

Tanzania: Gender and the Protection of Freshwater Resources

Men fished on the Tanga coast of Tanzania. Women caught small shrimps and planted rice. Men also planted crops - but coconuts and cashew nuts that could be sold for cash. Up to 1996, women were thus among the poorest people in villages studied by a team commissioned by the government and the IUCN - the World Conservation Union. Women owned and controlled few resources.

The study was part of an effort to help local people find more sustainable ways to use their coastal environment and protect the mangroves, which are vital for protection of freshwater resources.

At the beginning, the women did not attend meetings. Special meetings were thus held with women to analyze both the consequences and the causes of the lack of participation. They listed a number of reasons for their absence, the main one being that the men would not listen to them so they did not want to waste their valuable time. The second reason was that meetings occurred at times that were not suitable for them. They also complained that they were not properly informed about the meetings.

A new meeting was convened with both the women and the men to discuss the women's absence, and, after some discussion and promises from the men that they would listen to them, the women finally agreed to attend the meetings.

Women are now engaging in planning, monitoring and evaluation activities and they are apparently actively participating in the formulation of a fisheries management agreement. Illegal mangrove cutting and destructive fishing practices, including dynamite fishing, have declined through the enforcement efforts of the villagers themselves, and there is a voluntary mangrove replanting and weeding program.

Despite the potential conflict between the gender equity objective and the objective of reducing fishing pressure by developing alternative livelihoods, the program has in general had positive results. In the pilot villages, both the environmental committees and village management committees are more gender balanced today.

What the case illustrates:

Levels of gender awareness, participation and motivation have increased women's self-confidence and some are now even actively participating in typical male activities like village patrols. The situation improved gradually as the women gained self-confidence after participating in training courses, workshops, and study tours and seeing the results of their activities.

Source: Involvement of Women in Planning and Management in Tanga, Region, Tanzania, IUCN, The World Conservation Union.