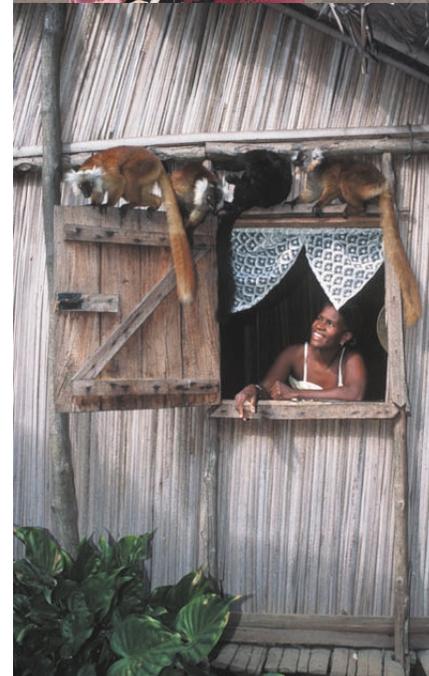


Gender Makes the Difference

- Across the globe, women predominate as wild plant gatherers, home gardeners and plant domesticators, herbalists and seed custodians.
- Research on 60 home gardens in Thailand revealed 230 different species, many of which had been rescued by women from neighboring forests before being cleared.
- Women in different regions of Latin America, Asia and Africa manage the interface between wild and domesticated species of edible plants. This role dates back to 15,000-19,000 B.C.
- Women and men often have different knowledge about, and preferences for, plants and animals. For example, women's criteria for choosing certain food crop seeds may include cooking time, meal quality, taste, resistance to bird damage and ease of collection, processing, preservation and storage. Men are more likely to consider yield, suitability for a range of soil types and ease of storage. Both are essential for human welfare.
- In a study in Sierra Leona, women could name 31 uses of trees on fallow land and in the forest, while men named eight different uses. This shows how men and women have distinct realms of knowledge and application for natural resource management, both of which are necessary for sustainable use and conservation.
- Women provide close to 80% of the total wild vegetable food collected in 135 different subsistence-based societies. Women often have specialized knowledge about "neglected" species.
- The majority of plant biodiversity research is not gender sensitive. This has led to incomplete or erroneous scientific results with respect to the diversity, characteristics and uses of plants, and the causes and potential responses to genetic erosion. Integrating women's traditional knowledge into botanical and ethnobotanical research, and protecting all informants' rights, are critical for improved knowledge and management.
- The language used by the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Bonn Guidelines to address subjects related to indigenous and local communities is not gender-sensitive.



In spite of the fact that an increasing number of experiences are highlighting the sustainable manner in which women use biological diversity, it is often true that women do so without equitable participation in the access and control of such resources. There is a tendency to ignore the natural spaces predominantly used by women in favor of those used by men, and to undervalue non-commercial (mostly female) production spaces in favor of commercial (mostly male) production spaces.

Therefore, it is necessary to make **visible** the gender-differentiated practices and knowledge of women and men in their relations with biodiversity resources. Despite considerable efforts over the past fifteen years at national and international fora, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, very little progress has been made in understanding the fundamental roles that women play in managing and conserving biodiversity. It is essential to recognize that women and men have particular needs, interests and aspirations, and that they make different contributions to the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity.

Making visible the various roles women play in biodiversity conservation, sustainable use of resources and survival of the human species is only the beginning.

FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:

IUCN-Gender and Environment
www.genderandenvironment.org

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
www.fao.org

Gender and Agrobiodiversity
www.fao.org/sd/links/gelibio.htm

Gender and Natural Resource Management
www.fao.org/sd/nrm.htm

Diversity Makes the Difference: Actions to Guarantee Gender Equity in the Application of the Convention on Biological Diversity
www.generoyambiente.org/ES/publicaciones_iucn/biodiversity/modulebiodiversity.htm

Gender and community conservation
www.usaid.gov

International Development Research Center
www.idrc.ca/books/

Women and biodiversity
www.igc.org

UNEP
<http://mirror.unep.org/>

State of the World 2003
www.worldwatch.org

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www.latam.ufl.edu/publications/index.html

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These roles should be **valued** in their broader scope. Special attention should be given to the significance of women's ancestral knowledge of biodiversity and the innovations generated by both men and women in adapting and sharing traditional practices for improved management within their own and other communities.

Recognizing and valuing women's knowledge and practices related to biodiversity helps us to understand the crucial step of **effective participation** for women in decision-making for biodiversity conservation. Making women's decision-making role meaningful requires us to actively overcome gender inequalities at all levels, from the local to the global. Biodiversity conservation is enhanced by empowering women to participate as equals in information sharing and generation, education and training, technology transfer, organizational development, financial assistance and policy development. The exclusion of women as agents of development means ignoring half of the planet's population, which, in turn, affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the conservation of biodiversity.

WHY GENDER MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN BIODIVERSITY INITIATIVES

- More diverse information on the management and ecology of plants is garnered when gendered, traditional knowledge is incorporated in basic research, ethnobotany and other studies. In Uttar Pradesh, men primarily use forest plants for fodder and mulch for agriculture. Women's uses are more related to household applications (for example, medicines, tonics, cleansers, fiber, food and tools). Elsewhere, women's criteria reflect the diverse ways in which they use plant materials (e.g., food, nutrition and culinary preferences, thatch, mat-making, fodder, fuel, leaves). In addition, women's knowledge about "neglected" species has been tapped.
- Improved land tenure for women can support biodiversity. Women's secure access, to land for agriculture and home-sites leads to greater on-farm habitat protection of existing biodiversity and exploration of improved varieties.
- Equitable access to agricultural resources and inputs can support biodiversity conservation by intensifying production on already cleared land and reducing encroachment into fragile areas. Both women and men working with plants and animals need credit, technical support and extension services in order to mitigate or reduce potentially harmful practices such as slash-and-burn agriculture and short-term fallow rotation.
- A gender approach brings innovation and participatory approaches to biodiversity research. For example, by studying women's recipes, one can see the changes in available resources over time and by season.
- Biodiversity research and program decisions have included broader and more diverse perspectives at local, national and regional levels, and have better reflected women's constraints, needs and preferences (such as access to land and other natural resources, land use, conflict resolution, household food security during difficult economic and climatic conditions).
- Recognizing the importance of the knowledge possessed by women, including use, rights and needs regarding local plant biodiversity, would help to reach several objectives of the Convention on Biodiversity, which seeks the sustainable use of biodiversity components and fair and equitable distribution of the benefits derived from its utilization.
- With a gender perspective, intellectual property regimes would consider women's roles and could promote a more equitable distribution of the benefits derived from biodiversity and its genetic resources.
- Some countries are taking advantage of their compliance with the Convention on Biological Diversity's provisions to create policies and legislation that safeguard the human rights of men and women, as well as indigenous and local communities. This is a great opportunity to achieve equality and equity between men and women in their access to resources, control of their traditional knowledge, and benefits from sound management and participation in governance and decision-making.

IN COLLABORATION
WITH THE
COMMUNITY
CONSERVATION
COALITION:

