Community forest management & gender justice

Key Takeaways from the Gender Justice Framework Document for Community Forest Management

mobilise resist transform
Building, strengthening and defending gender justice is an essential element of Community Forest Management (CFM). To do so, it’s important to consider women’s role in protecting forests and biodiversity as well as the barriers and opportunities of CFM.

More specifically, it is critical that we reflect on:
→ Women’s crucial role in the traditional use and defence of forests and biodiversity.
→ The urgent need to recognise and make visible women’s role.
→ Which practices we need to eliminate or strengthen to ensure CFM involves gender justice.

Linking community forest management with the struggle for gender justice

Women are responsible for a large number of tasks in caring for forests and biodiversity, tasks which are often invisible. These tasks range from using plants to prepare food or herbal medicines, to conservation activities and put women on the frontlines as defenders of forests, biodiversity and their territories. Making these tasks visible is essential to fully recognising the role of women and their knowledge about forests and biodiversity.

Women and CFM in the face of the dominant system and its impacts

Women suffer from discrimination when they are not seen or treated with equality and equity and are, as a result, not allowed to organise themselves or participate in community organising. They are, in turn, often excluded from or not considered in decision-making about their community’s use of forests, biodiversity and land.

"Framing Community forest management with a feminist perspective allows us to see nature through different lenses and this means using our emotions, sensitivity and spirituality to see, recognise and understand ourselves."

Theiva Lingam • Sahabat Alam Malaysia / Friends of the Earth Malaysia
Women are also subjected to violence that increases in situations where mining, monocultures and other projects are imposed on their territories. Their workload increases because they are forced to cover longer distances to fetch water and firewood, leaving less time to care for local forests and gardens; and if they have to get jobs to earn money, there is even less time for these tasks. These projects cause land for forests, agriculture and biodiversity to be lost, leading to a loss of knowledge in agroecology, culture, sovereignty and care for forests.

Further, women’s collective historical knowledge about the use of forests and biodiversity is often appropriated by actors outside of the community, such as companies or academics working for corporate interests, which can lead to a further loss of spirituality and cultural identity.

Understanding the interconnected impacts of capitalism and patriarchy on women, their bodies and territories reveals shared forms of oppression, exploitation and marginalisation of women. This also makes clear the infringement on women’s rights to participation in decision-making, involvement in community organisation, land ownership, and management of community-owned resources that are also essential to effective community forest management.

The urgent need to recognise women’s role in CFM

Women’s role in caring for, managing and defending forests, biodiversity and territories is central to CFM practices. Women carry specialised and highly diversified knowledge about forests, agriculture, food, health and more. This knowledge is traditional, scientific, historical, collective and important, especially in times of scarcity such as food crises. It comes from peoples’ collective history, in which women play a central role, and is part of the community’s culture and spirituality.

Recognising women’s role also helps to ensure an equal distribution of tasks between men and women at home, in forests and in agriculture.
A new dimension of CFM is revealed when linked to gender justice

When we link the need to recognise women’s role in caring for, protecting and managing forests, biodiversity and territories with women’s rights, we help address the negative impacts that the current development system has on women and society. Highlighting women’s critical role promotes gender justice and fosters community forest management as a tool for enhanced equity and justice in our communities.

When we apply CFM through a gender justice framework we widen its scope and apply a layer of complexity to its meaning. This can guide our transformation agenda based on demanding women’s rights to other ways of caring for each other that centre fundamental rights. We also lend importance to women’s traditional knowledge that is vital to the well-being of communities and ecosystems and acknowledge the interconnectedness of forests, agriculture, water, life, health and food in doing so.

Friends of the Earth International acknowledges CFM as the control that communities must have over their territories, carried out through horizontal decision-making mechanisms and structures. Linking CFM and gender justice centres life, care, forests, biodiversity and the collective and goes beyond setting a price and establishing ownership over nature and common resources. But this requires that rights, especially women’s rights, be constantly respected and realised.

Additional Resources:

→ "Why gender justice and dismantling patriarchy?"
→ "Feminist popular education manual. Sowing gender justice to dismantle patriarchy"
→ "Gender Justice and Community Forest Management"

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