



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



2010
International
Year of Biodiversity

Gender Dimensions



of Biodiversity



UNESCO International Year of Biodiversity
Science-Policy Conference
UNESCO Headquarters - Paris, France - 27 January 2010



Acknowledgement:

Special thanks to Mr. Salvatore Arico and Ms Ana Persic (SC/EES) and Ms Dominique LaRochelle (ODG/GE) for their contributions to the planning and organisation of this Round Table on the Gender Dimensions of Biodiversity.

S. Gülser Corat
Director, Division for Gender Equality
Office of the Director-General
UNESCO

Published by
UNESCO
Division for Gender Equality
Office of the Director-General
7, place de Fontenoy
75007 Paris, France
Tel.: 33 (0)1 45 68 16 54
Fax: 33 (0)1 45 68 55 58
Email: gender.equality@unesco.org

© UNESCO 2010

Photo credits © UNESCO/D. LaRochelle

Composed and printed by UNESCO
ODG-2010/WS/4 CLD 3040.10



Background

In the development and environmental discourse, it is increasingly acknowledged that the incorporation of gendered knowledge and practices is not only relevant but essential for sustainable development. In particular, the gendered division of labour has resulted in women and men in many societies having different roles and knowledge related to biodiversity within their communities. However, while women are increasingly seen as embodying specific biodiversity knowledge and although an increasing number of experiences highlight the sustainable manner in which women use biodiversity, their role in biodiversity management and decision-making process is often ignored.

It is thus imperative to raise awareness of the gender-differentiated practices and knowledge related to biological resources. It is essential to recognize that women and men have specific needs, interests and aspirations, and that they make different contributions to the conservation and sustainable management of biodiversity.

This Round Table, organized within the framework of the UNESCO International Year of Biodiversity Science-Policy Conference, was therefore intended to demonstrate why the pivotal role of gender in addressing biodiversity challenges merits special consideration in the formulation of conservation policies, strategies, and projects at all levels.

Conveners

UNESCO – Division for Gender Equality, Office of the Director-General and Division of Ecological and Earth Sciences, Natural Sciences Sector.

Panelists

The session was chaired and moderated by Ms S. Gülser Corat, Director of the Division for Gender Equality, Office of the Director-General. The panelists were:

Ms Lorena Aguilar, International Union for Conservation of Nature, Costa Rica

Dr. Stephen Wooten, Department of Anthropology, University of Oregon, USA

Ms Rosalie Ouoba, Support Network for Women from Rural Areas in West Africa and Chad, Burkina Faso



In the area of biodiversity, UNESCO's Gender Equality Action Plan notably states that "gender-responsive approaches to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development will be fostered through the promotion of effective participation of women in decision-making processes".

Opening Remarks

Ms S. Gülser Corat,

Director of the Division for Gender Equality, Office of the Director-General, UNESCO

Gender equality is an integral part of UNESCO's work. Gender Equality was designated as one of UNESCO's two global priorities in the Organization's Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013 and a UNESCO-wide "Gender Equality Action Plan for 2008-2013" was adopted by its Governing bodies.

In the area of biodiversity, UNESCO's Gender Equality Action Plan notably states that "gender-responsive approaches to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development will be fostered through the promotion of effective participation of women in decision-making processes". It also notes that the "value of indigenous and local knowledge held by women will be highlighted and showcased, with particular reference to natural disaster preparedness and response, biodiversity conservation and climate change".

Organized within the framework of the UNESCO International Year of Biodiversity Science-Policy Conference,

the session on the gender dimensions of biodiversity sought to build on this commitment to address the equal participation and inclusion of women in all biodiversity-related activities and processes. It also aimed at working towards a better recognition of the role of women in biodiversity management and decision-making process.

Ms Corat noted that in addition to being the International Year of Biodiversity, 2010 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing. The Beijing Conference adopted the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action, which, to date, remain the most comprehensive framework for achieving gender equality. This session, therefore, offered a timely opportunity to look at the progress realized in the Beijing Platform for Action's Strategic objective K.1, which calls for an increased active involvement of women in environmental decision-making at all levels.



Knowledge and Roles – Diversity Matters

Ms Lorena Aguilar,
International Union for Conservation of Nature, Costa Rica

What if women are not involved in biodiversity?

Do women not use biodiversity?

Do women and men possess the same knowledge of biodiversity?

Do women have the same access to biodiversity as men, are there no inequalities?

The answer to these questions is a resolute “no”.

For the last twenty years, there has been an ongoing debate about the role of women in biodiversity. Upon taking the floor, Ms Aguilar asked the following questions: What if women are not involved in biodiversity? Do women not use biodiversity? Do women and men possess the same knowledge of biodiversity? Do women have the same access to biodiversity as men, are there no inequalities? The answer to these questions is a resolute “no”. Women frequently interact with and respond to biodiversity in unique gender-specific ways, often in settings where their access to land is limited because of their gender.

Ms Aguilar then asked: “What is the added value of mainstreaming gender in biodiversity initiatives?” She suggested that there are at least eight benefits that explain the value of mainstreaming gender in biodiversity initiatives: (i) gender mainstreaming increases efficiency and effectiveness; (ii) ensures the incorporation of important knowledge, skills and experiences; (iii) enhances sustainability; (iv) improves

credibility and accountability; (v) contributes to combat poverty; (vi) guarantees compliance with human rights standards; (vii) promotes social justice; and (viii) prevents perpetuation of gender inequalities.

Ms Aguilar then highlighted the need to address the gap in communication and understanding between the environmental sector and women’s groups, as each possesses valuable information and expertise that the other has no or little knowledge of. She emphasized that collaboration needs to be encouraged. Ms Aguilar suggested that if this harmonisation process can be created, then the results could help achieve the goals of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and have positive implications for climate change research, poverty reduction and food security. Ms Aguilar concluded her presentation by saying that women from the world are asking to be part of the solution and not the victims of deficient decisions so they have to be actively involved in decision-making processes.



The Role of Gender in Agrobiodiversity and Food Security

Dr. Stephen Wooten,

Departments of International Studies & Anthropology, University of Oregon, USA

Using an anthropological and ethnographic perspective on biodiversity, Dr. Wooten highlighted how gender influences people-plant relationships in a specific rural agricultural setting, and how commercialization affects the role of women in crop production and diminishes biodiversity.

Professor Wooten's presentation on the Bamana social world and agrobiodiversity illustrated how gender interdependence is under threat from commercialization of non-native plants and crops, and how women in this West African society often bear the brunt of this social change. Using an anthropological and ethnographic perspective on biodiversity, Dr. Wooten highlighted how gender influences people-plant relationships in a specific rural agricultural setting, and how commercialization affects the role of women in crop production and diminishes biodiversity.

Traditionally, the social world of the Bamana people in Mali divided agricultural work and land use along distinct gender lines: Bamana women worked the low land areas to produce nafenw or sauce crops, while the men grew grain crops in the upland areas. Men and women, though not necessarily considered equal, lived for many generations in a state of "complementary interdependence" based on the gender division of mutually beneficiary agricultural tasks.

The commercialization of the Bamana kitchen gardens has meant a shift away from traditional food production of locally adapted crops destined for local consumption towards production of exotic crops for the consumer market. More and more gardens are needed to

produce larger quantities and varieties of non-domestic crops. To facilitate this expansion men use their privileged social position to claim land that was traditionally used by women. As a consequence of this displacement, women's interdependent, complementary agricultural role is transformed into a dependent existence in a culture of male-dominated commercial agricultural production. Furthermore, in terms of biodiversity, women are no longer able to sustain, grow and preserve a wide variety of local plants and seeds as land is now allocated to exotic crops. This shift has resulted in biodiversity loss in the community.

Professor Wooten suggested that this case study is just one local example of a global pattern of gender-based risk to biodiversity and its direct impact upon a community. Similar studies of gendered knowledge and resources in local contexts can help illuminate specific biodiversity threats through the lens of local culture and local people. In conclusion, Dr. Wooten suggested that collaboration between a purely scientific approach and a social science approach can be part of a solution to this issue as an interdisciplinary approach can help create informed understandings of local gender relations and cultural dynamics that can help mitigate the loss of important plant resources and knowledge.



The Work of the Civil Society in the Field of Gender Equality and Biodiversity

Ms Rosalie Ouoba,

Support Network for Women from Rural Areas in West Africa and Chad, Burkina Faso

From this experience Ms Ouoba suggested that it is the duty of the international community to ensure that rural women are directly involved in the implementation of the Beijing decisions and that rural women are trained and supported so they are able to fully participate in local, national and international processes in the future.

Ms Ouoba introduced the *Support Network for Women from Rural Areas in West Africa and Chad* by explaining where and why the network has been created. After participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, Ms Ouoba realized that women from rural areas were not very well represented, but that many decisions directly impacting their lives had been reached on their behalf without any consultation with them. From this experience Ms Ouoba suggested that it is the duty of the international community to ensure that rural women are directly involved in the implementation of the Beijing decisions and that rural women are trained and supported so they are able to fully participate in local, national and international processes in the future.

The aim of the *Support Network for Women from Rural Areas in West Africa and Chad* is to develop the capacity of rural women through the creation of networks and associations which encourage women to discuss, train and communicate on a variety of biodiversity issues - from rural agricultural land use and community gender politics to using information communication technologies (ICT) - to

enhance their existing capabilities through global knowledge sharing. The Network's goal is to create solidarity between rural women all over West Africa and Chad, and in doing so, to create an open dialogue to share knowledge and skills whilst enhancing women's self-confidence, awareness of gender equality issues and their ability to become involved in decision-making at all levels.

Ms Ouoba suggested that the achievements of the network are apparent in the changed attitudes of women who are more self-confident, more involved in decision-making within their communities and implementing more diverse agricultural methods and using improved agricultural technology. The networks have also given the rural women the opportunity to become involved in other activities, such as study trips, regional meetings and further ICT training programmes. The use of these networks has enhanced the communication and solidarity between rural women. In doing so, women have been encouraged to learn and use sustainable biodiversity approaches to agriculture in their own communities which in turn has improved their self-confidence.

Discussion/Q&A with the Audience

The key points emerging from the discussion focused on the following:

➤ The 2010 International Year of Biodiversity offers a great opportunity to better explore and understand the relationship between biodiversity and gender dynamics and this opportunity should not be missed.

➤ The gender dimensions of biodiversity-related research raised in the session are indeed important, but further discussion should be initiated on whether the perspective and the gender of researchers themselves have an influence on the type of information given by women in rural agricultural communities, and how this could impact on subsequent follow-up and follow-through.



➤ The discrepancy between the high number of men and the low number of women involved in biodiversity at the policy-making level needs to be addressed if gender equality in biodiversity is to be achieved.

Closing Remarks

In closing the session, Ms Corat reflected on the various gender dynamics of biodiversity. She thanked the panelists for offering their rich and different perspectives that ranged from an in-depth explanation of the linkages



between biodiversity and gender dynamics to a very interesting case study on gender and biodiversity's reaction to globalization and commerce, and finally an exploration of the positive effects of a gender equality and biodiversity programme in action. Ms Corat concluded that the key element common in all three presentations was an emphasis on the importance of including women in decision-making.

Extract from the “Statement and Recommendations” adopted at the UNESCO International Year of Biodiversity Science-Policy Conference

(UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, 25-29 January 2010)

Biodiversity and gender

The gendered division of labour has resulted in women and men in many societies having distinct forms of traditional knowledge related to biodiversity. Women are increasingly seen as embodying specific biodiversity knowledge, and there are many examples of the sustainable manner in which women use biodiversity. Nevertheless, their role in biodiversity management and decision-making process is often ignored.

To ensure the equal participation of women and women’s organizations in decision-making processes related to biodiversity, the Conference recommends that:

- Special consideration is given to the pivotal role of gender in addressing biodiversity challenges, notably in the formulation of conservation policies, strategies, and projects at all levels;
- The Gender Plan of Action of the CBD is fully implemented;
- Appropriate measures are taken to ensure that gender equality is mainstreamed in the actions, activities and initiatives conducted under the CBD;
- National capacities are developed to facilitate the understanding of the importance of including gender issues in biodiversity initiatives;
- Appropriate measures are taken to guarantee that the benefits derived from access to and use of biodiversity resources are equitably distributed between women and men.

Full document available at:

<http://www.unesco.org/mab/doc/iyb/recommendations.pdf>



2010 International Year of Biodiversity

Biodiversity is life
Biodiversity is our life



The Division for Gender Equality

UNESCO's commitment to promote gender equality and women's empowerment is facilitated by the Division for Gender Equality in the Office of the Director-General.

As the UNESCO focal point for Gender Equality, the Division provides policy guidance, carries out capacity-building and coordinates cutting edge research in order to provide informed policy advice to Member States and the Secretariat. The Division also monitors gender parity within the UNESCO Secretariat.

Division for Gender Equality
Office of the Director-General
7, place de Fontenoy
75007 Paris, France
Tel: 33 (0)1 45 68 16 54
Fax: 33 (0)1 45 68 55 58
Email: gender.equality@unesco.org

For more information on UNESCO's work promoting gender equality, please visit:

<http://www.unesco.org/genderequality>

For more information on the International Year of Biodiversity 2010, please visit:

<http://www.unesco.org/en/biodiversity>