of the network, each with a different aim or focus.

Damaris Sánchez is one of the leaders of AMIPILA and FUNDICCEP, groups belonging to the network. Established 16 years ago, AMIPILA carries out environmental education, sustainable agriculture, reforestation, and other programs, while FUNDICCEP has fostered the creation and strengthening of some of the network's nine other groups. For Damaris, who started out in 1998 as the coordinator of an organizational strengthening and environmental education project, the best part about working in FUNDICCEP is that "it has enabled me to develop all of my capacity as a professional. The community outreach and organizational strengthening work has been extremely interesting and has allowed me to get to know people, ideas, and experiences and learn how to understand the human side, needs, and limitations better so that communities and people get involved in environmental, social and other types of activities."

Damaris is able to distribute her time between working in the groups and taking care of her husband, 11-year-old son and 5-year-old daughter. Damaris writes, "like every woman who works and takes care of her home, you have to figure out ways of responding to both without negatively affecting either one. This isn't easy, because there are no schedules, holidays, or free days when you're working with communities. The groups' needs change and sometimes you need to work a lot of extra hours." However, if the activity is suitable, on weekends Damaris takes her children with her to work. "Obviously, sometimes I feel like I don't spend enough time with them, so I also get involved in activities we can all share. (The four of us are members of a folkloric group, so we take trips together and this allows us to spend some very beautiful times with one another.)" She is fortunate in having a supportive family. "Thank God I have my MOTHER, who is my greatest ally and helps take care of my children and me (still). My husband is a member of the foundation so he understands and is part of the activities. We try to share the house responsibilities and support one other."

Damaris recognizes that sometimes there are limitations that prevent other women from participating in activities away from home: their partners' lack of trust, lack of knowledge about some topics, fear of expressing their ideas, not recognizing their own capacities, and the family's economic situation. However, she feels comfortable working with men because there is respect, companionship and friendship. For Damaris, her greatest contribution at work is to share her love for natural resources with young people and children, and to "teach that we are all important and can contribute to achieving changes for the future."

Source: Electronic interview with Damaris Sánchez. October 20-23, 2006

4. Some conservation & sustainable use initiatives with gender perspective

Sustainable development initiatives in protected areas and buffer zones can offer unique opportunities to promote gender equality, as long as they promote equitable participation of men and women in activities, decision making and the distribution of benefits (Aguilar et al, 2004).

- Watershed management initiatives that include women have had more chances of success since they are the ones primarily in charge of collecting water and thus have considerable knowledge about water resources, including water quality and reliability (Siles, 2004). In Cuatro Ciénegas, Mexico, one of the main motivations for improving the water system was so that women would not have to bring water from far distances.
- Gender-sensitive environmental education initiatives have reached a larger population, since they do not exclude women and young people.
- Fair trade initiatives make women's input more visible in terms of knowledge, production, and protection of biodiversity, as well as guaranteeing them employment, improving income levels and securing access to technology, credit and participation in decision taking (Vargas and Siles, 2004). These initiatives contemplate, for example, handcrafts made of non-timber forest products, contributing to the sustainable use of the resources.
- Payment for environmental services initiatives can promote equity in terms of benefit sharing. For example, a percentage of the benefits can be set aside for activities with women. The Costa Rican Ministry of Environment established that part of the funds obtained in return for environmental services such as carbon fixing would be earmarked for activities promoting equity in beneficiary communities (Aguilar et al, 2002).

At the request of the Zacapulco and Topón communities, in Mexico's La Encrucijada Biosphere Reserve, a project was developed to produce paper mache handcrafts to sell to the reserve's visitors. This activity has made it possible to increase environmental awareness, especially in women and children, while helping supplement family income. Twenty-eight women and two men participated in the project.

- Sometimes, fishing initiatives in marine protected areas have excluded women. However, they should be given equitable opportunities for training and credit since in many places women are the ones in charge of in-shore fishing, maintaining nets, preparing meals for fishing trips, quality control, processing, commercialization, distribution, and other activities (Aguilar, 2004c).

In Peru's Pacaya-Samiria Nature Reserve, members of the fishing community have participated in the design and implementation of fishery management plans. Men and women in the reserve participate in different activities, based on their capacities and interests. For example, in accordance with their customs and culture, fishing is mainly done by men, but women are responsible for drying the fish. In activities related to the protection of river turtles, or taricaya, men carry the buckets with eggs and locate turtle nests, and women (who are usually more careful and delicate) handle the eggs and bury them in the artificial beaches.

- Ecotourism initiatives have also provided a vehicle for fostering equitable gender relations, with demonstrated effectiveness in empowering women through community-based tourism enterprises (Vargas y Aguilar, 2004).

- Initiatives aimed at promoting efficient use of energy sources have been more effective when they include women, who are the main decision makers about domestic energy use. It is estimated that women spend three times more time transporting fuel than men (Aguilar, 2004b).
- Farm planning initiatives or processes should involve all family members so that each one's role can be identified and, if needed, make it possible for their tasks to be done by another member. This is what was done in Chagres National Park, in Panama.

Women's participation should not be imposed. A project supported in Mexico's Sian Ka'an Biosphere Reserve involved the transmission of knowledge about traditional medicine by elder men. Women were not encouraged to participate at the beginning because the purpose was to recover Mayan traditions, and in this culture men are the ones who practice this activity and are educated to become priests. Only later did women start to participate and share their knowledge, but mostly about home gardens. In contrast, they were the main participants of a traditional medicine project in the Calakmul Biosphere Reserve, where the emphasis was on resolving family health problems, something of particular interest to them. (Cristina Lasch, telephone interview, October 14, 2006)

- Research initiatives that incorporate sources of non-traditional information have been more effective if they recognize women's knowledge in areas such as growing crops, crop resistance to pests, harvesting? [collection] and food processing. Women's- and men's-knowledge about biodiversity needs to be made visible and valued (Aguilar, 2004a).





Nicole Balloflet

case 6

Opportunities for women to live better: Atitlán Volcanoes, Guatemala

Asociación Unidos para Vivir Mejor (ASUVIM) [“United to Live Better”] was founded seven years ago in the Santa Clara Municipal Regional Park, in the Atitlán Volcanoes region. This association is a coffee-grower cooperative whose creation was supported by one of TNC’s partners, the non-governmental organization, Vivamos Mejor. ASUVIM has 99 members, of which 12 are women. To join ASUVIM, members must own land with coffee plantings. According to Daniel Balux Tzic, one of ASUVIM’s leaders, women have the same rights and benefits as men and their opinions are heard.

Since April of 2006, ASUVIM has been carrying out a tourism project called the “Coffee Tour,” which mainly consists of tours on horseback to see the different stages of coffee growing and processing. In response to a request from the women, this tourist service was expanded to include a stop at a coffee shop and souvenir store they managed. This new project benefits nine women who are ASUVIM members or wives and daughters of members. People taking the tour can visit the processing facilities in the town, and then have a cup of this excellent beverage in the coffee shop. Catarina Yac Sulugüi, member of ASUVIM since its very beginning, was the one who prepared the proposal for this project, which received support from a national coffee association (ANACAFE). According to Catarina, the project “opened their minds,” and ANACAFE trained Caterina to prepare high-quality coffee. The women also offer meals to the visitors that arrive each week, a service that has improved thanks to the training in food preparation they have received. They still don’t have all the cooking utensils they need and feel they need more training, but in general, are satisfied with the project. “We want to learn more, and we can offer something better because we have received training.”

Catarina believes that the most important thing is to put what they’ve learned into practice. Young women are the ones who are more enthusiastic and committed, while mothers face more obstacles. Her message to the women that participate in the project is: “If I stay at home, well, I can’t do anything and I can’t learn anything. But if I participate.... only then do I learn how to do things. I can improve myself and do the things men can do.... I insist that you do your part: learn.”

Source: Interview by TNC, August 24, 2006

Although complex, the integration of gender perspective in natural resource conservation and sustainable use actions is both possible and necessary in order to achieve more effective and sustainable results. There is still a long road to travel, one that requires commitment, time and financial, technical and human resources needed to initiate and consolidate local processes and gradually advance to higher levels. In sum, “working from a perspective of gender equity means much more than just “women’s activities for women.” It involves an approach, strategies and actions for women and men alike. Working from a gender equity perspective means acknowledging the unequal power relations between genders, and undertaking a series of actions at all levels that involves women and men in the construction of participatory and equitable relations in conservation and sustainable development processes.”

Aguilar et al, 2002: 43



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