INTERNAL BRIEFING

GENDER JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) believes that social and environmental justice is only achievable through a radical transformation of our societies. We seek justice and freedom from all systems that devalue and exploit women, peoples and the environment. These include patriarchy, racism, (neo)colonialism, class oppression, capitalism and heteronormativity. These systems cannot be tackled in isolation; they reinforce one another in the constant drive for material accumulation and for the benefit and privilege of elites in society.¹

Friends of the Earth International’s Forests and Biodiversity Programme conducted a participatory process with the Federation’s membership and other structures to debate and reflect on the links between gender justice and Community Forest Management (CFM). The main objective was to develop this CFM gender justice framework in order to increase the visibility of women’s active political participation and to recognise their central roles in this historical practice.

Our starting point was the notion that modern dichotomous thinking establishes a hierarchy of relationships between the human and the non-human.² This is rooted in existing structural racism expressed in the dispossession of ancestral territories, and in the denial of cultural practices and ways of caring for the environment that belong to peoples and communities around the world. These ideas and the conceptualisation of nature as a feminised entity are rooted in a binary way of thinking, primarily based on modern and colonial logics that determine hierarchical society-nature categories where the latter becomes devalued, in turn resulting in profound negative effects on women and their territories.³ In this context, violence against women is exacerbated through a strategy of “war” against women. This manifests in some South countries as increasing criminalisation, killing, and jailing of women for their actions in defence of their bodies, forests and biodiversity in their territories.⁴ ⁵

“Our struggle is growing stronger. Women, young people and sexual minorities are denied their rights, power-holders question our very existence. We defend life and biodiversity. Racism, colonialism and patriarchy are systems of oppression that we must combat in a comprehensive manner.” Sandra Morán, Guatemala, World March of Women, participant at FoEI’s second internal webinar on Community Forest Management and Gender Justice, 21 April 2022.

The capitalist system is strengthened by the patriarchal system, heteronormativity, racism, extractivism and ableism. The Federation’s struggle for system change

¹ FoEI, 2018, paragraph 1  
² Herrero, 2018

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³ UAF-LA, 2015  
⁴ Segato, 2016  
⁵ According to the Global Witness report on environmental defenders, in 2020, over half of attacks on defenders took place in just three countries: Colombia, Mexico and the Philippines. The data showed that over half of the lethal attacks were directly linked to defenders’ opposition to mining, logging and dam projects. Although most of the defenders attacked were men, women also face gender-specific forms of violence, including sexual violence. Women often have a double challenge: the public struggle to protect their land, and the less visible struggle to defend their right to speak out within their communities and families (Global Witness, 2020).
must include challenging these structures. In this sense, the proposals and initiatives presented must make it possible to end the systems that devalue women, racialised bodies and gender non-conforming people in the territories.

“We are also putting our bodies on the line against land-grabbing and the advance of oil palm; we are working in health centres with medicinal plants; we are caring for water, biodiversity and territories; and we are defending ourselves from violent attacks.” Mario, member of the LGBTQI collective within the Black Fraternal Organisation of Honduras (OFRANEH, acronym in Spanish), participant at FoEI’s second internal webinar on Community Forest Management and Gender Justice, 21 April 2022.

This political framework draws the linkages between CFM and gender justice. It presents our understanding of how the patriarchal system oppresses women specifically and exacerbates forms of structural violence that are already felt on their bodies and territories. Our approach takes elements from ecofeminism and from territorial community feminisms in the South. Furthermore, we seek to contribute to the assertion that women, their bodies and territories must be recognised, and to the creation of spaces for effective political participation. These should be far from exercises of simulation or quotas that do not aim at structural changes.

“For example, gender quotas are being promoted in all areas of government in Nepal. Legally, they seek more equal participation, but when it comes to funds, only a small portion of the budget (1%) is allocated for implementing gender justice strategies in the country.” Pallavi Joshi, Friends of the Earth Nepal, participant at FoEI’s second internal webinar on gender justice and CFM, 21 April 2022.

IMPACTS ON WOMEN

To explore the links between gender justice and CFM, we need to understand the impacts that the capitalist system, patriarchy and extractive projects – along with the models of oppression that sustain them – have on women’s bodies and territories. This allows us to grasp the magnitude of the situation and to identify the forms of violence and the commonalities in the extractive model, which is the basis for capitalist accumulation that affects territories, forests, biodiversity and women’s bodies. We are then able to discern care work and its connection with CFM as a concrete political strategy that nurtures practices of territorial defence and reproduction of life, which women are key in sustaining. Finally, we look at the historical demands for land tenure and ownership that women have fought for around the world – as a minimum of dignity – and that function both as a strategy of territorial defence and to strengthen CFM.

THREATS TO LIFE, WOMEN, FORESTS AND BIODIVERSITY IN THE TERRITORIES

The financialisation of nature, agribusiness, monoculture expansion, megaprojects and activities such as mining all exist because of the extractivist model and the imposition of a development model based on exploitation of natural resources and the commons as well as profit-driven accumulation.

We are currently in what is called a moment of “true war” against life, as the dynamics that are considered progress (called “development”) are built directly

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6 De-colonial feminisms, Latin American territorial feminisms and feminist theology all recognise the body as the first territory of specific historical experiences. Community feminists advance that the appropriation of knowledge, land and resources has required the use of women’s bodies in various ways. First, through attacks on our bodies, imposing violence and submission. Second, because women have always been the custodians, creators and restorers of places where life reproduces itself. They argue that the struggles to reclaim and defend their territories and their lands must go hand in hand with the struggle to reclaim their body-territory, because “the historical and oppressive forms of violence exist both for my first territory, the body, and for my historical territory, the land.” (Cabnal, 2012, page 17)

7 It is in the context of reproduction and production of life that we discuss concrete strategies for the defence of life, as well as the struggles that are cultivated on a daily basis. These strategies and struggles – through their practice – contribute to the development of political capacities. For example, when a community faces an imminent threat of dispossession of what, until then, had been part of the commons. Authors such as Silvia Federici and Raquel Gutiérrez discuss these concepts more clearly, nourished by the contribution of Latin American philosophers Bolívar Echeverría and Luis Tapia.

8 These encompass a set of mechanisms that Friends of the Earth International denounces. Examples include Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), carbon offsetting, biodiversity and habitat banking, among others – all of which have a common element of putting a price on nature, turning it into an exchangeable object, a financial asset.

9 Extractivism, as the basis for accumulation in the capitalist model (Gudynas, 2013), refers to the extraction of natural resources mostly destined for export; these resources are characterised by little or no processing. Accordingly, economic extractivism has gravely destructive effects on the environment, as well as on economic impoverishment and working conditions. Extractivism cannot be reduced to mining-energy exploitation; its main characteristic is the appropriation of large quantities of natural resources for export, with little or no impact on local economies. It engenders forms of appropriation that range from dispossession and displacement of people’s productive and reproductive activities, to the purchase and renting of land through negotiation processes with actors within local communities.

10 Korol, 2016
against the material bases that sustain life.\textsuperscript{11} This logic underpins the notion that one can claim the private ownership of forests and biodiversity and the elements they contain, including their genetic information and their functions in the territories.\textsuperscript{12}

Territories are strongly affected by the expansion of the agricultural frontier through the agribusiness model and the advance of monocultures such as oil palm and soybeans, along with accelerated deforestation and illegal logging. These impacts affect natural resources and the commons, collective forms of managing forests and biodiversity, and they affect women’s bodies and their strategies for preserving life in their communities.\textsuperscript{13} The processes of territorial defence and community feminisms recognise the body as the first territory, as extensive and intimately connected with the natural and spiritual elements that surround us. This is all part of recognising that “the first territory is our body”.

This model is not only about disputing and plundering the natural commons. Its negative impacts can be seen in the extractivist practices that are part of the model, such as the appropriation of ancestral knowledge, the loss of cultural identity, the loss of spiritual processes and practices, and the decline of women’s and their peoples’ organisational processes.\textsuperscript{14}

These projects emerge from patriarchal, racist and (neo)colonial visions, and they do nothing more than exacerbate and perpetuate the profound causes that the international and national agendas seek to promote as solutions to the climate crisis and biodiversity loss and extinction. As a result, they maintain an unjust and unequal system with intertwining forms of oppression, reproducing and reinforcing – instead of lowering – the structural barriers to recognising women’s rights.

The extractivist project limits women’s autonomy and increases their vulnerability through a combination of factors, including the loss of food sovereignty and cultural practices, impoverishment, violence and militarisation, rights violations, institutional violence and the lack of access to public policies.

**CARE WORK AND COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT**

The dominant model exacerbates the effects of climate change and biodiversity loss, and it affects agricultural production. It endangers water, land and access to natural resources such as forests and biodiversity, which are essential for local and family strategies for sustaining life. This also has an impact on human health, including malnutrition and illnesses, making care work – conducted by women – more difficult. Women face reduced access to the resources and technology they need to care, including medicines for the ill or access to medical equipment.\textsuperscript{15}

Women’s unpaid work in the realms of care, agriculture and food production highlight the urgent need to recognise these tasks, assign them an appropriate value, and ensure that they be shared among men, women and the State. These care tasks range from caring for children, caring for elders and people with physical and mental illnesses, caring for people with some type of disability, as well as household tasks like cooking, cleaning, sewing and gathering water and firewood. To understand the importance of this, we need only look at the fact that women conduct more than three-quarters of the unpaid care work globally, and they constitute two-thirds of the workforce in paid care work.\textsuperscript{16} Impacts on forests and biodiversity have been shown to be connected to increased vulnerability to pandemics such as COVID-19, and this further endangers women’s care work around the world.\textsuperscript{17}

All the points noted above help to explain how this model feeds into voracious capitalism, which in turn feeds on everything that exists in our territories through a system of structural violence that also renders care work invisible. They shed a light on how the continuum of military, paramilitary and organised crime violence associated with territorial dispossession is both a tool to attack women’s bodies and a control mechanism against territories.\textsuperscript{18} This situation creates a higher workload for women, and it combines with local realities where patriarchal organisational structures fail to recognise – or actively hamper – women’s political participation, which in turn devalues collective work and the reproduction of life.\textsuperscript{19}

In sum, these factors accelerate the loss of agricultural land in the territories. They also limit agroecological practices and local markets, affecting the family economy with a direct impact on women. Spaces for family farming, such as kitchen gardens, and gathering

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\item \textsuperscript{11} Herrero, 2017
\item \textsuperscript{12} Cardona Calle, Diego; FoEI, 2018
\item \textsuperscript{13} Baltodano, Javier; 2015
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ribeiro, 2002
\item \textsuperscript{15} Oxfam, 2020, p42
\item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{17} Rede social de justica e dereitos humanos, 2020
\item \textsuperscript{18} Santiesteban, 2017
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ramos, Claudia, 2019
\end{itemize}
firewood or water in forests are increasingly reduced due the effects of the extractive projects. Land erosion and salinisation in turn hinder local food production and jeopardise seed saving and exchanges, as there are no areas for in situ seed reproduction. This directly affects agrobiodiversity and animal grazing areas. Access to water for human and household consumption is also reduced. Access to food becomes increasingly dependent on the purchase of industrialised and processed products and the purchase of staple grains to feed the family. This decreases CFM practices and jeopardises the material basis for implementing these practices on the ground, in addition to creating a bigger workload for women.

THE STRUGGLE FOR LAND TENURE: THE SIGNIFICANCE FOR GENDER JUSTICE AND CFM

Peasant agriculture produces up to 80% of the food in non-industrialised countries, and women are responsible for 60-80% of this production. Additionally, women play an essential role in forest and biodiversity conservation; this role is intimately linked to food sovereignty, forests and biodiversity because of their contribution to diet and nutrition, water and firewood, supplying fodder for livestock. Most women take up social reproduction and care work in defence of land and territory, caring for water and biodiversity while at the same time participating in – or being responsible for – agricultural or forest production, management, and/or transformation. Therefore, they are active participants in CFM.

Despite these contributions, when it comes to agricultural land tenure, only 30% of rural women around the world own agricultural land, and they lack access to the means of production. Additionally, decision-making spaces inside and outside communities are primarily dominated by men, as they are perceived as being capable of managing the family and dealing with the demands of agricultural production and forest management. Even in communities with models of collective ownership, there are patriarchal structures that regularly fail to recognise women’s role in the collective work and in the reproduction of life. These dynamics prevent women from effectively participating in decision-making spaces, even though it is women who actively sustain the struggles to defend their lands from extractive projects. In order to make progress on a gender justice framework within CFM, we must observe and denounce these tensions within local processes.

When community lands are rented or leased, the money is primarily administered by men, according to their vision of what is important. They regularly exclude women’s needs, whose focus is primarily on feeding the family, education, health and care for children and the elderly. The denial of livelihoods and sustenance intensifies the burden of domestic and care work. It also creates an enabling context for women to opt for working for companies – including those that are expanding monocultures – as cheap labour. They take precarious jobs and, in the case of the youngest women, risk their lives undertaking undocumented migration or fall prey to human trafficking networks.

The “masculinisation” of territories (which intensifies inequalities of land access and tenure) exacerbates the negative impacts of extractivist projects by reconfiguring community spaces and daily life around the values and desires of a hegemonic masculinity. This phenomenon causes divisions and ruptures the social fabric – depriving women of their livelihoods, overexploiting their labour, and, furthermore, increasing violence inside families, human trafficking and the criminalisation of women human rights defenders. All of this has painful social and environmental consequences, and causes irreversible damage to the health of women and their families.

Access to land therefore becomes crucial to practicing CFM. It must be promoted as a minimum level of dignity to recognise women’s role in the struggle for forests and biodiversity and for the reorganisation of care work

20 FAO, 2020

21 Cardona, Calle; 2018.

22 A statistic sheds light on this gap: from the total amount of credit available for the countryside, women only receive 5-10% of technical support for the sector (FAO, 2015).

23 FAO, 2020

24 In Latin America, there are local experiences in the South of Mexico that provide a glimpse of the types of alternatives that communities create to recognise women’s agrarian rights. For example, having assemblies with mixed commissions [of men and women] who are responsible for drafting chapters on women’s rights and whose objectives are to win recognition for peoples’ social and collective ownership, and to resist projects that promote privatisation and dispossession. Initiatives for family land tenure go in the same direction, primarily promoting women’s right to be recognised as members of communal collectives and ejidos [lands held communally through traditional systems of land tenure], with equal rights as men and with the recognition of land as family property. Beyond the recognition of rights, this initiative points to the need for women to be able to speak out and make decisions in the community, in order to strengthen collective political control.

25 Extractive industries commit many forms of violence against women – even before they begin to exploit the minerals and after they have depleted the resources. It begins the moment corporations invade a territory using physical and sexual violence to dispossess and control, abusing and violating rights, and putting the communities and ecosystems where women and their families live and work at risk.

26 Solano Ortiz, 2015
in society. This not only strengthens the recognition of women as “owners” of the land, but it also promotes other logics for territorial management – and therefore forest and biodiversity management – that centre care work and the preservation of life.

**COMMUNITY FOREST MANAGEMENT AND GENDER JUSTICE: PLACING LIFE AT THE CENTRE.**

Friends of the Earth International understands CFM as the ability of communities to have political control over their territories and common resources through horizontal decision-making mechanisms that include transparency and accountability to the rest of the community. CFM is committed to short pathways to markets, promoting local and solidarity economies that bring the countryside closer to urban spaces and recognise local knowledge, culture, spirituality and diversity.27 This strengthens community organisation, which is an essential foundation for community management of forests and agroecology as communities’ sovereign practice of territorial control.

In this sense, and aligned with Friends of the Earth International’s definition of CFM, we recognise that women play a central role in CFM practices. Women have highly diversified knowledge of forests, focusing on forest products linked to family farming, food, firewood, foraging, improving soil fertility and conservation practices, as well as species used in the household and for health. Women also have specialised knowledge of trees and forests in terms of their species diversity.28 This knowledge and the management systems in which women participate are crucial during food crises. Thus, this knowledge of forests and biodiversity, and specifically of agrobiodiversity, must be recognised and exercised with equal rights and conditions, as it deconstructs the hegemonic narrative of forest and biodiversity management in the territories.

“False narratives are created to make women invisible, especially their role in indigenous societies. Rights, forests and agriculture are part of one structure, they cannot be separated. In preindustrial societies, many traditional ways of life revolved around forests and agriculture. There was a more equal distribution of household responsibilities. The false narrative serves patriarchy and capitalism... When there is a river, women meet there and they can work together. For example, with modernity and the masculinisation of agriculture – which brings road transport – women’s mobility is restricted and dominated by men.” Shamila Ariffin, Friends of the Earth Malaysia, participant in FoEI’s second internal webinar on Community Forest Management and Gender Justice, 21 April 2022.

These strategies become increasingly important in a commercialised world where capitalist pressure further subjugates our natural and common resources, our relationships as human beings and with nature.29 Women develop forest management technologies focused on territorial defence of common resources, CFM and links with agroecology. These connections are deeper, and they lead to the construction of social technologies that support women, such as eco-technologies, CFM, agroecological practices, etc. This logic counters the development of agribusiness technologies that involve territorial surveillance and control, such as the use of drones, geo-referencing and sensors, or offers to provide online technical assistance for rural extension programmes or policies.30

Women from the countryside, woods, forests, rivers and coastal areas have been resisting the destruction of biodiversity by agribusiness and transnational corporations. Millions of peasant and fisher women survive by implementing CFM practices. This demonstrates the accumulated knowledge linked to caring for territories, genetic heritage, the domestication of species and the sustainable production and conservation of seeds, food and medicinal plants.31

The example of the *quebradeiras de coco babuço* [Babassu nut breakers] in the state of Maranhão in Brazil’s Eastern Amazonia region helps us appreciate the scale of these experiences. They keep the resistance and struggle for free access and protection of the Babassu palm alive.32 Kitchen or home gardens are also an expression of accumulated knowledge regarding agroecology and forest and biodiversity management. These practices are expanding through the exchange of experiences and further relationship-building between culture and nutrition. In addition, thanks to the construction of strategies and public policies,

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27 Cardona Calle; 2018
28 FAO, 2020
29 Svampa, 2019
30 Lobo and Curado, 2022
31 Sof, 2015
32 The lives of entire families depend on the Babassu palm. They use the fibres to make roofs for their homes, doors, windows and household items like cofos (baskets made from Babassu straw), quibanos (sieves made of straw to sift rice) and mats.
such as the establishment of a national federation to create conditions for artisanal production and sale of forest and biodiversity products. The struggle of these women in defence of their forests and biodiversity raise a broad range of organisational processes that centre care for the commons, forests and biodiversity. They also show that women conceive of nature, biodiversity and knowledge in a holistic manner, within a territory that must be defended and preserved for the good of humanity as a whole.

This example shows how women organise themselves within their communities, developing proposals for a solidarity economy, agroecology and CFM based on an ethical vision of social and environmental justice that presupposes the distribution of household tasks, care work and managing production as well as a life free from violence, guided by respect and equality. We must recognise and value women’s strategic contribution to the provision of food, as they produce diversified and healthy food, conserve agrobiodiversity and allocate part of this production for family consumption. Consuming one’s own products is a key strategy for ensuring food sovereignty, improving the quality of food and reducing spending on food, thus giving families greater autonomy vis-a-vis the market. The practice of consuming one’s own products must be recognised, valued, and promoted through public policies, access to credits, and by seeking and promoting CFM practices.

CONCLUSIONS

We must understand – and never forget – that there are visions of the world that are more profound and complex than those which simply place a market price on the commons. These visions are based on multiple values and, in many cases, entail a connection with spiritual values and cultures. These visions of the world show that women preserve forests and biodiversity by practicing CFM, and do not only respond to the needs or ambitions of the models of accumulation and commodification of nature. They lead us to take distance from the capitalist, racist and (neo)colonial logics that impose ways of managing bodies, territories and land.

Drawing the links between gender justice and CFM helps us to combat an androcentric and patriarchal way of being, and being in the world, that annihilates other forms of knowledge and plurality of existences. This age-old knowledge, linked to a holistic management of the commons – including land, forests, biodiversity, water, seeds, their uses and transformations – makes the cognitive role of women visible, and allows us to understand the genealogy of forest and biodiversity preservation practices.

When we state in this gender justice framework that CFM is a concrete theoretical political tool, we expand on its meaning and make it more complex. It is a similar conceptualisation as the significance of agroecology as a political tool for food sovereignty and for the survival of peoples, communities, forests and biodiversity. The task now is to continue sharing how these concrete practices – which include knowledge and wisdoms created and exchanged by women – are part of the political aim of placing life, care, forests and biodiversity at the centre. This guides our transformation agenda based on demanding women’s rights, in the context of peoples’ collective rights, to achieve what some peoples, communities and sectors define as a Community Ethos, where other ways of relating and caring for each other – based on respect for our fundamental rights – are possible.

Women, racialised bodies and gender dissidences participate in the care and preservation of forests and biodiversity with practices such as CFM, despite facing multiple types of violence on their bodies and territories. Recognising their rights and contributions is crucial to continue promoting gender justice and dismantling patriarchy around the world.

“We are against logging and burning forests, we take great care of the rivers, we don’t make them dirty... we eat healthy, we share the harvests with our sister villages and communities, we take care of seeds and that makes our forests stronger.” Sandra Escobar, Friends of the Earth Honduras, participant at FoEI’s second internal webinar on gender justice and CFM, 21 April 2022.

Life’s continuity depends on social spaces for its production and reproduction. We recognise CFM as one such space – since it includes the preservation and care of forests and biodiversity around the world – and where, furthermore, the practices serve to reconstruct other ways of thinking beyond economics, market values and private property. These practices reinforce collective access to land and territories. They confront the wave of projects that seek to not only...

33 SOF, 2015

34 Svampa, 2019

35 Lobo and Curado, 2022
condition public investment policies regarding forest and biodiversity management, but also challenge the defence of ways of life in the territory. These harmful projects seek to privatise and plunder the commons.

In this sense, promoting CFM with a gender justice perspective as a concrete political tool can prevent the further privatisation of territories. It is therefore crucial to ensure women’s active political participation with absolute recognition of their bodies and sexuality; their ancestral knowledge; their spiritual practices; their agrarian and land tenure rights; and their role in the reproduction of life, care work and community development. We must also recognise the strength of their memories, their bodies, and the courage of their daily lives. This in turn means creating and fostering spaces that were historically self-convened by women to make their voices and experiences heard and to further deepen the links between CFM and gender justice.

“Framing CFM with a feminist perspective allows us to see nature from other angles that are also implicit in caring for forests; to do so through emotions, sensibility, spiritual practice. It allows us to see ourselves again and recognise ourselves.” Theiva Lingam, Friends of the Earth Malaysia, participant at FoEI’s second internal webinar on gender justice and CFM, 21 April 2022.

This Gender Justice and CFM framework is a living document that must continue to be nourished by experiences and dialogues with Friends of the Earth International’s allied movements. This will allow us to identify common places that allow us to continue promoting and demanding the permanence of the defence of life and therefore forests and biodiversity. It also involves recognising feminist perspectives in line with Friends of the Earth International’s political vision – such as those of ecofeminism and territorial community feminism – that nourish these approaches. This will allow us to develop them further, as well as expose the tensions and power dynamics that exist within CFM, which we need to dismantle as part of the transformation strategy. All of this in turn seeks to guarantee women’s right to full participation in the social, political and economic life of their communities, as well as their access to water, seeds and conditions for production and sale with autonomy and freedom, respecting the cycles of life.

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