



SFM and gender



The United Nations General Assembly defines sustainable forest management (SFM) as a “dynamic and evolving concept, which aims to maintain and enhance the economic, social and environmental values of all types of forests, for the benefit of present and future generations”.¹ The SFM concept encompasses both natural and planted forests in all geographic regions and climatic zones, and all forest functions, managed for conservation, production or multiple purposes, to provide a range of forest ecosystem goods

and services at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Criteria and indicators developed for boreal, temperate and tropical forests provide a framework to assess, monitor and report on the implementation of SFM based on: the extent of forest resources; biological diversity; forest health and vitality; productive functions; protective functions; socio-economic functions; and the legal, policy and institutional framework. Certification processes and best-practices guidelines have been developed to guide, assess, attest to and

monitor SFM at the forest management unit level.

There has been significant progress in implementing SFM, but many challenges remain. The objective of this series of fact sheets produced by the Collaborative Partnership on Forests² is to inform decision-makers and stakeholders about some of the issues and opportunities facing the implementation of SFM in the 21st century.³

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What is at stake?

The importance of gender in sustainable development is receiving greater international recognition. For example, one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is to “promote gender equality and empower women”. Gender equality is not just about women, but empowering women in forestry is an important priority.

Forest use has a strong gender dimension.⁴ In many poor forest communities, women are primary users of forests and rural landscapes, harvesting products such as fodder, fuelwood, medicines and foods. Men tend to harvest relatively high-value products such as wood and bushmeat. Women are usually also the primary care-givers: they use the products they harvest from forests to feed, shelter and heal their families and to earn income that they mostly spend on their families.

Involving women in forest-related decision-making at the community level has been shown to have positive effects on a range of forest management issues,

including the regulation of illegal activities and the capacity of community groups to manage conflict.⁵ Securing women’s property rights to forests can also be a powerful incentive for their implementation of sustainable forest management (SFM), including forest conservation and other multiple-use functions of forests. In many rural landscapes and countries, therefore, greater gender equity is one of the keys to SFM.

Key issues

Exclusion from decision-making. Women are often excluded from forest-related decision-making processes, especially in developing countries. They tend to have few rights to or ownership of forests and they benefit less than men from forest use, especially commercial wood harvesting. Studies in India and Nepal, for example, show that women in those countries are often excluded from forest management because of social barriers; logistical barriers (such as meeting times); the rules governing community forestry; and male bias in the attitudes of those promoting

community forest initiatives. This can have perverse effects: for example, a decision among men to close forests to assist regeneration may add to women’s workloads by forcing them to walk further to collect forest goods, or it might encourage them to break the rules and exploit forests illegally.⁶

Women tend to have less access to credit than men and fewer education and training opportunities, limiting their ability to create commercial forest-based enterprises. Many customary systems in Africa prevent women from owning land and planting trees, even if the state recognizes customary rights.⁷

Climate change, biodiversity loss and desertification/land degradation. Women may be especially vulnerable to climate change and pressures like biodiversity loss and desertification/land degradation because of their high dependence on forest products and their lack of participation in decision-making at the community and higher levels.⁸ A study in Mali, for example, showed that the drying of Lake Faguibine and other

factors caused a shift from water-based to forest-based livelihoods and added considerably to the workloads of women because they were forced to take on tasks that were formerly carried out by men.⁹ The roles of women in rural areas vary across regions but, worldwide, women often face gender-specific constraints that reduce their productivity and limit their potential contributions to economic growth and the well-being of their families, communities and countries.

The range of measures often emphasized in gender-sensitive strategies and policies to mitigate and adapt to climate change, reverse biodiversity loss and desertification/land degradation include the improvement of women's participation in decision-making, building the capacity of women's organizations, eliminating illiteracy among women, minimizing the disproportionate workload of women and eliminating all other gender disparities, for example in employment opportunities and in access to and the ownership of forest resources.

Lack of data. Most countries have poor data on the role of women in forestry, including on their participation in the paid workforce but especially on their social, economic and environmental contributions and the impacts of their forest use. The lack of data handicaps policy development and leads to the undervaluation of the role of women in forest management.¹⁰

Lack of awareness of rights. Even where women have legal rights to forests they may be unaware of those rights or they may lack access to the resources, such as legal representation, needed to claim them. In other cases, social and cultural norms may make women reluctant to claim their rights.

Lack of women's involvement in institutions. The marginalization of women in forest management

often reflects a broader marginalization in government. In Senegal, a lack of women in political institutions has made it difficult to achieve gender equity at the community level.¹¹ In China, the equity of forest land reforms is lessened by a lack of attention to gender issues, with the risk that women will lose ownership of land assets when they marry or divorce.¹²

Poor market access. A wide range of non-wood forest products, which are harvested predominantly by women, is increasingly being sold in high-value markets, especially in North America, Europe and Japan. The harvesters, however, typically receive much less than 10 percent of the final selling price¹³, reducing the financial incentive to pursue SFM. Most of the revenue is captured by traders, distributors and retailers, who tend to be men. The ability of women to capture more of the value of the products they harvest is reduced by a lack of information on markets, rights to forest resources, and access to credit.

Experience and knowledge

Women as managers. Women have many attributes that can make them effective managers of forest landscapes. Women may have a greater tendency than men to invest financial gains in community assets such as schools, health clinics and training.¹⁴ Moreover, usually bearing the main responsibility for feeding their families, women are more immediately affected by landscape degradation and are therefore highly motivated to prevent it.

Understanding cultural context. In some cultures, the participation of both men and women in decision-making allows and encourages learning between genders.¹⁵ On the other hand, a study in the small-scale furniture-making

sector in Java found that women worked more cooperatively in all-female groups.¹⁶ In some cultures, female-only groups may also help women to overcome their reluctance to speak out or act on issues.¹⁷

Increased recognition. In many countries, women are gaining a greater say in forest management. In the Philippines, the Wao Local Government Unit has been working to mainstream gender equity in natural resource management. Women in the region are now able to hold forest stewardship contracts, thereby gaining the right to use (and responsibility to conserve) up to three hectares of land. Recognition of tenure rights has enabled women to participate more fully in community meetings, training, livelihood support projects, resource management planning and implementation. The initiative has helped to halt illegal logging in 2000 hectares of watershed, address land conflicts and shift land use towards SFM.¹⁸

In Nepal, the percentage of women in key positions in community forest user groups increased from 20 percent in 2002 to 33 percent in 2005. The increasing role of women was evident in moves to increase transparency in fund management, strengthen gender-sensitive and pro-poor policies, diversify forest management objectives, and restrict grazing in regenerating forests.¹⁹

Challenges and opportunities

Ensuring women's participation in reform. Forest reform processes that do not fully involve women can have unintended perverse consequences. A study in Rajasthan, India, for example, found that identity-based tenure reform hindered the political empowerment of tribal women and their access to forest-based

resources because individual claims under the Forest Rights Act reduced their customary collecting rights.²⁰ Ensuring the full involvement of women in all stakeholder groups participating in tenure-reform processes is a significant challenge.

The effects of global processes. Emerging global processes and policies, such as climate-change mitigation and adaptation and global investments in biofuels, have implications for women. For example, they could restrict or expand women's rights to access and use forests and agricultural lands to produce food or biofuel, and they could affect gender relations in local communities.²¹ Involving women more fully in decision-making, not just locally but at the scale of the broader rural landscape and at the international level, is another major challenge.

Women's participation in international dialogue. Women, especially those from indigenous and other marginalized groups, are under-represented in international forest-related dialogues and negotiations and often lack the capacity to participate effectively.²² Moreover, while there are many policies that link gender to the environment, development agencies and government departments have often overlooked the roles of women in forestry and rural landscape management and their impacts on poverty reduction and environmental sustainability.²³

Greater effort is needed to build capacity among women to participate in international policy development²⁴ and to mainstream gender equity in forest-related policies.

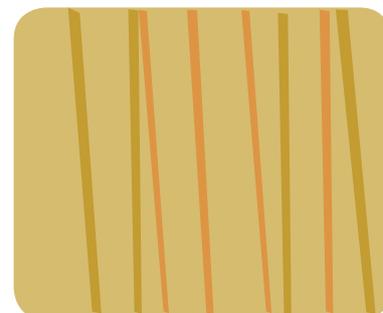
REDD+. One of the challenges for women posed by REDD+ is the potential for new sources of finance to worsen their situation. For example, REDD+ could encourage governments to restrict women's access to forests and motivate other actors to make claims on forests in order to benefit from REDD+ payments.²⁵

Nevertheless, REDD+ also offers opportunities to increase gender equity by encouraging standards such as those set out in the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. In the Cancun Agreements, the Conference of the Parties (COP 17) to the UNFCCC requested Parties to address "gender considerations" in pursuing REDD+, and also recognized that "gender equality and the effective participation of women and indigenous peoples are important for effective action on all aspects of climate change". Coupling REDD+ with the promotion of tree-planting on farms, for example, could enhance women's access to fuelwood, fruits and fodder. Guidelines have been proposed to better incorporate a gender perspective in REDD+ policies and programmes.²⁶

What is still to be learned?

Better understanding is needed of:

- Cultural barriers to the implementation of gender-sensitive policies, especially at the local and national levels.
- The ways in which the interactions between gender and, for example, ethnicity, religion, age and wealth affect SFM research, policies and management outcomes.
- The role of gender in the commercialization of forest products, such as by mapping the value chain and the division of labour between genders along it.
- The effect of increasing gender equity on forest governance, including its role in reducing corruption.
- The implications of tenure reforms for women's rights to trees and forest resources and ultimately for the security of their rights and access.
- The relative roles and contributions of women and men in organizing and maintaining social movements against forest land grabs and other threats to their livelihoods.
- The kinds of incentives, including organizational strategies, that can improve the implementation of gender-sensitive policies in the forest sector.²⁷



Key messages

- While gender equality is not only about women, empowering women in SFM is an important development priority.
- Involving women in forest-related decision-making has a wide range of positive effects.
- The importance of gender in SFM is becoming increasingly recognized, and in many countries women are gaining a greater say in forest management.
- More effort is needed, however, to fully achieve gender equity in the management of forests and rural landscapes.



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The Collaborative Partnership on Forests consists of 14 international organizations, bodies and convention secretariats that have substantial programmes on forests. The mission of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests is to promote sustainable management of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment to this end. The objectives of the Partnership are to support the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests and its member countries and to enhance cooperation and coordination on forest issues.

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Endnotes

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- Topics: SFM and the multiple functions of forests; SFM and primary forests; SFM, food security and livelihoods; SFM and indigenous peoples; SFM and REDD+; SFM and biodiversity; SFM and gender; and SFM and adaptation to climate change. The Partnership hopes to periodically update these fact sheets and to prepare new fact sheets on other important topics, including financing.
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