

# SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT NOTES

## SOCIAL INCLUSION

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### Summary of the Online Discussion on Linking Gender, Poverty, and Environment for Sustainable Development *May 2 – June 17, 2011*

**Gender-Poverty-Environment Links:** A focus on the links between gender disparity, poverty and environmental degradation is increasingly recognized as a key strategy for improving the lives of poor women and men. Acknowledging the ways in which relationships between the environment, society and the economy are gendered opens space for new approaches to poverty reduction, environmental conservation and gender equality. The Social Development Department (SDV) of the World Bank conducted in-depth studies in Ethiopia and Ghana to advance understanding of the dynamics underlying negative spirals of poverty, environmental degradation, and gender inequality, and how to foster a positive synergy in the Sustainable Development sector e.g. energy, agriculture, natural resource management, water, urban development, and transport.

An important component of the study design was an online discussion within and outside World Bank on findings from the country case studies to “ground truth” the potential for wider application in other countries; and to collect and share additional good practice cases that address gender-environment-poverty-links from as broad a range of countries as possible. Another aim was to get input on key elements needed for developing tools that could help government and development practitioners to design policies, and projects, that would foster positive

synergy and improved social/gender, poverty and environmental outcomes. The Social Development Department partnered with World Bank’s Independent Evaluation Group (IEG), who hosted the e-discussion on their Gender and Evaluation platform.

**Participants of the online discussion:** Invitations were sent to internal World Bank staff and external academic institutions, civil society organizations and women’s groups, working on environment and climate change issues. Nearly 1000 people were member of the platform from different parts of the world, and 50 shared comments, documents, examples and experiences related to the discussions. Majority of the participants were from Africa, and others were from UK, France, Japan, Indonesia, South Asia and Latin America.

#### Summary of the Discussions

The online discussion was organized around four topics to help address questions raised in SDV’s study:

**Topic 1: Understanding the Dynamics of the Gender-Poverty Environment links.** The first topic focused on a critical review of a draft conceptual framework that had evolved throughout the course of the case study research. The aim of the framework was to provide a guide to planners and decision-makers on key gender, poverty, and environment factors that need to be taken

into account in policies and programs. The framework was built on World Bank's pillars of Sustainable Development: social inclusion, economic growth, and environmental sustainability. The framework assumes that pillars constitute the context in which the links interact and the areas of overlap among economic, environmental and social spheres are where the positive and negative synergies take place.

*Social institutions and power relationships shape access to resources, opportunities and agency.* The field research indicated that formal and informal social institutions and power relationships are at the core of these synergies because they channel access to property rights, to resources, services, technology, economic opportunities, information, and voice in decision making needed by all groups for sustainable livelihoods. This access is differentiated by gender and other social characteristics. The research findings suggested that gender-poverty-environment synergies have the greatest impact in various problem scenarios: climatic shocks, chronic food insecurity; weak environmental governance; population pressure or decline, inadequately compensated displacement. Discussion participants also commented on a summary on one of the eight cases examined in the country studies -- Land Conservation and Smallholder Rehabilitation Project (LACOSREP 2) in Ghana. Participants suggested that a number of important elements including environmental governance, basic education and advocacy, time poverty, and the gendered impacts of large scale development initiatives (for example, the Inter-Oceanic highway in Brazil which has led to deforestation by cattle ranchers, and logging and mining companies) need to be included in the analytical framework.

*Topic 2: Gender and environment issues:* The second (also the third) discussion topic focused on *gender and environment issues*



identified in a 2011 Gender and Environment analytical background paper prepared for the new World Bank Environment strategy. "Environmental governance" and "managing multiple environmental risks," issues resonated well with the findings of the Ethiopia and Ghana case studies. The discussion on "Environmental Governance" critically examined recommendations from the Gender and Environment Issues Paper regarding what is needed to develop gender-responsive environmental governance: 1) links between women's and environmental ministries; 2) capacity building and improved participation of women in environmental governance bodies at all levels; 3) expanded women's involvement in demand-side accountability (eg. citizen report cards, gender audits); and 4) quotas for women's representation coupled with gender training to ensure men's support. Additional evidence from the Ghana and Ethiopia case studies confirmed the importance of formal and informal environmental governance

institutions to environmental sustainability, gender equality, and sustainable growth but also identified challenges to development of environmental governance that is gender-responsive, equitable, and transparent. Discussion participants pointed out the need to address constraints on women's voice in environmental decision-making, poverty, illiteracy, gender stereotypes, and women's time constraints. They proposed multiple systems to increase women's voice such as quota systems, skills training, advocacy and dialogue with formal and informal institutions, support from civil society organizations, and gender audits all of which require resources.

**Topic 3: Managing Multiple Environmental Risks.** The discussion started with the notion that gender-poverty-environment linkages emerge most vividly in vulnerabilities and resilience to multiple environmental risks, such those associated with climate change—floods, droughts, sea level rise, coastal and river erosion, temperature changes, and more frequent and severe tornado, cyclones etc. These risks threaten food, asset, and livelihood security as well as health and safety and may lead to migration and conflict. Gender differences in vulnerabilities and adaptation to climate associated risks were evident in both the Ghana and Ethiopia case studies. Participants discussed whether or not recommendations proposed in the Gender and Environment Background Paper were adequate to address these



vulnerabilities through: 1) expanding women's opportunities and capacity to participate in climate change adaptation, and disaster planning and recovery; 2) expanding availability of property insurance policies and social protection for the poor; 3) providing gender equitable access to community-based REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing countries) and carbon market incentives and benefits; 4) including Gender analysis in vulnerability assessments. Participants stressed the importance of monitoring and evaluation of women's participation and the impacts of the interventions. The Center for International Forestry Research has produced a tool to sex disaggregate data on tenure rights to land and carbon to inform REDD, which to date has focused on indigenous people and safeguards but not the gender dimension. Participants also suggested the need for more specific responses to gender based vulnerability to disasters including involving women in disaster risk management, targeting female heads of household for preparedness, strengthening response and relief activities to improve resilience, preservation of social networks, and access to income/employment.

**Topic 4: Approaches to promote positive dynamics:** The final discussion pulled together the threads of the previous discussions to inform the next steps in developing useful tools to take into account the gender-poverty-environment dynamics in sustainable development policy and/or project. Participants considered the following conditions (eg. climatic variability, deforestation, disasters, financial crises, inequitable access to resources, weak environmental governance, food insecurity, time poverty, appropriation of common property, resettlement, etc.) under which the risk of a negative spiral (environmental degradation, increasing poverty, greater gender inequality) is highest. They also suggested the most effective approaches to

turn a negative situation into a positive spiral. Discussants pointed to population pressure as a critical area along with human security measures, basic education, food security, environmental governance, and attention to the impacts of financial crises and resettlement.

### Themes Emerging in the Discussions

*Importance of women's agency.* Most of the online discussion focused on specific themes or issues. With some variation, similar themes emerged in each of the discussions even though the discussion topics differed. Every discussion raised the importance of women's participation and voice and various measures to create space for women at decision-making tables at all levels. In addition, gender-responsive environmental

governance emerged as a key issue in all the discussions. Access to natural and productive resources, particularly land tenure also emerged across the discussions as did the opportunity costs of women's time poverty due to domestic and care responsibilities. The greater socio-economic marginalization of poor women than men due to environmental degradation, climate change, and natural disasters emerged in three of the discussions as did the role of education. Topics that emerged in only one or two discussions included the threat of growing population pressure on natural resources, the importance of gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation, working with traditional leaders or change agents, the potential for REDD+ to start empowering women after ignoring them and their usufruct holdings in terms of the carbon offset market. The strategic use of



gender action plans in investment programs was also discussed. The discussion around the major themes is summarized below.

***Debate on nuanced approach:*** In addition to the gender divide, the participants noted rural vs. urban discrepancies in sharing development benefits, ethnic differences, and the analytical divide between gender and environment efforts i.e. the lack of attention to environment in women's empowerment activities and lack of attention to gender in environment initiatives. There was also a divide among discussion participants between those who wanted clear-cut cause and effect relationships or single factors that were the key to addressing the issue of gender, poverty and environment, in contrast to those who were comfortable with the complexity and ambiguity of multidimensional and overlapping relationships. For example, one participant viewed population as a primary driver for the negative spiral of environmental degradation, poverty and gender inequality. For another "the problem starts with lack of education." Yet another wanted to divide environment by sector because it was too broad-- "too much of a grab bag." In contrast, others suggested the need to examine the negative spiral from the perspective of the beneficiaries themselves --women and men in developing countries to understand why they feel they need many children; how they perceive their environment, and rituals and roles they play in maintaining a balance with the environment. One participant proposed taking a broader "human security" perspective. The researchers conducting the Ghana case study found that local people had a multidimensional perspective of the relationship between gender, poverty, and environment, reflecting the nature of their lives which are not segmented into sectors.

***Access to natural and production resources, land tenure.*** One participant suggested that giving poor women and men user rights and access to natural and productive resources

was one of the conclusions made by participants in national and regional workshops on gender, poverty and environment in Ghana. Another suggested the need to pay greater attention to access to land and natural resources in the analysis but not just limited to land tenure. Discussing the lack of attention to gender in REDD, one participant noted that under statutory and customary law, indigenous peoples or forest dependent communities have access to tropical forests, however, it cannot be assumed that women have equal access to or rights over these resources. As REDD+ is a performance-based mechanism, tenure and ownership of forests and carbon resources play a critical role in determining the distribution of REDD+ funding. However, women are often excluded from holding a title to land.

***Time poverty.*** One participant stressed that "in Nigeria poverty has a woman's face." Gender-based norms ascribe women the responsibility of carrying out tasks related to household management (caring for the young and elderly, cooking, cleaning etc) with no remuneration. Women's dual load prevents them from pursuing education and economic opportunities or attaining management or decision making positions at the same pace as their male colleagues in all sectors and spheres. Others stressed the need to identify measures to reduce the time constraints that limit or prevent women's participation in environmental governance. For example, a Lutheran World Relief project in Niger constructed wells and water storage facilities, freeing women's time and reducing exposure to gender-based violence. A study by the Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank (IEG) on the hazards of natural disasters found that women's care-giving responsibilities limited their mobility, making them more vulnerable to disasters along with cultural restrictions on mobility, lack of information on shelter options and disaster warnings.

**Population pressure.** One participant stated that population pressure is a major challenge and “women should be to control the timing and spacing of their children.” She also stressed the importance of girls’ education. Another participant noted that as long as there is high infant and child mortality in developing countries, women will continue to have many children, because children are perceived as “old age security” by the parents. Multiple actions are needed for saving children and women’s lives, that includes access to education, quality health, sanitation and water services; and access to and ownership over productive resources by the poor women. Another participant suggested that it is not just about family planning and birth spacing but also about understanding why men and women feel that they need to have many children.

**Women’s participation and voice in environmental governance:** One participant from Ghana proposed the need for explicit frameworks addressing gender-responsive decentralization and participation at the macro, meso and micro levels of decision-making. To do this, multiple approaches are

needed including capacity building and skills training for women and women’s groups, quotas for women’s representation in decision making at all levels, sustained grassroots advocacy with support from CSOs, application of laws and international conventions on women’s rights and dialogue with formal and informal institutions to achieve gender equality. A participant described the approach used by ENERGIA at the national level providing training, networking, and resources for studies and projects on gender and energy. Gender audits of the energy sectors in Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and India used consultative processes in the formulation of gender action plans by local energy and gender experts. The plans have influenced national energy policies, electrification master plans and the representation of women and gender issues in national governance discussions for the energy sector. The Gender action plans were also incorporated into the project cycle and planning documents through monitoring and evaluation frameworks, operational plans etc.

**Indigenous environmental intermediaries:** Several participants suggested the value of



working with and through local indigenous leaders and drawing on local environmental knowledge to promote positive gender-poverty-environment links. One described the role of women in the Balinese Subak institution for water and agricultural management. Women play an important role in Subak rituals for balancing the relationship between God, humans and the environment to keep all aspects of life harmonious. She suggested women in charge of these rituals could also play significant roles in food security and biodiversity protection. Another suggested identifying local change makers or visionary religious, youth, women leaders and working with them in thinking about how to link individuals, schools, families and community values to a vision for improving lives. She stressed that “the interaction between social-environment-economic dimensions of one’s living environment must be defined by the beneficiaries themselves.”

**Case Examples:** One participant described a striking positive change in the gender composition of Community Forest User Groups in Nepal over 14 years. The Maoist Civil war helped elevate the lower castes and women in the community forest user groups. Quota requirements from the government also helped equalize women’s participation in leadership positions. High male outmigration in some areas also facilitated female leadership. While there has been some debate whether or not women are mere tokens of men who still run the forest groups behind the scenes, women are now often in majority in group membership and over time they have gained leadership skills. Men have also adjusted to these changes and gender roles are evolving.

**Environmental degradation:** One participant described the negative impact of environmental degradation, disasters, and fuel crises on women in Sri Lanka. Nearly 80 percent of the population in Sri Lanka lives in rural areas, pursuing agricultural livelihoods. The decline in forest cover and lack of soil

fertility is jeopardizing subsistence livelihoods of the poor reducing their income and pushing them further into poverty. Rural women are most affected by financial crises, environmental degradation and disasters. Twenty percent of the households are headed by women who lack the contacts and opportunities enjoyed by male heads of household. Rural women depend on forests, mangroves and river bands for their economic activities including crafts sold for income. Deforestation, cutting of mangroves for shrimp tanks and sand mining have undermined women’s livelihood. When kerosene prices increase, wood fuel prices also rise, making it difficult for poor families to cook.

***Transformation of the Analytical Approach:***

The online discussion made a major contribution to the rethinking of the analytical approach for the case studies. Based on the feedback from the participants, the analysis was refined using a political ecology framework that encompassed the issues raised. The four key propositions guiding the case analysis include:

1. Socio-economic marginalization and natural resource degradation are mutually reinforcing processes that are gendered in their impacts on time use, food security, health, and vulnerability to climate change impacts.
2. The appropriation of land for the “public good” – for conservation areas, concessions to mining and lumber, or construction of large scale infrastructure such as hydropower dams-- disrupts affected household and community livelihoods, production, and social organization.
3. Competing environmental interests shape environmental change and the outcomes of socio-economic marginalization and natural resource degradation as well as appropriation of natural resources for the public good intensifies competing

interests along lines of gender, class, ethnic differences.

4. As women and men confront changing circumstances brought about by marginalization, resource degradation,

limited access to natural resources, and conflict over resources; a common response is collective action and fostering of resilience strategies to address the negative impacts.

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The online discussion was hosted by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) of the World Bank at the gender and evaluation platform (<http://genderinevaluation.ning.com> – now deactivated). The Note was prepared by Nilufar Ahmad and Mari Clarke (SDV), together with Alex McKenzie and Bahar Salimova (IEG). The findings, interpretations, and conclusions are entirely those of the authors and should not be attributed in any manner to the World Bank, its affiliated organizations, or members of its Board of Executive Directors or the country they represent. For additional copies please contact: [asksocial@worldbank.org](mailto:asksocial@worldbank.org)