



## Assessing gender responsiveness of forest policies in India

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### ABSTRACT

Gender Research spread over the last three decades in South Asia has positioned gender as an imperative in forest policy and practice. Policy attempts have been made to improve women's participation in forest governance at the local level. However, this has had insignificant effect on women's inclusion in forestry as it neglected the structural problems of power and inequity. This paper examines how forest policy has attended to gender concerns in India. It maps the gender trajectory within policy positions and identifies the gap in policy and research. It provides an analytical framework to analyse the Gender Responsiveness of forest policies. The framework helps classifying post-independence forest policies as Gender Blind, Gender Aware and Gender Responsive, based on the gender specific provisions. Analysis indicates that except for few provisions in the FRA, 2006, none of the forest policies appear to be categorically Gender Responsive. This could possibly be because of the limited engagement with structural issues; and, failure to design enabling institutions. Finally, our findings suggest that forest policies need to be grounded in a more nuanced understanding of gender relations and gender roles for sustainable socio-ecological outcomes.

### 1. Introduction

The interest in gender issues in forest governance has evolved with shifts in political, ecological, and economic conditions and changing academic perspectives. This evolution almost parallels with the feminist discourses of the 1970s and subsequent shifts in theoretical positions like the Women in Development (WID), Women and Development (WAD), Women Environment and Development (WED), Ecofeminism, Gender, Environment and Development (GAD), and Feminist Political Ecology (see Razavi and Miller, 1995, Sarker and Das, 2002, Davids et al., 2013). Some of these discourses have informed policy positions but such influences have been sporadic with inconsistent attempt to translate the rhetorical commitment to practice. The persistence of gender stereotypes in policy discourses might be a result of such inconsistency between gender informed discourses and policy positions.

Literature points out that policies have often overlooked inter- and intra-gender heterogeneities. Most often, households and communities are considered homogenous units, and even where gender nuances are recognised, they tend to ignore their intersectionality with other social identities (Dey et al., 2014; Arora-Jonsson, 2014). As a result, policy attempts at gender mainstreaming rarely move beyond ideas of nominal representation of women in economic and political institutions. When examined for forest policies, studies do not show any significant changes at the local level resulting from such narrowly conceived gender mainstreaming attempts. Most often, forest policies position

“Gender” as an instrument for realizing early economic goals, rather than focusing on long term goals of socio-political development.

Considerable evidence exists to suggest that policies play a critical role in mediating gender roles and in steering the power dynamics at the local level (Agarwal, 1994, Awumbila and Momsen, 1995, Elmhirst, 1998, Leach, 1992). Even though unintended, policies often reinforce and strengthen the stereotypical nature of gender roles and identities. Likewise, the existing gender roles, if not acknowledged, can have detrimental impacts on policy implementation and outcomes. For instance, the division of labour among men and women is such that often women are challenged with time constraints leading to their limited or insignificant participation in village meetings (Agarwal, 2010) yet policies find it beyond their remit. Thus far policies have only worked with discrete categories of ‘reproductive’ or ‘productive’ gender roles and ‘practical’ or ‘strategic’ gender needs. However, as established in research, gender roles and interests far from static, are evolving, and are often contingent upon shifting socio-political conditions. To be able to analyse the existent approach in policy, it is important to examine the extent to which policies consider gender dynamics in planning.

This paper contributes to the gender and forestry research in two ways, first, it presents a comprehensive framework for analysing gender responsiveness of forest policies and second, it presents the findings of policy analysis from a gender lens using the analytical framework developed for the study. The paper is structured as follows. In second section, we present the analytical framework along with the conceptual

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rationale. Methodology is discussed in section three. Section four will examine gender responsiveness of policies through content analysis. The discussion highlights the policy response to shifting discourses in gender and environment. Conclusion synthesizes the findings to lay ground for gender responsiveness within forest policies in India. It also discusses future implications of this analysis.

## 2. Gender analytical framework

Most often, the inability to translate policy into practice results from lack of clear mechanisms and structural procedures to respond to socio-political factors that impinge upon the implementation process. State's reluctance in recognizing these complex realities of planning process emerges from the power dynamics and cost of socio-political negotiations involved (Jackson, 1993; Ramdas, 2009). However, such ignorance might be challenging for equity and efficiency considerations in the forestry context. In absence of an adequate framework that addresses the responsiveness question, it was imperative that we first develop a comprehensive framework to analyse the flexibility of policies in accommodating the shifts in gender needs. Conceptually positioned in the gender and development discourse, proposed framework is based on review of some of the earlier gender analytical frameworks designed for assessing development projects and programme implementation. In general, these were designed to analyse: the gender division of labour (Harvard and Moser frameworks respectively), extent to which gender is institutionalised in policy, practice and research (Levy's framework), gendered impacts of projects and interventions (Gender Analysis Matrix), the extent to which project objectives are concerned with women's empowerment (Longwe framework), gendered assessment of capacities and vulnerabilities in a project area (Capacities and Vulnerabilities framework) and gender inequalities in the distribution of resources, responsibilities, and power (Social Relations Approach). Table 1 summarises the frameworks based on their aims/objectives, context, adaptability in forest policy analysis and concepts that we used in our study.

However, none of these frameworks were found independently adequate for forest policy analysis. These frameworks were also quite dated and required contextualization within the current socio-economic and political setting. Moreover, through the review we found the perception of gender roles and relations to be inadequate. For instance, the Harvard Analytical Framework delineates sexual division of labour and patterns of access and control over resources but does not challenge existing gender relations. Moser framework assesses the impact of interventions on gender relations but it does not consider change over time. Neither of the two accounts for intersectionality. Besides, frameworks like Social Relations Approach and Levy's Framework that emphasize on institutional analysis of gender relations require detailed and complex information on institutional interactions and connectedness of men and women through social relations. Some frameworks were entirely excluded as they could not be used for a forest policy analysis (like Capacities and Vulnerability framework and the Peoples Oriented Framework). Overall, we adapt tools and concepts from suitable frameworks and synthesize them with findings from an earlier review on gender and forestry (see Tyagi and Das, 2017) to develop a set of criteria for assessing the gender responsiveness of forest policies.

The proposed framework uses four interconnected dimensions of policy process: Socio-economic, Political, Socio-cultural and Operational dimensions. We analyse the gender responsiveness of forest policies based on these broad dimensions to further delineate policy positions into three categories- Gender Blind, Gender Aware and Gender Responsive. This classification is reconstructed from the policy classification developed by Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996) in their Social Relations Framework, where they introduced Gender Blind, Gender Aware and Gender Redistributive policy categories. In broad definitions given by Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996), Gender Blind policies do not recognize the gender differences and reinforce gender

bias through generic language and provisions that privilege male needs. Gender Aware policies acknowledge gender differences in terms of needs, priorities, and interests; and use the knowledge of gender differences in each context to target and meet the practical needs of both women and men without disturbing the existing gender relations. They define Gender Redistributive policies as the ones that aim towards transforming the existing gender relations and responsibilities by not just focussing on meeting the practical needs but also focus on long term gender interests. While in our analysis, the understanding of Gender Blind and Gender Aware policy categories remains same as given by Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996), we take an analytical leap and replace Redistributive policy with the 'Gender Responsive' policy category.

We explain gender-responsiveness of forest policies as the extent to which the policies are cognizant of the gendered nature of roles, household responsibilities, and capacities of men and women in a forest dependent community. It also captures the socio-cultural basis of gender differences and power relations as nuanced in the local setting. Thus, while assessing the gender responsiveness of policies we need to understand how and to what extent policies respond to gender-specific needs, reduce women's workload, improve their leadership skills, build capacities, break their seclusion from forest governance bodies, and increase access to economic resources (Molden et al., 2014). In addition to acknowledging the existing gender needs, it is also important to see if policies respond to the changing nature of gender roles and identities in space and time (Table 2 presents the proposed framework).

## 3. Methodology

In this paper, we use content analysis and discourse analysis to map gender considerations in forest related policy texts. Content analysis is defined as an approach to analyse documents and texts to determine the occurrence of predetermined themes and categories (Bryman, 2015). In this research, it is employed to identify concepts and sentences associated with gender blind, gender aware and gender responsive policies and legal frameworks. Study was further enhanced through discourse analysis that emphasizes on "language beyond sentence" (Litosseliti and Sunderland, 2002) and the latent meaning of the text in a specific context. The analysis in the paper shows how gender appears in select policies as well as how policy responds to shifting discourses in gender and forestry.

Forest policies are analysed (using the framework) to address the following research questions: How have post- independence forest policies in India responded to 'gender needs? What are the existing gender stereotypes in policy and planning? How has policy responded to shifting discourse in gender and forestry? For this analysis, we selected 22 policy documents at the national level pertaining to forest governance. Following criteria was used to select the policy documents: policy documents and legislations pertaining to forest (i.e forest,<sup>1</sup> wildlife,<sup>2</sup> biodiversity,<sup>3</sup> forest dependent communities<sup>4</sup>) enacted post-independence, in English language and accessible in electronic form. Selected documents fall into the following categories: policies and laws with amendments, circulars, notifications, guidelines, and rules.

Content analysis was carried out using NVivo software. Initially an explicit content analysis was carried out using text search queries in

<sup>1</sup> National Forest Policy, 1952; Forest Conservation Act, 1980; National Forest Policy, 1988; Joint Forest Management, 1990; State/ Union Territory Minor Forest Produce Act, 2005; Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006

<sup>2</sup> The Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972

<sup>3</sup> Biodiversity Act, 2002

<sup>4</sup> Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996. PESA Act, 1996 is not a forest law per se, but it does consider forests as one of the crucial resources supporting livelihoods of people living in scheduled areas of India and thus, it attempts to devolve forest related decision-making powers to the local population, where Gram Sabha is at the apex of decision making process

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