

Gender in Forestry

Basic knowledge

Gender in forestry contributes to SDGs:



The Gender in Forestry Module is intended for forest and other land managers, land-use planners interested in the role of forests in sustainable development, and forest-related civil-society, non-governmental and private-sector organizations and associations.

The module provides basic and more detailed information on gender in forestry, as well as tools and case studies on gender mainstreaming in forestry.

Why does gender matter in forestry?

Forests provide monetary and non-monetary benefits to both men and women in forest communities around the world. Men and women often have different roles in managing forests, different knowledge about them, different access to forests and different ways of using forest resources. Forestry tends to be perceived as male dominated although women are heavily involved in forest work such as gathering fuelwood, medicinal plants and other non-timber forest products, collecting food for family consumption as well as for income, and in processing secondary wood products. In fact, women in forest communities can generate more than 50 percent of their income from forests compared to about a third for men.

What challenges do women face in forestry?

Women are disadvantaged by insecure access and property rights to forest, tree and land resources, by discrimination and male bias in service provisions like credit and technology, and by being excluded from policy formulation and decision making at the household, community and national levels. Women realize only a fraction of the benefits and tend to be involved in decision making only when forest and tree resources are already degraded. Moreover, women's lack of formal education, employment and personal networks inhibits their ability to influence resource allocation or research.

What are the benefits of mainstreaming gender in forestry?

Research shows that mainstreaming gender equality at all levels of the forestry sector has positive effects on many forest management issues including resource sustainability, forest regeneration and conflict management. Properly integrating gender equality issues in forestry development contributes to meeting environmental targets, avoiding adverse impacts on women and contributing to the transformation of unequal gender relations within the forestry sector. Reducing the gender gap in forestry can also help to achieve broader social and economic goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Equality between men and women can significantly improve sustainable forest management, the overall welfare and social protection of families, communities and national economies, and it can help to create food secure environments.

As an example, FAO's community forestry team implemented a woman-focused branch-wood project in The Gambia that produced significant monetary benefits. The project was in an arid region where there were frequent fires. The women collected branches in the most susceptible areas before they could be lost to fire and sold the branch wood in local markets. Because of the women's contribution to forest fire management and their new income, women were empowered and the gender balance improved.

How can you mainstream gender in forestry?

A recent FAO publication, titled [How to mainstream gender in forestry: a practical field guide](#), can assist FAO forestry officers to develop concrete actions that bring gender issues into the mainstream in forestry projects and programmes.

The actions might involve seeking ways to increase women's participation in such areas as community forest management groups, small- and medium-scale enterprises, non-governmental organizations and village administration. Measures might also be considered to increase women's participation in marketing non-wood forest products (NWFP), including food and medicines, to help empower women in the forestry sector.

The guide is compact enough to carry into the field and comes with a helpful table to record data and information gathered from the field. The guide can also help officers in determining when more capacity is needed to better address gender issues in their work.

The field guide provides practical advice such as how to:

- conduct a gender analysis to gauge the particular challenges women face when participating in policy-making, income-generating and community-level activities;
- plan meetings and activities at a time and place that fits with the schedules of women stakeholders, allowing children when possible;
- maintain a dialogue between women's advocacy groups and the government;
- advocate for a stronger role for women in policy and decision-making; and
- ensure women have leadership and decision-making roles rather than simply counting the number of females at meetings.

Read the guidelines [here](#).

How can the challenges of gender and forestry be removed along the value chain?

There is huge potential for engaging women along the forestry value chain. To do so, governments, NGOs and the private sector must intervene by empowering women entrepreneurs, increasing their participation in policy making, encouraging women to join or form and

strengthen forestry groups and associations, and acting to link them to markets and industry stakeholders. By engaging in collective action, women would be able to gain a more powerful position in the value chain. This is advantageous in several ways: stronger bargaining power; ensuring a sustainable supply of products; reducing transaction costs; attracting more and larger buyers; accessing outside resources, such as extension and development assistance; accessing the lucrative fair-trade and certified markets; and contributing to the policy formulation process.

What are the key aspects for achieving gender equality in forestry?

To address the current gender gap, the forestry sector must continue to help mainstream gender in forestry policies and must work with programme and project leaders at the country level to address this challenge. Further actions to be taken include collecting greater gender disaggregated data to ascertain the roles of women and men in forestry, disseminating more knowledge and communication products, and increasing the capacity of women and their participation in associations and producer organizations.

Related modules

- [Development of forest-based enterprises](#)
- [Forest tenure](#)
- [Participatory approaches and tools for SFM](#)
- [Watershed management](#)

In more depth

Gender roles in forestry

Forestry and agroforestry systems are not gender-neutral. Women often have highly specialized knowledge of trees and forests in terms of species diversity, management, conservation and use. Compared with men, women's knowledge tends to be linked more directly to household food consumption, including collecting fuelwood for cooking and heating, and health, which is particularly important during food crises. Men tend to play a greater role than women in extracting timber for commercial purposes, although these roles are changing. In many developing countries, women typically gather fuelwood for domestic use, poles for fencing, food and medicine for the family, and fodder for livestock.

While women generally focus on meeting the nutritional and subsistence needs of their households, they are also frequently (and simultaneously) involved in forest-based income-earning activities, especially the collection, processing and sale of non-wood forest products (NWFPs). For example, African shea has long been collected, processed and traded by women. Shea nuts and shea butter have been the main source of income for women in key producing countries such as Burkina Faso, Benin, and Ghana. Processing forest products for later sale in local markets or for domestic use can be done near the home and is therefore well-suited to women who must combine income-earning activities with household chores. The generated income can often make a significant contribution to household well-being.

Women contribute to the forest sector in many ways, both formal and informal, including through agroforestry, watershed management, tree improvement and forest protection. Women make up a significant proportion of the labour force in forest industries worldwide, especially in tree nursery work but also in activities ranging from logging to wood processing. Although women contribute substantially to the forest sector, their roles are not fully recognized or documented, and their wages and working conditions are usually inferior to those of men. Moreover, women rarely have equal involvement to men in the formulation, planning and implementation of forest policies.

The economic, social, cultural, political and legal settings can affect the rights of women and men to control forest resources and own land. Even where women have ownership rights to forests, they may not have equal access to opportunities for forest-generated income. Commonly, women may have access to NWFPs and fuel wood but not to other wood resources, which is often the domain of men and also the most commercially valuable product in most forests. This gender differentiation has major implications for forest management and also gender-based power structures in communities.

Achieving gender equality in forestry

Achieving gender equality in the forest sector is a considerable challenge. Actions to incorporate gender concerns include: the collection of gender-disaggregated data to monitor gender roles and activities in the sector; the advocacy of governance systems that provide secure forest tenure for women and men; research and knowledge-building to explore and increase understanding of gender-specific roles, an increased understanding of cultural and social gender biases; the application of gender analysis in projects and programmes; attention to gender in capacity-building initiatives; and the dissemination of information on gender in forestry. Concrete examples on mainstreaming gender in forestry include:

1. Collecting gender disaggregated data;
2. Gender mainstreaming in policies and law; and
3. Promoting gender equality in forest enterprises and institutions.

Collecting gender-disaggregated data

The need for gender-disaggregated data to better understand gender disparities within the sector has never been greater. Collecting such data in forest education, employment and careers in the formal sector, as well as about the different roles of rural women and men in forest-based livelihoods makes it possible to develop gender-responsive forest-sector programmes and policies. A priority for research should be to generate gender-disaggregated data on the distribution of forest-related benefits and employment, as well as on the ownership of, access to and control over productive forest resources such as land, water, equipment, inputs, information and credit.

To ensure that data accurately represent gender interactions and inequalities in the forest sector, researchers should apply a gender sensitive approach to data collection. Detailed time-use surveys would increase understanding of the contributions of women and men to household production and welfare, as well as of their time constraints. The quantity and quality of gender-disaggregated data for policymaking can be increased through the integration of gender issues in agricultural censuses and surveys and the re-tabulation of existing census data. Gender differences and their implications may be more visible when gender-disaggregated data are collected, analysed and presented at the national level and by age class.

Some gender-disaggregated data are already available for the forest sector. For example, women account for about one-quarter of all employment in the formal forest sector. Information on informal activities, while more limited and imprecise, indicated that women and children account for up to 85 percent of all time spent on the collection of woodfuel for domestic use ([State of the world's forests 2014](#) by FAO, Rome, 2014).

Gender mainstreaming in policies and laws

It is increasingly clear that forest planning and policies, from the grassroots level up to decision-making bodies, will only be fully inclusive when women and men realize the needs, priorities and constraints of all people and this realization is taken into consideration as part of participatory processes.

In representing and defending the interests and rights of the people, governments should ensure that laws are not gender-blind and that they adequately consider the needs and interests of women and men of all ages. Gender equity policies and programmes merely show good intentions unless they are backed up by appropriate legislation and institutional support; gender mainstreaming in legislation is critical for establishing a framework in which gender equality can thrive. Laws should be supported by mechanisms and structures that ensure their observance and implementation, and efforts to change attitudes on the roles of women and men in forest management may be just as important for gender mainstreaming as supportive laws.

Women need to be involved in forest-related decision-making at all levels if their efforts to ensure the forest-based livelihoods of their families are to be sustainable. In particular, greater gender equity in land tenure and rights to forest resources is a cornerstone of the sustainable development of livelihoods based on forest resources. Policymakers should help realize the potential of gender equality by ensuring universal access to education and training and building gender-balanced entrepreneurial capacity in the sustainable management of forest resources.

Promoting gender equality in forest enterprises and institutions

Forest-dependent people and communities are among the poorest in the world. Nevertheless, projects that help forest communities to develop forest-based enterprises and to organize themselves to market their products have been successful in reducing poverty, improving gender equality and protecting forests and other natural resources.

Women are primary actors in forest communities and undertake many forest-related activities, but they often face barriers that constrain the extent to which they participate in decision-making, benefit-sharing and employment opportunities at various points of forestry value chains where value addition takes place. On the other hand, men and youth are increasingly migrating to cities in search of jobs, and many forest communities face labour shortages. Women, therefore, are likely to play an increasingly important role in forest-based entrepreneurship, and governments need to create an enabling environment for them to do so. This would involve, for example, ensuring an equal opportunity to participate in forest-based enterprises and local forest-related institutions, as well as providing women with the knowledge and skills to engage and benefit from employment opportunities at higher points of the forestry value chains. There is evidence that women's participation in the decision-making of forest institutions, such as forest-user groups, reduces the level of gender-based conflict because such participation leads to new rules of access that take women's needs into account and, therefore, their activities are less likely to be criminalized or viewed as infringements ([Forests, food security and gender](#) by Stloukal et al., *Unasylva* 241).

Scaling up efforts to promote forest-based enterprises, especially by facilitating greater gender equity, could contribute to national efforts to stimulate employment and strengthen livelihoods. At the regional and global scales, such efforts could play an important role in combating deforestation and forest degradation and in slowing the pace of climate change.

Further learning

Agarwal, B. 2010. [*Gender and green governance - The political economy of women's presence within and beyond community forestry.*](#) Oxford University Press. 516 p.

CPF. 2012. [*SFM and gender.*](#)

FAO. 2006. [*Time for action: changing the gender situation in forestry.*](#) Report of the team of specialists on gender and forestry. Rome.

FAO. 2011. [*The state of food and agriculture.*](#) Rome.

FAO. 2013. Forests, food security and gender: linkages, disparities and priorities for action. Background paper for the [*International conference on forests for food security and nutrition*](#), FAO, Rome, 13–15 May, 2013.

FAO. 2014. State of the world's forests 2014. Rome.

Mwangi, E., Meinzen-Dick, R. & Yan Sun. 2011. [*Gender and sustainable forest management in East Africa and Latin America.*](#) Ecology and Society, 16(1): 17.

FPP. 2015. *Indigenous women's right and the inter-American system – A toolkit on mechanisms.* Note #1-4. Forest Peoples Programme, UK. [\[English\]](#) [\[Spanish\]](#)

FPP. 2015. *Indigenous women's right and the inter-American system – A toolkit on mechanisms.* Note #5-8. Forest Peoples Programme, UK. [\[English\]](#) [\[Spanish\]](#)

Stloukal, L., Holding, C., Kaaria, S., Guarascio, F. & Gunewardena, N. 2013. Forests, food security and gender. *Unasylva*, 64(241): 37–45.

Credits

This module was developed with the kind collaboration of the following people and/or institutions:

Initiator(s): Qiang Ma - FAO, Forestry Department

This module was revised in 2016 to strengthen gender considerations.

Reviewer(s): Lauren Flejzor, Taylor Tondelli - FAO, Forestry Department

