

Centre for Applied Social Sciences



**Proceedings of the
Regional Conference on Gender Issues in
Community-Based Natural Resource Management**

C B N R M

(Cresta Lodge, Harare : 24 – 27 August 1998)

Compiled by

Nontokozo Nabane

September 1998

University of Zimbabwe

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The Role of Gender in Natural Resource Management:

Using Micro Projects as a Vehicle to establish the role of Gender in Natural Resource Management

Abby Taka Mgugu

1. Introduction

This paper discusses the development of micro projects in the Communal Areas Management programme in Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) programme as a way of bringing in the gender component into natural resources management. Sustainable utilisation and management of natural resources is dependent to a large extent on the working relationships between men and women. Gender analysis in natural resource management is a fairly new phenomenon which is based on the realisation by practitioners that access to and control, as well as use over natural resources is not gender neutral.

This realisation has made practitioners use the term gender to analyse the roles, responsibilities, constraints and opportunities of the persons involved in the management and utilisation of natural resources. The term gender refers to the socially created differences between men and women and how this affects their access to and control over resources. Feldsten, *et.al.* (1990) maintain that the lack of gender analysis in natural resource management has led to the design, implementation and evaluation of natural resource management programmes in a way that is insensitive to gender issues.

2. Why Gender Analysis in Natural Resource Management?

In the African context, gender and household level social relations play key roles in organising access to and control over productive resources. Gender is a category of social differentiation as powerful in its effects as class, race etc. The analysis of gender has been recognised as central to the success of development programmes (Nabane, 1997).

The gender analysis approach shows the importance of studying men and women in the household rather than using the household as the smallest unit of analysis. Men and women in the same household may access and use natural resources in separate production systems.

Gender analysis in natural resource management helps to design more effective resource management programmes, create more equitable projects that are natural resource based, work more effectively with both men and women in natural resource based micro projects as well as explore new and indigenous community resource management techniques.

The gender analysis approach considers both men and women and goes beyond equity issues, which have generally been the focus of Women in Development Literature (Tinker, 1990). The role played by women is critical to the economies of developing countries yet the value of these roles has been ignored. Traditional subordination of women has limited their access to and control over productive resources such as land and natural resources management.

Natural resource management within communities in Zimbabwe has transgressed through several stages. Prior to colonisation, there was interdependence of natural resources, which were recognised within traditional contexts. Customary laws, which were popular and agreed upon by all the indigenous people, played a crucial role in the management of natural resources. Traditionally, certain natural resources, such as trees and animals were respected and used wisely for the benefit of all the inhabitants of the areas. The customary laws assisted to maintain the interdependency and harmony between the natural systems and the people and this helped to sustain the natural resources. Most of the natural resource systems maintained as above were eroded during the colonial era with the enactment of separate regulations/rules which enhanced resource exploitation for the benefit of the colonialists. The colonial system subsequently threatened the concept of utilisation by alienating natural resources from local people. This resulted in a change of attitudes towards the local people's appreciation of natural resources.

In order to redress this situation, the Government of Zimbabwe embarked on a conservation programme aimed at decentralising the management of natural resources to the communities. This marked the birth of CAMPFIRE in which Zimbabwe Trust is one of the key players from the Non-Governmental Organisations community. The CAMPFIRE programme's main focus has been successfully implemented with wildlife, however, and not much attention has been paid to other natural resources within the habitat. It is necessary that a balance be struck between wildlife and other aspects of its habitat, which would assist to diversify the CAMPFIRE revenue base.

Wildlife is considered a male specific activity in that there is an inherent belief among communities that men are responsible for wildlife (Hunter *et. al.*, 1990). The participation of women in this area of natural resource management has been little or has been subsumed under the guise of culture. However, studies show that women have been involved with wildlife from time immemorial during their constant interaction with the environment. Women have also been involved in the hunting of animals as well as processing the meat etc. Given this background, the neglect of women in the whole CAMPFIRE programme will result in their knowledge base remaining untapped thus making the programme incomplete.

3. The Role of Zimbabwe Trust

Zimbabwe Trust promotes community capacity building through facilitating the development of representative community based institutions of an economic nature. The Rural District Councils (RDC) which are the local authorities, through whom Zimbabwe Trust works, are assisted to establish wildlife management institutions which are responsible for managing natural resources.

Skills training which has been offered to the communities and the Rural District Councils personnel range from wildlife management, financial management, project planning, communication, maintenance of Infrastructural projects such as the electric fences and the water points. The training needs are identified by the communities themselves at workshops organised by the Agency.

An analysis of these institutions and the training offered reveals that there is no equitable gender representation. The projects have a male bias. The CAMPFIRE programme has remained a male domain because, traditionally, the task of hunting was assigned to men (Ferguson, 1992). Women are left out of this due to their low levels of literacy, etc. A conclusion that can be drawn from this analysis is that in most African contexts, animals, be they domestic or wild, are the domain of men and therefore it follows that men should benefit from these institutions and training.

Very few women have received training in wildlife management because there is a high level of illiteracy among women and communities do not include them in these courses which require both functional and numerical skills (Nabane, 1994). In order to address this anomaly, it was felt that a new strategy that would increase the participation of women in these committees should be developed within the same fabric of CAMPFIRE.

4. Natural Resource Based Micro-Enterprise Development Projects

Zimbabwe Trust, as an organisation, has instituted a new programme called the Natural Resources and Gender Programme whose main objective is to **facilitate an increased participation of women in management, utilisation and conservation of natural resources**. This objective is being achieved through a number of activities among which include the gender sensitisation of the Zimbabwe Trust personnel and their Rural District Council counterparts. This sensitisation, it is believed, will assist these officers in implementing their programmes from a gender perspective which has been lacking in the main CAMPFIRE programme. However the gender sensitisation is a process as it is dealing with attitudes and these take time to change.

During the sensitisation workshops, approaches appropriate for use with the rural communities are developed, and personnel are encouraged to use these in their work with the communities. However, there are a number of obstacles to the sensitisation of the officers as, in applying with gender, one is dealing with attitudes and these are difficult to change, let alone measure. There is need for a number of training courses as a 'one-off' training will not suffice.

The officers are in turn expected to sensitise the communities they work with so that they realise the importance of men and women working together and move more towards the realisation of the above objective. However, this goes further than just the working together of men and women, it includes an increase in the degree of access to and control over the benefits of natural resources by both genders. It also involves the component of power sharing and involvement of both men and women in decision making in the management and utilisation of natural resources within a given community.

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