

Gender and forests in a changing landscape

Understanding women's participation in forestry in the Philippines

Policy brief



Photo by Caroline Liou

Key messages

- Although there is good common understanding about the value of integrating gender perspectives in forest policies and strategies, effective implementation at subnational and local levels could be improved.
- Institutional capacity development focused on gender analysis in forestry programmes would enhance implementation and promote reporting and dissemination of gender-sensitive data.
- It is essential to include gender-disaggregated data in forestry information systems at national and subnational levels to establish a user-friendly system that helps to monitor the progress on mainstreaming gender in forestry-related policies and programmes.

Background

The national Millennium Development Goals progress report in 2010 stated that the Philippines was likely to achieve targets set out under Goal 3 – promoting gender equality and empowering women – by 2015 (UNDG 2013). In 2012, the Philippines, a signatory to various global and regional human rights conventions, was ranked first in Asia in both education and health criteria in the Global Gender Gap Report (WEF 2013). The Philippine Plan for Gender-Responsive Development (1995-2025) recognizes gender equality as a means of attaining development goals that are equitable, sustainable and respectful of human rights.

The Women in Development and Nation Building Act (1992) and the Republic Act 9710 (2009) or the Magna Carta of Women (MCW), support the government's efforts to institutionalize women's concerns across the entire development sector. Government agencies in the Philippines have adopted Gender and Development (GAD) principles to promote women's rights and eliminate gender discrimination in government structures, systems and policies. Memorandum Circular No. 2011-01 of the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) provides the guidelines for creating, strengthening and institutionalizing the GAD focal point system. The focal point system is a technical group in all government agencies to promote women's rights and eliminate gender discrimination in their systems, structures, policies, programmes, processes and procedures. National forest strategy, such as the community-based forest management (CBFM) strategy of 1995 (Executive Order No. 263) and the Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act (Republic Act 8371) of 1997 are people-oriented, recognizing the rights of people living in forest lands. These documents aim to ensure the sustainable development of the Philippines' forest land and resources by granting access to forest resources for forest-dependent communities (Contreras 1998). The Department of Environment and Natural Resources' (DENR) CBFM strategy also mandates 30 percent representation of women on CBFM committees.

The perception of forestry as a solely male profession is gradually changing and more work opportunities for women are available now than ever before. More women occupy leadership positions, such as the Director General of the DENR-Forest Management Bureau, the national coordinating office of the CBFM programme. Box 1 outlines the prominence of such a leader in the forestry sector.

This brief discusses about how gender perspectives are integrated in the Philippines' forest policies, practices and legal frameworks in terms of women's representation and participation in forest use and management. It also highlights the prevailing key challenges and outlines recommendations to promote gender mainstreaming further in forestry.

Box 1. Champion of Asia-Pacific Forests 2012

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations cited Nely P. Alzula as one of the Champions of Asia-Pacific Forests in 2012. The honour was in recognition of her exemplary contributions to forestry as the President of the Regional Community-based Forest Management-People's Organization Federation in Southern Tagalog and as the Head of Kapit-Bisig Farmers' Association in Quezon.

In the 1970s, Ms Alzula earned her living by buying and selling wood charcoal. Her engagement with the forestry sector started when the Bureau of Forest Department started organizing communities to develop the Integrated Social Forestry Program and Ms Alzula was invited to attend an orientation and training session on Social Forestry and Natural Resource Management. Subsequently, through her activism and networking, she has been continuously raising awareness about community forestry and helping women to integrate women's concerns in forest policies and programmes (WOCAN 2013).

¹ The MCW is a comprehensive human rights law for women which seeks to eliminate discrimination against them by recognizing, protecting, fulfilling and protecting the rights of Filipino women. The MCW mandates 40 percent of women's representation in development councils.

Gender concerns in forest policies

The legal frameworks and the government's commitments towards promoting gender equality through the MCW and the GAD approach have helped lay the groundwork for gender-inclusive forest policies and strategies. For example, the adoption of GAD principles helped the integration of gender perspectives in the community resources management framework, environmental impact assessments and development of gender-sensitive methods and measures in CBFM (Beta-a 2013).

The Gender and Development Focal Point System (GADFS) is one of the models used by the PCW to influence all government agencies in installing mechanisms for gender mainstreaming. As a result, the DENR, in coordination with community-based organizations, has proactively planned to consider gender mainstreaming in its forest-related policies, plans and programmes (Box 2). Now, CBFM is one of the flagship programmes with a gender-inclusive approach that could serve as a good regional example.

Despite achieving such progress, the Philippines' efforts to mainstream gender further in forest policies and practices are still confronted by the following key challenges:

- Although there is good common understanding and knowledge of the value of integrating gender perspectives in forest policies and strategies, effective integration of gender equality principles at subnational and local levels is lacking.
- Although 5 percent of each government agencies' budget is allocated to GAD activities, this is often considered inadequate to fully mainstream gender in forestry plans and programmes.
- Limited gender-disaggregated statistics and lack of gender-sensitive monitoring and reporting systems in subnational and local forestry institutions and programmes.

Box 2. Women's initiative in CBFM

The Women's Initiative for Society, Culture and Environment (WISE), a core member of the Community-Based Forest Management Support Group, helps to foster the development of community forestry in the Philippines. The organization was also instrumental in developing the Philippine National REDD+ Strategy.

WISE has been analysing the performance of domestic funding on CBFM and engaging in REDD+ at regional and international levels through participation in drafting policy papers, discussing critical topics and organizing platforms for capacity building and communication. WISE is directly involved in the Philippines REDD+ Capacity Building and Communication Working Group providing education scholarships and health awareness services as well as promoting forest management by communities (RECOFTC et al. 2012).



Moving forward

The Philippines' forest policies and strategies recognize people's rights, including the concerns of marginalized groups and women, but more could be done to strengthen efforts towards achieving gender-responsive programmes and projects in forestry. For instance, provision of appropriate incentives at subnational and local levels would encourage the effective integration of gender concerns in forestry plans and programmes. Likewise, institutional capacity development on gender analysis in forestry programmes would help to enhance implementation and promote reporting and dissemination of gender-sensitive data. The following recommendations would be helpful for more effective implementation of policies and institutional mechanisms:

- Policies and strategies related to forest management need to be made available to the wider public in local languages and general awareness must be built through popular media channels.
- Forestry information systems should include gender-disaggregated data in national and subnational databases and ensure that these data are collected and disseminated. Thus, establishment of an easy and user-friendly system to help monitor the country's progress on mainstreaming gender in forestry-related policies, laws and programmes is recommended.
- Inclusion of gender analysis in the formulation of forestry programmes and undertaking gender research to identify gaps; documenting and disseminating best practices on gender mainstreaming in forest policies and strategies should be encouraged by the DENR.
- It is important that the DENR encourages and supports the GADFS to implement gender-responsive programmes and projects in forestry at subnational and local levels with increased budget allocation.

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This brief is part of a project entitled 'Mainstreaming Gender Issues into Forest Policies of Developing Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) Member Countries' funded by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and implemented by RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests. The objective is to promote gender equality in national forest policies, including strengthening the capacities of policy-makers and relevant stakeholders in mainstreaming gender issues in national forest policies. For more information, see: <http://www.recoftc.org/site/Gender/>.

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Bangkok, Thailand

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