

Raising Gender Awareness in Forestry

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Raising gender awareness in forestry was a main objective of the Gender and Forestry Seminar and Workshop held in Umeå, Sweden, from June 17 – 21, 2006. The Seminar marked the end of a 2-year assignment from FAO/ECE/ILO to a Team of Specialists (ToS) on Gender and Forestry in Europe and North America. The result of the work of the ToS is a "state of the art" report entitled "[Time for action - Changing the gender situation in forestry.](#)" In the workshop of IUFRO 6.08.01 that followed the seminar, the focus was widened to include Asia and Africa.

Since forestry has always been regarded as an arena mainly for men's work, business and governance, there is a huge lack of gender awareness in the sector. **Gender invisibility** has many forms: Statistics, for example, do not inform sufficiently on the involvement of women and men in the forestry sector. Information on women's involvement in family forestry, both as part of the workforce and as owners, is scarce. The differences between women and men in the relationship to, and the uses and management methods of natural resources, also need to be studied more closely.

Although women are significant users of forest products, they rarely make an input into **forestry decision making**, neither at the macro nor at the micro level. Even though some countries have introduced policies to improve the representation of women in the forestry sector, little has been done to encourage and/or follow up on these policies and, thus, the situation often remains unchanged. In most countries men dominate the forestry sector workforce, for example, and usually earn more than their equally qualified female counterparts.

In some countries, female representation within the forestry sector seems to be heavily influenced by the traditional values and perceptions of the role of women in society. Policies geared towards **equal opportunities** seem to have been impotent to break this general pattern. Even when women hold the majority ownership of private forests they are still marginalized in the decision making process.

Men and women have **different relationships to forests**. Women are credited with being more critical of forest management strategies, perhaps because they are more ecologically and socially aware of forestry issues.



The new vice-chancellor of SLU, Lisa Sennerby – Forse (center), discussing the report "Time for action" with Team of Specialists leader Gun Lidestav (right), and keynote speaker Carol J. Pierce Colfer (left). (Photo: Sven-Olov Bylund)

Women in forestry have been organizing themselves for more than 20 years. These networks, mainly of female forest owners, have proved to be very useful and important forums for women to discuss common problems and provide information and support to each other.

There was a general consensus that for any improvement to be made to the current gender imbalance in the forestry sector in Europe and North America, gender issues should be put on the agendas at **all levels of discussion**: the international community, governments and private and public sectors. To this end, the seminar concluded with the presentation of several specific recommendations targeted to each of these groups.

The IUFRO workshop following the seminar took a **more global perspective** with the emphasis being rather on women living in and managing the forests in their areas informally/traditionally than on gender issues in the formal forestry sector. At the business meeting of IUFRO Working Group 6.08.01 it was decided to extend the ToS analysis to Africa and Asia, to suggest gender-related themes to the World Forestry Congress, and to participate (via a panel) in the 2007 IUFRO Division VI Symposium, *Integrative Science for Integrative Management*, in Saariselka, Finland.