



## I. What's it all about?

### Conflicts related to water, land and forests

Inequalities in people's standards of living, loss of livelihood and damage to the environment and natural resources (this newsletter was only able to cover the resources of water, land and forests), as well as unjust economic, political and social structures make a society vulnerable to (armed) conflicts. The rapid loss of people's livelihood is often caused or aggravated by damage to the environment. This does not have the same

impact on men as on women. When a family loses its livelihood e.g. its farming land or irrigation water, its young men are left with no prospects. Unless these young men can find a new way to earn a living, they are quite likely to be recruited by armed militia. Due to established gender roles, young women often have to leave school earlier to help their families to survive. In the case of violent conflicts concerning livelihood, women are the first to be exposed to danger. Some young women even join armed groups in the hope of finding protection against the violence of marauding soldiers and militia.

Large-scale projects like dam-building are a prime cause of sudden loss of livelihood. Such projects are planned by governments, big businesses and banks without consulting the local population. Instead of the much-vaunted advantages of modernisation, these people and their environment face utter devastation. For example, new dam projects in India forced millions of people to migrate when countless hectares of farming land and forests became flooded. When so many people are left without a livelihood, the only things that remain are frustration, hopelessness and a tendency towards violence.

### The role of gender in natural resource conflicts

Most conflicts concerning water or land arise less from the lack of these resources than from the manner in which they are distributed, managed and controlled. Sources of conflict concerning access/control and structures/politics include:

- unsecured ownership rights
- rival claims
- unequal distribution/access
- expulsion, migration and return of local inhabitants
- symbolic/religious systems

One key approach to the prevention of violence is to include the problem of unequal distribution/access/ownership and the underlying structures in International Cooperation (IC) projects.

In all these fields of conflict, gender acts as a structural and exclusion criterion, although such conflicts are generally difficult to analyse precisely (e.g. according to the criteria of men/women, white/indigenous inhabitants). The analysis and resolution of conflicts must thus frequently take into account the obscure interplay of different causes of conflict, including the gender perspective (for „Gender perspective“: see NL 2/04). Clearly, due to the traditional allocation of work according to gender, social norms and exclusion mechanisms, men and women frequently have different interests, needs, rights and scopes of action, and they will assume different roles during conflicts.

## Editorial

Dear Reader

This edition of the newsletter „Focus on Gender and Peace-building“ examines the ongoing struggle for access to and use of natural resources (the present enquiry was only able to cover the resources of water, land and forests). Often, a community's politics and structures for the management of water, land and forests merely fortify the existing distribution of power and land-ownership, as well as access to and use of natural resources. The hierarchical position of men and women is just one dimension of such power distribution.

Environmental pollution, together with unequal rights of access, use and ownership, as well as politics and structures for the management of natural resources, can lead to the loss of people's livelihoods. This, in turn, creates a breeding ground for violent conflicts.

In such conflicts, men and women will not have the same statuses and roles. Based on typical examples and key questions, our newsletter illustrates how International Cooperation (IC) workers can integrate a gender perspective into the management of conflicts about water, land and forests.

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#### Imprint

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Seen from a gender perspective, the many themes and sources of conflict related to water, land and forests can be divided into two categories:

### 1. Access to and control of water, land and forests

1.4 billion people in the world (mainly in Africa, Asia and Latin America) are without clean drinking water. Land-ownership is extremely disproportionate, with a small percentage of the population owning most of the land. There is also a huge discrepancy in the amount of land owned by men and by women: women own only 2% of cultivable land, although they produce 60-80% of the food. In many countries, women are not entitled to use or own land independently of their husbands or other male relatives. At the same time the number of women (widows or single mothers) left in charge of a family is rapidly increasing in rural areas. These women are responsible for producing food. If they are not supported by male relatives, they often have to depend on other land owners.

For many people, access to and control of land and forests is essential in order to obtain food, housing and income. Often, access to other resources, such as water, depends on holding land rights. Legislation concerning land rights is also of historical, cultural and social significance. Particularly in rural areas, people's inclusion or exclusion depends on their decision-making powers and land-ownership, whereby there is a blatant inequality in the status of men and women. Women are the water-carriers, while men are the decision-

makers. Often, women spend several hours a day transporting water for themselves and their families. On the other hand, decision-making in water-politics and -management is mainly the prerogative of men. Women not only need water for their houses and families, but also for subsistence, agricultural and stock farming, as well as for activities in the informal economy (e.g. laundry-washing or cooking food for street trading). As they often own no land, women have limited access to water, so that their agricultural productivity depends on rainfall. Frequently, girls have to miss school in order to help transport water. Time spent by women and girls on the transportation of water and forest products (e.g. firewood) is time that cannot be spent on other tasks, including gainful activities.

### 2. Politics and structures for the management of water, land and forests

Access to and control of water, land and forests largely depends on the existing distribution of power and land-ownership, and is defined according to various exclusion criteria. One of these exclusion criteria is gender: rights of

access and ownership often discriminate against women. The marginalisation of women in decision-making and the privatisation of public property reinforce discriminatory gender roles. Often, the result is a precarious situation where a woman left in charge of her family finds herself without access to land, clean drinking water or firewood (see box).

This unequal distribution of rights of ownership, access and use of natural resources, along with political systems that merely fortify the existing distribution of power and land-ownership, is a potential source of conflict that IC workers need to include in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their programs and projects.

#### Example: the privatisation of water supplies

Conflicting attitudes have long existed at international policymaking level regarding the importance of water supplies, and whether water should be considered a public or a commercial commodity. Above all, the World Bank pursues a policy of privatising public resources. The privatisation of water supplies means that access to water is (still) determined by the existing distribution of power and land-ownership. This does not have the same impact on men as on women. When water supplies are privatised, the price of water increases. Most of women's reproductive work (care economy) is, however, unpaid and brings in no income. This work is therefore not taken into account in economic statistics, e.g. the gross national product. It is usually the men who have the necessary financial means of purchasing water, while women are often dependent on their husbands' income. At the same time, given their responsibility for looking after the family, women attach more importance than men do to the availability of clean drinking water. However, in view of the high cost of water and insufficient income, they often have to revert to using unclean water, resulting in the added burden of caring for sick family members. Consequently, the privatisation of public services such as water supplies leads to an increase in unpaid work, which is mainly carried out by women.

**Link to Factsheet „Agriculture – Gender Makes the Difference“:** [http://www.generoyambiente.org/ES/articulos\\_estudios/factsheets/Agriculture.pdf](http://www.generoyambiente.org/ES/articulos_estudios/factsheets/Agriculture.pdf)

**Link to Factsheet „Water – Gender Makes the Difference“:** [http://www.generoyambiente.org/ES/articulos\\_estudios/factsheets/Water.pdf](http://www.generoyambiente.org/ES/articulos_estudios/factsheets/Water.pdf)

**Link to Factsheet „Watershed Management – Gender Makes the Difference“:** [http://www.generoyambiente.org/ES/articulos\\_estudios/factsheets/Watershed.pdf](http://www.generoyambiente.org/ES/articulos_estudios/factsheets/Watershed.pdf)

**Link to FAO-Papier „A gender perspective on land rights“:** <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/007/y3495e/y3495e00.pdf>

## II. Where are the problems?

### Lessons learnt

IC programs and projects, e.g. for fairer access to irrigation systems, need to be gender-based for men and women to benefit equally. The same applies to other processes concerning the distribution of (natural) resources.

#### **Different uses of resources**

Water projects for agricultural communities are usually biased in favour of the male population's demand for irrigation water. Women's requirements are often only considered in the context of their role as housewives, overlooking the fact that women also need water for their agricultural activities, as well as for the informal economy.

Men and women also have different attitudes towards the use of other resources, such as forest products. It is essential to bear this in mind when establishing protected reserves, otherwise conflicts will ensue. Women and girls are generally responsible for gathering animal fodder (foliage) and firewood. Men, on the other hand, are more interested in gathering building timber, which they can sell in the towns. Good timber prices attract men to the potential of the forest. This, however, jeopardises the interests of their womenfolk as carers for their families and livestock, which, ultimately, may lead to conflict.

> It is therefore important for programs and projects to be gender-based, analysing the different roles, activities, needs and interests of men and women. Changes brought about by IC projects may also provide an opportunity to modify gender relationships (a point that needs to be included in a gender analysis). If, for example, a well is to be built in a village, this will certainly facilitate the

task of the women – who usually transport the water. At the same time, however, the women will lose the opportunity of social contact that this work provided. How should the well project react to this analysis? Which sectors are affected, and how can they be interconnected?

> Water and land rights for women should also be established outside traditional gender hierarchy. Programs and projects must be careful not to reinforce existing gender stereotypes or maintain the fixed allocation of roles. On the contrary, new role models for men and women should be established (or at least their establishment should not be impeded).

#### **Agricultural reforms**

Agricultural reforms are normally gender-blind. Men stand to profit far more than women. Women seldom possess land, and any land rights they may hold are usually tied up with male relatives. Market-oriented agricultural reforms also strengthen the inequalities between men and women, since women often do not possess the necessary income to acquire land.

In the aftermath of agricultural reforms, many men migrate (seasonally). Large-scale construction projects and loss of livelihood can also force smallholders to migrate. This means that women have to assume additional tasks and responsibilities, at the same time, however, acquiring increased powers of decision and a wider scope of action.

> Agricultural reforms must take into account the different situations of men and women if men and women are to benefit equally. Care must be taken not to exclude women from the ownership, use and inheritance of land. Land ownership titles and rights of use should no longer only be

transferred to households, but also to women (or women's cooperatives). Furthermore, women should be accepted as heiresses.

> It is essential for smallholders to have firmly established rights of use and access to land, in order to avoid conflicts about the same piece of land. At the same time, smallholders will enjoy a certain measure of security, making it easier for them to plan their own future and that of their families and communities. On the other hand, the costs of registering land are often exorbitant and beyond smallholders' means. High costs also contribute to the formation and/or encouragement of a commercial land market. Such problems and possible alternatives (e.g. communal land, women's cooperatives) must be taken into account when considering the establishment of smallholders' rights of access and use.

#### **The right to food and water**

Cleaning drinking water for everyday needs and basic foodstuffs are not just commercial commodities.

> The right to a supply of clean drinking water to cover basic needs must be established in international law as a human right, and the human right to food must be respected. Gender-sensitive agricultural reforms in favour of the poorest populations are one way of helping to enforce this right, secure livelihoods and thus prevent violent conflicts.

# III. What are the prospects?

## Examples of the gender-sensitive management of natural resource conflicts

The following examples illustrate how a gender perspective can be included in the management of natural resource conflicts, enabling men and women to enjoy equal access to resources such as land.

### **A gender perspective in peace committees**

Nomadic communities are accustomed to living in precarious conditions. They often inhabit arid regions and are constantly on the move, seeking new grazing land and fresh water. In many societies it is these pastoral peoples who suffer most from political and economic marginalisation, and their livelihood is constantly endangered. Such circumstances radicalise their way of thinking and they are quite likely to join state armies, rebel groups or „conflict entrepreneurs“.

> For example, in the Cercle de Nioro in Mali's Sahel Belt, natural resource disputes have arisen over the past few years between farming communities and pastoral peoples, as well as between different groups of pastoral peoples. In 1998, peace agreements were negotiated between these communities and peace committees were formed, composed exclusively of men. As a result, the local NGO Jam Sahel and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) launched the program „Enhancing local capacity for conflict management“. The aim of this program was to sensitise people to the different potentials and contributions of men and women in the management of natural resource conflicts, leaving the communities to decide for themselves how to include a gender perspective in their peacemaking institutions. Following a gender analysis of these institutions and lengthy consultations with members of peace committees and local authorities, as well as with men

and women from the different communities, each community was able to develop its own strategy. For example, this might include the participation of two women per peace committee, the sensitisation of husbands, the reduction of women's workload or the motivation of enterprising women.

This program successfully integrated a gender perspective into the management of natural resource conflicts. Women are now able to discuss matters that were formerly a male prerogative, which also gives them greater self-confidence.

Preliminary assessments have revealed the necessity of paying more attention to the quality of the women's participation and their accountability towards other women in their community, as well as the sustainability of the process. (Source: IIED)

**Link to project description:** [http://www.iied.org/docs/drylands/dry\\_ip116eng.pdf](http://www.iied.org/docs/drylands/dry_ip116eng.pdf)

### **Land rights for men and women**

To reduce women's financial and legal dependence on their male relatives, one option may be to distribute ownership rights within households.

> For example: in Dakiri, Burkina Faso, it is no longer the norm for male heads of households to receive larger pieces of land, but for men and women to receive smaller plots separately. Now that both men and women possess irrigated land, the productivity of irrigated fields has increased. The women have proved to be at least equally good farmers as their menfolk. Women who now own irrigated land are proud to contribute more to the needs of their household. As women become financially independent from their husbands, they are able to support other relatives and

increase their own chances of acquiring property in the form of livestock. This considerably boosts women's self confidence and increases their scope of action within both family and society. (Source: UNDP)

### **The wider consequences of lobbying for equal rights**

Lobbying for equal rights of access, use and ownership of natural resources can also promote equality between men and women in other fields.

> For example, during the 1980s, many people fled to Mexico as a result of the civil war in Guatemala. One of these refugees, a member of the women's organisation „Mama Maquín“ founded at that time, remembers: „In the refugee centres in Mexico we women learnt to organise ourselves and began to demand our right to self-determination concerning our return to Guatemala. We attended training courses, learnt to read and write, and actively prepared for our return to Guatemala. The refugees agreed to found cooperatives upon their return, which were to regulate land ownership and repayment of credit. We women demanded that we too be included as cooperative members, and we also signed the legal mandate allowing us access to credit for the purchase of land. Our aim was, on the one hand, to achieve a legal right to own land and, on the other hand, to have a say in the running of the cooperative. Once back in Guatemala, however, all our efforts came to nothing: we could not enforce our demands. In most cases we could not even participate in the running of the cooperatives.“ For this reason, „Mama Maquín“ and two other women's organisa-

tions joined forces in 2000 to create the „Negotiating Committee for the Co-ownership of Land and Equal Participation of Women“. This committee seeks gender-sensitive solutions to land disputes and holds dis-

cussions with men and women from the various communities on the subject of the (economic) recognition of women's work and the distribution of income between men and women. The end objective is to obtain con-

ditions of fairness between the sexes – not only with regard to land ownership but also in the family and community. (Source: Frauensolidarität)

## IV. What's the procedure?

### Ways of integrating resource-related conflicts in IC programs

If conflicts relating to water, land and forests are already included in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of IC programs and projects, there is a greater

chance of finding a peaceable settlement. The following key questions, which may vary according to context,

could be useful to IC workers:

#### Needs and interests

##### Access to and control of water, land and forests

- Who (in the household, village or region, or at international level) has what needs and interests concerning water, land and forests?
- Why do men require natural resources (e.g. wood from the forest that can be sold for construction)? Why do women require natural resources (e.g. animal fodder and firewood from the forest to cover the needs of their families)?
- Are the different needs and interests compatible, or are there open conflicts (e.g. between farming communities and pastoral peoples, between men and women, or between people of different castes or ethnic origins)?
- Which mechanisms or institutions exist for natural resource conflict management, and at which levels (individual, household, community,

national, regional or international)? Is equal consideration given to the needs and interests of men and women? Do both men and women have powers of decision and negotiation? Do these mechanisms or institutions target the fair distribution of access, use and ownership between men and women?

##### Structures and politics in the field of water, land and forests

- Who favours which resource politics (e.g. protected areas; local, democratic administration of resources; agricultural reforms; securing the food supply; export agriculture; privatisation; infrastructure projects)? And why?
- How are these diverse interests handled? Are they treated democratically or are certain persons and groups of people excluded?
- Which strategies are adopted for natural resource conflict management? Do all the players have a chance to participate? Do the strategies promote equal rights of access, use and ownership with regard to water/land/forests – for women too?
- Is there a danger that the conflicting interests of the different players may result in violence? How can the IC

program or project help to prevent violence? With whom - with which interest groups and with which men and women – must IC workers cooperate?

## Rights and participation

### Access to and control of water, land and forests

- Who has access to and control over water/land/forests?
- Is there a difference between the quantity or quality of the water/land/forests available to men and the quantity or quality of those available to women?
- Do smallholders - as individuals and not only as households - enjoy access not only to water/land/forests, but also to credit facilities, marketing, technology and training?
- Do conflicts exist about access to and control of water/land/forests between members of households, in larger communities (e.g. between various interested parties), regionally or internationally? What is at the root of these conflicts and who is involved in them?
- Do these conflicts offer an opportunity of analysing and changing the power balance between men and women?
- How can the program or project avoid a degeneration of the conflicts („do no harm“) and if possible contribute to a constructive, peaceable denouement?

### Structures and politics with regard to water, land and forests

- Who – cooperative or individual - has which rights (nationally recognised rights as well as traditional rights) of access to and use of water/land/forests?
- Are these rights oriented towards existing power and ownership structures? Who is privileged and who suffers discrimination?
- Do agricultural reforms and the zoning of parts of protected areas aim to secure the livelihood of the poorest sectors of the population? Are these measures gender-sensitive, i.e. are men and women treated equally?
- Who possesses which powers of decision – e.g. who is responsible for water supplies (public entities or private concerns), for what is the water used, what is being cultivated, who assumes which tasks, who controls the resulting income?
- In most rural areas, women are seriously under-represented on water/land/forest management committees. Even if they serve on a committee, the men often do not take them seriously, or else they are kept so busy caring for their children and livestock or obtaining food for the family that they have very little time to attend meetings. If women's participation in such committees is to be increased, the following factors must be taken into account:
  - Rules for members: do men and women enjoy equal rights of participation? Can all adult members of a household serve on a committee or only one person (mostly the father)?
  - Social norms, i.e. gender structures related to public opinion, distribution of work and behavioural norms: are women afraid of compromising their reputation if they attend a meeting? Are the meetings held at places mostly frequented by men? Do meetings take place at a time when both men and women are able to attend? Do the men behave in such a way that women are afraid to attend (e.g. by drinking or fighting)? Can lower class women also participate? Do female members of the committee represent the interests of the other women in their community?
  - Social awareness: do men and women recognise each other's capabilities and know-how? Do they regard each other as equals and key players? Are men and women equally consulted and included in decision-making?
  - Personal resources: are there differences in the distribution of resources between men and women, between women, or between men that hinder some people's participation in a committee (e.g. ownership rights, political networks, reputation, self-confidence)?
  - Household resources: are the members of one household disadvantaged vis-à-vis the members of another household with regard to joining a committee (e.g. because of social norms that discriminate against certain classes/castes)?

„Schlüssel Fragen und Indikatoren“ by SDC: [http://www.sdc.admin.ch/ressources/deza\\_product\\_d\\_10.pdf](http://www.sdc.admin.ch/ressources/deza_product_d_10.pdf)

„Gender und Wasser. Für geschlechtergerechte Interventionen in den Bereichen Wasser, Hygiene und Siedlungshygiene“ (forthcoming): <http://www.deza.admin.ch>

Factsheet „Gender Indicators – Gender Makes the Difference“: [http://www.generoyambiente.org/ES/articulos\\_estudios/factsheets/Gender%20Indicators.pdf](http://www.generoyambiente.org/ES/articulos_estudios/factsheets/Gender%20Indicators.pdf)

„Field Level Handbook“ by FAO/SEAGA: <http://www.fao.org/sd/seaga/downloads/En/FieldEn.pdf>

„Rural households and resources. A guide for extension workers“ by FAO/SEAGA: <http://www.fao.org/sd/seaga/downloads/En/RHREn.pdf>

Further handbooks and guides by FAO/SEAGA: [http://www.fao.org/sd/seaga/4\\_en.htm](http://www.fao.org/sd/seaga/4_en.htm)

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Español: ¿Tierra en manos de mujeres? Reformas Agrarias, Mercados de Tierra y Género: [http://www.fian.org/fian-es/index.php?option=com\\_doclight&Itemid=97&task=details&dl\\_docID=34](http://www.fian.org/fian-es/index.php?option=com_doclight&Itemid=97&task=details&dl_docID=34)
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## Links **Natural resources, conflicts and gender**

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<http://www.edcnews.se/Research/Gender-LivelihoodConfl.html>

FIAN: El derecho humano a la alimentación de mujeres rurales. 2004 :

[http://www.fian.org/fian-es/index.php?option=com\\_doclight&Itemid=97&task=details&dl\\_docID=43](http://www.fian.org/fian-es/index.php?option=com_doclight&Itemid=97&task=details&dl_docID=43)

Public Citizens: Water and Gender (case studies from around the world):

<http://www.citizen.org/cmep/Water/gender>

UNCHS: Women's Rights to Land, Housing and Property in Post-Conflict Situations and During Reconstruction: A Global Overview. Land Management Series No. 9. 1999:

<http://hq.unhabitat.org/en/uploadcontent/publication/Land.pdf>

## Organisations

Gender and Water Alliance

<http://www.genderandwater.org>

International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED)

[www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org)

Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO)

<http://www.wedo.org>

Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN)

<http://wocan.org>