

# GENDER

## Lessons learned from REDD+ and other conservation strategies

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### What is gender?

Gender is the term used to describe the culturally and socially given attributes, roles, activities and responsibilities associated with being male or female. Integrating gender into our conservation work means recognising these differences, analysing them, and responding to them as they relate to our work. This should include an analysis of the opportunities and constraints faced by women and men as a result of these different roles and responsibilities as well as ways in which our activities can help to address disparities between women and men.

Gender is not just about women, but is about women **and** men and the relations between them. Integrating gender into our conservation programmes means paying attention to issues of equity and facilitating the participation of **all** users of natural resources in the decisions that affect the way those resources are managed. It is widely acknowledged that, in most cases, women are more marginalised than their male peers. Research has shown that men tend to both participate in and benefit more from conservation interventions than do women. However gender is just one dimension of diversity and intersects with other factors of differentiation within a community including age, social status, wealth, ethnicity, and so on.

### Why is gender important for conservation?

Women often play key roles in livelihoods activities which affect and are affected by conservation interventions. These include collection, processing and use of fuelwood, fibres, water and other wild resources used for food, medicine and cultural practices. Women provide the majority of the labour in agricultural production in many of the places where we work. Therefore it makes sense that we engage with them when seeking to support more biodiversity-friendly agricultural and agroforestry practices. They are also often active in other livelihoods activities such as small-scale income generation, savings and loans schemes, and seedling production. However, these roles may be less visible than those of men and, in some cultures, women may be less vocal than men particularly in public fora. Their roles, views and aspirations are thus easily overlooked.

In discussions with FFI project teams, most people felt that women's participation in projects leads to more effective conservation outcomes because they interact differently with natural resources and biodiversity than men, based on their gendered roles and responsibilities. Women have their own specific knowledge, skills and perspectives. The design and implementation of an effective conservation initiative requires the participation of **all** stakeholders, including the 50% of the population who are female. It was also argued that women can often have excellent communication, conflict resolution, and financial management skills, all of which are key to the success of conservation, REDD+ and other Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) projects. Indeed, research in South Asia has shown that forest condition is significantly better when managed by community forest user groups with a high proportion of women in key decision-making roles.

FFI's position statement on Conservation, Livelihoods and Governance<sup>1</sup> commits us to respect basic human rights and not to cause further disadvantage to vulnerable and marginalised women and men in the communities where we work. In order to uphold these commitments we need to address gender in our conservation projects. In addition, in the context of REDD+, internationally recognised voluntary standards require attention to be paid to gender. For example, the **Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards** (version 3) requires project proponents to identify community groups whose members derive similar income, livelihood and/or cultural values from the project area – such as women, youth or Indigenous Peoples – and to outline how the values of these groups differ from other groups. The project proponents must also describe the measures taken to enable effective participation of community groups that want to be involved in the project, and how they have been implemented in a culturally appropriate and gender sensitive manner.

The **Plan Vivo Standard** (2012 draft) states that smallholders or community groups must not be excluded from participation in the project on the basis of gender, age, income or social status. It requires barriers to participation in the project to be identified and reasonable measures to be taken to encourage participation of people who face such barriers. These standards make it clear that we must endeavour to integrate gender into our work, and thus they provide an added incentive for us to improve our practice and to make progress towards fulfilling the commitments of our position statement.

There is nothing additional or specific to REDD+ projects with regards to integrating gender that we should not be doing in the whole range of conservation projects that we implement and support. In addition to issues around equity or, at the very least, 'doing no harm' (as per FFI's position statement), there are also practical reasons to integrate gender into our conservation programmes. For example, it is recognised that our projects should be based on a good understanding of the contexts in which we work, including the different roles, relationships and knowledge that women and men have with regard to natural resources and biodiversity. It should also involve developing an understanding of 'how things work' within a community including who does what and why, and who makes decisions and how. It is not adequate to rely on men to represent women, as this can result in women's perspectives becoming distorted. Rather, for those views to be taken into account in project design and implementation, we should be seeking appropriate ways to empower women to express their own opinions and for them to be heard and taken into account.

## How can we address gender in practice?

While acknowledging that integrating gender into conservation programmes can be challenging, FFI staff have identified a number of practical tips and steps that can help. For example when exploring the local socio-economic context where we work, we should:

- Recognise that women and men have different roles and responsibilities, and thus value and use natural resources in different ways. We need to try to understand these differences, for example by taking a gender sensitive approach when using participatory methods, such as stakeholder analysis or resource use mapping with communities.
- Seek to understand gender relations in the communities in which we work, including women's roles in decision making at household and community levels, and how these relate to other factors of differentiation.
- Appreciate that, in the same way that communities are not homogenous, nor are women a homogenous group.
- Acknowledge that culture and community and household dynamics are not static. Gender relations change over time, and over a lifetime. In Cambodia, for example, women become more respected as they age and thus older women can be influential in the wider community. In other contexts, younger women and men with more formal education than their elders may

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<sup>1</sup> FFI's position and approach to conservation, livelihoods and governance is available at <http://www.fauna-flora.org/wp-content/uploads/FFIs-position-and-approach-to-conservation-livelihoods-and-governance.pdf>

have more influence now than in the past, as demonstrated by the younger generation of village heads in parts of Indonesia.

- Explore how land tenure and resource use rights<sup>2</sup> are gender differentiated. Analyse the implications both for equitable distribution of the risks, costs and benefits of our work and for project success.

A key approach to integrating gender in conservation is to **assess the barriers to women's participation** in project design and implementation and take steps to address these. Men often dominate leadership and decision-making roles in a community, including in customary institutions, so we need to take additional measures to ensure that women's voices are heard.

- Consider the time of day and year for activities. Women and men may be busy at different times. The location of meetings is also an important consideration. When planning activities ask "Where are women most likely to feel at ease? Can women get to and from the venue easily and safely? What provision can be made for childcare?"
- If necessary hold separate meetings for women and for men. In many countries, such as Indonesia, women will remain silent in the presence of men but in a female-only group they are far more confident about voicing their opinions and aspirations.
- Recognise that women in rural communities often lead busy lives, taking the majority of the responsibility for the care of children, the elderly and sick, and running the household, as well as working in agricultural and other productive activities. We therefore need to take care not to increase women's burdens either through their participation in project activities, or as a result of restricting access to land and wild resources, such as fuelwood, water, wild foods and medicinal plants. Using participatory tools with separate groups of women and men can be an effective way for exploring respective roles and responsibilities, and identifying appropriate times for meetings and other project related activities. Be aware that people's schedules are likely to change through the year<sup>3</sup>.
- Consider carefully who should facilitate a meeting or other project processes as this will influence who engages and how. Employing female staff in field and project management roles can make a big difference to women's participation, and to men's understanding of women's potential.
- Empowerment starts with information, and access to information is a key part of a Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)<sup>4</sup> process. So we need to ensure that women, as well as men, have access to relevant information in a format that is appropriate to them. This includes use of appropriate language such that women can understand and communicate during meetings. Given that female education and literacy levels are often lower than those of men, it is often helpful to use methods such as familiar images and objects, as well as games and role-play, that do not involve reading and writing.
- Gender equity does not necessarily mean participation in equal numbers or in exactly the same activities as men. Rather it is about a process that is fair to both women and men so that they can equally enjoy socially-valued goods, opportunities, resources and benefits.

FFI project teams recognise the importance of integrating gender into **monitoring and evaluation** of conservation projects, both to ensure women's participation and to measure gender differentiated impacts. In order to do this, we need to collect gender disaggregated data and ask women, as well as men, what changes they observe and experience as a result of project activities.

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<sup>2</sup> See the paper in this series on tenure and resource use rights

<sup>3</sup> Useful participatory tools to explore roles and responsibilities of different groups at different times include the 24 hour calendar and seasonal calendar, available at <http://www.fauna-flora.org/initiatives/livelihoods-and-governance-library/#tools>

<sup>4</sup> See the paper in this series on Free, Prior and Informed Consent

We also need to consider how and in what form any direct benefits from conservation interventions are distributed. For example, in a REDD+ or other PES project, cash payments may be co-opted by male household heads. However, vouchers for agricultural inputs or investment in community assets such as health, water supply or education facilities may be more beneficial for all members of the community – women and men, girls and boys. Participation of both women and men in discussions and decisions over the form of financial benefits can help ensure more equitable distribution of benefits<sup>5</sup>.

Provision of specific support to women's own initiatives, for example savings and loans groups or small-scale income generation activities, can be both socially and economically empowering. However, we shouldn't confine our engagement with women to only supporting 'women's groups' but rather ensure that their voices are heard in wider decision-making related to conservation and resource management.

Several FFI staff recommended taking advantage of relevant national commitments, for example under the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), or legal and policy requirements for women's representation on committees. For example, in the Philippines advocacy on gender equality has resulted in gender being integrated into government policy. In Cambodia, the Millennium Development Goals, including that of promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, are reflected in policy from national to commune and village levels. In some contexts, such commitments can be used to lever action at the local level. In other cases, where gender might be a particularly sensitive issue or poorly understood, some staff recommended not using the word gender at all, suggesting that it is possible to work on gender without referring to it explicitly. In some projects in Indonesia for example gender is often seen as synonym for women, and for including a certain percentage of women in meetings rather than being about understanding the relationship between women and men, the barriers to women's participation and how to overcome them.

In addition to the practical steps above, FFI staff identified a number of broader **principles and attitudes** that should underpin our approach to integrating gender, and indeed to all our work on the social aspects of conservation.

- Be responsive and flexible. Engage in continuous exploration and learning, together with local stakeholders, and practise adaptive management.
- Try not to make assumptions about other people's knowledge, perceptions, attitudes, behaviour and aspirations. Regularly test any assumptions you do have.
- Recognise and act upon our own limitations, including the biases of existing staff members.
- While there may be a need for input from gender specialists or other social scientists, it is also important to encourage staff to become 'gender aware' and build their own understanding and skills
- Develop meaningful relationships with communities that are based upon trust in order to provide a solid basis on which to address gender and other sensitive issues
- Appreciate that any social and behavioural change takes time.

### **What challenges do we face and how have we tried to overcome them?**

While there are many challenges to integrating gender in conservation, most of them can be addressed by following the tips, steps and principles highlighted above. A great deal of commitment is needed in order to make 'integrating gender' more than a tick box exercise. One of the main challenges can be the attitude and behaviour of FFI programme staff and local partner organisations. Recognising the need to integrate gender and having the time and patience to take some basic key steps is as, if not more, important than having specific gender training or expertise.

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<sup>5</sup> See the paper in this series on equitable benefit sharing

At the project level, staff need to try to gain a good understanding of the local context and not make assumptions based on one factor. For example, some staff argue that women hold a lot of power over their husbands, citing cases where agreements in male-only meetings are reneged upon once participants have discussed the issues at home with their wives. Some women clearly can and do influence their husbands but this does not mean that women's views are always accurately represented by their husbands. Such cases illustrate the importance of engaging directly with both women and men to understand everyone's perspectives and to ensure informed and equitable decision-making. Decisions arrived at in this way are more likely to be respected and complied with.

In situations where women do exercise some degree of power, for example in deciding how household money is spent or in controlling aspects of certain resources such as the sale of bushmeat, it is often assumed that this is proof that women are not marginalised and there is thus no need to concern ourselves with gender. However, while some women may hold some power in the private sphere (the household) this does not mean that the same woman does not face disadvantage in other ways, in both the private and public sphere. Household and community relations are complex and it is important that we try to understand how gender relations at various levels affect women's participation in, and hence the success of, conservation interventions.

One of the most oft-cited reasons for not addressing gender is that it means challenging local culture and that it is not our place to seek to influence other people's attitudes and behaviour. However, many conservation interventions seek to do just that – incentivise people to adapt often fundamental aspects of their way of life in ways that project proponents consider are more compatible to achieving conservation goals. Culture is dynamic and is constantly evolving under the influence of many factors, both internal and external, shaped by existing power relations. It is possible to respect local cultures whilst at the same time working towards empowering communities to change practices that marginalise women or other groups within the community, or that are unsustainable from a biodiversity conservation perspective. This requires working with both women and men, including local leaders, to explore underlying values and identify forces for change within the communities themselves.

Recruiting staff with the relevant attitudes, skills and experience to address social issues, such as gender, in conservation is one way of improving capacity. Awareness-raising, guidance and training can also help existing staff improve their practice. However, in many cases staff just need some encouragement to start doing things slightly differently or taking some steps, such as those identified above, to begin to integrate gender into their work. As a first step, FFI has produced a list of key questions to help project managers think through relevant gender issues when developing a new project or seeking to improve an existing project.

## Key References

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This document is one of a series of outputs from a learning event held in Cambridge in April 2013 to share experience, tools and lessons learned on the social aspects of REDD+ and other conservation strategies.

Topics discussed included: equitable benefit sharing; Free, Prior and Informed Consent; gender; grievance mechanisms; Opportunity Cost Analysis; Social Impact Assessment; sustainable livelihoods; and tenure and resource use rights.

All outputs are available to download from FFI's Livelihoods and Governance library: <http://www.fauna-flora.org/initiatives/livelihoods-and-governance-library/#learning>



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