

Abstract

Community forestry: Opportunity or mirage for women in the Congo Basin?

In the Congo Basin, women play an important role in forest management by either practicing traditional agroforestry or collecting fuelwood and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) for food, livestock, and health care or income generation. As women are involved in forest management, they must also be recognised as key players in community forest initiatives, and encouraged to contribute. But the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Republic of Congo (Congo) are in the very early stages of developing pilot community forestry initiatives, so this is not yet the case. While state actors, civil society organisations, international donors and research institutes support gender mainstreaming in equitable forest management, there are still many gaps. These include governance models which are influenced by local traditions, the impact of land reforms on women's rights, and the way forest resources are managed and controlled. It is crucial to address these gaps by improving policies and practices.

This abstract is from the French language briefing note "La foresterie communautaire : Opportunité ou chimère pour les femmes du Bassin du Congo ?" It considers the extent to which community forestry in Central Africa, particularly in CAR and Congo, can benefit women, taking into account the regional, local institutional, legal and cultural context. In particular, the note aims to 1) provide a brief overview of gender mainstreaming in legislation, institutions, policies and practices of community-based forest management; 2) explore challenges and opportunities to mainstream gender and women's participation in community forestry in CAR and Congo; 3) make recommendations to Fern and its partners on how to support women to be involved in the equitable and sustainable management of forests.

Overall, the note identifies several obstacles to women's effective engagement in community forestry and their ability to fully exercising their rights to use and control forests and forest resources. These include:

- **Lack of national legislation promoting women's rights, including tenure rights and the lack of formal recognition of their economic role in forest management.**
 - **Lack of guidance regarding gender mainstreaming in national forest policies and institutions and mechanisms to promote women's participation. There is also a lack of gender mainstreaming tools (gender-disaggregated data, technical capacity, and gender expertise, working groups and focal points).**
 - **Failure to consider the differentiated needs and interests of men and women in forest policies.**
 - **A legal framework that does not promote rural women's access to property rights and opposes statutory and customary law.**
- The note also finds that in CAR, gender is better understood as a concept by community leaders than in Congo, and that communities want to be better informed about it. Whether it is women or men, there is also a real motivation to involve women more in decision-making because of their expertise. People wish to increase female leadership and build women's capacity because of the expertise they could bring.
- The note makes the following recommendations:
- **Support integration of gender equality principles in national forest and land policies.**
 - **Develop and promote clear procedures to ensure women are consulted.**
 - **Support the development of a gender strategy with a gender action plan for improving community forestry.**
 - **Strengthen collaboration and knowledge and experience sharing on gender issues in the Congo Basin.**
 - **Provide ways to disaggregate data and information by gender to measure successful and unsuccessful interventions.**