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**Center for Conservation Innovation /  
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# Social Dimensions in a Biological World

INTEGRATING GENDER AND CONSERVATION IN PRIORITY ECOREGIONS



# Taking Gender and Conservation Forward:

## A WWF PERSPECTIVE

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Drawing on its range of experience in developing conservation plans that accurately reflect the ways men and women interact with resources, WWF presents here a collection of examples, conclusions, and recommendations that explore issues of gender and their integration within conservation planning and action. This document introduces observations and lessons from a selection of gender activities undertaken by WWF over the past two years. The paper also explores the variety of approaches and tools used by WWF to address gender within its conservation planning and action—from mapping biological and socio-economic variables to direct gender analysis. While the examples are all at early stages, it is worth noting that they have been made possible by the framework for gender-based activities provided by the WWF Women and Conservation Initiative, and the experience of gender-based work around the WWF network.

Based on its experience around the world, the following is WWF's overarching finding on gender and conservation programming:

*Gender is a critical consideration when shaping conservation action. Gender analysis, gender training, and resulting gender-based projects, however, will only achieve conservation results if they are directly referenced to biodiversity goals and socioeconomic realities.*

The following are other lessons and recommendations drawn from WWF experiences with gender-related actions:

- ◆ Socioeconomic assessments using tools such as stakeholder analysis and threats-and-opportunities research should include considerations of gender from the outset. This means collecting gender-disaggregated data, surveying women's groups, and ensuring that during household data collection both women's and men's experiences, needs, roles, opportunities, and relative power are documented.

**THE CONSERVATION STRATEGIES UNIT'S MISSION** is to anticipate the challenges and opportunities of broad-scale conservation, and to identify and promote innovative and targeted responses. Through our commitment to learning, we work with WWF conservation practitioners, colleagues in the conservation community, and other influential stakeholders. We orchestrate networking, communications, technical support, capacity building, training, and research. Drawing on global, interdisciplinary expertise, our teams aim to guide critical thinking and shape conservation best practices to strengthen WWF's collective and positive impact on biodiversity.

**WWF'S MISSION** is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by

- ◆ conserving the world's biological diversity
- ◆ ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- ◆ promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption



- ◆ Stand-alone gender analysis is not likely to be helpful to conservation planning and decision making. If the analysis is not referenced to biodiversity goals and objectives and socioeconomic assessments, data may never be transformed into critical material for conservation decisions.
- ◆ Resistance to gender analysis and integration may be encountered from field staff who face time or resource constraints or who do not see the relevance of gender to their work. This highlights the need for increasing awareness of the important role of gender in conservation and the provision of concrete examples of its impacts through training and project experience. Commitment of senior staff in field offices and headquarters will facilitate this process.
- ◆ It is important to acknowledge and learn from less successful efforts at gender integration so that mistakes are not repeated.
- ◆ Gender should not be separate from or an “add on” to conservation practice; rather, it needs to be integrated into the socioeconomic dimensions of conservation, stakeholder assessments, and collaboration.

WWF’s experience to date also echoes some of the conclusions of the participants in a June 2001 women and conservation roundtable sponsored by WWF-US’s Center for Conservation Innovation, which included the following:

- ◆ Lessons learned from gender analysis and integration efforts need to be gathered and applied to organizational work plans and priorities.
- ◆ The term “gender” needs to be demystified through examples of its application and value.
- ◆ Goals for gender integration in conservation should be clearly defined and referenced to conservation goals and practice. In addition, the conditions that promote successful integration of gender issues into conservation activities need to be identified, defined, and disseminated.
- ◆ Better indicators need to be developed to measure the impact of gender on conservation goals and objectives.
- ◆ Lessons from gender and conservation work need to be shared both within and among institutions.

What follows is a summary of a number of examples where WWF has initiated analysis to address gender in conservation planning and practice. Two ecoregion examples, East African Marine and the Northern Andes,



present lessons from WWF’s “first cut” at gender analysis. The steps taken were not perfect, therefore, and the outcomes and impacts on conservation practice are still to be seen. Both efforts, however, have helped WWF learn about gender at ecoregional and institutional scales, and have informed subsequent, more ambitious efforts. The more recent efforts at gender integration are presented in the second half of the paper.



# Introduction

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In recent years, WWF has embraced conservation planning and action at the scale of the ecoregion (large units of land or water that contain geographically distinct assemblages of species, communities, dynamics, and environmental conditions). In doing so, it has become increasingly clear that effective conservation action across this large scale requires an understanding of, and response to, much more complex biological and socioeconomic interactions and trends than site-level work. This includes, of course, factors shaped by existing—and shifting—gender dynamics and the distinct ways in which women and men interact with and control natural resources.

WWF's ecoregion conservation approach comprises five key elements: a quick, multidisciplinary assessment to determine how to proceed (called a reconnaissance or scoping study); a biological assessment of existing species and the ecology that supports them; a biodiversity vision that details long-term conservation goals and actions; a socioeconomic assessment to understand human-resource interactions and map pressures and opportunities; and finally, an ecoregional plan—a comprehensive conservation strategy.

The socioeconomic assessment component of ecoregion conservation provides an important context within which to incorporate gender analysis. Over the past several years, WWF has developed, funded, and tested a variety of approaches and tools to assist field staff in incorporating gender into conservation strategy and action. Ecoregion conservation has also provided new opportunities for the WWF Women and Conservation Initiative to extend its work. It now not only aims to increase women's participation in, and leadership of, conservation activities, but also encourages consideration of the role and impact of gender on the realization of conservation goals.

Through its work in ecoregions around the world, WWF has learned a considerable amount about which methodologies are most effective and which are less so. As this learning process continues, tools and strategies are being revised and refined. The goal is to ensure that gender, as a critical variable in biodiversity conservation, is understood within the socioeconomic

context and that the data and analysis are used to craft relevant, proactive, and gender-aware interventions.


WWF prepared this paper to help conservation organizations learn and debate about gender—why it matters to conservation planning and programming and how it can best be integrated within conservation action. The paper reviews a number of examples of integrating gender into conservation at various stages and scales—project or site-based, institutional, and ecoregional. It also provides an assessment of how successful these activities have been and what lessons can be extracted and disseminated.

The document concludes by posing several questions about ways to integrate gender into the ecoregion conservation process. The move to integrate gender considerations within conservation planning and action is both a challenge and opportunity. Given the decentralized nature of WWF, it is expected—and necessary—that gender and conservation be addressed in diverse ways. Any approach to gender integration must be flexible enough to respond to local and regional socioeconomic and biodiversity realities, and be monitored closely for adaptation when necessary.

## WHY INCLUDE GENDER IN ECOREGION CONSERVATION?

WWF believes that programs that support women's roles as natural stewards of the environment and that engage women in activities to safeguard their environment are often key to successful conservation efforts. As environmental pressures around the world intensify, the direct and critical relationship between women and natural resources becomes clearer, as does the impact of gender-based use and control of resources on prospects for biodiversity conservation.

In many places throughout the developing world, women have a central role in growing food crops, collecting water and fuel-wood, and using materials from plants, trees, and marine ecosystems to prepare medicines for their families or products for sale in markets. Yet this critical work is often overlooked and many women have little opportunity to participate in decisions about their community's natural resources or join training and capacity-building initiatives designed to promote sustainable resource management.



It is WWF's contention—and experience—that gender strongly influences how women and men respond to conservation challenges and opportunities. As such, the impact of conservation initiatives are likely to increase when the rights and needs of those with an interest in maintaining biodiversity are understood and supported. Analyzing the interests of, and constraints on, men's and women's use of natural resources and helping them establish equitable participation and rights to make decisions about those resources has a positive and often dynamic impact on the achievement of conservation goals.



# First Steps in Gender Analysis and Integration

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## GENERAL GENDER CONSIDERATIONS

Within the ecoregion conservation planning process, the stakeholder assessment—one of the tasks in a broader socioeconomic assessment—is a key tool for assessing the realities and impact of gender roles. Stakeholder assessments seek to answer three main questions: “Who knows what?” “Who controls what?” and, “Who can help to change negative patterns of behavior?” The other elements of a socioeconomic assessment, in which gender also has an important place, are: analysis of threats and opportunities for biodiversity conservation, definition of possible interventions, and monitoring and evaluation of progress toward biodiversity goals. Experience shows that without a good understanding of gender, socioeconomic assessments and subsequent conservation initiatives risk irrelevance or failure.

WWF has supported the provision of gender training through workshops since 1999 in Nepal, Tanzania (Mafia Island), Kenya (East Africa Program Office), and Madagascar. The workshops were designed to enhance WWF staff and partners' understanding of gender issues, build skills in gender analysis, and develop an understanding of how gender considerations can be integrated into socioeconomic assessments and program planning. To date, over 60 people have participated in gender training and the response has been positive: participants attest that the training helped them better understand the roles of men and women in the use and management of resources and in conservation practice.

## DISCRETE GENDER ACTIONS

### *Gender Analysis: East African Marine Ecoregion*

In the East African Marine Ecoregion (EAME), WWF piloted a gender analysis that considered the factors that shape resource use in the coastal



communities of Tanzania and Mozambique. Country-based consultants used a number of stakeholder analysis tools to conduct the research. These included focus groups, household surveys, interviews with key informants (including representatives of government agencies charged with protecting natural resources, non-governmental conservation groups, and community leaders), as well as literature reviews. The reports contain considerable detail on which resources men and women use and control, and the ways that traditional gender roles inform current practices. They also sketch the policy and program context in each country, and address how national gender equity policies and donor commitment to gender equality and women's participation affect conservation.

The following are some of the major findings, which reflect the reality of gender and resource use in many other parts of the world:

- ◆ Men are primarily responsible for most use and destruction of marine resources because they are the main producers of household income and primarily employed in fishing in open waters.
- ◆ Women tend to use only those marine resources close to land that men do not control. Women occasionally collect small marine life, seaweed, turtle eggs, and crustaceans for home use, but more often collect these items for processing or sale.
- ◆ Women still have limited control over assets and resources, including land, even though Mozambique law guarantees women's and men's equal access to land.

But the reports also show that the situation is extremely dynamic. As men have migrated to cities in search of work, women have undertaken more economic activity due to food security needs. Many donor-funded programs promote women's participation, which has resulted in several initiatives increasing women's participation in natural resource management decisions.

Although national policies in both countries make commitments to gender equity, their implementation is weak. This is due to government personnel's limited understanding of gender issues, which are largely still perceived as "women's issues" or "women's programs." Projects in this ecoregion are more standard Women in Development programs than Gender and Development initiatives. In addition, there is limited training, and a lack of gender equity in staff, commissions, advisory boards, or entities overseeing national park management in the government sector.



As a means of assessing gender in the context of conservation, the EAME Tanzania and Mozambique analyses provided interesting insights. But because the two reports were "stand-alone" studies and were not integrated into the broader conservation process in the region, the information has had limited use.

One lesson to be drawn from this experience in Eastern Africa is that while the analysis produced substantial documentation, it had a minor role in the overall strategic planning and implementation of conservation activities because it was not part of a broader socioeconomic assessment for the ecoregion.

### ***GIS Mapping: Northern Andean Montane Forests Ecoregion***

GIS (Geographical Information Systems) mapping is another tool that can incorporate gender and other social variables along with biological variables for conservation priority setting. WWF has completed mapping projects that explore the role of population dynamics on ecosystems in three ecoregions—Eastern Himalayan Alpine Meadows, Madagascar Spiny Forest, and Northern Andean Montane Forests. In the Northern Andean ecoregion, the overlays (done in early 2000) show generally high population densities and significant rates of population increase and migration. The maps also show unusually low male to female ratios throughout the Northern Andes (there were many more women than men in mountainous communities). This suggests that men leave the region for economic opportunities elsewhere, likely in outlying lowlands.

These findings suggest that migration in this ecoregion is likely to affect traditional gender roles. The findings also suggest that, given the male to female ratios and the sheer number of women engaged in resource use, gender equity—and active participation of women—should be an objective in education and training programs linked to conservation goals.

The experiences of the Northern Andes map overlay project helped WWF learn about gender and conservation planning. However, the lesson that WWF has drawn is that while the information gathered on gender and population was interesting and relevant, the lack of biodiversity goals as a reference point made the data difficult to analyze and assess.





## Further Refinements and Progress

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Three examples that build on and draw lessons from the gender analysis and integration work described above follow. They represent another step in the development of WWF's gender and conservation work, embedding gender in broader socioeconomic assessments and the overarching ecoregion conservation.

### ***Mapping and Integration: Madagascar Spiny Forest Ecoregion***

A promising outcome for understanding the gender-conservation relationship emerged from a series of GIS map overlays completed for the Madagascar Spiny Forest Ecoregion. The WWF team in Madagascar, driven by their experience with a first coarse analysis, decided that the potential for assessing socioeconomic indicators across the ecoregion at a finer scale was worthwhile for informing future collaborations.

Following a series of biological and socioeconomic assessments, the WWF team in the Spiny Forest Ecoregion identified a network of priority conservation areas. They then constructed a series of maps that overlay this network of priority areas with demographic data and village-level data on population and gender, such as women's literacy levels (a key factor in fertility rates as well as a marker of women's status). The resulting series of overlays confirmed a relationship between low rates of female literacy and high population growth, a significant driver of rapid deforestation throughout the ecoregion.

A number of concrete initiatives that are integrating gender and conservation have emerged directly from the mapping project. First, WWF Madagascar and one of its key partners—the regional public-health education non-governmental organization (NGO), Action Sante Organisation Secours (ASOS)—have come together to implement a population and environment program across the ecoregion. This initiative, which builds upon lessons learned during previous WWF–ASOS conservation project collaborations, is delivering public health education and family planning to communities

living within the Spiny Forest Ecoregion. Specific villages or communes identified by the maps as falling within priority biodiversity areas *and* having high population growth rates (resulting from high fertility rates and migration) are those which the collaborative effort of WWF and ASOS will focus on.

As a result of the overlays' findings and increased gender awareness, WWF's Spiny Forest Program Office has also entered into a collaborative partnership with a local NGO that delivers adult education, including literacy and communication programs, in the ecoregion. The partnership will see these services provided in priority areas where levels of female literacy are low. The combination of education and environmental information will likely help women make wise choices in relation to resource use. WWF has also launched the Madagascar Spiny Forest Scholarship Program. Now in its first year, the program is providing scholarships to girls living in the ecoregion to attend primary and secondary school. It is also supporting the introduction and integration of environmental education in primary schools across the ecoregion and provision of education to out-of-school girls as well as adult women through a literacy program. The literacy initiative, which draws on the WWF–ASOS partnership model, is supporting a local NGO with expertise in literacy training to deliver literacy education along with environmental messages to girls and women in target conservation areas in the ecoregion.

WWF intends to stimulate wider interest in map overlays as an information and guidance tool for conservation and sustainable development planning. The lesson to be drawn is that they can inform programming and highlight the connections between conservation goals and gender equity.

### ***Gender Analysis and Women's Participation: Chocó-Darién Moist Forests***

In the Chocó-Darién Moist Forests Ecoregion, which spans the northwest coast of Latin America, gender roles are important to the WWF Colombia Program Office's program development with indigenous, Afro-American, and *mestizo* communities. Gender was among the central determinants of threats and opportunities examined in a socioeconomic analysis in the area.

The assessment found that the region's biodiversity and its largely Afro-American and indigenous population are increasingly under pressure from business and infrastructure development and the immigration that such



activity attracts. Poverty is widespread, access to health services and education is limited, rates of population increase are high (about 2 percent a year), and women's decision-making power is limited. The assessment also found clear divisions of labor among men and women. Collection of fuel-wood, management of home gardens, preparation of food, management of health, and maintenance of traditional knowledge are principally women's activities. While indigenous communities tended to limit women's access to community organizations, women were generally well represented in community groups in Afro-Colombian and *mestizo* communities. In addition, the research found that many of the ecology-focused groups emerging from local schools in the La Planada region are composed principally of young women.

Based on these findings, and in line with the WWF Colombia Program Office's strong commitment to gender equity within conservation action, the Chocó-Darién Conservation and Sustainable Development Project set a goal of targeting men and women in as equitable a fashion as possible while respecting cultural norms. Specific action steps taken have been: training women in resource management initiatives; expanding sustainable enterprises, especially those run by women (like those in agriculture and food processing); and increasing women's ability, skills, and self-confidence to serve as decision makers within communities and households.

The second phase of WWF's Chocó-Darién Conservation and Sustainable Development project will include: expanding productive, sustainable activities in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and tourism on a basis of gender equity; increasing the influence of Chocó-Darién communities (and therefore, its women) within national, regional, and local resource-use and development policy-making processes; and raising awareness about the underlying causes of biodiversity loss and environmental degradation and actions to respond to them. Additional activities may also include education, such as environmental projects and reproductive health education in schools.

The Chocó-Darién experience suggests the utility of gender analysis to conservation planning when it is integrated into the assessment and planning process from the earliest stages. It also suggests that strong commitment from staff and management can ensure that the issue of gender is kept on the table and used to inform the research, priority-setting, and planning necessary for large-scale conservation efforts.



### ***Gender Equity Planning: Solomon Islands***

Taking the goal of integrating gender into conservation further and in a new direction—with a focus on the institutional level—is the WWF Solomon Islands (SI) Project Office in the South Pacific. Here is a response to the gender-conservation challenge that is of the scope and ambition that WWF would like to encourage. With its Gender Equity Plan, WWF SI has adopted the achievement of gender equity among its staff as a major objective. By making gender equity a part of institutional operations, and therefore programming processes and decision making, the plan takes the idea of integration of gender within conservation activities to another level. The following are some of the objectives of the Solomon Islands plan:

- ◆ Recognize that male and female staff bring different capabilities, knowledge, and attitudes to work activities.
- ◆ Encourage female and male staff to participate in a wide range of experiences that broaden their view of what is acceptably feminine or masculine and enable them to take an active role in both the paid work force and wider society.
- ◆ Build on action which is already under way and outline new priorities and strategies for future action.
- ◆ Outline action toward achievement of gender equity within WWF program operations that will be a professional responsibility for all staff at all levels of the system.

Development of the plan was spurred by the fact, widely acknowledged throughout the community, that the Solomon Islands is a male-dominated society. It is very difficult for women to find and take advantage of opportunities—be they education, income generation, or political voice. Many NGOs, including WWF, have done some work to address the situation, but efforts have generally been ad hoc and reactive.

In February 2001, WWF SI undertook a comprehensive review and evaluation of what was achieved during Phase I of its program—including consultations with NGO partners, communities, women, government, and staff. Gender equity issues surfaced as part of the wider evaluation and staff agreed that as preparations began for Phase II of WWF work in the Solomon Islands (through 2006), the time was right to develop a formal gender equity policy and incorporate it into all sectors of the organization and all aspects of the program office's work, internal and external. Gender training for





management and staff will be incorporated into training sessions planned for the start of the Phase II program activities.

Given that WWF SI conservation work already has a priority on women-targeted projects, the Gender Equity Plan may not have a highly visible impact on external work. But by incorporating gender equity into organizational policy, the WWF SI office expects that village-level community work will, in turn, be even more inclusive (and effective) than it is already. WWF also hopes that communities themselves will begin to incorporate gender awareness into their own planning processes as a result of their partnership with WWF on conservation and resource management. To ensure this, gender awareness workshops will be included in WWF SI's community capacity-building strategy.

With its Gender Equity Plan, WWF SI expects to be a model of best practice in gender equity issues in Solomon Islands. It is hoped that other organizations follow this lead, and that gender equity will be practiced more widely than it is now. WWF SI plans to share its experiences with other organizations through collaboration, workshops, and “look and learn” exchanges. It is WWF SI's belief that other organizations will become more effective as they incorporate gender equity into their own programs—be they conservation, biodiversity preservation, family planning, community education, or other areas.



## Questions for Further Consideration and Action

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WWF's experiences with the gender and conservation relationship suggest several overarching questions that conservation and gender practitioners need to explore further:

- ◆ How can gender most effectively be made relevant to conservation at broader scales (for example, at ecoregional instead of site-based levels)? What conditions, learning, tools, guidelines, models, or other means are needed to anchor gender within the frame of larger-scale strategy and action?
- ◆ Given the decentralized structure of conservation networks, integration of gender into conservation action is difficult to mandate or replicate. In each region, integration of gender into conservation processes and practice will look different. Within this context, what safeguards or guidelines can be put in place to keep gender from getting lost? How is gender kept on the table as part and parcel of the broad range of work involved in conservation?
- ◆ Is a certain suite of activities or conditions essential to support gender integration efforts, and, if so, what might these be? Would it include gender training and funds for follow-up for staff and partners, provision of technical assistance on integrating gender into socioeconomic assessments, or an internal gender equity plan or framework, like that developed by the WWF Solomon Islands Project Office?

Reflections on these questions, generated both within and outside of WWF, will inform WWF's future practice of integrating gender within conservation practice in ecoregions around the world.



## WWF's Women and Conservation Initiative

WWF-US launched the Women and Conservation Initiative to recognize and respond to the critical roles women play in using and managing natural resources. Through the initiative, WWF also hopes to increase the representation of women in conservation activities, especially in leadership roles. Part of WWF-US's Center for Conservation Innovation, the Initiative has three interrelated objectives:

- ◆ Increase women's participation in the conservation profession;
- ◆ Empower women in natural resource management and biodiversity conservation; and
- ◆ Enable women to improve their own and their families' lives while protecting the environment.

The Initiative is also designed to increase awareness among WWF staff and partners of the distinct roles women and men play in natural resource management; how these roles influence their use of resources; and ways of applying an understanding of gender issues and their impacts on conservation goals in the design and implementation of WWF programs around the world.

The Initiative includes the following components:

- ◆ Strengthen WWF capacity to incorporate gender in conservation programs through training, technical assistance, and the development of tools;
- ◆ Support innovative ideas through a small grants fund that supports women and conservation programs in WWF ecoregions;
- ◆ Capture lessons learned by documenting the linkages between women, gender roles, and biodiversity conservation; and
- ◆ Recognize leadership through the Women and Conservation Recognition Awards.

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