



# **Gender-sensitive study of perceptions and practices in and around Bale Mountains National Park, Ethiopia**

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## **Summary**

This report describes the findings of one in a series of studies which aim to assess the linkages between the issues of 'gender'. These studies aim to assess the linkages between gender issues and a World Wildlife Fund (WWF) 'integrated conservation and development project' (ICDP) set in the Bale Mountains' National Park (BMNP), Ethiopia. The project is funded by the Netherlands' government (DGIS), and is one of seven international projects which form the Tropical Forest Portfolio, coordinated by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) International, Geneva, and managed by WWF Ethiopia.

The project was still in its early stages when the report was written. Since its inception in 1998, its immediate objectives have been to: firstly, strengthen the institutional capacity of the institutions involved in the management of Ethiopia's important protected areas, with an emphasis on forests. This is to be achieved through support to the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Organisation (EWCO) and the Oromiya State Regional Bureau of Agriculture (the department responsible for the management of the protected areas in the region). Secondly its objective is to conserve and manage sustainable forest and wildlife resources in the BMNP and the adjacent Mena-Angetu National Forest Protection Area through the adoption of improved and sustainable community-based natural resource management practices, with a focus on the four 'woredas' (or districts) which overlap the Park and/or 2-3 pilot villages.

Initially emphasis was to be placed on the first objective – thus laying a solid foundation for the rest of the project. The author, however, stated that the second objective involving the local communities and their natural resource

use was in actual fact the part that her study was particularly interested in, as it is in this area that gender issues and problems are most likely to occur. Hence we have a pilot study with a set of objectives of its own.

*'To gather background information on the local, political, historical, economic, cultural and social context within which the Bale Mountains' National Park and the DGIS-WWF supported project are set*

*To establish [sic] (assess) gender roles within households (including the decision-making processes), differing degrees of mobility between men and women and the presence of formal and/or informal means of support and/or social gatherings; and in particular an understanding of the position of women in the local community and the household was emphasised.*

*To assess the degree of pressure on natural resources in and around the Park from the local people and their livestock*

*To understand current livelihood practices in and around the Park and assess the possibilities for future expansion of such practices and/or suggest alternatives*

*To assess the current perceptions and views of the Park (and conservation practices in general) including the presence of costs and/or benefits to the local communities due to the presence of the Park'*

It was within this framework of objectives that the work was couched. In particular, it was considered to be of most value if the research described in this paper obtained a better understanding of the local socioeconomic, political, cultural, and environmental context in which the project was to be set. Thus emphasis was placed on gender issues, focusing on gender roles and differences in mobility, social organisation, current livelihood practices, and perceptions/views of the Park and 'conservation'. Through understanding these differences and gender 'domains' it was anticipated that areas of intervention would be highlighted, thus offering some direction and ways forward for the project, to take account of its objective of addressing gender issues and including marginal groups such as women. Hence the following questions were to be answered.

*'How do gender differences influence perceptions and use of biodiversity and its conservation in relation to particular livelihood strategies in local communities?*

*To what degree does gender influence the participation of members of a local community in the planning, implementation, and monitoring/evaluation of ICDPs and why?*



*What effect might the exclusion of marginalised groups, such as women, have on the successful implementation of ICDPs?*

*How might these exclusions be resolved, so that women, the communities, and biodiversity conservation benefit?'*

The research took place in four villages – Gojera, Karari, Gofingria and Soba – all of which are close to the one town – Dinsho – situated on the northern unfenced boundaries of BMNP. The research involved semi-structured interviews with village/town inhabitants and/or key informants; a survey of women traders in the market place; and the use of Rapid Rural Appraisal techniques such as mobility/resource mapping and transect walks. The paper as a whole describes the villages briefly, not always under the same headings, and gives questionnaires, village maps, and respondents. (All of these can be found on the CDROM giving the CMW papers in their entirety.)



## **Findings**

The town and villages are currently undergoing a process of change and 'modernisation', with Dinsho slowly growing in prosperity and size. This is reflected in the recent input to the provision of services in the town, such as a new market and the community-supported project to supply mains electricity. Both traditional and modern systems of governance run concurrently, and religion and culture still play an important role in influencing people's lives. The majority of the local community are Muslim and Oromo. (Editorial comment: The Oromiya who are the main group in the area apparently take their descent from a common ancestor, and it is around this belief that a strong animist worship – Oromo – has evolved, seemingly eclipsed in some areas by Muslim and Christian worship. Muslims and Christians do not get on well and will not eat together.)

The local communities (Gojera, Karari, Gofingria, and Soba) live in a relatively harsh and often unpredictable environment. Local services are few and those that exist are poorly resourced. Agriculture is mainly subsistence barley farming, supplemented by vegetable growing, semi-nomadic pastoralism, and the diversification of livelihoods. The grazing of cattle and collection of fuelwood from inside the Park's boundaries are illegal, yet they occur on a regular basis. The increasing population of both people and cattle in recent years has added to the pressure on the Park and its natural resources. This is particularly the case for the village of Gofingria.

Women and girls are marginalised groups in the society. Substantial gender inequities exist in schooling, health care, and institutional support. There are always seemingly valid reasons, obviously mostly dependent on female stereotypes: girls marry young, need to help in the home, are weaker than boys, sexually at risk, and so on. The poverty of the area also means that girls

do not receive preference over boys for education, and the lack of job opportunities is weighted against women. Women are mainly responsible for the household and men for agriculture. However, women often work on the land as well, but, despite this, gender stereotype roles are encouraged by local institutions. In addition, women's mobility is severely restrained and there is little formal support for their organisation or ways to challenge the inequities they experience. Informally, the self-help groups, or 'iddir', that have been established appear to offer an opportunity for providing 'space' to promote women's interests.

The BMNP was established in 1970, and since this time it has had a profound effect on the lives of those living in both Dinsho and the surrounding villages. During the time of the Derg or Communist regime (1974-91), many households were expelled from the Park, and, today, attempts are being made to force similar evictions. This has encouraged a very negative view of the Park within the local communities and has added to their insecurity.

Indeed, the majority of the local communities see no benefit from the Park, yet incur costs from the damage to crops by wild animals and restrictions on the use of natural resources in the Park. Some of the local population, living in the villages close to the Park, do obtain benefits from it through employment as scouts or within the Ethiopian Wolf Conservation Project, and through the hiring of horses and as guides for tourists. In addition some awareness of the importance of the Park in protecting the local environment and biodiversity was perceived.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is suggested that there are a number of areas that could be targeted by the WWF project for future intervention. These include the promotion of the growing of indigenous trees, trees for fuelwood, and trees for building materials; support for the provision of local services in the villages; support through a micro-credit system; tourism; and the promotion of better relations between the Park and the local communities. It was suggested that the market in wild herbs could be made more efficient and commercially viable, and the same suggestion was made for flowers since the Park had a wide range of 'spectacular' flowers. The leaner on these suggestions was that they would have to be controlled so that they were economically and environmentally sustainable. It was suggested that greater promotion of women's employment in the Park and in the businesses and projects connected to it was needed.

More specifically, in relation to women and the establishment of projects that target them, there are a number of existing institutions that already provide a good basis for moves forward. Firstly, the presence of supportive legislation, secondly the existence of self-help groups in some areas, and thirdly the



beginnings of community support for increased gender equity. In addition suggestions for projects are made, focusing on diversification of women's livelihoods. These range from handicrafts, honey, and butter making to sustainable enterprises based on the planting of fruit trees and the collection of wild herbs and flowers (see above). However, it is stressed that, if such projects are to be instigated, WWF must be cautious not to add excessively to women's daily workloads and to promote unwanted gender-stereotypical roles. This would mean that projects would have to blend into the working day so that women could accommodate projects.



Finally, it is suggested that the most appropriate of the villages studied for targeting by WWF as a pilot village for the project on conservation and development would be Karari. Reasons for this include its geographical situation, the already existing support in the village, the need for services in the village – particularly in education, the degree of diversification already existing in livelihoods that could be developed further, and the need for resolving present conflicts with the Park, particularly those related to damage by wild animals.

