

# Introduction to the Special Issue on Forests and Gender

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The United Nations General Assembly declared 2011 as the International Year of Forests (IYOF). The IYOF is intended to raise awareness and strengthen sustainable forest management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests for the benefit of current and future generations. Yet even as the world celebrates the role of forests and trees in enhancing economic, social and environmental benefits of some of the world's poorest, core challenges remain.

This special feature of the International Forestry Review (IFR) focuses on forestry and gender. Drawn from a wide variety of contexts in Africa, Asia and Latin America, papers in this special issue explore the gendered dimensions of diverse topics from multiple empirical perspectives. They highlight advances made by women in forest resource management and benefits and consider some of the core challenges to women's involvement in various aspects related to the use, sale and management of these resources. Some of the questions addressed include:

- What are the gendered impacts of climate variability?
- What are the constraints for women's involvement in markets and how can access to markets be improved?
- In what ways are women involved in policy processes and decisions related to climate mitigation and forest devolution?
- How have tenure reforms and certification influenced women's rights and access to forest resources?
- Do different proportions of men and women in user groups influence how forests are managed, the kinds of products harvested and overall access arrangements?
- How do women's movements emerge and evolve— with what policy impacts?
- What gender-relevant topics and themes have been of interest in the past decade and what new investments are needed to keep abreast with new demands in the forestry sector?

By addressing these issues, this special feature of the IFR provides a timely update of ongoing research, controversies and emerging areas of research and policy interest related to gender and forests.

While these contributions draw attention to well-documented issues such as roles, preferences and responsibilities of men and women in forest use and management, or their rights and access to forestry resources, they also point to instances of agency and are illustrative of the ground remaining to be covered in achieving gender equity. Women *are* taking on new roles. They are involved in markets (formal and informal), in different parts of the value chain, including even in the higher value nodes (for example furniture making) thus expanding their livelihoods opportunities. In adapting to climate variability they are diversifying their livelihoods portfolios and venturing into traditionally male activities. Although women may not have power or control in the traditional sense (such as due to status and wealth), their organizing increases their bargaining power and influence over policy processes.

Taken together, studies in this special issue reflect on two major areas of concern for policy and practice. The first relates to the idea of homogeneity. The authors agree that women's interests are not monolithic and that there is a need to embrace and explore how gender intersects with other group differentiations (such as ethnicity, religion, age, wealth) to produce outcomes for both men and women. This allows us to confront problems and solutions in a more complex manner. It also allows us to design policies and practices that are inclusive of different experiences, interests and claims.

The second area relates to participation. Authors view participation both as a means to improved forest governance or improved livelihoods as well as an end to enhance equity and increase the voice of women who have been marginalized in public policy and practice. Bina Agarwal's path breaking work (see Agarwal, 2010) has initiated debate, in forestry circles, over the question of women's participation and related outcomes for both women and forests. She shows that there is potential for descriptive representation (for example the number of women in executive committees), at given thresholds, to deliver a measure of substantive representation (for example the adoption of forest rules and processes that take into consideration women's use of forests).<sup>1</sup> The papers in this special issue are concerned with such matters of participation but differentiate this participation based on the wide range of activities women are involved in: marketing and sales

<sup>1</sup> Where women make up 33% or more of committee officials, a critical mass is reached and women's overall participation, including attending meetings and voicing needs and demands is increased by about 28%. In Nepal and India this level of participation positively impacts forest regeneration and lowers the incidence of illegal extraction.

of forest products, forest use and management groups, or struggles for political representation and policy change. Authors have different views of how to encourage and strengthen participation. Some argue for women's only groups as a pathway for improving their participation and effectiveness (see Purnomo *et al.*, Shackleton *et al.* on market access; Shanley *et al.* on social movements), others suggest that mixed groups are most efficient in forest management (Sun *et al.*), while others (Bandiaky-Badji, Peach Brown) argue that even as we press for more women in representative bodies or policy processes (the critical mass effect), it is their critical and accountable acts that are likely to deliver policies and practices that recognise women's needs and priorities.

The message from these diverse experiences with participation at first glance seems confusing. From the standpoint of a diversity of activities and institutions, the diverse outcomes may well be justified. Systematic assessments across issue areas and settings are needed to better identify the arenas in which critical mass effects are most relevant, where descriptive and substantive representation intersect, as against where critical acts may not necessarily intersect with critical mass, or even where women's only groups may be the most effective. The debate on participation and representation may greatly benefit from recognizing heterogeneity and the many obstacles that limit women's participation.

Papers in this special issue are ordered in no particular manner, however, the first three are primarily focused on livelihoods type issues and the rest on governance type issues.

The first paper by Djoudi and Brockhaus assesses men's and women's adaptive strategies to climatic variability at the forest-livestock interface in Mali. It uncovers men's and women's strategic preferences and the multi-dimensional impacts of variability on women. As men out-migrate women's workloads are increased and they undertake traditionally male activities such as livestock herding. Women also diversify into charcoal production although this is constrained by emerging tenure arrangements that limit their access to scarce forest resources, limited access to markets and exclusion from the social and political networks that characterise charcoal production and sale. Djoudi and Brockhaus further demonstrate how differentiation among women along ethnicity and wealth can limit their opportunities to diversify their livelihoods portfolios in the wake of climate variability. This paper acknowledges women's active roles and their heterogeneity, suggesting that climate adaptation policy and practice needs not only take into account gender differentiated vulnerabilities but pay greater attention to differentiation among women themselves.

The second paper by Shackleton *et al.* considers women's participation, constraints and avenues for improving their benefits in value chains of selected non timber forest products (NTFPs) from the dry forests of Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Zambia. It builds upon earlier work that flagged gender differentiation in NTFPs production-to-consumption systems

in Africa and Asia, and which illustrated how product commercialization is in some instances associated with increasing male dominance in value chains. (Kusters and Belcher 2004, Sunderland and Ndoye 2004).<sup>2</sup> The contributors find that women draw multiple benefits from their engagement in NTFPs value chains. They earn an independent income, increasing their livelihoods security while allowing them to contribute to children's health and education. Like Djoudi and Brockhaus, this study highlights differentiation among women whereby urban-based women depend on trade on a full-time basis and rural women on a part time basis. For all women, and especially for those engaged in informal markets, their efforts are hardly supported by policy and practice and are in some instances criminalised. Socio-cultural and religious norms and restrictions, risks associated with travel to markets, deferment to men and inappropriate technologies limit their participation. This is in addition to the poor prices they receive from brokers. Encouraging and strengthening collective action among women participants is one way of increasing benefits, though the gender composition of groups may vary depending on the part of the value chain women are engaged in. Authors suggest that providing greater support to informal markets (which are often erroneously branded as illicit) may substantially improve the benefits women derive from participation in markets.

The third paper by Purnomo *et al.* responds to the problem of women receiving lower incomes than men in the highly valued teak furniture industry of Jepara, Indonesia. As with Shackleton *et al.*, they employ a gender analysis of the teak value chain but build different market scenarios in order to identify women's and men's preferences for strategies for upgrading their enterprises. The authors find a distinct gender differentiation in the value chain node at which men and women work. They show that scenarios that allow men and women to change their positions to higher stages of the value chain, closer to furniture buyers, generate the highest perceived economic benefits to both. However, future implementation should specifically target the creation of women's only groups (as opposed to mixed groups as done currently) as women felt less effective when a minority in mixed groups with men. Existing women's self-help groups are an important pre-existing structure that can be used to build women's groups in the furniture industry.

The fourth paper by Peach Brown examines whether and how gender considerations are integrated into discussions and decision-making on climate change in three Congo Basin Forest countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo. As a starting point Peach Brown argues that even though women are increasingly involved in climate negotiations, their descriptive representation (for example number of women) may not necessarily translate into effective representation and women's interest may not feature in the outcome of negotiations. This argument is well developed, and often challenged, in feminist

<sup>2</sup> See Wardell and Fold (2011) for a historical illustration of the evolution of gendered access to the shea nut market in Northern Ghana.

political science but is only recently being tested in the forestry sector where Agarwal (2010) demonstrates the threshold at which descriptive representation translates into substantive representation in certain settings. This paper's results reveal a worrying trend. Though adaptation and REDD+ planning documents state the need for a gender sensitive approach to climate adaptation, broad participation in the development of the documents was not evident. Any strategies to address gender concerns were vague and government departments with a mandate to address gender issues were not included in policy processes. Initial REDD+ documents did not address gender equity concerns but the development of some later documents indicated a concern to increase the participation of women in the process. Peach Brown stresses the need to increase the number of women participating in adaptation planning and REDD+ consultations. However, for numbers to transform to substantive improvements, such as influencing agendas and an actual implementation of women's interests, a more involved process that targets power asymmetries and gender biased cultural norms is warranted. Peach Brown cautions against blind processes that don't take into account the diversity of women.

The fifth paper is by Bandiaky-Badji. Like Peach Brown, Bandiaky-Badji tackles the problem of gender inclusion in policy processes. Bandiaky-Badji confronts this problem by tracking the historical evolution of decentralization reforms in Senegal, considers the content of legal institutions and customary norms, and relates them to collective bargaining processes on the political front. The paper argues that local government institutions are critical channels for accessing resources, and women's access to land and other resources can be meaningfully assessed through their participation in local councils. The author finds that decentralization policies in the land and forestry sector are gender neutral or outright gender blind, a major pathway through which gender inequity is sustained. Women's political representation is at the heart of this outcome. Women's access to political power in representative bodies, such as local councils, faces major limitations. Patronage networks, the structure and organization of political parties, and gender biased cultural attitudes are barriers to women seeking political office. Interestingly, women's political representation, which has always been low, dropped even lower with the adoption of decentralization laws in the mid 1990s. The author suggests that the 2010 parity law (which demands 50/50 representation) offers promise for remedying this situation as it creates opportunity for bringing nominal (for instance descriptive) representation to a critical mass that may further allow for effective, substantive representation. Several interesting matters for further research are raised here: the interactions and sequencing between advocacy, political representation and reform as well as the enduring matter of the interactions between descriptive and substantive representation of women.

The sixth paper, by Lewark *et al.*, is pioneering in the sense that it attempts to establish the gender implications of the Forest Stewardship Councils (FSC) forest certification programme in Nepal. Forest certification is a relatively recent

innovation that is only slowly gaining currency in the developing world (Auld *et al.* 2008). Lewark *et al.* show that certification has hardly altered men's and women's collection of forest products such as firewood, timber, leaf litter and medicinal plants, although livestock grazing has substantially reduced imposing additional burdens for women in grass collection. Women are mostly represented in subcommittees and men usually hold the more influential positions in the executive committees, yet female sub-committee members are informed of meetings via their husbands. Women appear much less informed than men and are less likely to contribute to setting the agenda and even where they contribute, their contributions are often ignored. Authors suggest that separate women's committee members meetings should be considered in order to help build the skills and solidarity necessary to increase their effectiveness and influence in the subcommittees.

In the seventh paper Sun *et al.* focus on establishing whether differences in group composition may influence participation in rule making, rule enforcement, and exclusion (important indicators of forest governance) among groups in Kenya, Uganda, Bolivia and Mexico. The authors find that gender composition influences forest use and management. Female-dominated groups for example are more likely to harvest fuelwood and male dominated timber. Gender balanced groups appear to perform better in all the selected governance indicators than female or male-dominated groups. Further empirical work is needed to determine how varying numbers of men and women in mixed groups may affect cooperation, and how within-group dynamics may affect overall performance.

In the eighth paper Bose examines how India's Forest Rights Act of 2006, a pioneering legislation that recognises the rights of tribal groups to use and live within forests, has affected tribal women's rights and access to forests. The implementation of forest legislation was found to be biased in favour of men. For example, while the law allows for individual claims, in practice women's claims were subordinated to men's claims and men claimed on behalf of women. Thus individual women's access was increasingly dependent on men in stark contrast to before the law's implementation when women had a measure of control over forestland and access rights to forest resources. Institutions created for the implementation of the Act (such as forest committees) were mostly controlled by tribal men, unlike before when both male and female elders collectively participated in decision making over access, management and protection. Moreover, tribal women's identity was used to exclude them from the forest committees—they were viewed as ill mannered, unlike assimilated and mainstream Hindu women. These findings dovetail with longstanding evidence that individualization of land and related resources more often than not harms women's rights (Lastarria-Cornhiel 1997; Meinzen-Dick *et al.* 1997, see also Dahal *et al.* 2010 for outcomes of recent forestry reforms in other settings). The study also showcases women's differentiation along religious and ethnic lines and the manipulation of these differentiations by forestry elite to subordinate the rights of tribal women.

In the ninth paper Shanley *et al.* address the ongoing challenge of increasing women's access to decision making, ensuring that their rights, interests and priorities are taken into account in policy and reform processes. They analyse the evolution of women's involvement in one of Brazil's most prominent social movement organizations—the National Council of Extractivist Populations (CNS). Findings show that associational life in the church comprised an early building block of the rubber tapper's movement, and one way by which women's involvement in public life was fostered. The significance of this contribution lies in its demonstrating that women agents are capable of organizing, leadership, building links to formal institutions and exploiting their collective bargaining power to bring about positive change. However, inequality and traditional male leadership are some barriers to women attaining the critical mass that will gain them more confidence and influence. Another significant point is that women's movement leaders must decide on a strategy for action with a probability of success. In this case, the strategy traded off high levels of feminist activism for building partnerships with state institutions and participating in state-led decision-making processes. This strategy paid off (see Paudel *et al.* 2010 for successful strategies used by social movements in different forestry settings). Moreover, issue priorities changed over time: from citizenship, to health, to more open challenging of women's subordination. This paper suggests that women's movements in forestry are more likely to be successful when actors are to some extent incorporated in decision-making processes than when they are outside of it.

In the tenth paper Mai *et al.* present a review of the forests and gender literature published in the past decade, focusing mostly on tropical forests in developing countries<sup>3</sup>. They highlight the thematic areas in which most research has concentrated on and gaps for further research. They find a lack of balance with regard to geographical focus, thematic areas and methodology. Like other authors in this contribution, they emphasize the need for a more nuanced approach that pays attention to differentiation among women in addition to gender-based differentiation. They further underscore the need for a careful exploration of gender-based differentiation across multiple levels and scales, given increasing global interconnectedness. Climate change, international investments in biofuels, access to global markets for forest products, are examples of emerging research areas that provide fertile ground for gender analysis across multiple governance levels.

Overall, papers in this special issue on gender and forests confirm existing findings such as forest management, use and access are connected to gender roles. They also challenge them. For example gender roles in forestry can be dynamic and women can take up traditionally male activities. In

addition, women (or men) are not all the same, all the time; they can be differentiated. The cases provide cautions against sweeping generalizations.

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<sup>3</sup> See Kiptot and Franzel 2011 for a useful review of gender and agroforestry in Africa.