



# Engaging Women in Forest Governance in Liberia

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# Rationale for the Study

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Pressure to meet livelihood outcomes *and* conservation outcomes

Not clear for conservation community how to meaningfully, effectively engage local communities -particularly women

- Around livelihoods, equitable outcomes
  - Unintended consequences
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# Background of the Study

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What is the potential impact of women's participation in forest governance on forest outcomes?

- Positive evidence from Asia
- Need an evidence base for Africa

Liberia an appropriate case study

- A global good, economic reconstruction, rural livelihoods
- Legal and regulatory reforms

Change in question: *What is the nature of forest governance at the community level? What are the roles of men and women vis a vis the forest?*

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# Study Area & Methodology

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## Rivercess County

- Two communities (Gblazeo Neezuin)

## Conversations with NGO/ Government

## Community meetings

## Community institutions and organizations

- 37 office bearers

## Individual interviews

- Two phases that include observation
  - 181 in depth qualitative interviews
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Photo Credit: Business and Human Rights Center

# Gender and Forest Governance

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## Women's engagement in forest governance

- Formal community organizations
  - One woman engaged in the CFDC
  - Significant challenges engaging women across formal orgs
  - But... men's participation also limited
- Customary institutions
  - Women's participation consultative
    - Little engagement beyond the community



# The Organization of Livelihoods



## Women

Obedience, deference to community authority, husbands

Providing “motherly care”

- Domestic work, Traditional healers

Support husbands in providing for the household

- some forest based activities, petty trade,

## Men

Role to provide for households and families

- Farming, forest activities
- open households

Provide “protective care”

- orderliness and control of households/ household members

Men make decisions over use of productive assets

- Land, equipment

# Livelihoods and Forest Governance

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Women can and do participate in public life but in ways that align with social roles, responsibilities

*In order for women to become engaged in forest governance there is a complex set of gender social norms that need to be addressed*

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# Perceptions of Gender & Forest Governance

The challenges men face in becoming part of forest committee[s] is that our husbands have to hustle, work, to feed our families. [There is] not enough income so [they] have to do different things to bring money home. Because of this, there is no extra time for such activities (*Interview #2 Help Yourself Women's Group*)



There *could* be a difference if women were more involved [forest committees] but...even if they attended or formed part of these committees they won't give any contribution. The bulk of the work is resting on we the men.... But these days, in recent times, there [is] a lot of advocacy to include women on these committees so there are always women in these committees no matter what" (*Interview # 3 CFDC*).

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# Recommendations

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## Formal mechanisms of forest governance

- Important for critical mass to ensure women's voice in decision making
- Cannot operate outside of understanding of livelihoods/ well being

## Critical to understand social norms and livelihood decision making

- Intersectional perspective
- Broad livelihoods perspective
- Power dynamics

## Phasing that is appropriate for the context

- What value women/ marginalized men bring to forest governance (needs based vs. rights based approach)
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