

# GENDER IN BIODIVERSITY:

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## Edel-Quinn Agbaegbu

Pervasive inequalities shape policies, actions, plans, values and attitudes related to the conservation and sustainable use of the biodiversity resources and can be an influential factor in decision-making around access and benefit sharing. Across the globe, women have a unique relationship with biodiversity and predominate as wild plant gatherers and domesticators, seed custodians and herbalists. The role of women in different regions of the world including Africa in managing the interface between wild and domesticated species of edible plant dates back to 15,000 – 19,000BC. A research on 60 homes in Thailand revealed 230 different species many of which were rescued by women from neighbouring forests before being cleared. (Aguilar, 2004). A study in Sierra Leone showed that women could name 31 uses of trees on fallow land and in the forest while men named 8 different uses. This shows how men and women have distinct realms of knowledge and application for natural resources management both of which are necessary for sustainable use and conservation. Men and women knowledge of the forest is different as they utilize different forest resources. Women may prefer to collect berries, twigs and other fruits or some branches from trees for fuel while men will cut the same trees to sell as firewood or construction. Bedouin women

have a unique knowledge of medicinal plants used to protect their skin from the harsh conditions of the desert.

Updates have revealed that understanding gender dynamics in sustainable biodiversity has become more essential, as since 2013 half of conservation agreements in this area are executed by women. Gender information being gathered by the consultants hired by CI-Peru, represents a key and developing the study is a valuable opportunity to integrate gender considerations in biodiversity initiatives.

Ensuring equal participation of men and women poses a major challenge, as men take most of the household decisions. Again, with few exceptions, women have little access to cash and depend economically on their husbands particularly those in emerging economies. This hinders their participation in discussions regarding conservation agreements benefits and implementation. Also, there is growing informality of labour, income inequality and humanitarian crises. These obstacles undermine women and make it harder for women to get an equal footing with men in the world of work and are even worsened through legal barriers which further compound gender inequalities. Tradition, cultural values and religion are being misused as tools all around the world to restrict women's rights, entrench sexism and defend misogynistic practices.

Strategic actions such as conducting gender analysis and research to ascertain differences in values, roles and gender expertise should be part of gender-responsive measures to achieve the targets. There are opportunities to strengthen emphasis and implementation of gender responsive approach like during global biodiversity conferences. Gender considerations are relevant to the achievement of the objectives of the convention on biological diversity (CBD) in various ways. Therefore, the introduction of gender equality and biodiversity linkages in Gender Considerations and Biodiversity as overviews of key gender elements under the Convention on Biological Diversity is recommended.

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