

DEVELOPMENT

ENGENDERING CENTRAL AMERICAN FORESTRY MANAGEMENT:

The Integration of Women in Forest Policy Initiatives

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Awareness is growing worldwide that women have important, but often neglected, roles in the use and conservation of natural resources.¹ For centuries, women's work has been particularly critical in the rural areas of developing countries, where they sustain food production, manage forest resources, and meet many other survival needs. Their activities and constraints in relation to the environment are often distinct from those of men; and they often suffer disproportionately from unequal access to resources and from resource depletion. Their contributions and needs have been largely invisible in mainstream development planning and policies, and they are often left out of public decision-making in forestry and related fields. Yet, in some parts of the world, women are being acknowledged, integrated and empowered through environmental management initiatives. Such emerging efforts help ensure that *all* people have equitable opportunities in development and natural resource management activities.

This report summarizes a unique initiative to integrate and support gender equity in planning, policy, and actions in forest management in Central America. Through an innovative process, women from around the region are organizing to build on their grassroots experiences in community forestry and agroforestry, collaborate with scientists and planners, and tie into decision-making activities for the Tropical Forestry Action Plan (TFAP) and other forest policies. These efforts were consolidated in an important regional workshop in December, 1992, organized by the Regional Gender Advisory Group in Forestry, the TFAP of Central America, and the Nicaraguan Institute of Natural Resources (IRENA). It was sponsored by several organizations, including the World Resources Institute. Although many impediments to gender integration remain, the Central American experience provides useful lessons of relevance to other regions. This gender strategy is working toward sustainable development—i.e., development that is

environmentally sound, socially equitable, and economically productive for society as a whole.

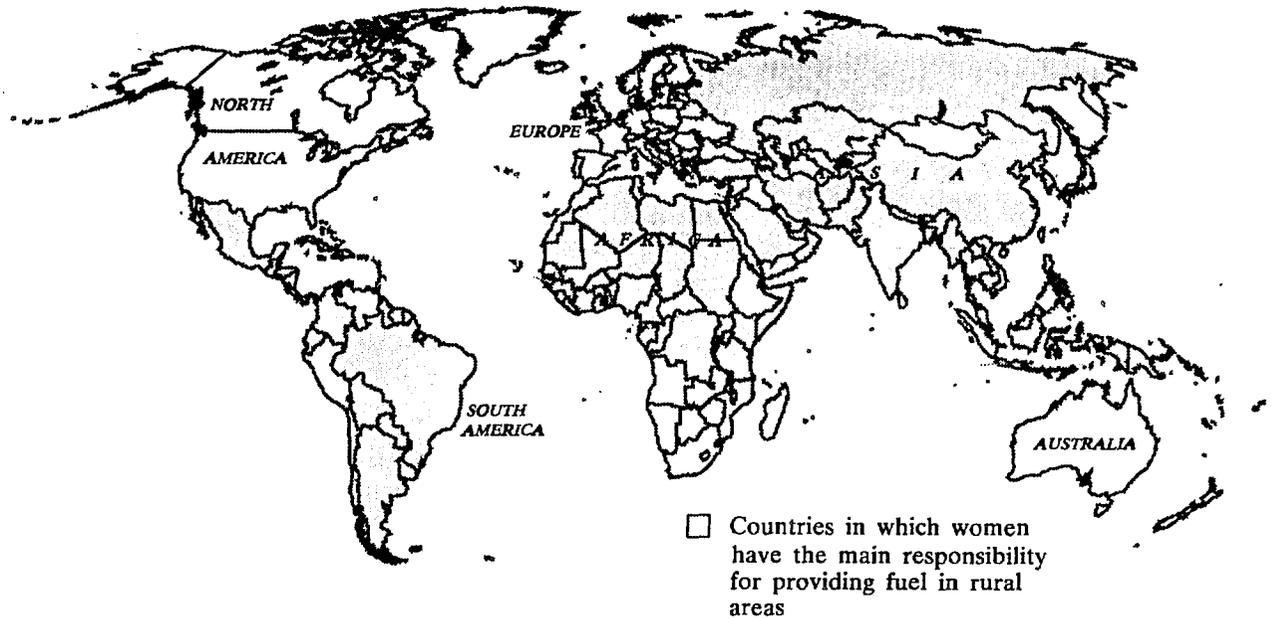
BACKGROUND ON WOMEN IN FORESTRY

Familiar pictures of poor women shouldering heavy loads of fuelwood vividly portray one of the major female roles in forest resource management in the developing world. In Central America, over 50 percent of the rural population depends on wood for energy. In Honduras, for example, 62 percent do; and in El Salvador, the figure is 57 percent.² In this region, as in many parts of the world, women are largely responsible for fuelwood collection, as illustrated in Figure 1. They also have the main responsibilities in preparing and using the wood for cooking and for home heating. This work requires a great deal of time, especially where wood resources have become increasingly scarce. For example, in resource-depleted areas of Central America, women spend many hours each week and travel long distances daily to find wood.

Yet, women's involvement in forest management goes far beyond fuelwood provision. In Central America, women plant, transplant, protect, and maintain trees. They also gather, and manage, forest products and put them to multiple uses—including food, animal feed, health, or income. Women commonly collect nuts, fruits, forage, medicines, and oils from trees for use at home, and in some cases, for sale in local markets. In many parts of the region, trees are integrated into subsistence farms and traditional agroforestry systems, which are often maintained by women.³

These activities give rural women unique and valuable knowledge about trees and forest products in Central America. Studies show that they have acquired extensive practical understanding about the suitability of various tree species for cooking and heating. Even rural women with

Figure 1: Women in Fuel Provision



Source: S. Lewenhak. *The Revaluation of Women's Work*, 1988 Croom Helm/Routledge edn., Notes pp. 324-325.

little or no formal education often know about qualities of woods and locations of supplies, as well as about such ecosystem services as the value of tree leaf-litter for soils.⁴ In some cases, women, especially in indigenous cultures, have unique knowledge of the medicinal values of barks, leaves, and resins from trees.⁵ Nicaraguan women, for instance, commonly know which tree species last longest as fuel and which types enhance food flavors.⁶ Moreover, studies find that most women are interested in conserving forest resources and planting trees for their families and farms. For example, evidence from several countries shows that women seeking fuelwood rarely cut entire trees; rather, they generally gather branches or dead wood.⁷ Given their continual work with forest products, they often have a vested interest in ensuring and improving a sustained supply of trees and tree products to meet their needs.

Of course, men also take part in forest management in Central America; and rural men, especially indigenous people, are knowledgeable about forest resources in some areas. They are also hurt by forest depletion. However, in many situations, men's activities and options are distinct from women's. Men generally work in commercial forestry, construction, and forest-based industries, and less in the kinds of activities mentioned above. Men are also generally responsible for cutting large trees, clearing land for agriculture, and extracting commercial timber. In some urban areas, men sell fuelwood or charcoal. In contrast, women are only occasionally involved in forest enterprises. They tend to work as wage laborers or as marketers of

non-wood products from trees. This gender-based division of labor is rooted in both cultural traditions and socioeconomic inequities.

As environmental stresses grow, the work of rural women in managing forest resources has become increasingly difficult in Central America. Deforestation continued throughout the region at an estimated rate of 400,000 hectares per year in the 1980s.⁸ In turn, the loss of forest cover aggravates soil erosion and other forms of resource degradation which undermine production. The diversity of forest products is also declining. Poor people have suffered most severely from these pressures. Of the poor, women bear an especially heavy burden, partly because they lack access and secure tenure of resources, including land, and because they usually bear the main responsibilities in securing their families' food and basic necessities. These pressures force them to travel longer and longer distances to find wood products, or pay ever-higher prices to brokers for purchasing fuel; this, in turn, aggravates women's poverty.⁹ Without economic alternatives, rural women must work harder to gather and manage water, cultivate marginal and exhausted soils, and adequately feed their families. Added to this, growing numbers of Central American rural households are headed by females, and such households are generally poorer than households headed by men.¹⁰ In Panama, Honduras, and El Salvador, households headed by women represent an estimated 22 percent of the total rural households.¹¹ As subsistence activities become the sole responsibility of women, such crucial tasks as gathering

wood products and securing food become ever more encumbering.

Adding to their difficulties, rural women usually lack access to credit and seldom own land in Central America.¹² Credit is often a bottleneck for all small farmers in Latin American countries, but more so for women, usually because of gender biases in credit policies.¹³ Such constraints often impede their ability to improve resource management practices and increase their welfare. Few women have opportunities for education and training in forestry and agroforestry. Worldwide, the forestry profession is male-dominated. For example, in North America, only 10 percent of the total 18,000 professional forester members of the Society of American Foresters are women, according to 1993 figures.¹⁴ In the U.S. Forest Service, women comprise only 26 percent of the total professional staff of 12,054 people, and only 7 percent of senior executive officers are women, as of 1992.¹⁵ In Central America, such detailed data are not available for forestry institutions, but general estimates suggest that fewer than 10 percent of professional staff in the region's government forestry services are women.¹⁶ In this region's educational and training institutes for forest professionals and technicians, women comprise only about 2 to 6 percent of the graduates, based on a study of 17 institutions with a total of 130 graduates annually.¹⁷ Although gender disparities in education occur in many fields, the forestry and agriculture professions are extreme cases of inadequate female representation.

RESPONSES AND INITIATIVES: FROM THE GRASSROOTS TO DONOR EFFORTS

Responding to stresses and needs, rural women in Central America, as in other parts of the world, are taking initiatives to improve forest resource management and to alleviate resource degradation. Many efforts are through the local projects of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and community groups.¹⁸ For example, a recent assessment of NGOs involved in environmental initiatives in the region revealed that about 20 of 35 conservation groups surveyed carried out forest resource-related activities to benefit women.¹⁹ The most common of such activities are reforestation, tree nurseries, agroforestry, and the distribution of seedlings. Occasionally, women also work in small forest-product enterprises.²⁰

Most of these efforts are small-scale, participatory, locally based, and oriented to meet social needs. In some cases, women's groups alone have developed such activities, but in others, women or men have led efforts that include both sexes. Most are spurred by the urgent necessity to manage resources wisely to fulfill basic needs, to protect rights, and build opportunities for rural poor people. For instance, Costa Rica's *Asociación Andar* is working with women to establish nurseries to provide seedlings for reforestation and farm use, and in a project of the Honduran Forest Development Agency (CODEFOR), women have had central responsibilities for establishing

Box 1: Cusmapa—A Successful Forest Management Enterprise

San Jose de Cusmapa, in the Matriz State of Nicaragua, is located in a relatively dry pine forest area at 1500 meters elevation. This community took action beginning in 1988, as deforestation and drought worsened. They began with a consultative process of project planning, and formed a Forest Association (cooperative) that manages some 1440 hectares, and benefits 43 people in the community. The group involved in this project consists largely of women, who were the most enthusiastic and became fully involved from the beginning when there was not financial compensation. The most unique and notable aspect of this project is the development of a small forest enterprise (sawmill), focusing on furniture construction. The association constructed a sawmill that produces 24,000 board-feet monthly, and its carpentry workshop builds furniture such as chairs and tables. Other important components of the project are management of the pine forest on 910 hectares, construction of an oven for charcoal production, training for the local communities, technical assistance from forest professionals from the National Institute of Natural Resources (IRENA), and awareness-raising on women's integration into forest management.

This project, supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), has developed into a well-organized and unified forest management cooperative involving community members. The project

has generated 23 permanent jobs, including both women and men; and it is coordinated by 9 main community members, 7 women and 2 men. The members actively maintain the nurseries, distribute and plant seedlings, and work in the furniture industry. They also collaborate with the owners of the forest in management plans, nurseries, and training activities. Sales from the furniture reached approximately \$765 dollars in 1993. A few of the women have received technical training in forest management, and they are providing systematic technical assistance alongside men. Many women have become skilled carpenters, and provide education on resource management to children in the area. Their future plans include not only strengthening ongoing activities but also developing a forest credit system and securing title to the land.

In short, participating women, as well as men, have acquired valuable skills, earned income, and developed their organizational capacities for managing forest resources and small-scale business—which lead to their empowerment. The support of other institutions and attention to health needs has helped contribute to their success. Although small in scale, this project contributes to the socioeconomic development of the area, promoting participation of women in decision-making on forestry and improving the sustainable use of the forest resources.

Source: IRENA, unpublished information, 1993

Box 2: Community Reforestation in San Rafael del Sur

In an arid region called San Rafael del Sur about 45 kilometers from Managua, women producers are organizing reforestation and agroforestry activities. This project, administered by the Institute of Natural Resources (IRENA), consists of training, technical assistance, forest management (including nursery establishment and reforestation), soil conservation, and integration of women into forestry. Some 31 community groups of beneficiaries are involved in the area. Approximately 61 women participate directly, but the impacts influence the wider population. For example, in the community of Montefresco, an estimated 500 people are impacted by the project activities.

Organized into Agroforestry Associations, participants establish demonstration plots, as well as plant trees on their own land. Communication on gender-awareness, as well as technical training, is part of the program. Meetings are held at least every month. The women select their own leaders, and these leaders spread ideas to other women's community groups. Through this farmer-to-farmer extension method, both seedlings and information are diffused to women and men. With the encouragement of foresters from IRENA, local women have become increasingly involved in decision-making and planning in these tree-planting initiatives. The

community members select species that they consider to be priorities. For example, in 1992, 5 percent were ornamental trees, 8 percent were fruit trees, 19 percent were forage trees, 23 percent were for fuelwood, and 45 percent of the total trees planted were for protective forest and/or construction. The communities make use of both communally-owned land and individual plots for the nurseries and agroforestry projects. Most of the women involved in these activities are very poor and live on very poor soils. Although these initiatives in San Rafael are making important steps forward, they are hindered by insufficient resources and lack of visibility to decision-makers. Some women complained that their husbands have resisted their work in the projects; and in another case men tried to seize control of efforts that women initiated. However, most of the men have become supportive, and have joined in the efforts. Support for other natural resource management projects is needed to accompany these efforts so women will have time to dedicate to agroforestry.

Source: IRENA, unpublished data, 1993; and field interviews

nurseries for a widespread reforestation effort.²¹ A good example from Nicaragua is the development of a forest association in San Jose de Cusmapa, led largely by women, which focuses on a small-scale furniture industry, along with forest management and conservation education. (See Box 1.) In San Rafael del Sur, Nicaragua, 31 groups of women are engaged in reforestation and agroforestry activities and are working to improve fuelwood management. (See Box 2.) In such projects, women have been empowered by strengthening their existing knowledge about forest resources, learning technical skills related to forest conservation and nursery maintenance, organizing projects, and, in some cases, gaining income from the sales of seedlings or other forest-based products. The participation of women in such efforts has helped improve adaptation of new approaches. For example, in Nicaragua, although eucalyptus was considered acceptable by men who were designing an energy project, women did not consider this species a priority for fuel because they knew its use gives food a bitter flavor. When these insights were acknowledged, the project was reformed to use eucalyptus as a medicinal plant and not for fuelwood.²²

Although these grassroots efforts show promise, they face major constraints. In particular, many are too small to generate much influence and recognition. As one Guatemalan stated perceptively: "We are like mere drops of water" ("*somos meras gotitas de agua*").²³ Similarly, the efforts are too few in number and they suffer from lack of funds, equipment, technical assistance, and training. In many communities, women are not well organized into

groups or coalitions, so it is hard for them to become involved in projects. Many men still expect women to remain at home and to stay away from group activities. Until the last two years or so, an equally important impediment has been the near-absence of women in mainstream forestry planning and policy-making. Wider social and economic inequities, patriarchal structures, and *machismo* also confine women's opportunities and tend to block their involvement in work outside their own homes and farms.

At the same time, in other parts of the Third World, gender concerns in natural resource management are increasingly being addressed. For example, various reports have brought attention to African and Indian women who have been very active in reforestation and social forestry. Furthermore, some donor organizations, development agencies, and northern non-governmental organizations have developed programs to support gender analysis and women's participation in environmental projects and other sustainable development activities. As in locally-based grassroots efforts, these initiatives have also suffered from insufficient funding, isolation from mainstream development projects, and, more important, absence of women in policy processes and decision-making. Nevertheless, along with grassroots efforts, these projects have begun to show that empowering women in resource management can help meet wider goals of sustainable development.

THE TROPICAL FORESTRY ACTION PLAN AND EARLY INITIATIVES TO INTEGRATE WOMEN

In Central America, as in many parts of the world, national and regional planning and policies for forest resource management have been established through new initiatives. One of the most renowned is the development of Tropical Forestry Action Plans (TFAP) (or *Plan de Accion Forestal Tropical*—known as “PAFT” in Spanish), which was first established at the international level in 1985, intended to coordinate efforts to manage and use forest resources wisely and to reverse the trend of accelerating loss of tropical forests.²⁴ Initially, the global TFAP was directed largely by government decision-makers and by international finance and development agencies. Even though the TFAP initiative acknowledged forest users and NGOs *on paper*, in reality the initial centralized plans bore little connection to grassroots peoples’ activities. In the early stages of planning and decision-making, the perspectives and interests of such key local forest users as indigenous peoples, small farmers, NGOs, and women, were mostly left out. In reaction, NGOs and other local groups called attention to weaknesses of this top-down, exclusive approach.²⁵ As a result, several aspects of the Plan were changed in the mid-to-late 1980’s. The planning was decentralized at regional and national levels and made more participatory.

In Central America for example, national PAFTs were established and became important building blocks for forest management. In 1990, the regional PAFT was formed to coordinate the national action plans in Central America.²⁶ Both regional and national planning processes continue to the present date. The goals of the PAFT-CA are “to increase the commitment and harmonize actions [among the member countries] directed toward the conservation, regeneration, and sustainable use of tropical forest resources, strengthening and supporting sustainable socioeconomic development.” Specific objectives are to help the developing countries define their priorities for using forest resources, identify policies and plans for forest-related activities, and search for the funds needed to apply the plans. The plan establishes regional cooperative mechanisms to promote rational resource use and to overcome ecological degradation. The PAFT-CA is an initiative of the Central American Commission for Environment and Development (CCAD), created by the Presidents of the region in 1989,²⁷ to promote regional coordination on forest-related issues.

Guidelines in the PAFT’s on NGO participation were published,²⁸ officially endorsing the contribution of diverse local interest groups. Starting during this period, NGOs and forest users have been brought into the planning process.²⁹ With increased “political space” and opportunities to participate in forest policy dialogue and decision-making, citizens now have a greater voice in planning. For example, PAFT-CA conducted consultations during its formulation in

each country which were decentralized, and some country plans involve participatory consultations, workshops, and negotiations among diverse sectors—whether public agencies, private industry, or NGOs—concerned with forest resources. This is also an important approach for seeking solutions, formulating policies, and gaining political commitment from governments, donors, and other interested stakeholders.³⁰ However, the process has inevitably faced constraints in coordination and conflicts of interests among private industry, governments, and NGOs; such difficulties have required hard work and stamina to surmount.

Early in the development of the PAFT-CA in Central America, some analysts called attention to a “lack of participation of women and indigenous people in the process, both at the country level and regionally.”³¹ Women and indigenous peoples’ federations sought political roles in the PAFT-CA process and in other forest policy initiatives. National coordinators responded supportively by undertaking efforts to diversify the range of participants and include all stakeholders in forest policy. In Guatemala, for example, representatives from 22 indigenous peoples federations formed the PAF-Maya in 1991, enabling indigenous representatives to identify their central concerns and their priorities for forest and land protection. The PAF-Maya has been supported and incorporated into the forestry planning processes with the national forestry plans in Guatemala.³²

Women began to introduce their perspectives and experiences into planning discussions and policy-making in the early 1990s. These women were mainly professionals and technical staff who work in government and non-government organizations on community forestry activities, are closely involved with grassroots activities, and represent interests and needs of local people as well as their own concerns. In January 1991, participants at a consultative workshop held in San Salvador on the Contributions of Women in Forestry Plans formed a Gender Advisory Group to continue support for this theme. In July 1991, at a workshop held in Costa Rica on Costa Rican Women in Sustainable Development, this Advisory Group was asked to share information on their experiences in environmental planning. In September 1991, the Group was invited to the PAFT-CA International Roundtable in Honduras, and the participants later carried out a gender analysis of the background documents on forestry planning. In these meetings, the group called attention to their significant grassroots experience, as well as to gender biases and constraints they faced in programs and plans.

In January 1992, the Gender Advisory Group was invited by the organizing committee of the PAFT-CA to present a proposal to hold a region-wide workshop on gender issues in forest management. Meanwhile, in Nicaragua, building on various forestry-related activities, women formed a national advisory group of professional women working in forestry. Nicaragua’s group attempted to improve mechanisms for integrating women and women’s

participation and experiences into the Nicaraguan TFAP. The Nicaraguan Advisory group also co-sponsored a national meeting of *campesina* women, to heighten awareness of women's roles and develop mechanisms for collaboration. These activities led to growing interest to expand activities to the regional level.

REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON GENDER ISSUES IN CENTRAL AMERICA'S FOREST MANAGEMENT

Building on these initiatives, an important regional workshop was held in Managua, Nicaragua in December 1992 on "Gender Perspectives in Forest Management" to coincide with an international PAFT-Nicaragua Roundtable meeting. This unique workshop enabled participants to develop a comprehensive strategy for integrating women into forest policy and planning at a regional level and to address wider gender issues in forest resource management, as described below. This event became part of an important broader process of women's integration in forestry policy decision-making forums in the region.

A. General Characteristics of the Workshop³³

The general goal of the gender workshop in Nicaragua was to support women's participation in forest management, ensuring the integration of women and gender awareness into forestry programs and policies, particularly the PAFT-CA.

The specific objectives of the workshop were to:

- Reveal experiences that women have had in reforestation, conservation, agroforestry, wildlands management, and other activities in Central America's forest sector;
- Initiate the planning of specific activities with women in forest projects;
- Exchange experiences and coordinate action to develop mechanisms for integrating women in the programs and projects related to the PAFT-CA and other forest policies;
- Identify immediate actions to integrate women into the PAFT in Central America.

The 45 participants included two to four representatives from each of the Central American countries (most of whom were previously involved in forest advisory groups and meetings), the Nicaraguan advisory team members (who hosted and organized the program), a gender expert from Mexico, four representatives from international organizations (FAO, WRI, and the Swedish International Development Agency), two representatives from the PAF-Maya (the Indigenous Peoples' Forest Advisory group), and two PAFT regional coordinators. In stark contrast to most meetings on forestry, 90 percent of the participants were women. They represented a variety of organizations, including NGOs and government agencies. The workshop was organized by the Gender Advisory Group and the PAFT-CA and financed by FAO, the

development agencies of Sweden, Finland, and Holland, and the World Resources Institute.

The first day began with field visits to two projects, in San Jose de Cusmapa and San Rafael del Sur, that involve women in grassroots agroforestry and forestry. The visits enabled the workshop participants to talk informally with the local people, to become familiar with natural resource challenges faced by rural women, and to learn of forest-related activities carried out or led by these women. Those involved in these activities are remarkably energetic, articulate, and committed to their work in forestry and agroforestry projects. Although most are very poor and usually have at best an elementary education, they are very knowledgeable about farming and tree-planting. They are proud and self-confident about the fruits of their activities, and they have benefitted from the technical assistance and support of the women coordinators from IRENA. In both cases, however, the women's groups generally lack resources, secure tenure, and adequate technical and educational services, and some are too busy keeping their households afloat to participate in the projects. Once they do get involved, they face the classic "double-day" syndrome; they still must bear their routine time-consuming responsibilities to meet family needs, for husbands rarely assume such work. The projects themselves are relatively small and remain unknown to forestry planners and the wider public. In sum, these field visits illustrated grassroots realities and helped bring the later workshop discussions alive. These projects also provide evidence that women's efforts to become fully involved in forestry planning and policy can pay off.

Following this field trip, the workshop was dedicated to discussion, analysis, presentation of summary reports of the national activities on women and forestry, and the development of a proposal to fulfill the workshop objectives. On the final day, the National PAFT coordinators and members of the Regional Advisory Group joined the workshop to further discuss constraints and possible solutions for women's participation in this arena. The group built consensus on key issues, and identified priority recommendations for a regional strategy. The results of the workshop spurred follow-up activities based on these regional recommendations.

B. Workshop Outcome: Synthesis of Progress, Constraints & Recommendations

By the end of the workshop, the participants had agreed on significant strategic planning factors. Specifically, its main accomplishments were identifying positive steps and obstacles and challenges, formulating a regional strategy and priority recommendations (explained below), and finalizing country-level strategies, including plans and mechanisms to integrate women in forest policy and programs in each country. Furthermore, the workshop enabled the exchange of information and ideas, solidarity and mutual support, and for many, greater sensitivity to gender issues.

As for findings, the workshop participants identified main areas of progress and positive steps toward meeting women's needs and improving conditions and opportunities for women. In terms of practical advances in forestry-related activities, women generally:

- work in projects that help improve social welfare;
- participate in activities that generate employment;
- work in groups that tend to cooperate with each other;
- train themselves and share technical skills; and
- participate in consultations undertaken by national TFAPs.

In terms of strategic advances in this field, women have made progress when they:

- are fairly well-organized;
- work in technical teams to raise awareness of gender issues in forestry;
- deal with laws to improve women's rights in titling and resource conditions; and

- address gender equity issues when serving on government commissions.

Furthermore, women in Central America are already participating in many kinds of sustainable development activities, ranging from soil conservation and horticulture to pig-raising and artisanry; and in these contexts have developed useful capacities. Local female leadership has proven critical to project success in a few cases.

On the other hand, many kinds of obstacles to women's participation in forest policy and planning were identified and discussed. They range from broad macroeconomic inequities and poverty, to specific technical constraints, such as lack of access to well-adapted tree seedlings at a local level. The main factors are shown in Box 3.

Based on an understanding of these obstacles and the experiences and capacities that women are developing in natural resource management, the participants clarified priority strategic recommendations for integrating gender in forest programs and policies, as noted in Box 4.

Box 3: Gender-Related Constraints in Forest Programs, Policies, and Planning in Central America (Identified by Workshop Participants, 1993)

A. The main obstacles to women's participation in forest policies:

- The differing conditions and roles of men and women involved with forest resources have rarely been taken into consideration in forest projects;
- In projects for communities, gender-specific needs are rarely analyzed;
- Even in programs inviting women's participation, gender training and education for women are rarely part of project implementation; and
- Projects often have technical limitations or biases such as lack of adapted technologies to meet women's needs and inadequate technology-transfer mechanisms.

B. The main reasons for the "invisibility" of women:

- Lack of knowledge and training about appropriate methodologies;
- Lack of statistics, information, and research on women's roles in forest management;
- Lack of awareness of gender issues on the part of men and women involved in decision-making and policies, and other professionals;
- Lack of female representation in agricultural and forest policy positions;
- Lack of attention to environmental themes by feminists in Central America; and
- The feminization of poverty under the prevalent neoliberal development model.

C. Structural obstacles to women's participation in forest and natural resource management:

- Inadequate distribution of land;
- Extreme poverty of rural women;
- Lack of credit, access to markets, jobs, and capital;
- Illiteracy and lack of educational opportunities;
- Poor organization of basic services for production;
- Customs, traditions, and patriarchal ideology;
- Violence affecting women;
- Lack of gender awareness and undervaluation of women; and
- Socially-assigned role of women in domestic work.

Box 4: Priority Strategic Recommendations (Identified in Regional Workshop, 1993)

- Unify criteria about how a gender perspective can be used for forestry projects and define clear objectives and actions;
- Identify concrete actions in all institutions to enable women to gain access to and control of resources;
- Strengthen national advisory groups to find strategies for integrating women into national and regional plans and policies and to implement recommendations;
- Train planners and professionals (both men and women) in gender analysis and incorporate it into project development;
- Carry out studies to prove and quantify women's roles in agroforestry and their labor in the forest-related activities.

Once these recommendations were presented, each country team and the PAF-Maya representatives stated their own priorities and the national PAFT coordinators expressed their support and concerns. The national-level team recommendations were similar, but more detailed. All groups identified training as a high priority.

C. Follow-up Steps

As follow-up to this workshop, the National Gender Advisory Groups were consolidated and more formally established. They also continued meeting with forest policy coordinators. Moreover, the insights and moral support gained through this workshop built up the participants' capacities to work in field-level grassroots projects. Four months later, the regional Gender Advisory group that organized the workshop began a comprehensive program in the region to implement the workshop recommendations and to apply the ideas and principles that were learned. The main objectives and activities are to:

- 1) Create national and regional mechanisms and policies that permit Central American women to participate in and benefit from forest development and management in the region.

To this end, national meetings are being held to establish a regulatory and organizational framework sensitive to gender in forest policy, and gender training is being undertaken in each country for people involved in forest policy issues.

- 2) Develop participatory research within the National Advisory groups, including a methodology for evaluating programs and projects of forestry development in terms of gender relations.

Workshops are being initiated on participatory methods to unify the approaches to be used in research and development efforts. Case studies of forest programs will be undertaken to elucidate gender dimensions, to help project officers, technicians, and researchers

understand how gender can be better integrated into forest projects.

- 3) Establish and implement information systems on forest projects and programs, disaggregated by gender, for use in planning.

National workshops will be held to design and develop national inventories on projects, focusing on gender-related baseline data, conduct inventories, undertake a regional synthesis, and disseminate the results of the inventories.

- 4) Promote the adoption of methodological tools for analyzing gender in selected forestry programs in each country.

Activities in this area include gender training for technicians and national advisory groups (including men and women) on practical methodologies for addressing gender concerns.

These initiatives, undertaken from 1993 through 1995, are being supported by donor agencies and foundations. The national teams have been making progress in these areas, thanks partly to regionally-coordinated efforts. Successful training workshops on gender analysis in forestry have been undertaken through the regional and national consultative groups. Based on field experiences, the first methodological manual of the guidelines for integrating women in forestry projects was developed. The National Consultative groups are also expanding their influence, beginning to integrate professional women as decision-makers into the natural resource sector and in state institutions. Such activities are contributing more broadly to empowerment for women in this sector, socially and politically, and are building toward gender equity that benefits society overall.

RETROSPECTIVE REFLECTIONS: OPPORTUNITIES, WEAKNESSES, AND LESSONS

A. Why Women Make a Difference

These efforts to integrate women into forest planning and policies shed light on two important questions: What do women add to forest management planning and programs? And are their contributions distinct from those of men? These initiatives, like other recent studies concerning gender and natural resources, show that women have unique insights and roles in this field, which can broaden and complement the perspectives of men. They also show that women can make important contributions in planning, decision-making, and program development on forest resources. Despite the heavy constraints they face in this field, the Central American women involved in these activities are remarkably dedicated to improving social and environmental conditions. It is also logical and effective to include, rather than exclude, one half of the human population in such important efforts for change. Moreover, the women from local communities are actively involved in forest resource management, as noted previously, so they have first-hand knowledge and experience that not only

contribute to forest management and policy-formulation, but also have wider social value for promoting sustainable and equitable development patterns.

Although some men clearly share these perspectives and experiences, studies find that generally male decision-makers interests are different than those of poor women in relation to natural resources.³⁴ They are, for instance, usually less concerned than women about alleviating the burden of collecting fuelwood, largely because of the gender division of labor in the management of woodfuel. Women's contributions in planning for sustainable resources management thus complement and supplement those of men.

B. Remaining Challenges

Several challenges remain in these efforts. Four factors in particular stand out:

1) *Integration Rather than Segregation*

Women and men often remain segregated in these initiatives concerning gender. In the workshops in Nicaragua, for example, the two groups (Gender Advisory and Nicaragua PAFT) were separate in many ways. Participants in the gender workshop were 90 percent female, while the PAFT-Nicaragua Roundtable held simultaneously was 90 percent male. Important gender-related issues rarely surfaced in the roundtable sessions. The interaction between the groups occurred only when women representatives presented a short synopsis of recommendations during the roundtable and when the national PAFT coordinators participated in the final session of the gender workshop. In short, the women remained somewhat marginalized in early policy discussions in this context, as in many similar situations.

In these Central American activities, segregation seems to reflect common socialized gender roles and organizational patterns, rather than animosity or antagonism. Although it is sometimes valuable for women to have separate activities and their own meetings to build solidarity and identify priorities as women, this kind of policy-related event is often more fruitful when men are more fully involved. Likewise, the typically male-dominated groups and discussions on forest management can be improved if women are involved. At any rate, the women and men involved in these activities are now addressing this issue and are attempting to avoid segregation in gender and forestry discussions.

2) *Learning from and Collaborating with Other Experiences*

Participants in these forestry initiatives need to take fuller advantage of the experiences of other women's groups in natural resource management in Central America. They would benefit greatly by interacting with and learning from other women working on sustainable agriculture and the environment in the region. A few other groups and networks working on similar topics have emerged in

Central America, but collaboration among such groups has been minimal. More substantial cooperation among these groups will help them progress together—building strength in numbers, avoiding duplicative efforts, and learning from each others' mistakes and successes. Similarly, the women in this group can learn from other groups that have worked on integrating marginalized people into forestry policies. In particular, the significant experience of PAFT-Maya could provide insights about how their group has become involved in forest policy-making and planning. It would be useful to build opportunities to integrate the Maya group's ideas about their advances and struggles. Although this effort is distinct in many ways, it provides some relevant lessons for strategies in dealing with forest policy.

3) *Diversifying Representation*

The participants in policy-level workshops, like the ones described here, usually consist of women professionals who are coordinators and technical advisors in both governmental and non-governmental organizations. Often, rural women from the grassroots are excluded. At least a few grassroots women leaders should be included in such forums to expand the diversity of classes and backgrounds represented, directly incorporate perspectives on local realities, and enable local women to increase their own capacities and confidence.

4) *Moving from Abstraction to Policy Action and Empowerment*

Many of the recommendations and suggested policy changes in these forums have been articulated in very broad terms. Although this level of generality allowed participants flexibility and enabled them to address broad issues, most of them were somewhat abstract and a few lacked clarity. Indeed, decision-makers unfamiliar with such terms as "gender analysis" may be suspicious about the idea and need more clarification. Now, these Central American groups are moving increasingly toward more specific and concrete policy recommendations and actions—ranging from forestry courses to legal reforms in the forest sector, training in participatory methods, and involvement in political decision-making on forest laws. These changes toward more definitive policy changes will help build gender equity, and women's opportunities and empowerment in forest management and in wider resource planning.

5) *Economic and Structural Changes*

Poverty and cultural obstacles continue to impede women's participation in forestry and agricultural efforts, especially for those in poor and isolated rural areas. Making changes in such deeply-entrenched constraints may go beyond the capacities of these particular women in Central America; yet, efforts are needed at a macroeconomic level, by governments and donor agencies, to improve attention to those who are marginalized, particularly to provide equitable opportunities in education, in tenure and credit policies, and in employment in resource sectors.

C. Lessons for the Future and for Other Regions

Further challenges lie ahead. Although the experience of women in Central America is unique and they show considerable potential, making progress is not easy. Traditional gender biases and discrimination in professional forestry and in policy decision-making, among other constraints, cannot be broken down easily. Support for professional women in forestry goes against many conventional gender stereotypes. However, it is encouraging to see increasing awareness in this region that the full participation of women is crucial to sustainable resource management. Whether this awareness can translate into action remains to be seen.

This experience from Central America offers lessons that are transferable to other areas of the world. Efforts are

needed to develop similar kinds of gender advisory groups in forest policy processes and forums in other countries and regions. NGOs, donors, and governments alike should encourage these initiatives to expand peoples' participation in forest policy-making. Likewise, women and men involved in grassroots forestry around the world should pursue opportunities to incorporate their concerns in planning and decision-making, following the innovative example set in Central America. These steps toward integrating women in natural resource initiatives open up important opportunities and they will generate multi-dimensional benefits by promoting social justice and sustainable development goals.

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