

Gender and forests in a changing landscape

Understanding women's participation in forestry in Cambodia

Policy brief



Photo by Jephraim Oro

Key messages

- The low representation and participation of women in forestry-related decision-making remains a challenge.
- To promote women's participation in forestry there is a need for capacity development among rural women in the contexts of developing alternative skills for income generation and enhancing technical forestry skills.
- More efforts are required by the Forestry Administration in coordination with the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) to strengthen the capacity of gender working groups; this requires the allocation of adequate budget for gender mainstreaming in forestry.

Background

The Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) has shown commitment toward gender equality as a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. It has also created a national legal framework to protect women's rights and promote gender equality in all sectors, including forestry.

The Rectangular Strategy Phase III, a comprehensive policy framework for the formulation of the National Strategic Development Plan, is consistent with Cambodia's other sectoral policies, including forestry. The strategy has a central theme of 'Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency', which is relevant to Cambodia's pursuit of the Fifth Legislature of the National Assembly (2013-2018). During the next five years, Phase III of the strategy will guide Cambodia's transition to a higher level of development through fundamental transformation including structural reforms and investing in building more human capital, especially through increased investment in youth and women (RGC 2013).

Additionally, the Neary Ratanak Strategic Plan III stresses the provision of expanded opportunities for women across all sectors, including forestry, to develop their knowledge and capacity according to market requirements while facilitating access to credit for female entrepreneurs in small and medium enterprises. Complementing this, MoWA has appointed gender focal points to support gender mainstreaming in various ministries and to promote gender-responsive budgeting (Mer 2013).

Sustainable forest management is a core issue in Cambodia; its importance is further underscored by the country's goal of achieving 60 percent forest cover nationwide by 2015. To realize this goal, the government has introduced various laws, policies, subdecrees and programmes. This is complemented by the work of civil society organizations (Box 1) that aim to ensure men and women's equal participation, backed by a strategy to develop capacity and skills in alternative income-generating activities.

Gender disparities in Cambodia's forestry sector are still largely attributed to social norms that reinforce forestry as a male profession (Box 2). This is compounded by the lack of gender-disaggregated data and limited research on gender-differentiated rights and responsibilities in the management of the nation's forests.

Due to women's reliance on forests primarily for subsistence (80 percent of rural women are involved in collecting non-wood forest products [NWFPs]) and sale (FA 2008; MoWA 2009), women's rights and responsibilities in forest management and protection have often been perceived as secondary to those of men. Amongst other obstacles, this has impeded women from participating in forest planning and management meetings, resulting in women's low representation in forestry-related decision-making processes (Bradley et al. 2012).

This brief discusses how gender perspectives are being integrated in Cambodia's forest policies, laws and regulations in terms of women's representation, participation, access and decision-making in forest use and management. The brief also highlights the key challenges that prevail and outlines recommendations to promote gender mainstreaming further in forestry.



Gender concerns in forest policies

The RGC's reform efforts in the forestry sector have resulted in new laws and policies aimed at decentralizing forest governance; they include laws and policies that promote community forestry agreements and community-protected areas, which formally recognize the rights of local communities (Gurung et al. 2011). While the Forestry Law (2002) provides a legal framework for the involvement of user groups, such as local and indigenous people, in forest management and protection, there is no acknowledgement of the different needs, priorities, capacities and customary practices of women and men in terms of judicious use and management of forests and forest resources. Therefore gender and its implications in forest use and management are not explicitly addressed in the law.

Furthermore, although the Sub-decree on Community Forest Management (2003) has a provision that encourages women's participation on the Community Forestry Management Committee (CFMC), the CFMC does not have a specific quota for women's participation. Consequently, less than 5 percent of women hold management positions in the CFMC and less than 10 percent of community forestry groups have realized women's participation (PACT 2009).

To mainstream gender further in Cambodia's forest policies and practices, more efforts are needed to address the following key challenges:

- There is no specific quota in the Sub-decree on Community Forest Management (2003) for women's participation in the CFMC; this hinders women's meaningful participation in CFMC planning and at meetings.
- Women are under-represented in decision-making by national and subnational forestry institutions. For example, only 12 percent of Forestry Administration (FA) staff are female; less than 1 percent occupy management positions.
- Limited financial and human resources in the FA impede the gender working group from functioning effectively; this also inhibits gender plan implementation, research and monitoring and evaluation activities.

Box. 1 An effective combination: Developing capacity on alternative income generation skills alongside forestry training

Evaluations of government and civil society initiatives to promote women's representation and empowerment have found that capacity development of complementary alternative skills for income generation among women combined with enhancement of technical forestry skills is an approach that works. This combination has also been effective in increasing women's and their families' understanding of the multiple benefits of engaging women in forestry-related activities (Mer 2013).

Organizations such as the Cambodian Center for Study and Development in Agriculture (CEDAC), Cambodian Rural Development Team (CRDT), HEIFER International and RECOFTC – the Center for People and Forests are conducting more training events to improve skills in bookkeeping, accounting, income generation and literacy for indigenous women and girls along with technical training on forestry. In order to facilitate women's participation, organizations like PACT and the Wildlife Conservation Society stipulate that 30-50 percent of participants at capacity development activities must be women (Chhneang 2012).

Box 2. The effect of social norms on a woman involved in community forestry

"When I came home from patrolling the forest against illegal loggers, my family members were very angry with me. They asked me to stop participating in the committee, as they claimed that there is no benefit from this work. Although my family is not supportive, I am still interested in contributing to protecting forests and learning new skills as I know we get our food and fuel from the forests. I hope the situation will improve one day, and that my family will see value in this work."

– A female subcommittee member of Trapeang Ruong Community Forest, Kampong Thom Province (Mer 2013)



Moving forward

While progress has been made toward mainstreaming gender into forest policies and practices in Cambodia, the remaining challenges can be addressed through the following recommendations:

- Convening dialogues and consultation meetings at national and local levels to discuss the Forestry Law and Sub-decree on Community Forest Management to ensure women's representation in the CFMC by including specific mandatory quotas.
- Developing a training-of-trainers training manual on gender analysis and gender equity integration guidelines for programmes with a focus on the forestry sector, and strengthening gender analysis capacities of gender working group members and policy-makers.
- Allocating adequate financial resources through the national budgeting process to enable gender-related activities to operate within the FA and beyond.
- Promoting women's representation and empowerment in forestry programmes through capacity development on alternative income generation skills, accountancy and literacy for women alongside technical forestry training.
- Developing a mechanism to provide gender focal points at the provincial level to ensure that information and technical support meet needs at community levels more successfully.
- Investing in research to collect gender-disaggregated data and information on gender rights and responsibilities in forestry.

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RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests
P.O. Box 1111
Kasetsart Post Office
Bangkok 10903, Thailand
Tel +66 (0)2 940 5700
Fax +66 (0)2 561 4880
info@recoftc.org
www.recoftc.org

FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
39 Phra Atit Road
Bangkok 10200, Thailand
Tel +66 (0)2 697 4000
Fax +66 (0)2 697 4445
FAO-RAP@fao.org
www.fao.org