

Gender

Gender Relations and Biodiversity



Foto: Schütz

What Is Gender (Gender Relations)?

Whereas biological gender ('sex') is genetically determined, social gender is shaped by society. 'Gender' is a sociological concept intended to help us understand the relations between men and women in society. It encompasses the social, economic, and cultural differences that have arisen between men and women in the course of time—both within the same household and between different cultures. These differences are manifested, amongst other things, in differing roles and areas of responsibility, in differing access to resources, differing chances, needs, perceptions, and attitudes on the part of men and women. Hence, 'gender' is not a synonym for the role of woman in society; it takes equal cognizance of men and women, and of their interdependent relations. The structural approach to gender replaces the 1980s development-policy concept of 'Women in Development', which was essentially confined to the promotion of women, particularly in the agricultural sector.

Due to the nature of socio-economic and cultural relations between the sexes, knowledge about biodiversity is often unevenly distributed between them. In developing countries, women often make use of different resources from men, or make different use of the same resources. A typical example is the use and commercial exploitation of trees and forest products: whereas women often gather fruits, medicinal plants, and firewood for immediate use or for sale at local markets, men work in timber production.

Women often have different types and rights of access to resources such as land or marine products – or indeed no access at all, which is often not the case for men. Benefits that accrue from the conservation and sustainable use of genetic resources are unevenly distributed between men and women and do not correspond to their respective inputs. At the same time, men's and women's influence on political goal-setting and decision-making – including as regards the use of biodiversity – differs greatly. Little or no account is taken of women's experience and skills. In developing countries, for example, women are often responsible for the cultivation and propagation of seed, yet all over the world, women are underrepresented as decision-makers in agricultural research. Protected-area management similarly fails to take proper account of gender-relations. This is true both of access to resources in protected areas and of representation within the workforce and in the decision-making bodies of protected-area administration. Women are not trained in sufficient numbers for these kinds of activities.

Gender in the Convention on Biodiversity

The Convention on Biological Diversity recognizes 'the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity' and confirms 'the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation for biological diversity conservation'. And yet neither the decisions of the Conferences of the Parties nor the recommendations of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice (SBSTTA) have taken much account of the significance of gender in the attainment of the convention's objectives.

Contribution of the project 'Implementing the Biodiversity Convention'

The BIODIV Project is helping to speed up implementation of the Biodiversity Convention in development co-operation and promoting the further development of the convention itself and of its various instruments and bodies. As part of the project, developing countries are given assistance in implementing the convention, through individual measures.

In future, BIODIV will pay greater attention to the gender aspect in the implementation of the convention, in line with the German government's policy on gender. Efforts are being made, within the framework of the convention negotiations, to get gender-specific aspects discussed and taken into account in decision-making. Differences in knowledge and practice that are of relevance to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity are being given greater consideration in the conduct of projects.

A project being run in conjunction with the NGO Centro de la Mujer Peruana 'Flora Tristán' in Peru has already adopted a gender-specific approach: analyses are being carried out to see how use of biodiversity and natural resources by male and female small-scale producers differs, and what gender-specific indigenous and local knowledge exists, particularly in the area of food security. In conjunction with the GTZ's Pilot Programme on Gender, the BIO-DIV Project has also drawn up a concept-paper on the integration of gender in the CBD.

Priorities for action

- Given the present scant awareness of gender difference in the Biodiversity Convention, the most urgent task is to sensitize the convention's decision-makers—the great majority of whom are men—to this issue.
- The proportion of women in the delegations that work in the convention's various bodies must be increased.
- The convention's overall goals can only be achieved if gender is taken into account in the implementation of the convention's three aims—conservation, sustainable use, and benefit-sharing—in all relevant thematic and cross-sectoral domains.

Biodiversity and the Convention on Biodiversity

The term "biological diversity", or short "biodiversity", encompasses the diversity of life on earth, ranging from genetic diversity and diversity of species to the diversity of ecosystems. The Convention on Biodiversity adopted in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 comprises three elements: the conservation of biological diversity, its sustainable use and the equitable distribution of benefits arising from its use. In the meantime, 179 countries and the European Union have joined the Convention. By signing the Convention, Germany has agreed not only to conserve biodiversity on its own territory but also to support developing countries in implementing necessary measures.

Projects, plans, and programmes must all reach the correct target-group—in other words, must take account of aspects specific to men and women, and, where necessary, promote women in practical and strategic ways.

- The links between gender relations and the conservation and use of biodiversity must be brought to greater attention through studies and research, so that decisions, projects, and programmes can be designed in ways that ensure they reach their targets.

Further Information

Biodiversity and Gender: A Contribution by the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) Project 'Implementing the Biodiversity Convention', soon available at:
<http://www.gtz.de/biodiv>

Special Session of the General Assembly for the Beijing+5 Review, 5–9 June 2000, New York:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/confer/beijing5>

Preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace – Technical Assistance and Women: From Mainstreaming towards Institutional Accountability:
gopher://gopher.un.org/00/esc/cn6/1995/1995-6.en

FWCW Platform for Action: Women and the Environment:
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/enviro.htm>



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