LESSON LEARNED Adaptive Collaborative Management to advance jointly gender equality, biodiversity, climate, and land restoration goals in Uganda

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Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM) is an approach where stakeholders collectively plan the management of a common natural resource. The method is characterized by conscious efforts to communicate, collaborate, negotiate, resolve conflicts and learn about the impact of their actions regarding the natural resource. Here we share lessons learned from the use of ACM to increase women's participation in forest-related decisions, secure land tenure for women and support restoration activities for men and women in Uganda. The approach showed synergistic outcomes with respect to gender equality and environmental outcomes.

Important Details

time (or time period)	2011-2016
country & region	Uganda
context & agro-eco landscape type	Community forestry
key actors, stakeholders & beneficiaries	Rural women in Uganda
model and/or tools used	Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM)

Description & takeaways

Uganda loses approximately 80,000 ha of forest every year almost entirely due to the consumption of fuel wood. This problem is projected to intensify along with Uganda's predicted population growth rate of 3.2% per year (Musaka et al. 2012).

Women are disproportionately impacted by deforestation as they have to travel further and further to secure fuel and food due to the gendered division of labor. Although Uganda's forest policy formally recognizes tenure security for women, on-the-ground implementation is "fragmented, uncoordinated and generally ineffective" (Mwangi 2017). Cultural biases and unequal power dynamics at the community level further prevent women from full and meaningful participation in community forestry. At the outset of an action research project focusing on gender gaps in community forestry, women were sidelined in leadership and decision-making roles and were rarely included in forestry activities. This perpetuated their marginalization and overlooked their perspectives, priorities, and knowledge, all of which are imperative to successful, sustainable and resilient community forest management.

Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM) was used as an approach to address both social and environmental issues in community-based forestry. ACM is a process of social learning and reflection that fosters a safe space where women can more effectively share their opinions in men's presence and be heard with more equal weight. The adoption of ACM successfully contributed to an increase in women's participation in forest-related decisions, secured women's land tenure and incentivized both women and men to support mixed-gender restoration activities. Intentionally including men in gender-focused activities encouraged them to endorse and contribute to initiatives that supported women's empowerment. Inclusive facilitation, women's participation in registered community groups, and the strengthening of social capital within communities and between communities and external actors gave women recognition, exposed them to new ideas and practices, and helped them realize their vision. Consensus-based decision-making proved to be a critical factor enabling women's voice and influence over important decisions.

In addition to creating significant positive inroads for women into positions of decision-making, leadership, and generally enabling higher levels of self-confidence, this approach led to positive environmental outcomes. With the project, women planted 5896 trees on farms and 2645 trees in forest reserves. Overall, 82 acres (~33ha) of degraded forest reserves were replanted by both men and women, thereby contributing to forest rehabilitation and climate change mitigation. Moreover, through ACM-led discussions, 70 out of 173 participating women were able to plant *Ficus natalensis*, a tree that signifies land ownership in Ugandan cultures and which is traditionally only permitted for men to plant. Further research on ACM applications in Uganda showed that women's planting of formerly forbidden species can have positive synergistic outcomes for enhanced biodiversity, women's economic opportunities, and decision-making as to which species will be planted and how they will be managed (Mukasa et al. 2016).

Key references

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