

MARCH 2011

## OVERVIEW

### IIED Gender and Generation Team

**Project name:**  
Gender and Generation

**Project leaders:**  
Cecilia Tacoli and Donatella Gnisci

**Time frame:**  
January 2010 – March 2011

**Cost:**  
£24,500

**Objective:**  
Compare studies on gender and generation across IIED's working groups to draw out lessons, stimulate discussion and find ways to ensure gender and generation are addressed more consistently in the work of IIED and its partners.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

A strong analysis of gender and generation is essential to understanding power imbalances and being able to influence them. The Gender and Generation Team at IIED was established in 2009 to strengthen the institute's capacity to incorporate gender and generational issues in its research and partnerships. In 2010, the group commissioned four case studies documenting IIED's recent work on these issues. The studies focus on different sectors – urban poverty, migration, access to land, and media coverage of climate change – but reveal overlapping insights that we aim to capture and build on in the future.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

If the goal of sustainable development is to transform livelihoods, then it is crucial to thoroughly understand how livelihoods are constructed – including the specific experiences of women, men, younger and older people. Existing research has amply demonstrated that analyses of gender and generation are important to the success of sustainable development initiatives, and many available tools and approaches already reflect this. Yet IIED's work on gender and generation has been scattered

# Gender and generation matter

The different experiences of men, women, younger and older people inform new ways to improve livelihoods and encourage sustainable development.

Has IIED research been ignoring the voices of half the population? Because women in the developing world are so often left out of decision-making and their interests disregarded in policies, they can be overlooked even by NGOs nurturing local leadership. Similarly, the youngest community members disappear in research focused on the mainstream. Yet sustainable development initiatives need a clear picture of these power imbalances, and tools to alter them. Already, work across IIED has changed our understanding of poverty and environmental problems by analysing the disparate experiences of men, women, young and old people. Like those of other research organisations, however, IIED's programmes are not consistently designed to listen and learn from these different groups.

We aim to change this through the new Gender and Generation Team. Four case studies commissioned by the group in 2010 shed light on the many facets of gender and generational issues, and also offer several broad insights that can guide future research.

## Looking across contexts

The studies document IIED's recent work investigating the roles of women, men and youth in a changing world. They cover an array of research topics in different parts of the globe.

In Mumbai, India, researchers described the establishment of the first women-led federation of slum dwellers, Mahila

Milan. Supported by a local NGO, the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), Mahila Milan began with savings groups where women collected funds for housing. The groups met an immediate need, and participants received training and support to organise and expand their influence, first in the wider city and then within international networks.

The experiences of young female migrants were explored during a project on rural-urban migration in Tanzania and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Increasing numbers of young people, especially young women, are moving in search of jobs and independence. Mobility is not necessarily a crisis, researchers say – often it is a wise strategy. But women may have less choice in the matter than men. In Lotima, Tanzania, for example, young women argued that they would not have to migrate if they had secure access to land and water.

A third study showed how women's access to land and natural resources is changing in Mali and Niger. Here, and in other West African countries, the introduction of local-level democratic processes is giving women opportunities to get involved in public life. One of the women's main concerns is dwindling availability of farmland, as population growth, new land-rights rules and modernised agriculture are pushing marginalised people out of farming – especially women and young men.

and uncoordinated. The case study series will highlight connections across research groups and help make these issues a central priority, which in turn moves us towards a key objective in IIED's five-year plan: 'making gender and generation matter'.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNT & INNOVATIONS

- Limited access to assets and resources is a major cause of poverty in low- and middle-income nations. Social and cultural norms, in addition to economic constraints, mean that women and young people often have very little say on how such limited resources are used.
- Gender and generational relations are part of local culture and contexts, and initiatives to transform them should be driven by local organisations.
- Making issues of gender and generation visible can deepen understanding of sustainable development problems and inspire new approaches.

## IIED GENDER AND GENERATION TEAM

The Gender and Generation Team works to document changing gender and generational relations and explore the implications for understanding poverty and establishing sustainable development priorities and initiatives.



Photo: Marie Monimart

The studies document IIED's recent work investigating the roles of women, men and youth in a changing world.

The final case looked at gender and generation in climate change journalism. As part of efforts to improve reporting on climate change in poorer countries, the IIED-backed Climate Change Media Partnership asked its journalist fellows about the importance of gender and generation. Although most male and female fellows acknowledged a need to include women's views in their reports, they lacked the resources, tools and knowledge to do so. The journalists also varied in their awareness about the different effects of climate change on men and women of all ages, and about the need to report these differences.

### Key concepts for the future

Together, these studies point to general concepts that could be widely applied in IIED's work.

**Identity matters.** In the migration study, when asked their occupation, rural people often answered 'farming' – even when they actually made their living from a range of other activities. People's identities persist through changing circumstances, and their perceived roles comprise gender, generation and power relations. Addressing poverty means not just altering material conditions but also examining issues of identity and socio-cultural norms.

**Scarcity forces change among the voiceless.** In East Africa and Southeast Asia, scarce jobs and land forced younger people to migrate. Increasing pressure on farmland in West Africa means women and young men must look for alternative livelihoods. And women in Mumbai slums developed different ways to meet their needs when adequate employment was unavailable. Sustainable development initiatives have to consider how scarcity intersects

with gender and generation to shape people's options for making a living.

**Empowerment starts from the bottom.** The Mumbai federation began as a small-scale project to meet women's basic need for a safety net, and was then nurtured towards broader change. Though not a new lesson, it's worth reiterating: transformations in gender and generational relations take time and must be grounded in people's perceived needs and priorities.

**Invisible issues are lost opportunities.** The Climate Change Media Partnership study highlighted that issues of gender and generation can become invisible if journalists do not understand and report on them. Similarly, researchers who overlook gender and generation will miss important relationships that can offer new ways to approach problems and bring about change.

To take these insights forward, IIED is organising a meeting with international fellows and long-term partners. Participants will develop a more detailed agenda and methodology for future work. IIED's new five-year strategy also includes the objective of 'making gender and generation matter'. We'll need local partners to drive projects to achieve this goal – ensuring that the interplay of men and women, young and old shapes research across IIED, but remains sensitive and specific to each local social context.

The International Institute for Environment and Development's Reflect & act series showcases innovation and lessons learnt in selected projects from across the institute. See [www.iied.org](http://www.iied.org) for more.