

The Forestry and Gender Situation in Africa – Is There a Need for Time for Action?

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Africa is endowed as one of the largest tropical forests worldwide with the potential of meeting the socio-cultural and economic needs of its people. Yet these forests are being continuously threatened by human pressure, whilst the majority of its people live in abject poverty. With the advent of the global philosophy of sustainable development, the challenge seems to be mounting. The challenge is how to design a sound forest management system, which in itself is sustainable enough to preserve and sustain natural resources for future use. At the same time, the need for improving the lives of the African population and alleviating poverty have become a driving force among policy makers, researchers and development agents at all levels. One of the key challenges in the forestry development sector is the issue of gender mainstreaming.

Forestry in Africa, as in many nation states, has a male face. Since colonial inception in Africa, the formal forestry sector has been male dominated, whilst forestry policy itself is more technical than human oriented. African women are acknowledged as critical actors in forestry and natural resources utilization and management, yet there is no systematic knowledge and comprehensive database on forestry research data disaggregated by sex. Past and current forestry policies in Africa have been developed on gender neutral basis without taking into consideration gender interests relating to participation, decision making and benefit sharing of forest resource and its management. For sustainable management of forest resources and biodiversity, some of the critical resources needed are ownership and control of the means of production, which have been the bane of women. To engender the forestry sector and empower women, the paper attempts to create the need for action by examining the changing situation of women in forestry, through gender analysis of forestry structures in the formal and informal forestry sectors, forest ownership and rights in forestry communities and related issues.