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Routes for change: Ensuring gender consideration in biodiversity governance

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*The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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Introduction

There is growing awareness and evidence within conservation and development communities of the roles and contributions of women in natural resource management. But there are limited mechanisms in place to systematically map, collect and analyze women's and girls' roles and activities regarding biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and access and benefit-sharing, including baseline studies and indicators rendering their contributions invisible. This also applies to the analysis of the extent to which the loss of biodiversity disproportionately burdens women and girls. Hence, there is a need to systematically resource and map the knowledge, innovations, and practices of women to build stronger documentation to provide guidance to resource management, governance, and conservation outcomes.

Forestry¹, fisheries,² and agriculture may be the three sectors whereby you can see more documentation on the recognition of the roles of women, including the availability of some data. Data found on forestry estimated 880 million people worldwide spend part of their time collecting fuelwood or producing charcoal, many of them are women³. Figures tell us that women account for just 14 percent of the 59.5 million people engaged in the primary sector of fisheries and aquaculture in 2018, but makeup of about 47 percent of the global fishers labor force and just under 50 percent of the global agricultural workforce are women and over two-thirds of smallholder farmers. Women's contributions are crucial, however, on looking closer the roles of women are often limited to secondary roles and they have a minimal voice when it comes to decision-making in management and governance of the resources.

Loss of biodiversity, climate crisis, and disaster risks are linked and have an impact on the status of women in all spheres of their lives placing them in more vulnerable situations. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated fault lines of inequality. Biodiversity loss associated with the transformation of landscapes can lead to increased emerging disease risk⁴ and may pose a higher risk for women and girls considering their close interaction and dependence on their natural environments and the land territories, and resources within.

¹ <https://www.cifor.org/knowledge/publication/3975/>

² <http://www.fao.org/state-of-fisheries-aquaculture>

³ [The State of the World's Forests \(SOF\)](#)

⁴ https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-11/201104_IPBES_Workshop_on_Diversity_and_Pandemics_Executive_Summary_Digital_Version.pdf

International Gender-Environment Policy Framework

United Nations human rights instruments and mechanisms, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), provide a framework for, and critical support to, efforts to respect, protect and fulfill women's rights in all policy areas. Gender-responsive approaches identify and lead to action to address gaps and constraints in women's enjoyment of human rights, including in relation to natural resource management, conservation of biodiversity, and restoration of ecosystems.

In addition, the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, calls upon Governments, at all levels, including municipal authorities, as appropriate, to take actions to “encourage, subject to national legislation and consistent with the Convention on Biological Diversity, the effective protection and use of the knowledge, innovations and practices of women of indigenous and local communities (...); in addition, safeguard the existing intellectual property rights of these women as protected under national and international law (...).”

The Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) preamble text⁵ recognizes the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and affirms the need for the full participation of women in the implementation of the convention. Subsequently, the general Principles for the programme of work on the implementation of article 8(j)⁶ of the Convention calls for the “full and effective participation of women of indigenous and local communities”. The CBD was also the first of the Rio Conventions to have adopted a Gender Plan of Action in 2008 making it the first Multilateral Environmental Agreement (MEA) to do so, and an updated Gender Plan of Action in 2014.

The Convention on Biological Diversity's [2015 - 2020 Gender Plan of Action](#) includes mainstreaming gender into national biodiversity strategies and action plans (NBSAPs) as one of the possible actions for Parties towards integrating a gender perspective into implementation of the Convention. Reviews of NBSAPs undertaken by IUCN⁷ and the Secretariat of the Convention⁸ suggest that many Parties recognise some relevance of gender in efforts to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity. Women are most frequently characterized as a vulnerable group within NBSAP, or beneficiaries rather than as key actors in the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity.

Also, in 2010, CBD COP 10 the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) adopted the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 -2020 including Aichi Biodiversity Targets, a ten-year framework for action to safeguard biodiversity and the benefits it provides to people.

⁵ <https://www.cbd.int/convention/articles/?a=cbd-00>

⁶ <https://www.cbd.int/traditional/>

⁷ https://genderandenvironment.org/web_post/advancing-gender-equality-in-biodiversity-conservation-a-review-of-the-fifth-national-reports-to-the-cbd/

⁸ See [CBD/SBI/2/2/Add.3](#).

Similarly, there are also synergies in integrating gender in work to implement the CBD and other MEAs, in particular, to address climate change, land degradation, and desertification. Women's participation in climate/environmental decision-making processes, for example, is a common priority for the "Rio Conventions"⁹.

Women in conservation, sustainable use and restoration

In the [Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011 -2020](#), Parties are requested to mainstream gender considerations, where appropriate, in the implementation of the Plan and its associated goals, Aichi Targets, and indicators. The Strategic Plan also indicates that capacity-building for gender mainstreaming should be supported. Of the Aichi Biodiversity Targets, Target 14 is the only one to address gender issues overtly, calling for the needs of women, indigenous peoples, local communities, and the poor and vulnerable to be taken into account in the restoration and safeguarding of ecosystems. No other provisions are contained within the Strategic Plan on how gender should be mainstreamed. The Global Biodiversity Outlook - 5 (GBO5) also indicated that at the global level none of the 20 targets have been fully achieved and in particular to Target 14¹⁰, noted that a number of Parties note a lack of knowledge or data on how the needs of women may be taken into account in ecosystem management¹¹.

In recent years there has been an addition of evidence and research on the actions that women are taking to protect their lands from externally driven destructions and actively conserve, manage, use and restore and are harvesting benefits from biological and genetic resources. Their innovations and practices are based on traditional knowledge and customary practices to adopting new approaches to assert their voice in policy and decision-making spaces.

Women contribute significantly in all spheres of biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and management of natural resources however many studies show how women are often on the margins, and their roles and work often get under-recognised or are hidden in all sectors. The roles of men and women are often gendered and they use and manage resources differently. In certain situations, gender disparities in land and natural resource access, control, and ownership, as well as systemic socio-cultural impediments to women's economic prospects, can make women more reliant on local access to nature and more vulnerable to environmental degradation.

In many communities, women are establishing their specific responsibilities as knowledge bearers and defenders, taking collaborative action to achieve Target 14. Examples include:

- In India, women's collectives in villages in Korchi taluka are resisting mining and opening spaces for self-governance. Nearly 85 percent of the Godchiroli district is covered in forest.

⁹ This term refers to the conventions arising from the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil – the CBD, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

¹⁰ Aichi Biodiversity Target 14 -By 2020, ecosystems that provide essential services, including services related to water, and contribute to health, livelihoods and well-being, are restored and safeguarded, taking into account the needs of women, indigenous and local communities, and the poor and vulnerable.

¹¹ [Global Biodiversity Outlook -5](#)

Besides forests being important for local economics and livelihood they are an integral part of the *Adivasi* “indigenous” socio-cultural practices and political identity. Between 1990 and 2017, 24 mining leases have been sanctioned or are proposed in the District, collectively impacting approximately 15,000 hectares of dense forest diversity and over 16,000 hectares indirectly. Women’s collectives have started to assert their voices not only in resisting mining but also in the newly emerging village and *taluka* level decision-making institutions¹².

- In the Dolakha district of Nepal, women play essential roles in community forests, using their knowledge and experience to develop effective strategies to conserve, manage and use the forests. As a result of these success stories, women are increasingly being recognised as important actors engaged in biodiversity conservation in this region¹³.
- In the Mexican state of Queretaro, in the Charape-La Joya Ejido community, Eulalia Moreno with her two daughters founded Women & Environment (W&E), a community-based initiative, supported by the Autonomous University of Queretaro (UAQ), to improve the livelihoods of the town’s residents through a micro-business focused on the sustainable use of plants. In 2016, W&E in collaboration with the Spanish Company Provital S.A, inspired by the Nagoya Protocol guidelines, initiated the path to obtain the Internationally Recognized Certificate of Compliance for access to a plant useful for cosmetics purposes and its associated traditional knowledge. By 2017, after completing all the processes, Provital S.A. turned into the first cosmetic ingredients supplier worldwide to fully fulfil the Nagoya Protocol requirements, and, initiated work with the community and UAQ¹⁴.
- In the isles of Kei, the southeast Moluccas in Indonesia, in the area that is now part of a regional Marine Protected Area (MPA), women tend to collect molluscs and shells in the intertidal area. This activity is called *bameti* in many parts of eastern Indonesia. While often referred to as a local subsistence activity, *bameti* is actually a form of sustainable management of marine biodiversity by women in coastal areas based on traditional practices and local knowledge. Women are also small-scale fish traders (*papalele*). Through a sustainable use of natural resources, they are able to monitor changes in the availability and abundance of species, take action for restoration and conservation, and temporary limitations in the use of certain resources. *Bameti* also helps women build their economic resilience and that of their families¹⁵.

Heading towards Living in Harmony with Nature - the 2050 Vision

¹² Contributed by Kalpavrisikh and Amhi Amchya Arogyasaathi, India (2020) *Reimagining wellbeing: Women’s collective in villages in Korchi taluka, India, resisting mining and opening spaces for self-governance* (Women4Biodiversity)

¹³ [Khadka, M. and Verma, R. \(2012\) *Gender and biodiversity management in the Greater Himalayas: Towards equitable mountain development*. Kathmandu: International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development.](#)

¹⁴ <https://abs-sustainabledevelopment.net/resource/biodiscovery-case-in-mexico/>

¹⁵ Contributed by WWF Indonesia and FoMMA (Alliance of the People of the Kayan Mentarang National Party) and GOW (The united association of Women’s Organisations) for Women4Biodiversity

In 2018, at the fourteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD in its decision (Decision 14/34) decided that the process to develop the post-2020 global biodiversity framework would be gender-responsive. The [First draft of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework](#)(GBF) published 5 July 2021 proposes 21 Targets, from which only Target 21¹⁶ mentions women. It is crucial that gender considerations are addressed throughout the post-2020 global biodiversity framework including in the principles, objectives, implementation, financing, monitoring, reporting and review for the full realisation of the 2050 vision. This is also needed to ensure that both the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the post-2020 Gender Plan of Action (GPA) are aligned and are complementary to each other to address and ensure women and girls equal access, ownership and control over their land and territories and resources and their full and effective engagement at all levels of policy and decision-making related to biodiversity.

An approach to integrating a gender-responsive post-2020 global biodiversity framework may also include a specific target on gender¹⁷, as a way to ensure that gender considerations receive specific attention on their own and, could complement and enhance cross-cutting measures. This could also assist with garnering support for the post-2020 Gender Plan of Action that is to be adopted alongside the global biodiversity framework at the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the CBD in Kunming in China in 2022.

¹⁶ [Target 21. Ensure equitable and effective participation in decision-making related to biodiversity by indigenous peoples and local communities, and respect their rights over lands, territories and resources, as well as by women and girls, and youth](#)

¹⁷ [Costa Rica \(CBD/WG2020/3/CG/4/REPORT\) Report of the co-leads of contact group 4](#) and also being proposed by Women4Biodiversity [Target 22](#)