



Gender and Biodiversity

Biodiversity

Biological diversity, or biodiversity, refers to the total number of species and ecosystems in a region. As human beings, our ability to live on this planet-- to breath air, consume food and water, and cure disease-- is intricately linked to biodiversity.

At present, the planet is facing an escalating loss of species across our natural environment, roughly 1,000 times the natural rate¹, due to increased pollution, disease, land-use, and the impacts of climate change. Although a large percentage of this environmental degradation is fueled by over-consumption and development in industrialized nations, the affects are felt hardest by communities in the developing world whose livelihoods are linked to natural resources. These resources are vital both for consumption and income through forestry, fishing, agriculture, etc.

Gender and Biodiversity

Women and men undertake different roles in the use and management of natural resources to combat biodiversity loss and ensure equitable access to these resources, especially in developing countries. Although gender differentiated responsibilities vary region to region, in most communities in the developing world, women act as primary caretakers and natural resource managers. For example:

- Women often take the leading role in household /community management by controlling consumption patterns, collecting firewood for fuel and cooking, managing household waste, and providing healthcare through traditional medicines.
- Females in developing countries on average carry 20 litres of water per day over 6 km.²
- Women control as much as 60-80%³ of the world's food production and play a huge role in both water management and forestry. However, in some countries, women have few legal rights to land and globally women own less than 2% of the world's titled land.⁴

The gendered nature of resource management coupled with an unequal access to rights in certain countries leaves many women particularly vulnerable to the affects of biodiversity loss. As forests are depleted and fresh water supply exhausted, it is women and young girls who travel farther each day to collect firewood and water for their communities. Having to devote more time to water collection and travelling longer distances, means that girls may be unable to attend school and often puts women at greater risk for sexual harassment.⁶

Significantly though, these gendered roles have provided women with vital technical and traditional knowledge on managing natural resources, particularly in terms of preservation and innovation. For example, women's work in agriculture lends them a vast understanding of crop and seed varietals and in turn how to adapt their food production to changes in weather patterns and food supply.⁵ Without women's full participation in decision making we cannot hope to develop the solutions and innovations necessary to combat biodiversity loss.

In order to develop effective solutions for conserving biodiversity, we must fully analyze these gender-differentiated roles of natural resource management and ensure that women's and men's specific knowledge in these areas are being equally integrated into programs and policies. Furthermore, we must actively work to promote women's equal access to rights and engagement in decision-making processes on resource management.

Convention on Biological Diversity

The 1993 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) is the international framework for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and the equitable sharing of its benefits. The Preamble of the Convention shows a commitment to gender equality by, "*Recognizing also: the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and affirming the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation for biological diversity conservation.*"⁷ However, there is no further mention of women's specific roles or participation in decision making throughout the rest of the text.

In order to develop a more effective and equal framework for the Convention, in 2007 IUCN spearheaded an initiative to mainstream gender into the CBD, resulting in the elaboration of a [Gender Plan of Action for the Convention on Biological Diversity](#). The CBD is the first multilateral environmental agreement to have a road map for ensuring gender equality in the application of its principles.

The Tenth Meeting of the CBD Conference of Parties (CBD COP10) will take place from 18 - 29 October 2010 in Nagoya, Japan and will attempt to forge a 'Big Plan' to curb escalating biodiversity loss and preserve life on earth. WEDO, IUCN, and other members of the GGCA (Global Gender and Climate Alliance) will be there to ensure that gender is taken into account in the negotiations across all aspects of any new agreement.

Recommendations

For further information please use the following links:

Convention on Biological Diversity

<http://www.cbd.int/>

Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender into National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans

www.cbd.int/doc/publications/cbd-ts-49-en.pdf

CBD Factsheet: Biodiversity, Gender and Climate Change

www.cbd.int/climate/doc/biodiversity-gender-climate-change-en.pdf

CBD Factsheet: Gender and Biodiversity

www.cbd.int/iyb/doc/prints/factsheets/iyb-cbd-factsheet-gender-en.pdf



Women's Environment &
Development Organization
355 Lexington Avenue, Third
Floor, New York, NY 10017, U.S.A.
Tel: (212) 973-0325
Fax: (212) 973-0335
E-mail: wedo@wedo.org
Website: www.wedo.org

Notes: ¹IUCN. "Why is biodiversity in crisis?" May 3, 2010 http://www.iucn.org/iyb/about/biodiversity_crisis/; ²Social Watch, 2007 and 2008; Oxfam 2007; Neumayer and Plumper, 2007; and ILO, 2008; ³Convention on Biological Diversity "Gender and Biodiversity" <http://www.cbd.int/iyb/doc/prints/factsheets/iyb-cbd-factsheet-gender-en.pdf>; ⁴Rural Development Institute, Global Center for Womens Land Rights' http://www.rdiland.org/what_we_do/global_center_women_land, accessed July 10, 2010. ⁵ActionAid (2007) "We know what we need: South Asian women speak out on climate change adaptation" Institute of Development Studies (November), http://www.actionaid.org/assets/pdf/ActionAid%20%20IDS%20Report%20_We%20know%20what%20we%20need.pdf; ⁶BRIDGE (2008) "Gender and Climate Change: mapping the linkages, a scoping study on knowledge and gaps" Institute of Development Studies (June); ⁷Convention on Biological Diversity, 1993