

Gender and Biodiversity



Convention on
Biological Diversity



Gender refers to the social roles that men and women play and the power relations between them, which usually have a profound effect on the use and management of natural resources. Gender is not based on sex, or the biological differences between men and women. Gender is shaped by

culture, social relations, and natural environments. Thus, depending on values, norms customs and laws men and women in different parts of the world have evolved different gender roles.

Gender roles of women and men include different labour responsibilities, decision-making processes, and

knowledge. According to their needs, men and women often use and manage resources in different ways. The gendering of local knowledge, including knowledge for managing biological systems has four key characteristics (Husinga *et al.*,2001):

1. *Women and men have knowledge about different things.*
2. *Men and women have different knowledge about the same things.*
3. *Women and men may organize their knowledge in different ways.*
4. *Men and women may receive and transmit their knowledge by different means.*

Gender and gender roles affect the economic, political, social and ecological opportunities and constraints faced by both men and women.

The importance of biodiversity to different individuals, groups and communities varies according to their gender, among other factors. In most countries, the survival of rural communities, their well-being and empowerment depend on biodiversity. For men and women in developing countries, particularly in the least developed countries, biodiversity is vital for their survival and the survival

of their families. Biodiversity is also part of their belief system and their cultural and spiritual values.

Exposing and understanding the gender-differentiated biodiversity practices and knowledge of women and men enhances biodiversity conservation. Many case studies from around the world have demonstrated that in empowering women and vulnerable groups to participate as equals in information

sharing and generation, education and training, technology transfer, organizational development, financial assistance and policy development, biodiversity conservation efforts become more effective and efficient.

Considerable efforts over the past fifteen years at national and international fora, have brought the Convention on Biological Diversity to understand the fundamental roles

that women play in managing and conserving biodiversity and the need to integrate the gender perspective into their framework. The Convention is strongly committed to recognizing and promoting the integral yet distinct roles that women and men play in conserving, celebrating and sharing biodiversity. The CBD further recognizes that women, and distinct groups of women, require special consideration because of institutionalized systems that marginalize women and do not explicitly value women's contributions to biodiversity.

Acknowledging gender differences is not enough. To determine what actions are required to promote both women and men's roles in biodiversity, the Secretariat of the CBD in collaboration with IUCN convened a workshop with gender experts, indigenous women, and other UN agencies for mainstreaming gender in the Convention. The result of this event was the elaboration of the CBD Gender Plan of Action, which defines the role that the CBD Secretariat will play in stimulating and facilitating efforts, both in house and with partners at the national, regional and global levels, to overcome constraints and take advantage of opportunities to promote gender equality. It is also a reflection of the increasing awareness that gender equality and empowerment of vulnerable groups are important prerequisites for environmental conservation and sustainable development.

Examples

- *Women and men often have different knowledge about, and preference for, plants and animals. For example, women's criteria for choosing certain food crop seeds may include cooking time, meal quality, taste, resistance to bird damage and ease of collection, processing, preservation and storage (Aguilar 2004).*
- *In the Himalayan region the creation of protected areas has caused several conflicts. Women, in particular, came into day-to-day conflicts with the forest patrols when collecting wood and other non-timber products and many admitted that they were willing to steal biomass from the protected areas. The Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary realized these problems and promoted women's participation in ecodevelopment and ecotourism planning. Women began to take pride in the protected area and now they are instrumental in the planning for the area (Badola and Hussain 2003).*

Challenges

- *Lack of availability of gender sensitive biodiversity research on existing linkages between gender, biodiversity and poverty eradication.*
- *Development of clear guidelines, tools, and methodologies to mainstream gender into biodiversity management.*
- *Integration of a gender perspective into the national biodiversity planning processes.*
- *Establishment of partnerships and networks to promote gender mainstreaming within biodiversity conservation and management.*
- *Enhanced capacity building of indigenous and local community women, to participate in the CBD processes.*

Aguilar, L. (2004). Biodiversity: IUCN.

Badola, R., and Hussain, S. A. (2003). Conflict in Paradise: Women and Protected Areas in the Indian Himalayas. *Mountain Research and Development*, 23(3), 234-237.

Huisinga Norem, R., R. Yoder and Y. Martin, (2001). "Indigenous Agricultural Knowledge and Gender Issues in Third World Agricultural Development", cited in Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis Programme – Intermediate Level Handbook. FAO, Rome: 21.

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