Bearing the fruits of action: Bioversity's gender responsive forestry research

Bioversity International delivers scientific evidence, management practices and policy options to use and safeguard agricultural and tree biodiversity to attain sustainable global food and nutrition security

Who we are

Bioversity International focuses on sustainably managing and conserving the rich agricultural and forest biodiversity—species, varieties, and their products—that result from the long process of trial and selection by culturally diverse farmer and forest communities across the world. These women and men hold vast and gender-specific ecological knowledge adapted to the diverse physical environments in which they live.

Bioversity's work on forest genetic resources focuses on sustainably managing and conserving the diversity within and across tree species that are important for people and sits within the CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA). To achieve these objectives, we are attentive to the ways gender and other social factors, such as age, socio-economic status and/or ethnicity, influence tree and forest management strategies and forest-based livelihoods.

Aside from the innumerable environmental services they provide, forests are an important source of food, fuel, and income for women and men in the developing world. Women are traditionally the main collectors of fuel wood, medicinal and aromatic plants and other non-timber forest products, and they often generate more than half of their income from forests. Their participation in decision making at household and community levels, even when limited, has been shown to improve prospects for forest conservation.

What we do

Gender-responsive forestry research for development

Bioversity's research for development aims to understand how gender relations and norms affect the sustainable management of forest genetic resources. We examine women's and men's distinct and complementary sets of knowledge, practices, rights and interests related to forest genetic resources to develop effective management options that can improve social equity, livelihoods, and the long-term sustainability of forests.

- In Burkina Faso, participatory research with women and men from different ethnic groups revealed their differentiated knowledge of ethnovarieties—or farmer recognized types—of shea (*Vitellaria paradoxa*) trees. The extensive breath of knowledge elicited will guide efforts to propagate farmer varieties that meet the interests of both women and men.

Eliciting gendered knowledge on *V. paradoxa* ethnovarieties in Southwest Burkina Faso. Credit: INERA/M. Karambiri

- In Kyrgyzstan, studies have focused on the gendered norms associated with the management of fruit trees in the world's largest walnut forest. This research is part of the CGIAR's global comparative study: 'Gennovate: Enabling gender equality in agricultural and environmental innovation'. Identifying the constraints women face in participating in formal forest management processes gave rise to recommendations for promoting more gender-equitable decision-making that benefits from both women's and men's forest-related knowledge and ideas.

Bioversity International is a member of the CGIAR Consortium. CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food secure future.

Banner Photo: Women in India's Western Ghats processing *kokum* for sale. Credit: Bioversity International/E. Hermanowicz

- Research on the gendered dimensions of native fruit tree management has resulted in initiatives that support women's collective processing and marketing of *kokum* (*Garcinia indica*) in India and mango (*Mangifera indica*) in Malaysia to improve women's incomes, strengthen their social networks and develop their self-confidence.

Development of tools

We use mixed research methods, qualitative and quantitative, to understand the ways communities relate to their forest environment. We emphasize the effectiveness of participatory research approaches to understand gender relations and their impact on community-based forest genetic resources management. These approaches engage rural women and men in research, enabling them to take actions that foster change.

We develop and adapt an innovative set of tools to facilitate communication of knowledge and experience and foster quality research.

- *Participatory Theatre* can be useful to convey complex processes and initiate dialogue and interactions among diversified social groups with different levels of education in an engaging and fun way. Scripts are adapted to local realities and involve researchers, artists and other interested individuals. We use participatory theatre as part of a sequence of activities focused on learning about local knowledge differences between gender and age groups that can guide more sustainable management of forest genetic resources.

Research through theatre: participatory methods can spark discussion and empower local communities. Credit: Bioversity International/H. Lamers

- *5Caps-G* is a gender-responsive version of the 5Capitals asset-based tool designed to analyze the poverty impacts of value chain development. In a joint effort, FTA and the CGIAR Research Program on Policies, Institutions and Markets (PIM) are revisiting the original methodology. The revised tool will support analysis of how inequalities related to gender and age shape the ways women and men participate in and benefit from the development of value chains for forest products, among others. 5Caps-G offers guidance on how to make value chain development more beneficial and equitable for forest-dependent producers.

Capacity strengthening

We carry out various activities to strengthen the capacities our scientists and partners need to do quality research on gender in forestry, including:

- The Gender Research Fellowship Programme (GRFP). The overarching goal of the GRFP is to strengthen the capacity of research fellows, partner institutions, and research teams to conduct participatory gender-responsive research pertaining to forest genetic resource management and use. In its 2013-2014 Edition, the programme offered professional development opportunities—including first-hand experience in conducting gender-responsive participatory research, participating in international conferences and publishing in peer-reviewed journals—to five women and men from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, India, Kyrgyzstan and Malaysia, selected as Fellows.

Fellows celebrating a year of gender-responsive forestry research
Credit: Bioversity International/E. Hermanowicz

- 'Gender in Forestry' workshops for scientists at Bioversity and its partner organizations take a social learning approach to build skills in the use of participatory tools that engage diverse groups of women and men in the generation, recovery and sharing of knowledge about forests and trees.

Working in partnership

Our success in accomplishing this ambitious agenda rests in the fruitful partnerships we have developed with academics from the biophysical and social sciences, professionals working in forestry and in the gender fields, civil society and public and private sector organizations. We welcome new partnerships with stakeholders who value the sustainable and equitable management of the world's precious forest genetic resources and the well-being of the women and men who manage these.

For more information about our gender-responsive forestry research please visit:
www.bioversityinternational.org/research-portfolio/forests/gender-responsive-forestry-research/

Bioversity International

CGIAR RESEARCH PROGRAM ON Forests, Trees and Agroforestry

Marlène Elias
Gender Specialist
Bioversity International-Malaysia
marlene.elias@cgiar.org
www.bioversityinternational.org