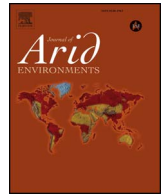




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Warlpiri experiences highlight challenges and opportunities for gender equity in Indigenous conservation management in arid Australia

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ABSTRACT

Gender equity has been recognized as a guiding principle for conservation management globally. Yet little attention is paid to gender in the design and implementation of many conservation programs including those in the vibrant and expanding arena of Australian Indigenous conservation partnerships. We examined the impact of gender in management of the Northern Tanami Indigenous Protected Area (IPA) in arid central Australia through qualitative research (interviews and participant observation) with senior Warlpiri women and men and members of the all-male Wulain community-based ranger group. Senior men and women had many similar perspectives including that customary knowledge, skills and activities were important in managing country and were occurring less through the IPA's management partnerships than they would like. Additional challenges reported by women included lack of vehicles to access country. Senior men specifically called for greater gender equity in allocation of resources including establishment of a women's ranger group. These perspectives indicate that gender equity is a Warlpiri cultural norm for management of country. Differences between Indigenous women's and men's management of country elsewhere in arid Australia suggest that opportunities also exist for gender equity to enhance conservation outcomes.

Prevalent belief systems in Australia, and many other developed countries, are gender blind in that they fail to recognize differences between men's and women's needs, interests, knowledges, behaviors and power. Monitoring of Australian Indigenous conservation programs shows that an increasing proportion of Indigenous community-based rangers are women. However factors that might explain and support this trend cannot be readily identified because little or no attention to gender is apparent in program design and project planning. Gender-aware design of conservation management policies, programs and projects is important for challenging and changing gender blindness. Brokers and bridging institutions, or 'two-way' approaches, have been important in progressing cross-cultural equity in the implementation of Australian Indigenous conservation partnerships and can be expected to be also valuable for promoting gender equity.

1. Introduction

Indigenous and other local peoples have shown themselves to be willing and capable of applying and adapting their knowledge and customary institutions to govern and manage protected areas, often in collaboration with other actors (Berkes, 2009). Win-win outcomes for both conservation and community development are widely sought, although acknowledged as being difficult to establish in practice (McShane et al., 2011; Naughton-Treves et al., 2005). Communities are not, however, homogenous entities (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). Gender is a key factor in the distribution of the costs and benefits that

communities derive from protected areas (West et al., 2006).

1.1. Institutional inertia perpetuates gender inequities

The term 'gender' refers to the way that prevailing social and cultural norms lead men and women to assume different roles, responsibilities and behaviors and to experience different opportunities, challenges and outcomes (Sarkar, 2006). Gender is a prime structural determinant of poverty and inequity globally (World Bank, 2016). It impacts on distribution of resources, responsibilities and opportunities within households and societies (Moser, 1993; Sarkar, 2006). Gender

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inequality constrains women's agency and women's capability, that is, women's freedom to make choices that enable them to live lives they have reason to value (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999). The different needs, interests, knowledge, behavior and power of women and men must be understood and addressed if women and men are to achieve equal outcomes (IUCN, 2007). Thus, gender equity requires that women and men are equally valued and are treated equitably according to their needs (Sarkar, 2006). The gender mainstreaming approach, which became prominent in international development from the late 1990s, stresses that both men and women share responsibility for redressing inequities between the sexes. It was a response to critique that gender equity could not be achieved without men, as well as women, taking responsibility for the necessary social and institutional changes (Alston, 2009; Debusscher, 2012; Smyth, 2007). Institutions include norms or ways of doing things that reflect social and cultural expectations as well as formal mechanisms such as legislation and policy. They determine the opportunities and outcomes that people experience in their lives and their frustrations and limitations (Ostrom, 2005). Decision makers' resistance to institutional change is a key reason why gender mainstreaming approaches have commonly failed to achieve impact (Allwood, 2013; Smyth, 2007; Verma, 2014).

1.2. Gender blindness prevails in conservation programs

'Gender blindness' is a term used to characterize policy and planning that does not take account of differences in men's and women's perspectives, priorities, decisions and actions (Alston, 2009; Mavin et al., 2004). Although the global peak body for conservation, The World Conservation Union or IUCN, began to pay attention to gender equity in the 1980s and now recognizes gender equity as part and parcel of efficient and fair governance and management (IUCN, 2007), gender blindness remains prevalent in conservation programs globally. Analyses of the impact of gender on governance and management of protected areas, and on community based conservation and natural resource management more broadly, are relatively scant (Agarwal, 2009; Egunyu and Reed, 2015; Leach, 2007; Westermann et al., 2005). National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs) from 174 countries show low awareness of, and attention to, gender (Clabots and Gilligan, 2017). Systematic study of the relationships between gender and sustainability has also been lacking (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014). Guidance documents produced for protected area managers by IUCN and its associates (e.g. Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2013; Borrini-Feyerabend et al., 2004; Gross et al., 2016; Hockings et al., 2006; Worboys et al., 2015) pay little or no attention to gender, nor much specific attention to women, beyond recognizing that gender equity is an important principle or aspirational goal.

In Australia, as in many other developed countries, a belief that male dominance is normal in conservation and natural resource management continues to be prevalent (Allwood, 2013; Alston, 2009; Egunyu and Reed, 2015; Howitt and Suchet-Pearson, 2006; Stratford and Davidson, 2002). Gender had little overt attention and impact in the evolution of government-community partnerships and collaborations in Australian natural resource management (Stratford and Davidson, 2002). A change was heralded in the late 1990s when the rhetoric of gender mainstreaming was adopted in Australian agricultural policy (Alston, 2009). However entrenched male-centric norms meant that policy makers took no steps to understand women's role in agricultural production and in the economic and social fabric of rural areas, which led to catastrophic failure of measures that governments had designed as a financial safety net for drought-affected farmers (Alston, 2009).

The prevalent gender blindness of conservation programs extends to contemporary Australian Indigenous conservation management, or management of 'country', being the land and/or sea for which Indigenous people have customary responsibilities and from which they draw spiritual strength (Arthur, 1996). With few exceptions (Davies

et al., 1999; Ens et al., 2012a; Muller, 2003; Nursey-Bray, 2009; Sithole et al., 2008; Urbis Pty Ltd, 2012; Vaarzon-Morel and Gabrys, 2009; Wirf et al., 2008; Young et al., 1991), research that has described, analyzed, or assessed outcomes in this distinct and vibrant arena (e.g. Altman and Kerins, 2012; Burgess et al., 2009; Davies et al., 2011; Ens et al., 2015; Gilligan, 2006; Gorman and Vemuri, 2012; Hill et al., 2013; Hunt, 2012; Jackson, 2006; Mackie and Meacham, 2016; Ross et al., 2009; Smyth, 2011) has not identified commonalities or differences between women's and men's approaches and experiences nor considered their implications. This gender blindness contrasts markedly with the attention that Indigenous women have attracted as subjects of Australian anthropological research.

1.3. Women's roles in Australian Indigenous societies and management of country

Diverse interpretations of women's role in Australian Indigenous societies, published from the 1970s, countered the assumption implicit in most earlier scholarship that women's perspectives could add little to the knowledge gained from men about Indigenous social life (de Lepervanche, 1993; Gale, 1970; Merlan, 1988). These analyses have in turn attracted critique including that portrayals of Aboriginal women have been constructed to fit researchers' preconceived representations (Sabbioni, 1996; Wirf et al., 2008) and that researchers have focused on reconstructing an idealised past rather than on understanding contemporary gender relations (Merlan, 1988). A growing body of Indigenous women's published life stories and teachings (e.g. Ellis and Dousset, 2016; Turner et al., 2010; Wallace and Lovell, 2009) offer counterpoints to these critiques. They testify to the destructive social impacts of colonisation and racism and also to Indigenous women's resilience, leadership and achievement in family, community and broader domains. Australian Indigenous women, often in cross-cultural collaborations, have also contributed strongly to gaining recognition of the key role of Indigenous ecological knowledge in conservation (e.g. Baker et al., 1992; Daniels et al., 2012; Ens et al., 2012c; Marika et al., 2009; Paltridge et al., 2005; Walsh and Douglas, 2011; Walsh et al., 2013).

In arid Australia, as is common in Indigenous societies globally (Pfeiffer and Butz, 2005), women and men tend to harvest different natural resources (e.g. Bryce, 1992; Devitt, 1988) and have separate rituals as well as rituals they participate in together (e.g. Hamilton, 1981; Keen, 2004; Payne, 1989). The tendency of Australian Indigenous women to undertake activities in gender-segregated groups has been described as 'extreme' in desert regions (Payne, 1989). However there is substantial diversity across the continent, including within desert regions, in such social practices and in other aspects of gender roles (e.g. see Hamilton, 1981). In contemporary Australian Indigenous and cross-cultural conservation management, separation of men and women is common, though not universal, in work teams, planning consultations, networking and conferences (see Daniels et al., 2012; Ens et al., 2012a; Preuss and Dixon, 2012; Sithole et al., 2008). Across a broad range of contemporary settings, Australian Indigenous women and men have different contexts and styles of leadership (Hunt et al., 2008).

Social norms that underpin Indigenous gender differences derive ultimately from ontologies that are glossed by the English term 'Dreamtime' or 'The Dreaming' (Stanner, 2009) and have been portrayed amongst Warlpiri people as the interconnected elements of *ngurra-kurlu*: family, law, land, language and ceremony (Holmes and Jampijinpa, 2013; Patrick, 2015). Places, songs, stories and relationships have their cosmological genesis in the activities of male and female ancestral beings who continue to exercise agency in the contemporary landscape (Stanner, 2009). As a result, Australia's cultural landscapes are "complexly gendered" (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson, 2006: p.48). Australian Indigenous peoples tend to see gender domains as part of the natural social order; they do not express a generalised concept of 'personhood' in which gender is unspecified (Merlan, 1988).

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