



international
alert

Rooting out inequalities

Recommendations for civil society on women, forest management and peacebuilding

Why is women's participation in forest management important?

- **Women have a right to participate in decision-making** that impacts their lives and their security.
- **When women participate meaningfully in peace processes, this increases the likelihood of achieving a peace agreement – and of its successful implementation.** If women are excluded, agreements are less likely to cover all the issues over which there is conflict, such as access to natural resources, and situations are therefore more likely to relapse into violence.
- **Similarly, overlooking women's perspectives and experiences impacts the effectiveness of projects.** Women need to be meaningfully included in development and conservation projects.
- **Any project intervention in the conflict-affected Karen context could have unintentional impacts on peace and conflict trends and gender dynamics.** Programming should be informed by the vision of a positive peace that includes gender equality.

Current gender roles in forest management

Similarities



Collecting firewood and cutting trees for construction



Monitoring illegal logging



Working in agroforestry
(e.g. growing durian, mangosteen and cardamom, and collecting bamboo shoots)



Working in community forestry
(e.g. reforestation, rehabilitation and protecting watersheds)

Differences



Men's tasks were described as "harder" or requiring greater strength (e.g. climbing trees, felling large trees, hunting or paid tasks)



Women's tasks were described as "lighter" (e.g. collecting smaller branches for firewood, medicine plants for home remedies, leaves for roofing or fruit and forest produce to eat or sell, and growing and planting seedlings)



Women are more likely to engage in forest-related community information and training sessions and voluntary forest maintenance and conservation, but are generally assigned administrative roles in forest departments



Forestry leadership and decision-making was considered a male domain in the community, government and Karen National Union forest departments, with women's suitability for leadership roles questioned

Practical tips for overcoming barriers to women's participation

Barriers

Tips



Conflict, security and mobility

Women often need the approval of their families and communities to leave their village, especially in conflict-affected contexts, where

ethnic minority women have been targets of sexual violence and road conditions are often not safe.

Venue: The venue must be accessible for women in villages and safe transport arranged or reimbursed.

Overnight trips: Avoid requiring women to spend nights away from home. If staying overnight somewhere else is necessary, ensure that the reasons for their absence and the arrangements made for their safety are clear to family members (especially parents, husbands or mothers-in-law).



Triple workloads

Childcare, domestic and economic responsibilities are traditionally seen as the role of women in Karen areas, as in much of Myanmar. Domestic

responsibilities are considerable where households do not have access to running water or electricity.

Timing: Consider women's daily schedule of responsibilities when arranging activities.

Child-friendly: Ensure that both the venue and the meeting are child-friendly or facilitate and support childcare arrangements.

Information sharing: Build in alternative mechanisms for information sharing, e.g. identify female key community members who can relay information to and from anyone unable to participate directly.



Social norms

Traditional socio-cultural norms in Karen areas see men holding leadership roles in the household and communities, while women are seen as 'followers'. This

creates barriers for women's leadership and limits recognition of their vital participation in forest management.

Messaging: Communication and training materials (including manuals) should represent women as active leaders, not just as potential victims or in their role as mothers.

Role models: Consider the gender balance of the training or facilitation team, as female trainers can be powerful role models for women's leadership.

Follow up: Take concrete steps to involve both women and men in follow-up activities that turn the training points into action.

Invitations: Ask administrators or senior staff to assign both male and female participants. Specify diverse ages and backgrounds, to involve a broader cross-section of the community and avoid the same people always attending.



Do no harm

Promoting gender equality challenges customary inequalities, which can cause friction in households and communities, including among women

themselves. While promoting gender equality is necessary to transform gender inequalities, secure women's rights and work towards peace, this should not result in backlash in the personal lives of women.

Prevent backlash: Consider prior outreach to husbands and fathers, inviting them to trainings or conducting separate sessions for them.

Referral system: Ensure trainers know where to refer any cases of gender-based violence.

Prepare female participants: Train women on how to engage male stakeholders in conversations around gender equality, discuss upfront coping strategies and identify existing communal social support mechanisms.