

2. GENDER DIFFERENCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

Differences and inequalities between the sexes exist in all sections of society and all communities within Africa. Some of these are more directly linked to natural resource use and the environment than others. There can be a wide variation between countries and regions. The following describes some of the more prominent differences and inequities.

2.1 FUELWOOD COLLECTION AND SALE

The collection and use of wood in Africa exemplifies simple gender differences that are heavily embedded in cultural, social and historical contexts. Men dominate collection of large timber for buildings, boats and ploughs. Women and often children are almost exclusively responsible for fuelwood collection. In many areas, due to forest degradation, this now takes up excessive amounts of valuable time that could be used more productively for other activities. In Sudan for example, deforestation in the last decade has led to a quadrupling of women's time spent gathering wood (PRB, 2002).

Where conservation legislation has restricted the collection of natural resources including firewood, both women and men will take large risks to continue unless alternatives are provided or found (Tapia and Flintan, 2002; Abbot and Mace, 1999). In Malawi it was shown that despite patrolling by wildlife authorities and the imposition of penalties or fines, 83.5% of the women who collect wood in the Malawi National Park do so illegally: i.e., without a permit. It was concluded that:

“even with increased patrolling effort or more severe penalties, law enforcement polices alone are unlikely to protect the woodlands because they fail to provide alternative supplies of fuelwood for resident households” (Abbot and Mace, 1999:421).

Though fuelwood is mainly collected for subsistence purposes, it also provides an important source of household income and may be sold in both local rural and more distant urban areas. In Mali it is suggested that such trade is dominated by wealthy women or women from the civil service. They control the trade from the capital and buy or rent new equipment, hire young villagers living in the city to cut trees for one or two weeks and rent trucks to carry the wood to the urban areas for sale (Kanoute, 1990).

Conversely, in Uganda, the fuelwood trade is dominated by established groups of predominantly low-income women who sell the wood outside the local area. They may operate under informal 'licensing arrangements' with local law enforcement officers, and the earnings from their trade may represent a substantial percentage of their income (Blomley, 2001).

Men tend to be solely responsible for charcoal production, though for example, in Zanzibar women can also be involved, particularly in its trade. Charcoal tends to be used by more affluent groups in communities or sold to urban dwellers.

2.2 COLLECTION OF NTFPS

Both men and women collect NTFPs (Non-Timber Forest Products), though women's collection may be seen to be of a lower profile or of less importance than that of men's (Otto and Elbow, 1994). Though women collect predominantly for subsistence purposes, they may also benefit financially

from the exploitation of NTFPs such as fruits and plants used for medicinal purposes or food and can be highly active traders (see 2.6.1). Women tend to collect closer to home than men.

Although this might suggest that women are 'minor' forest users, they may in fact use a high proportion of their labour within the forest. As a labour analysis undertaken in the Mt. Elgon area of Uganda showed, more than 40% of the total household labour time spent within the forest is by women. As a result:

“there is no substantial difference between the intensity of forest use by men and women”
(Scott, 1998).

Such use of forest products (including bark and seeds) will often increase during times of drought (Abuquah, undated). In non-forest areas women will collect other wild foods such as grass seeds, fruits, water lilies, tubers and leafy greens. These may be collected whilst going about other chores or on longer trips which may become something of a social event. The poorest of households tend to make greater use of wild plants, as found in DRC (Tshombe *et al.*, 2000).

Due to women's high use of local plants and flowers, their knowledge of them tends to be thorough. In a survey in Sierra Leone, women proved able to name 31 products that they gathered or made from local flora, while men were able to name only eight. Women in rural areas often use traditional medicine to cure ailments (for example in Mali see Kanoute, 1990 or South Africa see Kepe *et al.*, 2000). They have the charge of gathering necessary ingredients that may be required to prepare and transform roots and leaves into medicine. Elderly women are particularly renowned for their knowledge on natural resources.

The collection of forest products for cultural purposes is dominated by men. For example, in Uganda many of the ceremonies related to circumcision and manhood have very close ties with the forest and these connections are upheld by the males of the community (Scott, 1998). However, this does not prevent culture influencing women's relationship with the environment. For example in the Kakamega District of Kenya there are taboos that prevent married women from planting trees, such as eucalyptus, for the construction of houses. It is said that if a married woman is allowed to plant a tree that will be used for timber, the roots will grow towards the house and overturn it (Mwangi & Houghton, 1993 in Aguilar *et al.*, 2002).

Both women and men are involved in processing natural resources, though it is usually women who provide a greater labour input. For example, in Mali processing shea nuts into butter is an income generating activity exclusively performed by women. The women tend to work cooperatively in groups, because the process requires high input of time and labour (Kanoute, 1990).

Honey production is a major source of revenue for many communities living in and around African forest areas. The production of honey tends to be dominated by men, not least because it usually relies on the collection of honey from hives placed in trees that are physically difficult for women to access. However, it is often women who will sell the honey, through local markets or traders, and in areas where honey production is less physically challenging, women may also be apiculturalists. In Cameroon, for example, women have been trained to plant 'bee trees' on their farms that contribute to a well-established honey trade (Abuquah, undated). In a study of views and perceptions of conservation in the Bale Mountains National Park, Ethiopia, honey production was the only development oriented activity that local women linked with the conservation of resources: the trees were needed to supply flowers for the nectar and for the honey, which was an important source of household income (Flintan, 2000).

2.3 WETLAND AND COASTAL-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Both women and men are involved in wetland and coastal related activities, with gender differences depending on the geographical and social contexts. In most fishing communities in southern Africa, deep water fishing in dugout canoes is usually carried out by men and young boys, while women are heavily involved in the post-harvest activities such as processing and marketing of fish and fish by-products, as well as shell collection and seaweed farming (Flintan, 2001c). A debilitating factor for women's involvement in coastal activities, both from a productive- and conservation-oriented perspective, is that the majority of women cannot swim (Flintan, 2002a).

In Ethiopia, while women's principle interaction with wetlands is in the form of water collection, they also contribute substantially to agricultural production. However, it is often the case that despite this, women's productive contributions go largely unrecognised by local, national and international institutions (Shields, 2001).

2.4 HUNTING

Men dominate the hunting of wild game. In fact a male bias in hunting appears to be a universal feature for most cultures with women, in general, excluded from the activity. The reasons for this differ from culture to culture however. For example, in Guinea a primary reason is that it is believed that women cannot keep secrets and therefore might give away locations of secret hunting grounds (Leach, 1999).

However, women's exclusion is not always the case and the Ituri forest in the DRC provides an example of women's active participation in hunting and enjoyment of the cultural and economic benefits of it. Mbuti communities hunt collectively using nets, and all able bodied members tend to be involved, even children, mothers with infants and the elderly. They all receive an equal share of the benefits (Tshombe *et al.*, 2000). In addition there are examples of women collecting smaller wildlife such as snails (Abruqah, 1998); tortoises, small antelope and monitors in Botswana; and rats in West Africa (Hunter *et al.*, 1990). In addition the collection of mopane worms is common throughout southern Africa.

Bushmeat collection also tends to be dominated by men, and often those who are more affluent. In DRC, for example, it is suggested that the poorest members of the community rarely have access to bushmeat; they do not possess the capital to buy the rifles or snares required to hunt animals, and do not have a sufficient income to purchase meat at the market. On the whole, wealthier households consume and trade in bushmeat and fish much more than poorer households (Tshombe *et al.*, 2000). Protected areas are a major source of such resources.

2.5 CONSTRAINTS ON WOMEN'S TIME

Women are constrained by burdens of housekeeping and raising families, being almost totally responsible for household work and meal preparation. In addition, women's work tends to be consistent all year round, whereas men's peaks and troughs at certain times throughout the agricultural year.

Some African meals require a tremendous preparation time. In areas of Mali for example, local women cook varieties of groundnuts (*tiganikourou*) that are rich in protein, but entail cooking for 10 to 14 hours. These particular meals not only require time but also large quantities of water and

firewood (Kanoute, 1990). In Ethiopia the traditional coffee-making ceremony carried out by women can take up to six hours a day for preparation and serving (two hours per meal-time). However, despite constraints, food preparation does allow them 'time-off' from other activities and usually involves women coming together as a group, providing opportunities for an exchange of information and support (Flintan, 2000).

As such, it is recognised that women may have less time to become involved in conservation and environmental protection processes. Furthermore, the constraints and limits that influence their relationship with the environment may cause them to compromise long-term sustainability for short-term needs.

2.6 DIVISION OF LABOUR

Within Africa, gender still plays a dominant role in defining the roles of men and women and the division of labour. Essentially, men dominate agricultural production, especially that for sale, and women dominate labour activities focussed on the household. In Zimbabwe, it is suggested that gendered divisions of labour have arisen from men's incorporation into wage labour and women's responsibilities for remaining on the land and managing it on a daily and seasonal basis. Such divisions in turn have filtered perceptions of the local landscape and resources and the different relationships that men and women have with them (Moore, 1996a).

In pastoral societies, men are generally responsible for herding the larger livestock such as cattle and camels, while women are responsible for smaller animals such as calves and goats. The sale of animals, charcoal production and marketing, and off-farm employment are generally undertaken by men. Women perform sales of dairy products, firewood and, where necessary, purchase grain for household consumption.

In Muslim societies, traditionally, women are not expected to 'work', that is, beyond their household duties and for economic returns. However, in recent years many societies now acknowledge and support women's role in economically productive activities, though their participation tends to be limited to culturally acceptable roles such as teaching.

2.6.1 Trading Activities

Women often play an active role in trading activities. For example, a study in Cameroon found that 89% of the estimated 1,100 NTFP traders in 25 markets in the Dense Humid Zone were women. Here, a 'Cheftaine' controls the markets. The Cheftaine is a woman, usually elected by the traders from the local area, who is responsible for the smooth running of the market place, including conflict resolution (Ruiz Perez, 1998 in Abbot *et al.* 2000:22). Similarly, in DRC it is suggested that women's participation in the bushmeat trade appears to be greater than that of men. Women are prominent traders in the markets, both at the village level and in supplying urban markets. Extensive observations of people's activities at a Sunday market in a local village suggest that though the market is a social forum for men, it is more of a commercial centre for women; while the men congregate at the periphery of the market, women manage most of the stalls (Tshombe *et al.*, 2000).

A study in South Africa concludes that the women involved in such activities tend to share certain similarities: they are usually *de facto* heads of their households for various reasons; tend to be stronger, more active and to have young children. They are willing, or in a position to travel to, distant markets to sell their products. But for most of these women, the heavy labour and time demands of their trade increases the burden imposed by their domestic duties (Kepe *et al.* 2000).

Other trade activities that women are becoming increasingly involved in are beer production, bread baking and small grocery sales (Flintan, 2001c; Flintan, 2000). Many of these can be carried out from home or in conjunction with other commitments and tasks. It is more likely that poorer women, often widowed or unmarried, also do jobs like weeding, house cleaning and so forth for cash or food, whilst also being dependent on support from kin.

In Tanzania it is suggested that economic hardships have led to changes in gender roles particularly in those areas close to cities or towns. Women, particularly those who are single (see Box 2.1) are increasingly expanding their roles, away from traditional domestic activities to income-generating activities such as exploitation and sale of forest products, casual labour and petty business. In some cases men may be gradually taking up activities which have traditionally been the domain of women (Monela *et al.*, 2000). The position women face is by no means uniform, and their ability to negotiate access to the resources they seek depends on social contacts, economic power and their capacity to gain political support.

Box 2.1 Socio-Economic Divisions In Petty Business Trading.

A study of the use of *miombo* woodlands in Tanzania showed that petty business trade is very much influenced by socio-economic factors. Education, marital status, area of land and sex were found to be strongly correlated with petty business. While only 65% of respondents were married, a strong relationship was observed between marital status and petty business. Single (unmarried, divorced, widowed or separated) women were more often left alone with their children and thus increasingly faced economic and other pressures that lead them to engage in petty business.

(Monela *et al.*, 2000)

2.7 DECISION MAKING PROCESSES AND POWER DYNAMICS

Women's share of decision-making power at both macro and micro levels remains low: it is dominated by men. Traditionally they have had little role in decision-making processes, particularly at the community level. Women are compromised by a power structure, which in rural communities is heavily biased in favour of the male. Women may be farmers, but they are rarely field managers. This is particularly true in Islamic regions where culture and religion often deny women participation in public life (NCF & WWF-UK, 1998; Otto and Elbow, 1994; Flintan, 2000; 2001b).

A question often raised is the extent to which cultural and social inequities should be influenced or encouraged to change. Even where equitable participation is a given objective, culture can compromise the situation. For example at a meeting for a CBNRM project in Namibia all the women attending the meeting were physically excluded from participating and obliged to sit outside the shelter in which the meeting was being held. This was justified by the meeting organisers – the Ministry of Tourism – on the strength that they were working within the constraints of the traditional male leadership. As suggested:

“this is somewhat ironic given that the whole purpose of the meeting was to try and begin a process of new institution-building, enabling better representation and participation in the decentralisation of decision-making power” (Sullivan, 1999:16).

Although women are most active in the household they still do not tend to control household resources, particularly cash transactions. In addition, some men have undermined women's use of resources as they have attempted to increase participation in the cash economy.

Indeed, though women may be strong traders in commodities such as bush meat it is unclear whether women benefit from the distribution of market profits. This point is raised by MacGaffey (1991), who suggests that Congolese commercial society, for example, is exceptionally male biased. The bias is enshrined in the Family Code of DRC (Decret 87-010), which states that a wife must relinquish her belongings to her husband if he can show that her ownership of assets '*portent atteinte à l'harmonie et aux intérêts pécuniaires du ménage*' [goes against the household's harmony and monetary interests]. In practice, this gives men the legal basis to control their wives' assets. So while women may have a prominent role in the trading of bushmeat commodities, they comprise a small minority who are tied into highly restrictive client-patron relationships with male military officers or high ranking administrators as well as inequitable arrangements with their husbands (Tshombe *et al*, 2000).

Box 2.2 Mountain Societies Have a Higher Level of Gender Equality.

In mountain societies there is generally a higher degree of gender equality. Life is harsh, intensified by altitude, steep terrain and isolation. Men and women support each other to overcome the constraints. In Uganda for example, the nature of guiding and portering work takes the men away from their farms and families, yet the women still welcome the opportunities it brings. The women perceive that on the mountain the men cannot drink, and in the words of one guide:

"I wouldn't befriend a tourist woman, don't know her history in America...not going to stray from the path, unlike traders going to other towns."

(Scott, 1998).

2.8 LAND AND LAND TENURE INEQUITIES

Gender inequality in access to land is widespread. Many African societies, regardless of whether they are patrilineal or matrilineal, confer only secondary, usufruct rights in descent group land to women. Women are normally entitled to cultivate land controlled by their husband's lineages, but not to alienate or inherit it.

In Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso and Cameroon, for example, women have the legal right to 'own' land and trees (PRB, 2002; FSS, CEF & University of Sussex, undated), and in Niger to own cattle (Otto and Elbow, 1994) but, in practice, men control nearly all of the property and women only have use rights. Indeed, in Zimbabwe since 1994 women do not have the right to communal land (Gambill, 1999). And in general, tree planting by secondary rights users such as women is not encouraged as it is a widely recognised way in which a land user may stake a long term claim to land. In Cameroon for example, some men will only allow women to plant short-lived trees, such as papaya, to prevent women from gaining land tenure.

Because land tenure is not secure, women have little incentive to invest in conservation practices. In Zimbabwe, researchers found that women are also significantly less likely to plant trees for food, medicine and fuelwood in areas where future access is uncertain. Restrictions on women's land rights hinder their ability to access other resources and information. Unable to use land as collateral to obtain loans, women have difficulty in adopting new technology and hiring labour when needed (PRB, 2002).

In Kenya men reserve the right to make final decisions about how the land is used. A woman must therefore secure the approval of her husband before she can build a terrace to conserve the soil. Situations have been encountered where this approval was not given, and despite the woman's better judgement and understanding of the problem she was powerless to act (Mwanduka and Thampy, 1995).

Another example of how women's relationship with land is controlled by external factors is given in Box 2.3. Here, in Kaerezi, Zimbabwe, the production of *tjenja* by local women hinged on access to cultivable plots. This access was mediated neither by patriarchal nor state conceptions of land rights, but by the women defending their rightful inheritance to 'free cultivation' (*kurima madiro*) without intervention from state officials or conservation regulations. Many still recalled the 'suffering for the land' (*kutambudzikira nyika*) during the 1972 evictions from Gaeresi Ranch when women were beaten by police and stripped of their clothes (Moore, 1996a).

Box 2.3 External Factors Affecting Women's Relationship with Land.

In Kaerezi, Zimbabwe, married women have to contend both with patrilineal notions of land rights and a state policy of allocating permits within resettlement schemes to male household heads. Women here cultivate one crop in particular: *tjenja* (*Coleus esculentus*). It is usually grown outside of the fields allocated to 'households' because resettlement is officially prohibited in the scheme, ostensibly because the crop is thought to poison the soil and erode steep slopes. Its cultivation also challenges the Government's ordered pattern of regulated land use. Despite these 'restrictions', in practice cultivation of *tjenja* is widely tolerated.

Cash from selling the crop, more than from any other marketable produce, is most likely to be subject to women's discretion within their household budgets. It is therefore an important source of relatively autonomous cash income in an area where few women engage in formal wage labour, and improves their bargaining position within the 'conjugal contract' through which household economic decisions and provisioning responsibilities are negotiated. Women feared that the establishment of a protected area close by would encourage greater attention to land-use prohibitions elsewhere in Kaerezi, endangering their *tjenja* fields.

(Moore, 1996a).

In many parts of Africa as competition for land has increased, migration of male members of the household to urban areas to find work has grown. For example, in Zimbabwe research reveals that the labour force in the Communal Areas is heavily female-based with as many as 32% of males spending less than three months at home per year (Patel, 1998). This can lead to specific problems for women. For example, in Ethiopia women are often 'encouraged' to give up their land or enter into sharecropping arrangements (FSS, CEF & University of Sussex, undated). In Ghana it is suggested that, due to the lack of male labour for clearing thick bush, longer cropping rotations occur on land that should have been left fallow after one or two years. As a result, land fertility and yields decline and soil erosion increases (PRB, 2002).

A number of other factors constrain women's productive use of land. Often women do not have access to inputs or tools, for reasons of lack of money, market access and credit. Time pressures are also important.

2.9 LACK OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND HEALTH

Women, more than men, suffer from poor health and a lack of education. The amount of physical tasks expected of the women exacerbates this poor health. In addition, women bear children early and often have no access to antenatal care. Heavy workloads often make education impossible and when it is available, it is usually offered to males first.

In Gashaka-Gumti NP, Nigeria, a correlation was found between health status and educational level, and the continuing illiteracy in Park villages is thus considered a serious limiting factor in improvement of health status (Nadia McDonald, 1994).

2.10 COOPERATIVES AND MOBILISATION

Women tend to be keener than men to form cooperatives and self-mobilise as a group to share responsibilities, provide support, and perhaps to initiate change. Women have seen the advantage of 'group power'. They will often attend meetings *en masse* and sit together in a group where they feel less vulnerable and supported by the presence of their contemporaries. Single women, particularly those divorced or widowed, tend to be more mobile, confident and able to participate in activities.

In many countries there are strong networks of women's groups or 'self-help' groups or government-supported Women's Associations (for examples: in Nigeria see McDonald, 1994; Zanzibar see Flintan, 2001b; and Ethiopia see Flintan, 2000). In Ethiopia there has been an extensive growth in the 'self-help' groups (*iddir*) throughout the country. The groups provide their members with support in times of need, such as weddings and funerals. Though they offer great opportunities as a foundation for more formal institutions that could be involved in conservation activities and provide 'space' for a focus on women's interests and needs, their contribution has yet to be recognised and utilised.

Such groups are often of an informal nature and may not be readily visible. However, they can provide a strong basis on which to build stronger cooperation and a good entry point for mobilising women into more formal or active institutions.