



Working with community-based conservation with a gender focus: a guide

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Summary

This paper described the process used to give community conservation initiatives a gender focus. The author was contracted as part of an evaluation team for the Parks in Peril (PIP) project of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The project was funded by the Office of Women in Development (G/WID) through the Women in Development Technical Assistance (WIDTECH) Project. The WIDTECH Project provides technical assistance and training on gender issues to USAID bureaus and missions.

The Parks in Peril Project, in turn, is a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy and USAID. The evaluation included field visits to seven protected areas in Mexico (La Encrucijada, El Ocote, and Sian Ka'an), Ecuador (Machalilla), Peru (Bahuaja Sonene), Costa Rica (Talamanca), Guatemala (Sierra de Las Minas) and discussions with headquarters' staff at USAID and The Nature Conservancy in Washington, D.C.

The team was *"to assess the overall performance of PIP against the programme's purpose and results outlined in the USAID Results Framework."* The strategic objective of the programme is the *"protection of selected Latin American and Caribbean parks and reserves important to conserve the hemisphere's biological diversity."*

The purpose of the evaluation was not to evaluate the individual sites but to evaluate the PIP Project overall. Therefore, observations during particular site visits were used as examples illustrating broader issues. The guide given in this paper uses examples from the site visits that were used to build on the results

of the evaluation and recommend ways in which the PIP project could “*easily, efficiently, and equitably*” integrate gender into their work.

The guide starts from the premise that gender considerations are important for community-based conservation and should be integral to the policies and programmes that support conservation. It presents six steps for use by the personnel of protected areas and their community partners and others working in the field of community conservation, as well as for those working in this area in institutions and at policy-making levels.

The Guide: The bulk of the text is taken up by the guide itself, which is not reproduced in its entirety here, merely a brief overview of the contents.¹ The author recommends use of the guide as a short workshop on gender or as separate components. Facilitators are needed to lead the conceptual discussions about gender and conservation included in each step. The stated goal is not to transmit authoritative knowledge, but to share information through structured group activities, and build up understanding by wider group discussions and interactive exercises. The whole six steps (see below), it seems, can be completed in 3-4 hours, depending of course on the size of groups.

A brief description of the separate steps and their contents, contained in the guide, is given below.

1. Develop a rationale for gender

This step contains sections on a conceptual discussion, approach, and an exercise. Basically the conceptual discussion gives the reasons why gender issues are important in conservation and discusses the under-representation of women at local, institutional, and policy levels. It is presented that involving the whole community lies at the very heart of success or failure and bound in with a reserves long-term viability. The health of the reserve is related to the alleviation of hunger and poverty in a conservation area surrounded by borderlands that are poor.

The argument is for a community-based approach that encourages environmental decision-making, leadership, and participation from all-inclusive strategies for conservation and resource management, understanding of gender in terms of access to environmental activities and addressal of economic, social, and legal constraints. The usefulness of gender analysis as a conservation tool is also presented by drawing on traditional stereotypes and the need to redefine roles. An example is given of the cost of exclusion of women by drawing on the study of a mangrove ecosystem in the Gulf of Fonseca. An exercise for small groups concludes this section.

¹ Those interested in using this guide who were not participants at the Conference on Celebrating Mountain Women should contact distri@icimod.org



2. Deconstruct terms to understand gender roles and relations

This section discusses terminology. It consists of a conceptual discussion and an exercise.

The conceptual discussion covers how language conjures up images of specific genders, when in fact the image can be erroneous. Because of the propensity of most languages to conjure up male images for certain words, women's role in agricultural and conservation work remains invisible.

The exercise is based on asking participants what women particularly, but also men, do during various times of the year or during a typical day. Examples are taken from a variety of activities: brazil nut collection, gold mining, fishing, herb cultivation and collection, crop cultivation and processing, gardening, livestock rearing, fruit collection, water and fuelwood collection. One specific example of iguana farming (seen exclusively as men's work) is given to demonstrate how, if looked at carefully, women can be seen to contribute a great deal to so-called men's work.

Highlight women as PIP participants

The conceptual discussion in this section focuses on the importance of making women visible in a number of different, important roles.

- i) As wives and mothers they are important not only to women but to society as a whole, hence too to conservation. An example is given of women's roles in this respect.
- ii) As leaders and professionals, and these are given from throughout the PIP project, especially where women are important as role models for other women.

Suggestions are also made concerning how to break down stereotypes and the exercise involves taking stereotypical presentations and coming up with ways to change these.

Build on women's individual and group experience

The conceptual discussion here is focused on integrating women into activities rather than addressing them separately, and the reasons for such an approach. At the same time the author accepts that additional efforts directed only at women are necessary sometimes because of traditional taboos prohibiting men and women working together. Patterns of women working in groups separately from men emerged from the PIP sites and these are given as examples here.

Such groups include a livestock raising and marketing group; a sewing and baking group; and this latter group also included activities in market gardening and scholarships for further schooling.

The exercise picks up on the debate about whether there should be women's components or is it better to fully integrate women into the activities? do women have competitive advantages in value adding? are such activities sustainable without subsidies?

The second pattern is of women as pioneers and this involves a case about a fisherwoman who became a tour guide. The exercise is mainly brainstorming to come up with names of women pioneers within the community.

The third pattern is a women's component of an already established organisation. The case is that of a union of rural people and the attempts of the union staff to integrate women and to be gender sensitive, yet at the same time establishing a separate women's component with a woman extension agent. The exercise in this case involves an institutional analysis of different organisations to look at gender aspects.

3. Remove barriers to participation

This section focuses on the importance of empowerment. A citation is given from Rosa Barrantes of the Instituto de Saber, Peru.

"If there were a policy where women could participate with their own voice and with decision-making powers it would be possible to confront many of the great problems that affect the environment."

This particular section lists a rationale for the importance of women's participation in conservation efforts and it includes their leadership, often invisible, organisational capacities; skill in management of natural resources; role as primary care givers; and judicious use of assets (financial and other).

Women did not participate, however, for various reasons and the barriers seen were language, not mobile outside the community and home, absence from public meetings, young age at marriage, failure of staff to contact women, male chauvinism, jealousy of women leaders, not included in training, seen as just housewives, and no value given to the work they do. Many of these of course are related to stereotyping and the concept of what women will or will not do. Such concepts are often culture specific. One way of overcoming barriers is to bring in expertise from the many women's organisations working with gender and women's issues.

The exercise involved brainstorming to come up with suggestions for overcoming barriers.

4. Work across sectors

Apart from the community-based approach, it is important to involve the mechanisms of governance and democracy. This section mainly deals with that. The issue of education in terms of illiteracy, and apart from that the issue



in terms of awareness of women, (compared with men) about environmental problems. It was deemed that education was a sine qua non for environmental protection and for narrowing the gap between men and women and their participation in the same.

In terms of democracy and governance it is perceived that conservation of biodiversity is dependent on local-level solutions, and hence the importance of involving the community without whose support and participation conservation is not possible. On the other hand, it is proposed that community approaches can often act against women's interests as there is a tendency worldwide for poor representation of women politically at all levels. Methods of overcoming this, based on the fact that women are more comfortable talking to other women, are given for the PIP sites.

An important point raised is that the PIP sites have in some areas a post conflict situation, as states move to more democratic forms of representation and governance. The irony of how war can give women public space is given, citing the examples of Rigoberta Menchu and Rosalina Tuyuc in Gutaemala.

The exercise in this section is small group discussion about the role of education and of participatory processes.

Conclusion

The author concludes by stating the reasons for the guide as a response to one of the recommendations of the evaluation to, "document the PIP experience with gender."

The perception is that by completing this process and the exercises given, the PIP staff will understand the value of participatory methods and the value attention to gender can bring to conservation. She states the following.

Having completed the training, participants will be able to:

- develop a rationale for their institution for the inclusion of gender in community conservation;
- analyse women's and men's roles and their relationship to the management of natural resources;
- highlight the accomplishments of both women and men in organisational documents and environmental education materials;
- analyse women's groups and their potential contribution to conservation;
- articulate the importance of women's participation in conservation efforts and the barriers they face to participation, and implement ways to remove the barriers; and
- promote cross-sectoral work in education and democracy and governance as a means of addressing environmental issues.

This exercise seems to contain the tools to help participants succeed in all of the above.

