Asking women the right questions

What do women already know about trees, their products and management?

Women in many societies have limited mobility. Most activities must be located near the home and include women in their activities. This may help identify existing structures to which women may add their own input. Women are forced to work a “double day.”

What problems are women experiencing in relation to tree resources?

In many rural areas, older women complain that they can no longer prepare medicines because medicinal trees that were formerly available have been removed. They can help identify and reintroduce those trees.

What do women already know about trees, their products and management?

In Burkina Faso, women spoke out against monoculture forestry plantation projects. Although such plantations provide a source of wood for urban markets, the women said, they also removed access to “unused bush” for neighbouring families and thus removed important sources of fuelwood, food, and plant material. The women asked for more multipurpose trees as well as guaranteed access for local residents.

How can women organize themselves?

For example, women may be unable to prepare medicines because the trees they need have been removed. They can help identify and reintroduce those trees.

In India, a project recommended that women adopt a particular silkworm that produces a large quantity of silk. However, the women objected, saying that “it is better to have trees.”

In Guinea, women said they wanted projects to be joint efforts, involving both men and women. They felt that men had more time to contribute and that men would appreciate women’s input more if it was an all-community effort.

In Indonesia, where the logging industry is becoming increasingly scarce, mainly because it is being indiscriminately cut for fuelwood. The forest service has suggested the use of another species, but female artisans have found it does not produce as fine a product. They have suggested an alternative solution: protect the valuable species when permits to cut fuelwood are given out.

In Zambia, it was noted that women made oil from a local tree that foresters had never considered putting in an inventory. In Thailand, women select different species of wood for cooking different items, according to their different heating qualities. One type of wood with specific burning qualities is considered essential by these women for processing good quality silk.

In centeral Nepal a village forest committee formed by women, successfully modified legislation that sought to delegate forest management to the panchayat, an administrative unit that includes many villages. The organized women argued that management should have been in the hands of a few central administrators. However, this was essential to the work that had to be done. It was found that the women were perfectly willing to speak with men from outside the community, once they saw that the subject was of interest.

What do women already know about trees, their products and management?

In the informal discussions that followed, the women asked to go into the reserve accompanied by the project staff to identify forest products available for collecting or harvesting. They asked if the project could provide them with information on medicinal plants, fruits and nuts, and if they could learn about recipes for extracting honey.

In Indonesia, a project recommended that women adopt a particular silkworm that produces a large quantity of silk. However, the women objected, saying that “it is better to have a baby when you let them silkworms into your house.” Why were the women not interested in planting?

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sub-unit of the panchayat as had been the tradition. This smaller unit was closer to the women and would allow women to participate more fully.\textsuperscript{21}

Organized women in Kenya have raised funds to support large scale tree planting and nursery development, while in India groups of women have helped change legislation on forest harvesting by "hugging" trees, thereby drawing public attention to economic and environmental problems caused by overexploitation.