
Philippines: Lessons on gender from community based forest management

Many community-based forest management projects are implemented in the Philippines aiming at increasing community involvement in forest management and at providing employment and livelihood. Although there are many examples of successful cases, we decided to choose a less positive one, as a means to show how the exclusion of women or lack of gender awareness can lead to increasing gender inequalities, both within communities and in households.

An evaluation of a community-based forest management project in Pagkalinawan, Jala-Jala, in effect since 1972, shows that despite several positive impacts on peoples' livelihoods, the project had negative impacts for women.

Its failure was rooted in the fact that it did not recognise women's knowledge and the gender divisions of labour in the community and in the household. The project issued land use certificates and land titles --to improve land tenureship-- only to men, who thus became the ones to have access to and control over resources.

The project had the insidious effect of reinforcing patriarchy and establishing gender inequality in the community:

- Men had more opportunities to become representatives of the community and the market and to become powerful leaders in Pagkalinawan.
- Men, and not women, had links to external agencies (e.g., markets) through the credit facilities of the project.
- Men, and not women, had links to other economic and educational opportunities.

Community customary rights, land use and allocations were undermined upon the implementation of a pattern of privatisation of resources. Gender unbalance was thus linked to a hierarchical and male model rooted in dominion and control of nature along the lines of the globalisation "development" goal. From this experience it becomes clear that for a community-based forest management project to succeed, the inclusion of the gender dimension based on acknowledgement of women's knowledge, views and participation is a must.

Article based on information from: "Seeing the Forest for the People. A Handbook on Gender, Forestry and Rural Livelihoods", Vanessa Griffen, APDC (Asian and Pacific Development Centre), 2001.