

Promoting gender equity in community-based forest management: what strategies work? Experiences from the CoForEST Project

Key Messages

- Gender equity enhances community-based forest management (CBFM) legitimacy and effectiveness.
- Strengthening participation, tenure, benefit-sharing and governance to benefit women and other vulnerable groups, are effective strategies for strengthening gender-equity in CBFM.
- If training on forest-based enterprises is gender-sensitive, women can benefit from value chains such as charcoal where women have been less active historically.
- A combination of strategies is needed to enhance gender equity in CBFM, including strategies to address the underlying causes and to reduce the negative impact of gender disparities.

Gender and community-based forest management

In Tanzania, community-based forest management (CBFM) involves community-led management of forests on village land. It is supported by the National Forest Policy. Gender dynamics in CBFM reflect those of the broader society. Gender affects control over, and access to, forest products and services in CBFM. Addressing gender disparities in CBFM contributes to safeguarding everyone's right to fair and equal treatment and is essential if CBFM is to contribute to sustainable development. Ignoring gender disparities in CBFM risks perpetuating inequality and erodes CBFM's legitimacy and effectiveness.

Assessing different strategies to promote gender-equitable CBFM

There are different strategies that practitioners can use to promote gender-equitable CBFM. This research summary looks at the different strategies to address gender disparities in CBFM that were used by the 'Conserving Forests through sustainable forest-based Enterprise Support in Tanzania (CoForEST)' project. The research objective was 'to identify effective strategies to overcome the economic, social, cultural, political and legal factors that limit women and other disadvantaged groups from influencing and accessing CBFM benefits.' The study used a Participatory Action Research approach involving women and men in nine CoForEST-project villages in Morogoro Region. Different strategies were assessed through key informant interviews, focus-group discussions, and participatory action planning.

Results: effective strategies to address gender disparities in CBFM

The study identified five successful strategies to reduce gender disparities in CBFM.

- i. Strengthening women's participation in all aspects of CBFM including in local institutions such as Village Natural Resources Committees.
- ii. Strengthening forest, land, and tree tenure rights for women and other vulnerable groups.
- iii. Equitable sharing of CBFM benefits.
- iv. Strengthening women's capacity to engage in forest-based enterprise value chains.
- v. Building women's and other vulnerable groups' knowledge and skills on CBFM.

In pursuing these strategies, the activities identified as being the most successful by the CoForEST project beneficiaries included:

- i. Regular and widespread awareness raising on gender and its importance for CBFM;
- ii. Training on gender and conflict resolution for community leaders;
- iii. Promoting the involvement of women in entrepreneurship activities;
- iv. Supporting formation of separate groups for women and men in the development of forest-based enterprises, such as charcoal and timber;
- v. Supporting law enforcement and good governance in CBFM implementation, including complying with quotas for women's membership in VNRCs and ensuring transparency, accountability and participation.

Conclusions

Gender disparities are widespread in CBFM including in: participation, leadership, land tenure rights, forest resources use, division of labour and workload, access to and control of income, access to credits, access to markets, access to employment opportunities and policy engagement. Strategies to achieve gender equity need to address these different types of disparity.

Most interventions undertaken to reduce CBFM gender disparities, also reduce poverty. Some approaches address underlying causes of gender inequity, while others reduce the impact of such disparities. Raising awareness on gender equity is insufficient. A combination of strategies is needed. The aim of the CoForEST project is to achieve sustainable, pro-community natural forest management that transforms the economics and governance of the forest products value chains.' The project has been implemented in three phases between 2012 and 2023 in 39 villages, mainly in Morogoro Region in eastern Tanzania.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

- CBFM planning identify local gender dynamics and activities to promote equitable involvement from women and other vulnerable groups.
- Multiple strategies and interventions be applied to tackle the root causes of gender disparities, to increase CBFM benefits to women and other vulnerable groups, and to mitigate negative impacts.
- Capacity-building on promoting gender-equitable CBFM and supporting communities to safeguard women's land and natural resources rights is needed, for practitioners and Local Government staff.
- Gender parity rules for local councils, cooperatives and producer organizations be promoted to open up greater access for women to key decision-making arenas.



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