

## Policy pointers

**To meet the Convention** on Biological Diversity goals, policymakers should prioritise gender-responsive implementation of the Global Biodiversity Framework, using the Gender Plan of Action as a mechanism, and integrate gender into budgets.

**To overcome social** barriers to gender equity in conservation on the ground, practitioners must engage with customary institutions and tailor approaches to meet women's needs, especially those of the most marginalised.

**To enhance women's** meaningful participation in conservation, practitioners must recognise and build upon women's influence and social networks, to facilitate knowledge exchange and problem solving across the wider community.

**All conservation actors** must work towards transformational change by challenging assumptions: aided by collecting and using sex-disaggregated data, and working directly with men to change harmful gender norms.

## Why gender matters for biodiversity conservation

Addressing gender inequality in biodiversity conservation is fundamental to meeting the goals and targets of the Convention on Biological Diversity's post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, and building synergies with the Sustainable Development Goals. There are positive outcomes for nature, equity and sustainability, and for overall community wellbeing when women access and control biodiversity and natural resources, can benefit equally from nature, and participate meaningfully in biodiversity-related decision making. This briefing provides evidence of the value of integrating gender into conservation interventions, suggesting that Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity should therefore prioritise the gender-responsive implementation of the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, using the Gender Plan of Action as a guiding mechanism. It identifies key avenues for effective action on the ground, based on evidence from successful interventions.

Women are key users of biodiversity, but are routinely excluded from decision making and benefit sharing in conservation. This ignores the scale and scope of women's potential and actual contributions to natural resource management. For example, women represent 43% of the agricultural labour force (including hunting, fishing and forestry activities) in the global South, manage 29% of Europe's farms<sup>1</sup> and make up 47% of the global fisheries workforce.

Due to culturally defined gender roles, women tend to use and value biodiversity differently to men, opening unique and valuable areas of knowledge. Women's relationships with the environment are varied and contextual but there are commonalities across regions and sectors. Women collect, propagate, produce, prepare, distribute, sell and use a wide range of food, fuel, fodder, seeds, medicines and building materials from nature that are essential to household

livelihoods and wellbeing. Whereas men tend to focus on a narrower range of marketable resources such as high-value timber and meat, women more often work with non-monetised species, sold locally or destined for home use.

Gender matters for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use because women access different spaces, use different resources and have different priorities to men. Due to women's marginalisation from decision making, conservation interventions are more likely to negatively impact them. For example, restrictions on seaweed harvesting in the Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve, India, enforced from 2002, have undermined women's financial autonomy, exacerbating harm to those experiencing domestic violence, despite seaweed removal likely benefiting coral reefs.<sup>2</sup> Interventions ignoring such impacts can lose legitimacy, reduce compliance to conservation rules and increase resistance. Biodiversity loss also disproportionately impacts

## *Little attention is paid to women and girls' roles in sustaining and managing biodiversity*

women and girls, exacerbating gender inequalities: when resources become scarcer, women must expend energy making up shortfalls.<sup>3</sup> In this way, conservation efforts are intertwined with progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 5 to achieve gender equality.

Nonetheless, little attention is paid to women and girls' roles in sustaining and managing biodiversity, or to the importance of gender relations (that is, the dynamics between women and men in households, communities and wider society) in securing positive outcomes for conservation. The post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) acknowledges the need to appropriately recognise gender equality, women's empowerment and gender-responsive approaches (see Box 1) to meet the objectives of biodiversity conservation, sustainable use and equitable sharing of benefits.

This briefing is the outcome of an expert workshop<sup>4</sup> and desk research. It emphasises the importance of gender-responsive approaches for a post-2020 GBF that needs to be ambitious, transformative and inclusive, and for delivering the GBF's vision of living in harmony with nature, providing examples of current best practice that align with guidance in the post-2020 Gender Plan of Action. It underlines the need for a standalone target on gender equality within the GBF, given the centrality of gender to conservation success and the need for Parties to monitor and evaluate progress.

### **Why gender-responsive implementation of the post-2020 GBF is important**

**Women's equal and secure access, ownership and control over biodiversity and natural resources provides an incentive and capacity for sustainable management and conservation** (see Box 2). Yet women generally hold far fewer rights than men and constitute less than 13% of landholders globally.<sup>5</sup> Women often have user rights through men in their families, but long-term investments for biodiversity require control over management, exclusion and selling. Where women's tenure is secure, their power within the household and with external actors increases, delivering multiple positive impacts on

human wellbeing, including a reduction in gender-based violence, supporting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>6</sup>

**Equal benefits from nature and biodiversity for women and girls, including nutrition, food security, livelihoods, health and wellbeing, come from access, benefit-sharing mechanisms and employment opportunities in biodiversity-related sectors**, supporting the global sustainable development agenda while encouraging sustainable management. In Japan, women have established entrepreneurship groups to market low-value fish catches that would otherwise be discarded, generating around US\$9 million a year.<sup>7</sup> When women have greater control over household resources, spending patterns shift towards girls' and families' food and education,<sup>8</sup> while their increased economic contributions can also reduce husbands' resource-gathering pressures (see Box 2).

**Increasing and strengthening meaningful participation and leadership of women at all levels of decision making is necessary for institutions to represent communities' full range of knowledge, interests, needs and priorities.** Worldwide, research finds that women's participation in natural resource management groups improves collaboration, conflict resolution and resource sustainability.<sup>9,10</sup> Access to decision making at higher levels affects global consumption and production, yet women occupy only 21% of senior government positions and 20% of corporate board seats globally.

**Ignoring women and gender relations poses a serious risk to conservation success**, but women continue to be marginalised. Why? Women's lack of engagement should be seen less as a sign of disinterest, and more as a lack of opportunity. Women struggle to access land, information, financing and time, bearing a disproportionate share of domestic and unpaid work, with higher workloads and responsibilities than men. Women tend to have less formal education, lower literacy rates and less public speaking experience, compromising their ability to participate. Yet research shows that given opportunities, women engage (see Box 3). Social and cultural norms should not be seen as insurmountable barriers: cultures are dynamic and harmful norms can be challenged.

#### **Box 1. Key definitions**

**Gender-responsive** approaches go beyond mere identification of gender issues, to include proactive efforts to promote equal participation and distribution of benefits.

**Gender-transformative** actions aim to shift unequal gendered power dynamics by tackling social norms and structural constraints such as resource control.

#### **What works for gender-responsive biodiversity conservation?**

##### **Integrate gender throughout programmes, budgets and monitoring**

International and domestic funding bodies must allocate financing for the gender-responsive

implementation of the GBF. Governments and donors should make gender a required consideration, from conception and implementation of budgets to monitoring and reporting on impacts, also recognising the different situations and needs of women in order to promote gender equality more efficiently. For example, training budgets may need to consider childcare costs or venues' accessibility to women. However, accountability must be built into conservation organisation structures to ensure gender-responsive measures in all interventions, regardless of donor requirements.<sup>11</sup>

### **Work to bring progressive laws and policies into resource governance practice**

Most countries now recognise women's equal status to own, control, sell and manage land and productive resources.<sup>8</sup> Legal recognition of equality in marriage and joint land titling policies provide further protection and benefits for women. However, customary laws and social practices continue to limit women's rights to claim and protect their assets. Government agencies and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) must engage with community and elected leaders and institutions to address discrimination. One Tanzanian NGO has used participatory approaches to promote equality in control over land through the creation of village by-laws and by providing technical legal support, improving resource governance and community cohesion.<sup>12</sup> Aspects of customary practices favouring women's use and control over resources, such as collective access systems, can also be promoted.

### **Tailor interventions to meet women's needs and overcome social barriers**

Women need information and legal literacy to demand control over biodiversity and protect it, but practitioners need to adapt and redesign forms of communication, finance and new technologies to ensure access. Given women's heavy and multiple responsibilities, flexible approaches to participation are important: examples include reducing time commitments during busy periods, providing childcare or avoiding scheduling activities that require overnight travel.

### **Recognise and leverage women's relationships to engage with the wider community**

Women may hold power and influence in less obvious ways: through their social relationships, away from public spaces and institutions. Women's role in encouraging pro-conservation attitudes among husbands, relatives and neighbours is

### **Box 2. Giving women control over resources benefits biodiversity and wellbeing**

In Bangladesh, over 150,000 landless families live in government-run shelters, with many given access to government-owned seasonal and derelict ponds in the area. These are usually controlled by men and leased out by the government to their fishing groups, who may put them to commercial purpose. The government recently partnered with WorldFish through the Increasing Income, Diversifying Diets, and Empowering Women in Bangladesh and Nigeria (IDEA) project to give landless women living in a shelter area of Taraganj (Rangpur District) use of a government pond for semi-intensive aquaculture, farming native fish species in decline.<sup>13</sup> With technical support from WorldFish, women have formed a management group to collectively restore the freshwater pond and produce large numbers of native fish to eat at home. This has reduced pressure on wild fish stocks nearby and other natural resources otherwise collected to meet their families' consumption needs, while enhancing households' food security and nutrition. The pilot project has worked with men from the community to address gender norms and ease women's access to the pond. The expectation is that more women's groups will be formalised and gain access to government ponds for sustainable aquaculture, scaling upwards to increase benefits for women, their families and biodiversity.

demonstrated in their recruitment as anti-poaching rangers in southern Africa.<sup>14</sup> Among the Heiltsuk Nation of Canada's Pacific Coast, Indigenous women's ability to draw on social networks to mobilise people and resources, advise leading men and keep protests peaceful has transformed fisheries governance, facilitating long-term sustainability of local herring stocks.<sup>15</sup>

### **Support women's social networks to facilitate information sharing, problem solving and decision making**

Placing women in positions of power without the 'critical mass' and capacity to influence decision making can be counterproductive, reinforcing gender biases and hierarchies. Women's groups provide a forum to develop technical skills, share

### **Box 3. When given the opportunity and capacity, women are conservation leaders**

The savanna landscapes of Tanzania and Kenya are renowned for large herds of wildlife and are the focus of multiple types of wildlife conservation efforts. Yet Maasai women who inhabit them are largely excluded from land management and conservation decision making in both countries. Women's participation in conservation is typically marginalised into 'cultural' activities like selling beadwork to tourists, and they are often excluded from management boards because they are not landowners. However, Maasai women have a wealth of unique knowledge about wildlife behaviours and movement patterns that could improve conservation work. They also tend to prioritise economic investments in communities, such as supporting girls' education and community healthcare.<sup>16</sup> When given opportunities, women are often enthusiastic to join conservation work, such as tourism safari driving, usually viewed as men-only occupations in Tanzania<sup>17</sup> and Kenya.<sup>18</sup> Learning about their legal rights to land can lead Maasai women to resist conservation interventions that do not include them.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, women's participation and leadership are vital to any future conservation planning to succeed in this region.

knowledge and organise. Through training and learning opportunities, women increase their capabilities, confidence and social networks, which can be leveraged to access income opportunities, enhancing commitment to conservation. In Spain, women fishers have benefited from government-sponsored capacity building to improve their political representation, working conditions and incomes, instituting quotas and anti-poaching patrols that have revitalised shellfish beds.<sup>20</sup>

## Work towards transformational change by challenging assumptions and amplifying small successes

Governments and stakeholders should prioritise the collection, analysis and application of sex-disaggregated data to understand gendered impacts and women's contributions. This should include qualitative data recognising lived experiences. A cultural shift must occur in conservation organisations through accessing technical expertise on gender, promoting knowledge exchange between conservationists, policymakers and women's networks, and actively seeking local perspectives.<sup>11</sup> Small initiatives can challenge perceptions and expand into larger movements: in Indonesia, an Indigenous women's collective enterprise selling a diverse range of organic local vegetables has attracted external support and been replicated across North Kalimantan, protecting agrobiodiversity, traditional knowledge and forest ecosystems, while enhancing health, food security and women's incomes.<sup>21</sup>

## Look beyond gender towards other aspects of social identity and gender relations

Women's ability to participate can rest on men granting permissions or providing practical support

with childcare and domestic work, so interventions must engage men and boys alongside women and girls to address norms, social structures and power imbalances. In Kenya, a project is supporting reflective discussions in the community facilitated by local men and women who are 'gender equality champions', addressing harmful gender norms and practices preventing women from participating in conservancy activities.<sup>22</sup> Gender intersects with other social characteristics such as age, social status, ethnicity, occupation, religion, formal education, sexual orientation or marriage status to shape individuals' abilities to benefit from interventions, which should recognise this heterogeneity and include the most marginalised. In India, a project designed to bring men and women of different ethnic groups together has broadened knowledge of non-timber forest products and challenged social norms, initiating a sense of shared responsibility for more sustainable forest management.<sup>23</sup>

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## Notes

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