



**COmmunity-based Management of
EnviromenTal challenges in Latin America**



Briefing: Gender Perspective in Conservation Projects

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1. Introduction

The development perspective of local groups and organizations in different countries is strongly related to the use, management, and conservation of natural resources. The possibility of generating new strategies that permit the development of communities makes it necessary to recognize, from the gender perspective, local activities that enable the use, management, and conservation of these resources.

2. What is gender?

The basic belief of the gender approach is that: 'People are born female or male, but learn to be girls and boys who grow into women and men. They are taught what the appropriate behaviour and attitudes, roles and activities are for them, and how they should relate to other people. This learned behaviour is what makes up gender identity, and determines gender roles' (Williams, Seed et al. 1994: 4).

This fundamental idea means at least two things. First, gender is a socio-cultural construction, not a natural one, which identifies and values the characteristics, opportunities, expectations, rights, responsibilities and roles assigned to persons depending on their sex (a biological condition). So, gender varies depending on culture and social group (e.g. on race, class, economic conditions, age), and as these are dynamic, gender also changes across periods of time. Second, gender is relational in the sense that it occurs within social relationships, and so a woman's gender characteristics are always shaped in relation to other women's as well as men's in a specific place and time (Farah, 2010).

3. Gender Perspective and Conservation

Environmental and social dilemmas present new challenges given the multiplicity of players and, hence, of interests that interact in natural resource management. Local communities, direct users of the resources (from which they depend economically for their survival in most cases) must encounter not only the interests of the State (resource regulator), but must also deal with interests, perspectives, and different degrees of power within their own communities. This heterogeneity of the groups has been analyzed from distinct disciplines and from different categories and analysis

perspectives. However, analysis from the gender perspective in the conservation of natural resources has been more recent (Maya and Ramos, 2006).

While the gender variable has been considered important in the development field for quite some time, efforts to incorporate the gender analysis onto the field of conservation are more recent. *"Growing recognition of the important role played by women in projects of base organizations is still not reflected on strategies that influence upon policies, institutions, and alliances of organizations for conservation and development. Less, still, have the conservation initiatives adopted the fundamental analyses of gender relations and their implications in the use and management of natural resources"* (Schimink, 1999).

The gender perspective addresses the relationships between men and women, and considers the analysis of the roles each society assigns to men or women¹ in domestic, productive, public, and private spaces (productive, reproductive, and community roles). The gender perspective also analyzes aspects like the possibilities (for men and women) of the access and control over resources and benefits of environmental goods, improved conditions and the position of men and women within a given social context and accomplishment of practical or basic needs and strategic interests (Figure 1).

¹ A broad vision of gender also implies analyzing the relationships between men and women, crossing it with conditions of age (inter-generational), race, and socio-economic class.

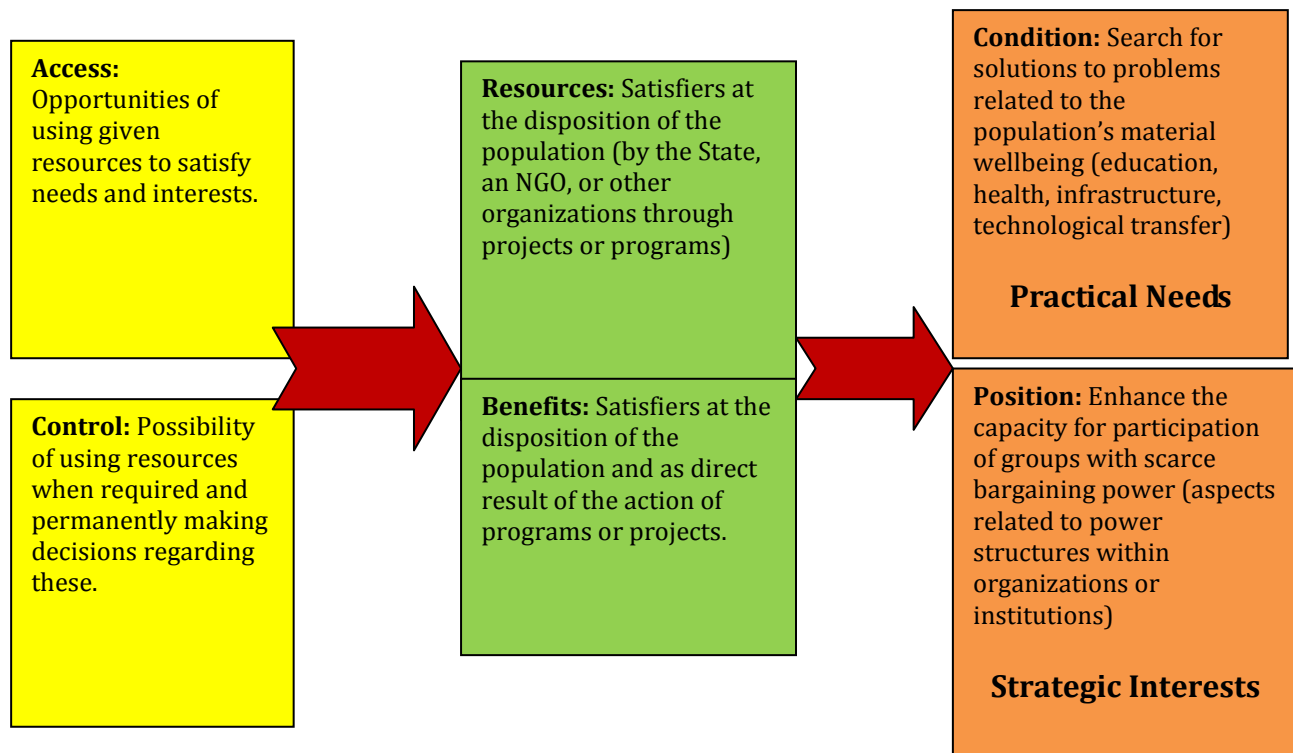


Figure 1. Categories of gender perspective analysis

Under a gender perspective, we may identify how different interaction scopes between men and women affect and are affected (directly and indirectly) by decisions and actions of conservation and management of natural resources, and what roles of women and men from different ages, ethnicities, and socio-economic classes are being affected or not in each scope. The interaction scopes are:

- Productive: Involves the production of goods and services for consumption, Exchange, or sale, which in the end implies generation of economic revenue (monetary and nonmonetary).
- Reproductive or domestic: Implies survival of the human species and recovery of the work potential of the household members. For example: reproduction, upbringing, feeding, healthcare, care for the elderly, rest, affective support, organization of the home.
- Community: Covers the collective activities to obtain services and strengthens base social organizations, which involves negotiation activities among social groups and the State.
- Political: This setting includes actions and attitudes that lead to acquiring and managing power, which means, for example, forms of organization for decision making.

- Cultural: Implies producing, maintaining, and controlling the life ideals, values, beliefs, and norms of the social group.

An analysis from a gender perspective permits identifying how women and men get the access and control over resources and benefits, and how this influences on environmental conservation processes and – in turn – how these affect the first. **Access** refers to the opportunity women and men have of using resources (*i.e.*, land, money, food, water, biodiversity, forests, legal resources, organizations, education, health, etc.) to satisfy personal or collective practical needs or strategic interests. In other words, access broadly can be understood 'as the ability to benefit from things – including objects, persons, institutions, and symbols' (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 153). These authors differentiate access from property in the sense that access is focused on *ability* while property is focused on *rights*. **Control** implies not only having the opportunity to use resources when needed, but also to make decisions on them. Access does not always mean control.

Likewise, gender analyses identifies what practical needs and strategic interests of women and men are considered or kept in mind, or are being met or satisfied explicitly or implicitly by conservation actions and management of natural resources. As practical interests or needs they are directly related to the concrete conditions which women and men occupy within the gender division of labour. In other words, **practical needs** are those referring to the material conditions, which are observable and quantifiable, like, for example, nutrition, housing, health, education, drinking water, among others. Satisfaction or not of the practical conditions determines the **condition** of an individual or of a group of people. Practical needs are usually a response to an immediate perceived basic need and do not generally entail a strategic goal in relation to the existing gender order such as women's emancipation or gender equality. In the words of Molyneux (1985: 233), 'practical interests do not in themselves challenge the prevailing forms of gender subordination, even though they arise directly out of them'. This type of interest is widely used in the analysis of people's participation in social action and how social policies and programs meet them. The strategic interests come from the examination of women's subordination, the questioning of the gender order and the formulation of an alternative to overcome it. In this sense, **strategic interests** refer to the **position** of each individual or social group in the community in terms of power and equity. These refer to not easily observable aspects and which are part of a society's structure. Having a gender perspective implies analyzing the effects (direct and indirect) that community-based management of natural resources has on the condition as on the position of women and men, and how these two

can influence on how decisions are made and how conservation programs and actions are executed. Table 1 presents the characteristics and differences between practical needs and strategic interests.

Table 1. Characteristics and differences between practical needs and strategic interests

Practical Needs	Strategic Interests
Focused on the <i>condition</i> ; related to situations of dissatisfaction due to material shortages	Focused on the <i>position</i> ; related to accomplishing equity
Easily observable and quantifiable	Are invisible due to influencing factors.
Related to specific areas of life: drinking water, housing, etc.	Related to structural conditions, which define access and control of resources and benefits, and of opportunities for personal development.
Can be satisfied with specific resources, with equipment, credit, technical training	Their satisfaction is more complex and abstract. Requires awareness and changes in everyday living.
Related to particular social groups, to defined communities	Are common to all women. Their manifestation varies according to factors like ethnics, religion, etc.
Can be satisfied by others, <i>i.e.</i> , granted.	Require personal and collective appropriation processes.
Their satisfaction permits better performance of activities associated to traditional gender roles.	Their satisfaction leads to greater equity between genders

4. Gender perspective in the COMET-LA project

For the COMET-LA project, characterization of socio-ecological systems considered the gender perspective. Thus, in workshops with Participative Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools, groups were made up differentiated into men and women. The results regarding the perceptions on the state of the resources, organizations, and the relations with the community and the vision over the territory reveal important similarities and differences to keep in mind when defining resource conservation strategies.

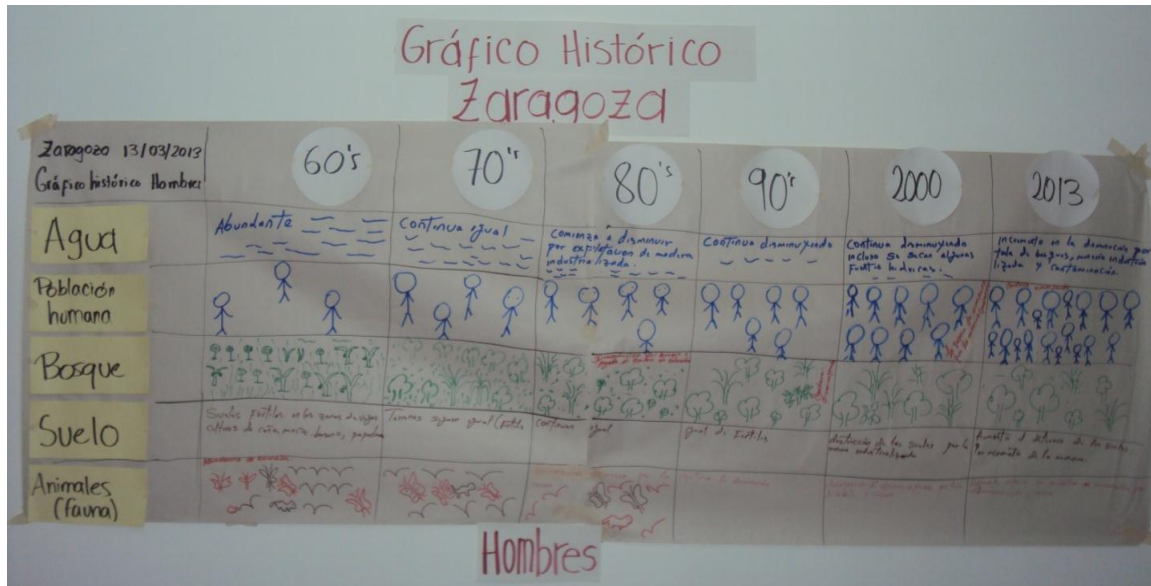
4.1. Some examples



Source: Characterization workshop in Zaragoza (Community Council from Alto and Medio Dagua), Buenaventura Colombia, 2013. Women

During the analysis of collective action for natural resource management, the perception of the communities on the state of resources is a vitally important variable. In the Historical Chart elaborated by a group of women from the Zaragoza community (Community Council from Alto and Medio Dagua), these are sensitive to aspects like diminished hydric resource forest resource due to natural disasters (landslides and flooding) and diminished population due to migration and forced displacement.

Men centered their attention on diminished crops, income, and river contamination due to mining practices.



Source: Characterization workshop in Zaragoza (Community Council from Alto and Medio Dagua), Buenaventura Colombia, 2013. Men

Likewise, in the yesterday, today, and tomorrow maps (social mapping) women were more optimistic than men regarding the future of the communities, when carrying out actions of conservation, reforestation, and environmental education. Men, on the contrary, see a great threat from the mining exploitation and the invasion of illegal dredgers.

The exercises performed in the communities with these tools and from the gender perspective permit identifying the current role of men and women in the territory, participation in decision spaces, and the perspective and strategies that according to their interests they have in the territory.

For the tool to not merely remain in the analysis made by researchers, but to transcend to the communities, it is necessary to train individuals from the community, to sensitize them on the theme and help them acquire theoretical, conceptual, and legal and methodological knowledge to apply a gender perspective in their projects and actions, and even in their everyday lives. This is why in the Colombia COMET-LA project one of the themes in the co-researcher training course was precisely that of gender.

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