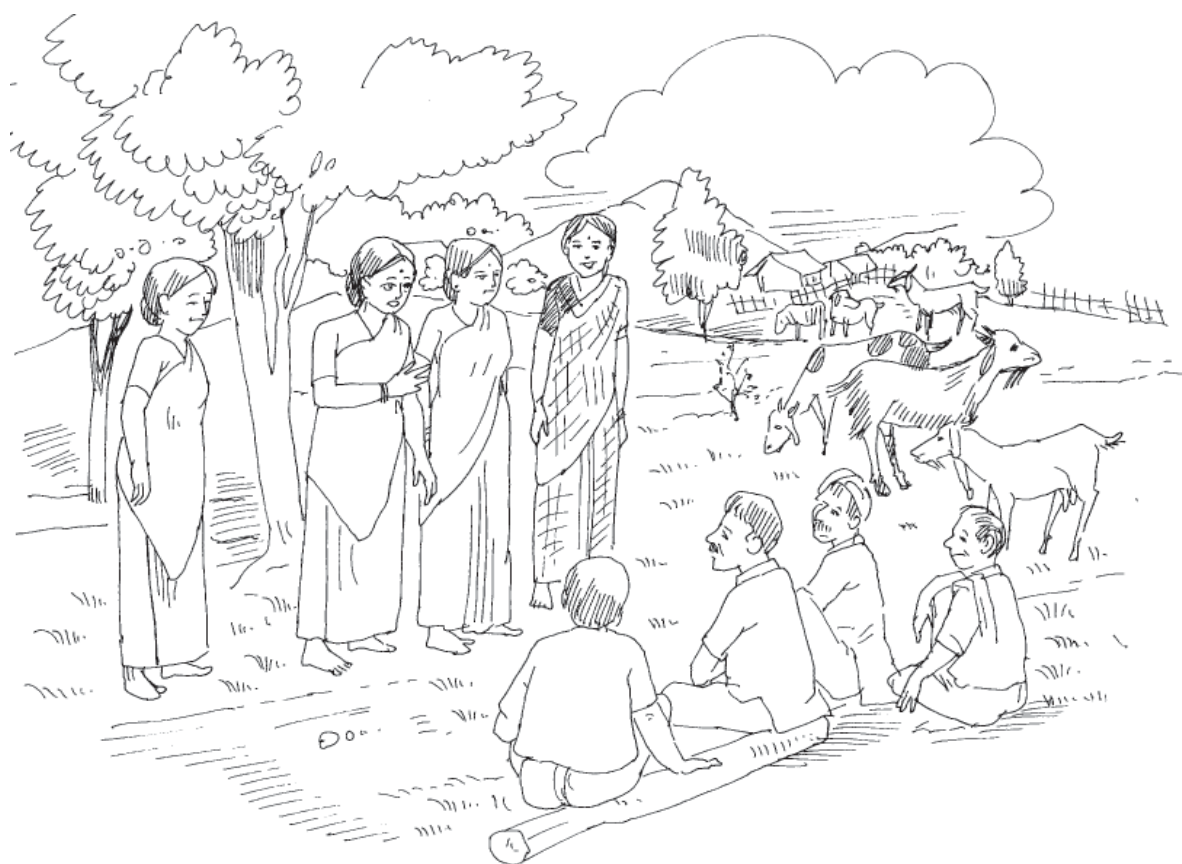


# Involving Men and Women for Effective Groups



**C**ollective action plays a vital role in many people's lives, particularly for income generation, risk reduction, public service provision, and the management of natural resources. While women are important users of natural resources (land, water, forests, fisheries), they are often excluded from management of those resources, and men's and women's voices are often not equally represented or valued when people act together. Understanding how men and women interact, what motivates them, and what capacities they have (or do not have) for effectively working together can result in natural resources being managed more effectively and equitably.

## SOURCE:

Pandolfelli, L., S. Dohrn and R. Meinzen-Dick. 2007. *Gender and Collective Action: Policy Implications from Recent Research*. CAPRI Policy Brief No. 5. International Food Policy Research Institute, Washington, D.C.

## Collective Action with Both Men and Women in the Group

In many instances, the gender composition of groups is an important determinant of effective collective action, especially for natural resources management in two key dimensions:

1. **The ability of groups to meet their immediate purposes**, whether that purpose is the management of a natural resource or the disbursement of funds to members of a burial group.

- 2. The process by which the group works to meet that purpose.** Specific measures of effectiveness might include tangible indicators such as economic returns to group members' compliance with rules, transparency, and accountability in managing funds or the incidence and severity of conflicts, as well as less tangible indicators, such as members' satisfaction with the group.

Strong common identity and interests among members make it easier for groups to establish management rules that are easy to understand and enforce. It is often easier to get all-female or all-male groups established, especially where women and men do not mingle freely. However, involving both men and women may lead to more effective groups in the long run, because they draw on their gender-based strengths. For example, in Bangladesh, women ensure community compliance with sanctuaries and fishing rules because they are the ones who decide whether to catch or not to catch fish.

## Success Stories of Both Men and Women Participating in Collective Action

What are the gains when both men and women participate in collective action that aims to protect natural resources? The success stories below feature how men and women can best work together:

- **Madhya Pradesh, India.** Control of illicit grazing of livestock has increased by 24 percent, control of illicit felling of trees by 28 percent, and regeneration of allotted forest by 28 percent when women participate in forest protection committees.
- **Bangladesh.** Compliance with rules limiting fishing in protected areas is higher when both men and women collectively manage floodplain and fishery resources. Women's participation in fishery management is widely accepted by the community because much of the pressure to ensure community compliance with sanctuaries and fishing rules comes from women, who control what is cooked, discuss fish catches in group meetings, and decide to catch or not to catch fish. However, men's participation is also vital for ensuring compliance with the rules because they are better able to guard the fish sanctuaries at night when it is unsafe for women to do so.
- **Kenya.** Better governance practices can be seen in mixed-sex groups in the highlands of central

Kenya, where women are regarded as more trustworthy with money than men. Men express more satisfaction with the way group finances are managed when women manage the money. In these groups, women frequently act as treasurer, while in all-male groups, men who act as treasurers are perceived to be more vulnerable to corruption.

However, simply adding women to a group does not automatically lead to greater group effectiveness. To actively participate, women need to be able to make management decisions and take on leadership responsibilities.



**In mixed-sex groups, women frequently act as treasurers because people regard them as more trustworthy.**

## Recommendations

Planners need to consider how to overcome the barriers to active participation of both men and women working together in groups.

At a practical level, this means:

1. **Assessing women's and men's motivations for joining groups.** Since development policies and programs prefer to work with groups rather than individuals, a better understanding of women's and men's reasons for joining groups can help policymakers and practitioners assess whether their programs are hitting or missing their targets. Men and women have different capacities and motivations for joining groups. For example, men often have more land and financial resources. If financial resources are critical to the success of the joint activity, microfinance targeted at women may be a critical intervention.
2. **Assessing the level of gender segregation in the community.** In communities where high levels of gender segregation exist, a more effective initial intervention may be to promote women's groups and build their capacity, while sensitizing men about the benefits of women's participation.
3. **Promoting approaches and rules of engagement that foster women's inclusion in collective action, whether through mixed or single-sex groups.** Formal or informal rules of participation often exclude women, for example, when only the land owner or head of household can be a member. Planners need to consider the opportunity cost of women's time for engaging in collective action and approaches enabling women to actively participate. Timing of meetings, for example, can be critical if women are to attend. Furthermore, women often do not speak up in public for various reasons, so strategies to overcome this may be needed (e.g. parallel discussions).
4. **Working with women to strengthen their technical and organizational capacities.** Where gender segregation hinders women from participating in the public sphere, capacity building initiatives aimed at enabling them to assume leadership roles may be helpful.



**Women may need to be trained to enable them to assume leadership roles.**

In drafting measures to empower women, planners need to ensure that all women's interests within a group are represented, including the voices of poorer and less-educated women, as well as those from marginalized communities.

## Suggested Readings

- Agrawal, A., G. Yadama, R. Andrade and A. Bhattacharya. 2006. *Decentralization and Environmental Conservation: Gender Effects from Participation in Joint Forest Management*. CAPRI Working Paper No. 53. International Food Policy Research Institute: Washington, D.C.
- Kariuki, G. and F. Place. 2005. *Initiatives for Rural Development Through Collective Action: The Case of Household Participation in Group Activities in the Highlands of Central Kenya*. CAPRI Working Paper No. 43. International Food Policy Research Institute: Washington, D.C.
- Pandolfelli, L., R. Meinzen-Dick and S. Dohrn. 2007. *Gender and Collective Action: A Conceptual Framework for Analysis*. CAPRI Working Paper No. 64. International Food Policy Research Institute: Washington, D.C.
- Sultana, P. and P. Thompson. 2006. *Gender and Local Floodplain Management Institutions: A Case Study from Bangladesh*. CAPRI Working Paper No. 57. International Food Policy Research Institute: Washington, D.C.

Sourcebook on **Resources, Rights, and Cooperation**, produced by the CGIAR Program on Collective Action and Property Rights (CAPRI)