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Importance of Gender and Regional Differences in the Use of Forest Resources



This interesting study shows a new and integrated vision of the hypotheses about the importance of considering gender in the analysis of the use of forest products in various regions of the world. The results indicate that men and women in rural livelihoods contribute almost equally to the value of family income from unprocessed forest products, although there are strong differences in this aspect among regions of Southeast Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Man gathering bark for palm wine.

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This study uses a multi-case dataset to question current assumptions about the gender differentiation of forest product use. We test some of the commonly held ideas on how men and women access, manage, and use different forest products. Overall, we found significant gender differentiation in the collection of forest products, however, we also found that men play a much more important and diverse role in the contribution of forest products to rural livelihoods than previously reported, with strong differences across tropical Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The study is the product of the Poverty and Environment Network (PEN) (www.cifor.org/pen), a collaborative effort led by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR). The largest

quantitative global-comparative research project to date on forests and rural livelihoods, it analyzes data gathered from some 8,000 households in 24 developing countries.

A commonly held belief in the gender debate with respect to the relative roles of men and women in the use of forest resources is that women are the main collectors of forest products. However, results from our study suggest that men and women contribute almost equally to the value of household income from unprocessed forest products such as timber, poles, fruits and mushrooms. This overall finding, however, hides regional differences. In Latin America, for example, men bring to the household about seven times more income from unprocessed forest products, such as Brazil nuts, than women.

In Africa, women play a stronger subsistence role, while in Southeast Asia men and women tend to share more responsibilities in forest management and agricultural production.

Another common generalization is that men sell products of the highest value, whereas women — if they get to a market at all — are focused on small-scale subsistence products. But, in fact, there is incredible regional variation. In Africa, where the markets tend to be more subsistence-oriented, women tend to dominate. In Latin America, which have more specialized markets, men dominate, and in Asia, it's a mixture of the two.

Earlier case studies weren't wrong, only too narrowly focused. Findings from one site have been often extrapolated to make broad generalizations. This study shows that men do collect firewood and women do produce for the markets. The gender division is much less pronounced than we thought.

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References

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