



Women's participation in forest management: A cross-country analysis

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 18 November 2011

Received in revised form 14 July 2012

Accepted 5 October 2012

Available online 28 November 2012

Keywords:

Gender

Participation

Forestry

Bolivia

Kenya

Mexico

Uganda

ABSTRACT

The role of women's participation in community forestry has recently been investigated in a number of theoretical and empirical papers. This paper takes an existing theoretical framework developed by Agarwal (2001) and applies it to examine two questions: (1) What determines women's participation in forestry institutions? and (2) What effect does women's participation have on institutional outcomes (such as levels of conflict and rule fairness)? To answer these questions data is used from two sources: (1) a detailed household survey conducted with 1,433 households in Bolivia, Kenya, Mexico, and Uganda and (2) a more aggregated dataset from forest associations investigated by the International Forestry Resources and Institutions (IFRI) program in 10 countries. The analyses suggest that women's participation is likely when institutions exist that are less exclusionary, when households have more education, and when there is small economic inequality in general and across genders in particular. A history of women's participation, especially when women are seated on forest councils or attain leadership positions, is highly correlated with less disruptive conflict.

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1. Introduction

In recent years there has been much academic and policy interest on the role of women's participation in forest management (Agarwal, 2001, 2009, 2010; Agrawal and Chhatre, 2006; Cornwall, 2003; Dolisca et al., 2009; Molinas, 1998). Participation has long been viewed by development scholars and practitioners as a crucial element that allows poor and marginalized groups to exert influence over institutions and decisions that critically affect their lives (Mayoux, 1995). Particularly in the forestry sector, participation has been viewed as a pathway towards improving governance, promoting sustainable use and management, all while enhancing livelihoods benefits and opportunities. Whether women's participation in forest management facilitates sustainable use or improves livelihoods is still the subject of intense debate. The factors that determine women's participation are critically important because forestry reforms in many developing countries explicitly aim at improving the participation of marginalized groups in decision making processes such as forest management (Mai et al., 2011). Furthermore, the topic is of critical importance to effective implementation of sustainable forest management and

climate change mitigation initiatives, in particular, those that relate to forest management such as REDD+.

The existing research investigating women's participation examines why and to what extent women participate in forest management (Agarwal, 2001, 2010; Cornwall, 2003). Using this theory as a background, models of different types of participation have been used to explain variation in forest conditions (Agarwal, 2010; Agrawal and Chhatre, 2006) or variation in the degree of cooperativeness of the members in forest institutions defined as their willingness to engage in forest-management activities (Dolisca et al., 2009; Molinas, 1998). Attending meetings, frequency of meetings, speaking up at meetings, or holding official positions in forest committees are some indicators of participation in forestry settings which in turn reflect a higher level of involvement and engagement by participants (Agarwal, 2001). These indicators capture a range of individual and group rights and responsibilities. For example, user group meetings may determine who can harvest which forest products and when. They can also determine fines and penalties for any infractions.

Following the theoretical work by Agarwal (2001) six categories of variables are hypothesized to affect women's participation in forest institutions: 1-rules that exclude entry of women into the participatory process; 2-social norms such as segregation, division of labor or gendered biases; 3-social preferences that give more weight to men's participation than women's; 4-entrenched claims by men who are hesitant to give power to women; 5-few personal endowments of property or social networks that would allow

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effective participation from women, and; 6-household endowments or attributes that prevent effective participation (such as caste position or social status). Agarwal argues that these factors explain the degree, and type, of women's participation in forest management.

Taking this theoretical background, Agarwal (2010) used a subset of these factors to explain variation in women's participation for a group of forests in India and Nepal. She found that the gender composition of the forestry councils, as well as the age of the women on those councils, significantly affects the likelihood both of participation and the likelihood that women not only show up to meetings but that they speak up on certain types of issues. Agrawal and Chhatre (2006) found that even after controlling for a number of confounding variables women's participation significantly correlates with positive forest user rankings of forest conditions.

Molinas (1998) found that women's participation was significantly correlated with cooperation in forest management, measured by such factors as the number of activities engaged in by the group, attendance at group meetings, and leader/member evaluation of group performance. Agarwal (2009) found that the presence of women on forest committees, the percentage of the forest committee that were women, as well as the willingness of women to speak up in meetings, all significantly correlate with improved forest conditions (as measured subjectively by foresters, researchers, and community members and by more objective measures from satellite imagery). Agarwal's study used data from Nepal and India and the results were especially strong among the Nepal subsample.

In this paper we advance the research on gender, participation, and forestry in a number of important ways. First, we assess participation in terms of a more complete probability model using the theoretical insights of Agarwal (2001) by collecting data on all of the factors she argues are associated with women's participation. Thus, we are able to test competing hypotheses meant to explain participation that more fully capture the relevant theoretical expectations. Second, while most of the previous literature surveys communities as the unit of analysis, we use household level survey data to compare the responsibility of women and men within the household. Specifically, we examine whether responsibilities for participation fall mostly upon the wife, husband, are equally shared, or whether there is no participation by the household at all. Third, we then extend this analysis to examine what effects the different configurations of participation have on institutional outcomes from the forest user groups (FUGs). Fourth, our data analysis uses data from a household survey administered in Bolivia, Kenya, Mexico, and Uganda and thus provides an extension of the previous literature to these countries. Fifth, and finally, we also examine the results from an analysis of formal forest user associations in 10 countries in order to assess broader measures of participation (including women's participation with forest association councils and their leadership positions).

In the next section we examine the theoretical insights of Agarwal (2001) in a bit more depth. In Section 3 we present our data analysis to estimate the factors that affect women's participation as well as the effects of participation on various institutional outcomes. In Section 4 we discuss our results and in Section 5 we conclude.

2. Gender and participation: Theoretical perspectives

The theoretical framework of this paper is drawn directly from the work of Bina Agarwal (2001) as discussed in the introduction. In that paper Agarwal argues that women's participation is explained by the previously mentioned 6 factors. Thus, the model

is that women's participation is a function (f) of these variables, such that:

$$\text{Women's Participation} = f(\text{rules, norms, social preferences, entrenched claims, personal endowments, household endowments}) \quad (1)$$

Rules of entry for women's participation are necessary for women's participation, but they are not sufficient to ensure participation. Rules of entry to participate may limit participation to men-only, one-person per household, allow one-man and one-women per household, allow anyone willing to participate, or have fees required for participation. When participation is men-only then women cannot participate and the rule is obviously exclusionary. If participation is one-person per household, then it may still be possible for women to participate, but such participation may still be unlikely if men wish to participate as well. When participation is open to both men and women from the same household then women will be more likely to participate. The role of fees has not been thoroughly investigated; however, if there are member dues or in-kind time commitments required to participate in forest-management decisions, then these may particularly disadvantage women. Time commitments may be overly onerous on women if women's labor time is more intensive than men's. Further, time commitments may take place at times inconvenient for women yet more convenient for men.

Norms refer to gendered norms in the community. Certain norms may preclude women's participation even if participation is possible under the given rules. Relevant norms that may preclude women's participation include gender segregation in the public sphere (it may only be socially acceptable for men to participate in meetings), norms involving the division of labor (where women have many obligations and no time to attend meetings), or gendered behavioral norms (men refuse to listen to women in meetings or intimidate them from effective participation).

Social preferences refer to the preferences those with forest management responsibilities have over the types of people for which they allow effective participation. For example, input from those with little education or illiteracy may not be taken seriously by leaders in forest management. If women tend to be less literate or have less education then they will be less likely to participate as their views will not be heard or fairly considered.

The entrenched claims of men may also preclude effective women's participation. If men disproportionately benefit from existing forest management policies they will be hesitant to cede participation responsibilities to other groups that may challenge their existing benefits. Men may not want to change the existing rule structure because it currently favors them.

Personal endowments and attributes refer to the ability of individual women to effectively participate. Those with more relevant capabilities might be better able change rules in a favorable manner to themselves and other women, and thus may be more likely to participate in forest management. For example, those with property, those that are well connected socially or politically, and those that have enough time to attend meetings are more likely to do so. Household endowments and attributes refer to attributes such as caste, class, or ethnicity of the household. These factors also contribute to how effectively women can participate.

Beyond our interest of what determines women's participation in forest management, we are also interested in the effects of such participation on institutional outcomes. The literature in public participation suggests that citizen participation, in general has the potential to lead to better outcomes, although achieving such outcomes may be difficult in practice (Irvin and Stansbury, 2004).

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