

Gender in Forestry

by Heidrun STRÖBERT-BELOUD

For the first time since the Mediterranean Forest Weeks have been organized, the theme of gender found its place in their 4th edition held in Barcelona in March 2015. During a 90-minutes side event, the audience was sensitised on the need of specialised women working in forest organizations in the Mediterranean region, as they still form a minority in the sector. Furthermore, the need for promotion of female forest users was illustrated, as rural women are very vulnerable but also very important actors to the forest sector.

Although more attention has been paid to the gender issue for quite a while, it is not yet sufficiently taken into account throughout the forest sector in the Mediterranean region. Key forest actors might not exactly know how to integrate gender into forestry, as they might not have felt yet the urgency of the issue: is it really important that women are working in the forest sector just as men do? Why would we want to have women alongside male colleagues at all management levels in forest institutions and organizations?

Female participation and leadership in forestry

The Open Working Group setting up proposals for the United Nations' Post 2015 Development Agenda has suggested "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life" as a new indicator for the goal number 3 "gender equality and women empowerment". The issue of participation and leadership will thus be raised onto the international level, showing its crucial character for development and progress in the developing countries and in the post-industrialized world.

There is evidence from the private sector that mixed leaderships produce positive impacts. Various studies have come to the conclusion that — in terms of global performance — it is profitable for organizations to promote gender diversity at all levels. As women experience different living situations, they necessarily develop different views and percep-

Picture 1:

Gender Side Event
Barcelona 2015.

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tions comparing to their male colleagues. These different experiences are likely to extend the scope of considerations which flow into decisions, programs and policies and make them more comprehensive.

Today, women are still underrepresented in many sectors and certainly in the forest sector. There is a number of factors that are responsible for this situation. National policies and governmental orientations can either promote or impede female career development, producing a nationwide impact in one sense or the other. At the organization's level, the current existence of "glass ceilings", "side walls" and "leaking pipelines" obstruct vertical and horizontal movements towards higher or more strategic departments for women. At the societal and personal level, rigid gender roles generally make it harder for women than for men to develop professional careers. Gender roles are socially constructed and shaped by society. Boys and girls grow into these roles from their birth onwards. Gender roles and stereotypes often have the negative effect to

Picture 2:

Forestry needs well
trained women.

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confine people's range of opportunities. What is more, they often stem from deeply held misconceptions which cannot be easily or rapidly changed. As a forester is stereotypically male and the forest sector is perceived as a men's sector, women might be discouraged to opt for forestry.

A changing sector opens up new opportunities

But there is good news also: for quite a few years now, the new missions of forestry and society's new expectations have gradually transformed the traditional conservation and wood production sector into an environmental service provider. New demands enlarge the action field of the forest sector, for example:

- there is a steady clientele for sustainable tourism offers, and foresters can contribute to serve this market;
- there is potential for partnerships with private companies that wish to invest in green projects in the frame of their social and environmental responsibility policies;
- the forest sector can play an important role in promoting forest related value chains and thus contribute to keep rural areas populated;
- today, more urban forests are needed to create recreational areas in fast growing cities;
- there is an urgent need for communication on the value of forests in order to raise new funds, win new partners, sensitise the population and educate the young generation.

Modern forest management is no longer a sectoral matter, but demands for multi-dimensional cooperation. Such a modern service provider is likely to break up the classical male career bracket in forestry and attract more well-trained female talents with diverse professional profiles.

In addition, forest administrations can actively campaign for more women at all levels through targeted measures. Attentive to its female staff for a long time already, the Moroccan Forest Administration launched a gender mainstreaming process within its institution in 2013. In the larger context of Morocco's political commitment to promote equal rights and opportunities for men and

women, the Forest Administration adopted a three-year gender programme in 2014 to address the underrepresentation of female officials and to systematically integrate a gender approach into forest related actions.

Gender mainstreaming in the Moroccan forest administration

A baseline study conducted in this context showed that merely 14% of the Moroccan forest administration's total staff is female. In leading positions, women hold a share of 5.5%, the large majority of this percentage being found in the lower management. In the planning of local forest projects, the integration of the gender approach is not a compulsory requirement yet. Therefore, the medium term programme envisages a series of measures to address both aspects. As a first step, the administration officially set up an Operational Gender Committee (OGC).

Its eleven members were elected according to parity criteria (men-women, central-regional, cross cutting forest department representation). The OGC members are responsible for implementing and monitoring the programme. To do so, they are supported by an external expert who initiated them into gender concepts and approaches. Together with the gender expert and with the support of the German Development Agency (GIZ), the OGC organized internal awareness raising sessions reaching a large number of forest officials in leading positions. Human resource managers were trained on how to integrate a gender approach in their daily work: gender sensitive employment offers shall avoid gender bias in wordings and in conditions for application. Gender sensitive internal statistics shall contain sex disaggregated data on professional development and on-the-job trainings. Selection committees in charge of the promotion of staff shall be composed of both men and women, and so forth. A training on female leadership offered time and space to ambitious female officials to reflect on the option to develop their careers. Both the Moroccan National and the International Day of Women are celebrated within the Forest Administration to increase the visibil-

ity of forest women. A gender discussion was integrated in a training course on value chain development in favour of forest engineers to illustrate the place of women in these chains.

Other measures of the programme will be implemented during 2015 and 2016. The end of the programme, however, does not mean achievement of gender equality yet. Sustainability of results and further progress is depending on continuous long-term funding, ideally granted by the forest administration's proper (gender sensitive) budget.

Rural women and their unused potential

In the Mediterranean region, several million people are living in and on forests. Forest populations often live in precarious situations without social protection. Among the poor population, women are particularly hard struck because of the existing gender inequalities. Yet, rural women are very important actors as they contribute to the family income. Research indicates that rural women tend to spend their revenues in a socio-responsible way.

A high percentage of their modest earnings is spent for the benefit of their children. Thus, rural women hold an important potential in terms of human development work.

But socio-cultural and economic framework conditions often do not give rural women the necessary latitude to efficiently combat poverty, but confine their scope of influence, mobility and work opportunities. Women still do not have the same access to property, money, time, information, trans-



Picture 3:
Female leadership
training, Morocco 2014.



Picture 4:
Rural Women in the
MENA region.
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portation and social support networks as their male counterparts do. Laws, social relations and gender roles will have to change in a way to allow rural women to gain more autonomy and a larger range of options so that they can actively improve their living situation and thus contribute to human, economic and ecological development. Indeed, rural women are important sustainable managers of “their” forest resources. Not only because women are said to have a close relation to nature, but also because they understand that only healthy forests can grant their revenues in the long term.

Local forest projects focusing on gender – an experience made by the Agency of Social Development of Morocco

During the Gender Side Event in Barcelona, the Moroccan “*Agence de Développement Social*” (ADS) presented one of their experiences carried out in the frame of a project with the local Moroccan argan forest population. Roughly summarized, the mission of the ADS is to combat poverty in various sectors, using a territorial approach by developing human capacities on the basis of gender equality principles. In the case of the presented example, a preliminary base-

line study collected data on gender roles and relations within the targeted group of argan forest users. The analysis looked into work division, access and control over forest resources and benefits, participation in decision making processes and factors hampering opportunities for both sexes. The supporting measures aimed at reducing the identified gender gap and at advancing the strategic interests of women. In the longer term, the role of women in the local development shall be strengthened and their economic situation and social status improved. At the same time, women shall be able to contribute to the conservation of forest resources.

After several years of support, the implemented measures led to visible impacts at the personal, communal, economic and political levels: the women experienced personal empowerment and strengthened their self-confidence through the acquirement of new technical and organizational knowledge. In their families and communities, their role and status have increased in importance and recognition, leading to more liberties as regards mobility, participation, power of decision. As their revenues improved, the women gained more autonomy. At the political level, several women became elected members of communal councils. More effects have been measured, which are mutually amplified triggering a virtuous cycle, creating a continuous dynamic of development in terms of economic situations and socio-cultural patterns.

The presentation of the ADS is a concrete example of how a gender sensitive project is planned, what it implies and what positive impacts can result from it. It is also a good example of cooperation between public departments which — at first glance — do not seem to have many intersections: the Moroccan Forest Administration (delivering forest related inputs) and the Agency of Social Development (delivering gender experience). In fact, interdisciplinary cooperation is needed to unite complementary competences and knowledge in order to tackle the complexity of the challenges we have to face today.

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