

## Making the conservation case for gender integration: what does the research say?

*The task of integrating gender dynamics into conservation initiatives has received more and more attention in recent years. The argument for ensuring that both men and women are able to equally participate and benefit from conservation activities often centers on the need for full community participation as a prerequisite for sustainable conservation. But is this borne out in practice? In fact, a number of studies looking at this issue have concluded that involving women in natural resource decision making processes does result in directly benefitting on conservation outcomes. Here are highlights from several such studies:*

Agarwal, B (2009) Gender and forest conservation: the impact of women's participation in community forest governance. *Ecological Economics* 68(11): 2785-2799.

Would enhancing women's presence in community institutions of forest governance improve resource conservation and regeneration? This paper focuses on this little addressed question. Based on the author's primary data on communities managing their local forests in parts of India and Nepal, it statistically assesses whether the gender composition of a local forest management group affects forest conservation outcomes, after controlling for other characteristics of the management group, aspects of institutional functioning, forest and population characteristics, and related factors. It is found that **groups with a high proportion of women in their executive committee (EC)—the principal decision-making body—show significantly greater improvements in forest condition in both regions.** Moreover, groups with all-women ECs in the Nepal sample have better forest regeneration and canopy growth than other groups, despite receiving much smaller and more degraded forests. Older EC members, especially older women, also make a particular difference, as does employing a guard. The beneficial impact of women's presence on conservation outcomes is attributable especially to **women's contributions to improved forest protection and rule compliance.** More opportunity for women to use their knowledge of plant species and methods of product extraction, as well as greater cooperation among women, are also likely contributory factors.

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Westermann, O et al. (2005) Gender and social capital: the importance of gender differences for the maturity and effectiveness of natural resource management groups. *World Development* 33(11): 1783-1799

This paper seeks to contribute to an improved understanding of the gender aspects of social capital manifested in groups for natural resource management (NRM). We investigated how gender differentiated social groups differ in their activities and outcomes for NRM. A total of 46 men's, mixed, and women's groups were analyzed in 33 rural programs in 20 countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia. Significant gender differences were found in relation to group maturity and NRM achievements and approaches as well as important differences in experiences of collaboration and capacity to manage conflict. Overall, we found that **collaboration, solidarity, and conflict resolution all increase in groups where women are present.** In addition, **norms of reciprocity are more likely to operate in women's and mixed groups.** Similarly, the **capacity for self-sustaining collective action increased with women's presence and was significantly higher in the women's groups.** The results demonstrate the importance of gender analysis for collective NRM and particularly **the role of women for collaboration in and sustainability of NRM groups.**

Shandra, Shandra & London (2008) Women, non-governmental organizations, and deforestation: a cross-national study. *Population and Environment* 30(1-2): 48-72.

There have been several cross-national studies published in the world polity theoretical tradition that find a strong correlation between nations with high levels of environmental nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and low levels of various forms of environmental degradation. However, these studies neglect the role that women's NGOs potentially play in this process. We seek to address this gap by conducting a cross-national study of the association between women's NGOs and deforestation. We examine this relationship because deforestation often translates into increased household labor, loss of income, and impaired health for women and, as a result, women's non-governmental organizations have become increasingly involved in dealing with these problems often by protecting forests. We use data from a sample of 61 nations for the period of 1990–2005. We find **substantial support for world polity theory that both high levels of women's and environmental NGOs per capita are associated with lower rates of deforestation**. We also find that high levels of debt service and structural adjustment are correlated with higher rates of forest loss. We conclude with a discussion of findings, policy implications, and possible future research directions.

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Agrawal B (2000) Conceptualizing environmental collective action: why gender matters. *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 24(3): 283-310.

This paper demonstrates how institutions for natural resource management (such as community forestry groups), which appear to be participative, equitable and efficient, can be found lacking on all three counts from a gender perspective. It also examines possible gender differences in social networks, values and motivations. Although there is little to suggest that women are inherently more conservationist than men, **the distinctness of women's social networks embodying prior experience of successful cooperation, their higher dependence on these networks (as also on the commons in general), and their potentially greater group homogeneity relative to men, could provide an important (and largely ignored) basis for organizing sustainable environmental collective action**. The paper also outlines the factors that can constrain or facilitate women's participation in formal environmental management groups. Illustrative examples are drawn from rural South Asia.

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Agrawal A et al. (2006) Decentralization and environmental conservation: Gender effects from participation in joint forest management. CAPRI working paper No. 53:

This paper analyzes how women's participation affects institutional outcomes related to the decentralized governance of community forests in Madhya Pradesh, India. The analysis is based on data from a representative sample of 641 cases of joint forest management, India's flagship program to involve communities in forest governance. We focus on two outcomes relevant for local livelihoods: control of illicit grazing and control of illicit felling in the forest. The paper statistically estimates the effects of women's participation on outcomes, and also the source of this effect in terms of women's representation in committees and action in protecting forests. We find that **women's participation has substantial positive effects on regulating illicit grazing and felling**, even after controlling for the effects of a range of independent variables. We also find that the "action effect" is more important than the "representation effect," confirming some major arguments advanced by feminist environmentalists. Our statistical results are robust to different specifications and provide considerable empirical support for promoting women's participation in community-based protection of natural resources.

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