

# **MERGE**

**MANAGING ECOSYSTEMS AND RESOURCES  
WITH GENDER EMPHASIS**

Case Study No. 3  
June, 2000

**Working with Community-Based  
Conservation with a Gender Focus: A Guide**  
*Mary Hill Rojas*



**UNIVERSITY OF  
FLORIDA**



**PESACRE**  
grupo de pesquisa e extensão em  
sistemas agroflorestais do Acre



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The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation



# GENDER, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

## Case Studies Series

### Published by

MERGE (Managing Ecosystems and Resources  
with Gender Emphasis),  
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WIDTECH  
University of Florida

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The MERGE Case Studies Series on Gender, Community Participation and Natural Resource Management, supported by grants from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and WIDTECH, is designed to show how a gender focus has been relevant and useful in natural resource management projects. The cases focus on concrete examples from extension, applied research, and participatory planning activities involving rural communities, especially those in and around protected areas primarily from projects in Latin America with which the MERGE program has collaborated. The format lends itself to practical applications as well as training in gender and natural resource management. The cases are translated into English, Portuguese and Spanish, and are available on the Internet (<http://www.tcd.ufl.edu>).

The following are the first case studies of the Series:

1. **Conceptual Framework for Gender and Community-Based Conservation**, by Marianne Schmink, 1999
2. **Gender, Conservation and Community Participation: The Case of Jaú National Park, Brazil**, by Regina Oliveira and Suely Anderson, 1999
3. **Working with Community-Based Conservation with a Gender Focus: A Guide**, by Mary Hill Rojas, 2000

**Case Studies Series on Gender, Community Participation  
and Natural Resource Management, No. 3, 2000.**

**Working with Community-Based  
Conservation with a Gender Focus: A  
Guide**

*Mary Hill Rojas*

June, 2000

# Working with Community-Based Conservation with a Gender Focus: A Guide

*Mary Hill Rojas*

The WIDTECH Project, funded by the Office of Women in Development (G/WID) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), provides technical assistance and training on gender issues to USAID bureaus and missions. In spring 1998, at the request of Eric Fajer, USAID Latin American and Caribbean Bureau, I served as a member of the Parks in Peril (PIP) Project evaluation team. The evaluation team consisted of Laurence Hausman, team leader, institutional relationships and strengthening; Allen Putney, management of protected areas; Lorenzo Rosenzweig, conservation finance; and myself, community development, participation and gender.

The evaluation reviewed the progress under the Parks in Peril Project, a cooperative agreement between The Nature Conservancy and USAID. The evaluation included field visits to seven protected areas in Mexico (La Encrucijada, El Ocote, and Sian Ka'an), Ecuador (Machalilla), Peru (Bahuaja Sonene), Costa Rica (Talamanca), Guatemala (Sierra de Las Minas) and discussions with headquarters staff at USAID and The Nature Conservancy in Washington, D.C.

The team was "to assess the overall performance of PIP against the program's purpose and results outlined in the USAID Results Framework." The strategic objective of the program is the "protection of selected Latin American and Caribbean parks and reserves important to conserve the hemisphere's biological diversity."

The purpose of the evaluation was not to evaluate the individual sites but to evaluate the PIP Project overall. Therefore, observations during particular site visits were used as examples illustrating broader issues. This guide uses examples from the site visits and builds on the results of the evaluation to suggest ways that PIP project personnel can easily, efficiently, and equitably integrate gender in their work.

WIDTECH has collaborated with MERGE on many projects and programs dealing with community conservation, gender and protected areas. In keeping with that tradition, I am pleased that this guide can be a part of the MERGE case studies series.

I am grateful to Eric Fajer, LAC/USAID; Constance Campbell, The Nature Conservancy; and Marianne Schmink, MERGE/University of Florida for their support of this project. I am also grateful to the Nature Conservancy personnel, their partners who work with PIP, and the local men and women living near the protected areas who provided the examples on gender used in this document.

Mary Hill Rojas  
Washington, D.C.  
December 1998

## Introduction

The Parks in Peril Project (PIP) was developed to conserve imperiled ecosystems in Latin America and the Caribbean by "ensuring on-site management of officially designated protected areas containing globally important biological diversity." Parks in Peril is a term used by The Nature Conservancy for 55 conservation sites in Latin America and the Caribbean. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has thus far provided funding for 28 of these sites, with plans for adding new sites in the near future.

With the support of USAID Washington and the USAID missions in each country, The Nature Conservancy works with one or more partners, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in each site. At the sites visited in the evaluation these partners in 1998 were:

- ✍ La Encrucijada, Mexico: Instituto de Historia Natural de Chiapas;
- ✍ El Ocote, Mexico: Instituto de Historia Natural de Chiapas;
- ✍ Sian Ka'an, Mexico: Amigos de Sian Ka'an;

- ✂ Machalilla, Ecuador: Fundación Natura and The Conservation Data Center;
- ✂ Bahuaja Sonene, Peru: Pro Naturaleza;
- ✂ Talamanca, Costa Rica: Talamanca Caribbean Biological Corridor Commission;
- ✂ Sierra de las Minas, Guatemala: Defensores de la Naturaleza.

All these partners in turn work with other local NGOs. One partner, the Talamanca Corridor Commission, is a confederation of 14 local, grassroots, organizations. The seven sites contain very diverse environments, ranging from coastal reserves to tropical forests and savannas to mountain forests. A primary goal of PIP is to gain the support and involvement of the communities that live in and around the parks and reserves so they, too, have a stake in the conservation of biodiversity.

## The Purpose of the Guide

Attention to gender is an important part of community-based conservation and of the policy and programs that support conservation. This guide, built on examples and lessons learned from the Parks in Peril Project mid-term evaluation, provides six steps to begin to understand gender analysis and its importance to conservation. The guide is meant for use by the personnel of protected areas and their community partners and others who work with community conservation in the field, within institutions and at a policy level.

## How to Use the Guide

This guide can be used either in its entirety as a short workshop on gender (two to three hours) or each of the components can be used separately as a part of a regular staff meeting agenda (20-30 minutes). In both cases, a facilitator prepares for the "training". In the guide, each "step" begins with a conceptual discussion relating gender and conservation. The conceptual discussion is followed with an exercise for the workshop participants. Each "step" can be copied and sent to the participants ahead of time for their consideration or it can be presented by the facilitator at the workshop or meeting. Each "step" presents an exercise to engage the participants in discussion of the material. Each exercise leads to a tangible result: this may be a rationale for community conservation or the skills necessary to carry out rapid gender analysis in the field and within institutions. The primary goal is not to transmit authoritative knowl-

edge, but to share information through structured group activities, and construct understandings through large group discussions and interactive exercises.

Having completed the training, participants will be able to:

- ✂ Develop a rationale for their institution for the inclusion of gender in community conservation;
- ✂ Analyze women's and men's roles and their relationship to the management of natural resources;
- ✂ Highlight the accomplishments of both women and men in organizational documents and environmental education materials;
- ✂ Analyze women's groups and their potential contribution to conservation;
- ✂ Articulate the importance of women's participation in conservation efforts and the barriers they face to participation, and implement ways to remove the barriers; and
- ✂ Promote cross-sectoral work in education and democracy and governance as a means to address environmental issues.

## Step One: Develop a Rationale for Paying Attention to Gender

### Conceptual Discussion

"Why do we care about gender?" The conservation of biodiversity relies on the involvement of people, the full community constituency, both women and men, whose interests and perspectives related to natural resources may be quite different. Often women are underrepresented or not represented at all at a local level, within institutions and at a policy level where decisions are made. In order to use gender in their work PIP personnel need to develop and articulate a rationale that ties gender to community-based conservation. One such rationale follows:

"The Parks in Peril Program is in concert with the policy of the first Latin American Congress on National Parks and Other Protected Areas held in Santa Marta, Colombia (1997) which recognizes that conservation is a social issue. Within the PIP Program, there is a recognition that engaging communities to foster the conservation of biodiversity and the well-being of the protected areas is critical to the reserves' long-term viability, especially when hunger and poverty lie close to the reserve boundaries. Food, habitat, livelihood and health depend on a healthy environment.

A primary goal of PIP is to gain the support and involvement of the communities that live in and around the parks and reserves so they, too, have a stake in the conservation of biodiversity.

Those who work with the conservation of biodiversity recognize the diversity of stakeholders and the various levels and definitions of community—those within the protected area or on its borders, urban constituencies, and the broader regional, national and international communities that support the reserves. Gender is central to this community-based approach, affecting how communities, households and institutions are organized and, in turn, how they relate to the environment around them.

A community-based approach to conservation builds on the vital roles women and men play in understanding and managing the environment that surrounds them both in rural and urban settings.

### **The Approach**

- ☞ Encourages environmental decision making, leadership, and participation of both men and women within the civil society, so that they can better serve as advocates for environmental issues of concern to them, their families and their communities.
- ☞ Develops inclusive strategies for conservation and resource management based on democratic principles and participatory techniques of the full citizenry.
- ☞ Increases understanding of how gender shapes the access to, the participation in, and the agenda of, collective activities affecting the environment.
- ☞ Addresses specifically the economic, social, institutional and legal constraints to effective management of natural resources by men and by women.

As a part of this overall approach, gender analysis is a useful conservation tool as it:

- ☞ *Assists in breaking down stereotypes.* The documentation of the presence of women as reserve directors and forest rangers in Peru serves to dispel the common idea that protected areas are too remote to attract professional women (TRC 1998: 22 and 31).
- ☞ *Uncovers roles that are overlooked.* Often women are defined and, define themselves, as housewives which masks their roles as daily

managers of natural resources, providing water and fuelwood for their families, tending kitchen gardens and fruit trees, disposing of garbage and tending livestock.

- ☞ *Helps assure the representation of diversity in environmental education materials.* Women have the potential to play a central role in environmental education because their intimate relationship to their communities and families provides an ideal conduit for the diffusion of environment messages. However, environmental education messages overwhelmingly target men in their depiction of the management of natural resources.

- ☞ *Describes communities and the institutions that support them.* Institutional norms such as kinship, marriage, religion, ethnicity, and class often

determine who will make the decisions on how natural resources will be used in a given community. These norms are gender-based. For example, women often have a small political presence on community councils. Public meetings often are perceived as male spaces and local organizations and institutions may be based on male hierarchies. These institutional barriers for women need to be recognized in mobilizing public support for environmental improvements

Including local women and men in an activity can improve the environmental results of a project and not including them can often doom an intervention. Particularly this is true with

women because they are more invisible than men and are often not included. Examples from a recent study on a Mangrove ecosystem in the Gulf of Fonseca, bordered by Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras, illustrates this point (Box 1).

### **The Exercise**

Give a copy of the above rationale to participants to read before a staff meeting or planned workshop. Discuss the rationale at the meeting in small groups. The small groups report back their ideas to the full group. The group then works to arrive at a

#### **Box 1: Mangrove ecosystem use in the Gulf of Fonseca, bordered by Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras**

In an attempt to conserve the mangroves, restrictions have been placed on fishing in the estuaries and attempts have been made to preserve timber and limit firewood use. The majority of women fish in the estuaries, while the men fish in the open sea. Women's involvement with fishing were not understood and the restrictions limited their access rights. A vital source of household protein and income has been lost. Women also gather firewood. Individuals continue to fish in the estuary secretly and to gather firewood for their own use or to sell. "This highlights an important conservation lesson: unless the constraints that individual and communities face in changing their resource use are considered, attempts to change may not succeed." (Gammage 1999:4)

consensus on a rationale acceptable as a framework for working with gender in the protected area. Such a consensus can include a minority opinion if full consensus cannot be reached.

## Step Two: Deconstruct Terms to Understand Gender Roles and Relations

### Conceptual Discussion

Language often masks the work that women do. Many terms in many languages, “farmer,” “forester,” and “doctor,” conjure up a male image. “The farmer wore a dress” is a startling phrase. Deconstructing terms to make women’s work visible is important in fostering conservation.

Women who live near protected areas often are defined by themselves, their families, protected area staff and others as “housewives.” Men have more descriptive titles, “fisherman,” “farmer,” “cheese-maker,” which more clearly delineates their relationship to natural resources. It is important to deconstruct the term “housewife” in order to understand how women interact with the natural world around them.

### The Exercise

Before the workshop have the participants, when in the field, ask what women (and men) do during various times of the year or during a typical day. The participants then bring the information they gather to the workshop to share with the others.

For example, a first illustration comes from Bahaja Sonene where two of the greatest threats to conservation are gold mining and the unregulated collection of Brazil nuts.

Women were identified as “housewives” and the men as “miners” and “nut collectors.” The director of a local NGO, a woman, “unpacked” the term *housewife* to shed light on women’s roles in these activities:

#### Brazil Nut Collection.

Both women and men move to the forest to collect the nuts during the harvest season. The women collect, dry, peel and often sell the nut. The majority of contracts for collecting the nuts are in the woman’s name. The men also collect the nut; transport the nut by boat to market; use

the machete to break the shell open to expose the nut; carry the bags of nuts (often 75 kilos) on their backs out of the forest.

✂ **Gold Mining.** Both the men and the women set up camp in the forest near the mining site. The woman buys the food and cooks and generally sets up house. She often does the contracting to mine the gold and sells the gold. Gold mining is very hard labor and the men do the digging and the processing of the gold.

A second illustration from El Ocote was formulated by an extension agent, a woman, who quickly listed tasks that put a housewife in direct daily contact with the natural resources in and around the protected area:

✂ **Fishing.** Some women fish but all women cook, clean, market and preserve fish.

✂ **Herbs.** Women grow herbs (*chipitin*; *hierba santa*; *achiote*; *pimienta*) for adornment, medicinal reasons and food.

✂ **Crops.**

- *Maize.* Women store the corn, grind it and make the daily tortilla and *atol*.

- *Coffee.* Some women plant and help with the harvest. All women process (select, wash, shell, dry and bag) the beans after the picking. The men market the coffee. For home use women toast, grind, and make the coffee.

- *Chili.* Women make the seed beds, transplant, control insects, and manage the plants. They cut and select the chili for size and color, bag and market them.

✂ **The Garden.** The woman is responsible for the garden that provides food for the family and market (tomatoes, squash, *hierba mora*, *hierba buena*)

✂ **Animals.** Women tend chickens and turkeys for home use and barter.

✂ **Fruit.** Women collect *nance*, oranges, limes, lemons to market or to make preserves.

✂ **Water and Wood.** Women are responsible for gathering the water and firewood for family needs.

**Box 2: Iguana Farming.** By defining terms too narrowly women’s work may be overlooked. Iguana farming in El Ocote was defined as the raising of Iguana, men’s work. However, when defined more broadly to include the slaughter, skinning and cooking of the animals women played an equal role yet may not have enjoyed the project benefits. Deconstruction of terms not only breaks down stereotypes but provides important insights into the use of natural resources. Such insights can inform strategic planning and policy decisions for conservation.

A final example in Box 2 illustrates the importance of deconstructing terms to find where women fit.

### Step Three: Highlight Women as PIP Participants

#### *Conceptual Discussion*

It is important to make visible the involvement of women throughout the PIP project in order to take credit for what has been accomplished and to document the lessons learned.

#### *Wives and Mothers*

Besides the direct participation of women in PIP activities, women take pride in their roles as wives and mothers. These roles are important to women and to men and they can serve conservation.

One example is from Sierra de las Minas. Don Juan is an influential catechist who lives with his family near the reserve. They have a mixed farm that is a model for sustainable agriculture: worm composting, terraces with cardamon and coffee, fruit trees and a Tilapia fish pond. The sign on their door says that “the forest is life—take care of it for your children.” His wife supports his work especially with the cultivation of native plants and traditional medicines. She knows the plants for childhood sicknesses and travels with her husband to share this knowledge with neighbors.

A second example is from Sian Ka’an. The reserve funds a nursery that rescues the old Mayan traditions to restore soils, protect the forest and grow native and medicinal plants. A local man runs the nursery, conducts basic research and acts as an extension agent. His wife also works in the nursery with the plants and knows the uses of plants, against bites, for gastritis, for aching bones and for women in labor. In this case the wife works in support of her husband without pay. There is a need to recognize the value to conservation of husband and wife teams.

#### *Leaders and Professionals*

Women are visible in a variety of leadership roles and as professionals throughout the PIP project area. They are heads of Ministries of the Environment (Mexico); founders of partner NGOs (Sian Ka’an); extension agents (La Encrucijada; El Ocote); leaders of reserve councils (Talamanca); park guards and directors (Bahuaia Sonene); directors of partner NGOs (Talamanca); leaders of indigenous groups

(Sierra de las Minas); leaders of PIP sponsored activities (Machalilla); lead staff of USAID missions and bureaus; and members of the board of directors of the Nature Conservancy.

Making such women visible in publications, environmental education materials, annual reports and public presentations encourages other women and helps to break down stereotypes. For example, in Bahuaia Sonene, the obvious presence of women as former park directors, park rangers, community health workers, and volunteer park rangers serves to dispel the all too common idea that protected areas are too remote to attract female professionals.

#### *The Exercise*

Give each participant a different example of environmental education materials or other conservation publications. Have each participant do an individual analysis of the material to determine how often men are represented and how often women are represented both graphically and in the text. Each individual then reports their findings back to the large group. Generally speaking men are overwhelmingly referred to and pictured. Attention to gender in materials reflects attention to diversity. Diversity is an indicator of inclusiveness, important for community participation in the name of conservation. The findings from this exercise should be used by those developing publications for the protected area or community partners.

The sign on their door says that “the forest is life—take care of it for your children.”

### Step Four: Build on Women’s Individual and Group Experience

#### *Conceptual Discussion*

Experience shows that integrating women into the central activities of projects and programs is generally more effective than a separate effort directed at women. However, this may vary, especially in areas where there is a tradition of women working together in groups or where there are taboos against unrelated males and females working together. Sometimes, additional efforts must be directed towards women to overcome the effects of past discrimination or to help develop the self-reliance that helps women avoid conflict or competition with men (Dixon-Mueller and Anker 1988). Targeting women separately from men may make sense in regions where many households are headed by women or where women specialize in tasks that could be made more productive with specific assistance to them.

Several patterns emerged at the PIP sites of women working in groups separately from men:



### ***Pattern One: Women's Economic Activities***

Two examples illustrate the many economic activities around and in the PIP protected areas:

✍ The Committee of Women established in 1996 in Machalilla has successfully raised chickens for sale to local hotels. These women are middle aged. According to them younger women do not participate because of their husband's jealousy or their childcare responsibilities. The project has provided training in small business skills in accounting, cost calculations, and administration. Technical assistance has been provided on feeding chickens and veterinarian services.

✍ A women's group in Sierra de las Minas has been working together for six years with the idea of earning income. They began with sewing projects both for the home and the market with little success. With help from the Peace Corps, they also began baking cookies for sale. Through a government agency, they had exchanges with other women's groups and the opportunity for scholarships for further schooling. They had experimented with vegetable gardens and were thinking of providing food services to tourists. None of these enterprises had been economically successful to date. A current effort to grow organic coffee seems to hold promise as it has a competitive advantage, is a value-added product and is market-based.

#### ***The Exercise***

Ask a staff member working with women's economic activities to present the activity as a short case study. After the presentation, have the participants evaluate the activity: How does it relate to the conservation of biodiversity? Do they have a competitive advantage and a value-added product? Is the product market-based? Do the women have small business skills? Does PIP subsidize the activity so that it is not sustainable without the subsidies?

### ***Pattern Two: Women as Pioneers***

In Punta Allen in the Sian Ka'an protected area, there is a sense of urgency to transform fishermen to tour guides before the reef dies. A tour guide class has been established to teach English and other skills. One woman participates in the tour guide class. Although she is not a fisherwoman, she was accepted due to her charisma and eagerness to participate. She

acts as a role model for other women. Often women who break with tradition are pointed out sometimes with pride, sometimes with dismay. They are change agents.

#### ***The Exercise***

At a staff meeting brainstorm who are the women pioneers within the community. Consider whether they are community leaders. Consider how they may be effectively used as partners in promoting conservation.

### ***Pattern Three: A Women's Component of an Established Organization***

Near Bahuaja Sonene there is a union of rural people. The union staff and members try to integrate women into the association making sure their language is gender sensitive and their publications and programs highlight both men and women.

At the same time, there is a women's component which includes a woman extension agent working with women and activities of the union directed specifically to women. There is a long-standing debate over whether to have a women's component within the organization or to work to fully integrate women into the mainstream of the activities. In most contexts, some combination of the two seems most productive.

#### ***The Exercise***

Before the workshop have each participant do a brief institutional analysis of an organization or agency working in or near PIP protected areas. This analysis should include the following steps: identify decision-making bodies and look at their male/female ratio; look at the women's component if there is one and its productivity, programs, policy and power; informally interview women and men as to their evaluation of women's participation in the institution; and, look at the membership or clientele and who is being served. Each participant brings the results of their analysis to the workshop to share with others. In a large group answer the question: How can the analysis findings be useful?

## **Step Five: Remove Barriers to Participation**

### ***Conceptual Discussion***

In Peru, Rosa Barrantes of the Instituto de Saber writes "if there were a policy where women could participate with their own voice and with decision-

making powers it would be possible to confront many of the great problems that affect the environment” (Marin 1991: 31).

In talking with staff and local people during the PIP evaluation a rationale emerged for the importance of women’s participation in conservation efforts:

- ✍ Women are community leaders, but often invisible to outsiders;
- ✍ Women are often those who organize local environment events, from saving the turtles to celebrating traditional rituals and values;
- ✍ Women manage natural resources daily—e.g., gardens, fuelwood, medicinal plants and herbs—and they have central roles in farming, fishing and hunting;
- ✍ Women are the primary caregivers of children to whom they pass on environmental messages; and
- ✍ Women do not drink away the profits from economic activities or spend the money on themselves as men do, but rather spend them on the children’s education or on the household.

However, throughout the evaluation at all the sites visited, a variety of reasons were given for why women did not participate more in the work of PIP. The barriers to women’s participation that were mentioned, a mix of cultural and institutional factors, included:

- ✍ Indigenous women do not speak Spanish;
- ✍ Women do not leave the community nor are they as mobile as men;
- ✍ Women are to stay in their homes;
- ✍ Women do not attend public meetings;
- ✍ Women marry young and drop out of school at a younger age than do boys;
- ✍ Women are not contacted by PIP staff;
- ✍ There is a prevalence of *machismo*;
- ✍ There is jealousy within the community if a local woman is hired as an extension agent;
- ✍ Women are thought not to want to attend training activities, but, in fact, often are eager to do so;
- ✍ Women are perceived of as *just* housewives and women; and
- ✍ There is little value placed on women’s work or their roles with natural resources.

Also, there are perceptions of what women will and will not do. Beehives in El Ocote were introduced but it was perceived that women would not tend the hives as the bees were too aggressive. Yet

the men abandon the hives when the coffee is ready to be harvested.

Many of the obstacles are specific to a particular culture, country or region. In Guatemala, officials were pleased that widows in an indigenous group near Sierra de las Minas were to be given title to land as heads of household. However, the women were ashamed to publicly claim their title. If the literature worldwide is a guide then the shame may be related to the women’s perceived failure in keeping their husbands alive and in keeping a home where there is no man. (See Owens 1996, and Chen and Dreuze 1992 on the plight of widows worldwide.)

Given that conservation depends on the participation of both men and women; given that women participate less than men because of a variety of barriers; given that many of these barriers are specific to a given culture, a simple strategy for addressing the barriers is to rely on the expertise and experience of local NGOs which work with gender and women’s issues.

In all the countries where there are Parks in Peril sites, there are organizations working on behalf of women. In Mexico alone, there are some 370 women’s organizations. There are regional networks of women’s organizations, such as the Red de Mujeres Afrocaribeñas y Afrolatinoamericanas housed in Costa Rica. There are indigenous groups such as the Aymara women in Bolivia who have formed organizations to defend their culture, land and territories. Many of these organizations are particularly focused on gender and the environment or on ways of involving women in community development. The themes of the first international conference on women of the Amazon forest held in 1999 in Rio Branco in Brazil were women, development and the environment. The conference developed new networks and revealed old ones.

### *The Exercise*

Identify local groups through a participant brainstorming session and assign each participant a group to research and to contact. Many groups may be willing partners in conservation with techniques and experience for reaching women and overcoming the barriers to participation that many women confront.

## **Step Six: Work Across Sectors**

### *Conceptual Discussion*

A community-based approach to addressing environmental protection and sustainable natural re-

Women are  
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source management acknowledges an interaction of the environment, resource use and political, economic and social forces. Particularly of importance in PIP is the interaction of the conservation of biodiversity and education, and the interaction of conservation, democracy and governance.

### **Education**

Between 1970 and 1990, illiteracy in Latin America has fallen, often dramatically, but with variations among countries. For example, in the countries visited by the PIP evaluation team, only Costa Rica has an illiteracy rate below 10 percent. Mexico, Ecuador and Peru have rates between 10 percent and 20 percent. In Guatemala, there are more than 20 percent who are illiterate. There are more illiterate women than men in all the countries visited, except for Costa Rica. In Guatemala, Peru and Ecuador, there are significant differences in the numbers of illiterate men and women. The numbers of illiterate women far exceed those of illiterate men. Rural and indigenous groups often show more illiteracy than the general population and greater gaps between the literacy rates of men and of women (Valdez and Gomariz 1995: 98).

In a national survey of people's awareness of environmental issues in Peru there was a significant difference between men and women regarding their knowledge of environmental issues, including the conservation of biodiversity and protected areas. Women, as compared to men, knew less. However, the differences disappeared when education was taken into account. Therefore, the results of the survey gave central importance to education as a means of addressing environmental issues, including conservation. The hypothesis was: a) *given* that knowledge about environmental problems and the measures needed to overcome them increases with education; b) *given* that in the next few years levels of education for Peruvians will go up; c) *given* that the difference between men's and women's education will diminish, it can be expected that the general environmental knowledge of the population will increase. Therefore, the support of education and, in particular, women's education, is important to environmental protection (Rojas 1998: 6).

### **Democracy and Governance**

There is a recognition that the conservation of biodiversity and the health and welfare of protected areas are often dependent on local level solutions derived from community initiatives.

- ✎ In Machalilla, the reserve personnel have gone from policing protected areas to keep people out, to participatory planning with communities in the management of the reserve.
- ✎ In La Gandoca, a part of the Talamanca Corridor, the land of the protected area belongs to the members of the community. Without their support and participation in its management there is no protected area.

However, community approaches can act against women's interests. For example, worldwide, women often have a small political presence on community councils. Public meetings often are perceived as male spaces. In La Encrucijada, a public meeting for the PIP evaluators in a small village in the protected area drew only the fishermen. Women were working elsewhere. As one woman commented, "Many programs have no women. Many staff members do not talk with them. They are women." These are common barriers and there are simple strategies to address them:

- ✎ Women in various cultures worldwide are more comfortable talking with other women and in some cultures, it is inappropriate for women to talk with men outside their families. In El Ocote, La Encrucijada, and Machalilla, PIP staff reach out to women using local women as community workers and extension agents.
- ✎ To reach women with conservation messages and programs it is important to identify where women meet. Often the formal, public spaces are not the spaces of women. Women will create their own spaces for meeting if their participation and opinions are sought. Also it is important to identify what resources are under the influence of women and men. Often natural resources are "gendered"—for example, women control the fruit but men control the fruit tree.
- ✎ In some of the PIP sites there is a post-conflict environment, a transitional period from conflict to an increasingly democratic and decentralized state. For example, the war in Guatemala ironically gave women more public space especially through the prestigious National Coordinating Committee of Widows and through such indigenous leaders as Rigoberta Menchu and Rosalina Tuyuc. The Guatemala Peace Accord emphasized support to Mayan women. These democratic openings provide a forum for women to discuss many concerns, including those related to the environment.

**The support of education and, in particular, women's education, is important to environmental protection**

### ***The Exercise***

- ✍ Discuss how supporting education, especially women's education, can be a conservation tool. In this light, USAID's support of programs such as the Girl's and Women's Education Program of the Office of Women in Development is seen as support for environment and natural resource objectives.
- ✍ Discuss in small groups how the PIP participatory processes not only promote conservation and support for protected areas but can be vital in strengthening social organization and democratic institutions, including women's rights. In the large group brainstorm how those working with democracy and governance issues can collaborate with the environment sector to learn from and support each other.

### **Conclusion**

This training guide was written as a result of the Parks in Peril mid-term evaluation and responds to one of the evaluation recommendations, "to document the PIP experience with gender" (TRD 1998). From the evaluation emerged many valuable examples of the importance of gender to good conservation. By completing the exercises in the guide, the staff of protected areas and their partners in the communities in and around the reserves will have begun to capture the conceptual richness and participatory methods that attention to gender can bring to the conservation of biodiversity. Such training results in valuable skills that range from the ability to deconstruct language that keeps us from fully understanding how men and women use natural resources to examining institutional structures that exclude women. Although the examples in the guide are from Latin America the concepts and exercises are appropriate anywhere in the world. There is no doubt that the gender variable is a central component for those practicing community conservation.

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