

Transforming gender relations: upscaling collective action in women's entrepreneurship

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International Institute for Environment and Development (2018)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17992>

Accessed: 12-10-2018 14:14 UTC

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## Policy pointers

### Progress towards

gender equality in forest and farm sectors is essential to achieve Sustainable Development Goals that leave no-one behind.

### Social and cultural

norms present the most challenging barrier to gender equality – requiring action to build gender awareness and challenge constraining socio-cultural norms at household, institution and national levels.

### Women's business

groups that address poverty are a legitimate entry point for improving gender equality. Investment in business incubation for women (i.e. support to accelerate the successful development of sustainable businesses in forest landscapes) can help build a critical mass of women entrepreneurs.

### Collective action by

women is known to result in gender transformative impacts and can be facilitated and monitored using the 'three Rs' of representation, recognition and resource distribution.

# Transforming gender relations: upscaling collective action in women's entrepreneurship

Strengthening gender equality in business is an important and valid entry point to achieve Sustainable Development Goals that leave no-one behind. Making progress on gender means tackling entrenched power inequalities in diverse societies. At the heart of gender inequality lie systems of patriarchy and related socio-cultural norms which must be challenged at multiple levels. In practice, social and religious taboos restrict entry points. But upscaling collective action to strengthen women's role in business can be facilitated. Phase I of the Forest and Farm Facility (FFF) used peer mentoring, business incubation and networking to increase gender equality and reduce poverty within Forest and Farm Producer Organisations (FFPOs) and their businesses. Future actions will be tracked to ensure greater representation, recognition and resource re-distribution to women at household, institution and national levels.

At least half of the 1.5 billion people globally who depend on forest landscapes are women. And of the 1.4 billion who live on less than US\$1.25 per day, 829 million are women and girls (522 million men and boys) with most living in forest landscapes.<sup>1</sup> In this context, increasing rural women's role in business is an important and valid entry point to reduce poverty. However, little is known about how to do this, and many obstacles exist. Promoting more equal forest land tenure is one clear priority, since on average, women are estimated to own less than 20% of landholdings globally. This affects their ability to access credit, invest and grow their businesses. Yet even when women own land, socio-cultural norms institutionalised through policy and practice often view men as household heads. This can hinder women's ability to make business use of forests and reduce access to extension services such as subsidised fertilisers.<sup>2</sup> There is

also evidence that women wishing to pursue business face barriers in accessing finance, due to socio-cultural norms which favour male entrepreneurs in investment decisions.<sup>3</sup>

This briefing describes gender empowerment approaches introduced since 2012 through the FFF programme, working with more than 900 FFPOs in ten partner countries: Vietnam, Myanmar, Nepal, Kenya, Liberia, The Gambia, Zambia, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Bolivia.

## Changing socio-cultural norms to transform gender relations

To make progress on gender equality, many socio-cultural norms need to be challenged. Patriarchy exists at different levels: the family unit, community, religious and financial institutions, and government services. All interconnect with entrepreneurship. Understanding the patriarchy's

role in creating gender divisions should be a starting point for any intervention that seeks to address those power relationships.

## *Being gender transformative means understanding how to improve outcomes for women and men, which indeed can lead to changes in gender roles and relations*

Changing attitudes and patterns of behaviour to address harmful environmental practices is already common practice in forest and livelihood related activities.<sup>4</sup> Extending this approach to include gender is often a gradual process of first understanding (being gender aware), then taking

action to address differences and complementarities between genders that can reduce inequalities (being gender transformative). Being gender transformative means understanding how to improve outcomes for women and men, which indeed can lead to changes in gender roles and relations. It involves an iterative process of facilitated research, capacity building, institutional linking, strengthened accountability and collective action. To then change socio-cultural norms on gender, a process of collective action needs to be facilitated.

### **Collective action for gender transformative outcomes**

FFPOs and their businesses range from cooperatives to farmers', women's and indigenous peoples' organisations. They form large parts of key rural sectors within the economy, putting them in a unique position to advance economic empowerment for both women and men. Globally, women's participation and leadership in FFPOs is lower than men's, although the fastest growing form of cooperatives — savings cooperatives — are mainly led by women.<sup>5</sup> Despite the latter anomaly, strategies for addressing gender inequalities within cooperatives are generally weak.<sup>6</sup> Socio-cultural issues have been identified as the most significant barrier to making progress. These findings resonate with our own assessment of gender equality within 29 FFPOs in ten partner countries through the FFF programme.<sup>7</sup> To overcome socio-cultural norms, FFPOs need to build alliances with other actors and social movements such as credit unions and women's labour and environmental movements.

Research shows that women's representation needs to reach a 'critical mass' of at least 25–50% to have a positive impact on gender outcomes, and above 50% to increase the likelihood of women taking on leadership roles.<sup>8</sup> Since women belonging to the same community or institution may not organically develop a sense of solidarity or

see the benefits of collective action, supporting agencies can help bring diverse groups together around shared interests. This may lead not just to collective organising around women's interests, but towards citizenship — representing both men's and women's interests.<sup>9</sup> Women's group enterprises can be a key driver for achieving this critical mass; Figure 1 illustrates the process.

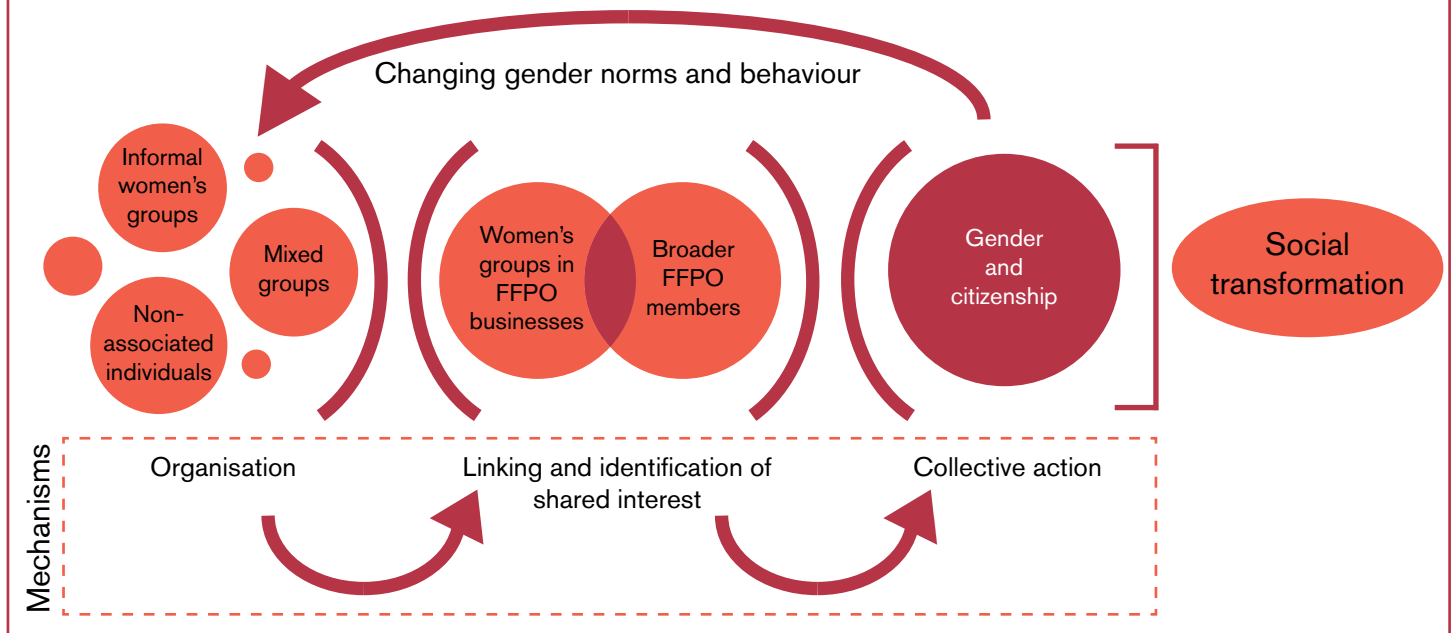
Women-led group businesses and women's peer-to-peer mentoring help facilitate collective action and create important multiplier effects. Women who start their enterprise in teams (of greater than three) have greater ambitions to create job opportunities for others.<sup>9</sup> The 10,000 Women's Initiative found that 90% of women who had received mentorship training were likely to train an average of eight other women within their communities.<sup>10</sup>

### **Scaling up gender equality through the Forest and Farm Facility**

IIED works with FAO, IUCN and AgriCord partners within the FFF programme<sup>11</sup> to improve gender relations and strategies within FFPOs. During Phase I (2012–2017) FFF worked with more than 900 FFPOs, reaching over 30 million forest and farm producers in the ten partner countries.<sup>7</sup> Further linkages were created with an additional 25 countries through regional and global FFPO federations, trainings, exchanges and thematic conferences. Gender was mainstreamed and monitored through sex-disaggregated indicators measuring progress on women's and men's participation in policy dialogues and the ratio of female leadership within producer groups. Across the ten countries women's participation in FFPOs ranged from 21–79%, with outliers in Nicaragua, Nepal and Myanmar. The programme aimed to support the participation of at least a 50%, or majority, share of women in all activities. After four years, this has been the most challenging objective to achieve.

The first phase of FFF saw significant progress overall. Programme support raised profitability in 262 FFPO businesses — improving livelihoods for tens of thousands of producers. FFPO representation in policy processes led to 33 policy changes across the ten partner countries. In Bolivia, Guatemala and Vietnam additional funding in excess of US \$100 million was leveraged — four times the programme's total expenditure. However, despite these successes, in nearly all ten countries women were still under-represented in decision making positions, at meetings, and in businesses. In 2017, FFF carried out a gender assessment to better understand why, and how this was being addressed by 29 FFPOs across the ten countries.

Figure 1. Facilitating collective action through women's group enterprises



Findings revealed that while there was awareness of women's lack of participation, very little was actively done to change this. In the final year of Phase I, FFF developed three new strategies to address gender gaps; these were then tested in different country contexts.

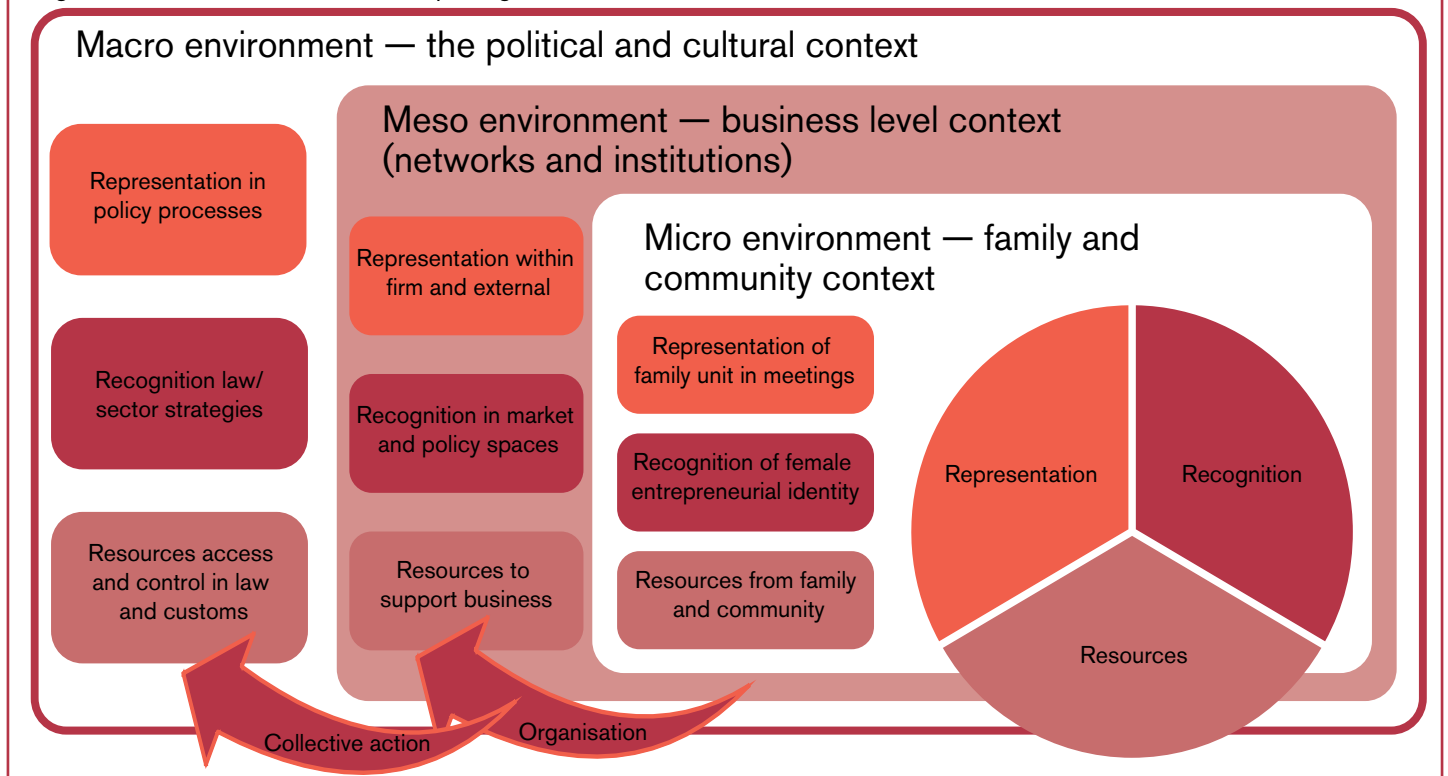
**1: Developing peer-to-peer mentors to improve women's skills**

FFF initiated a process for establishing a network of peer-to-peer women mentors. In a few select

countries internal FFPO surveys were conducted to identify women champions – key resource persons that had a skill or position that would enable them to mentor others. Their role was to motivate other women to engage more in business and leadership activities, but also to facilitate greater networking and organisation among women to ensure they participate and strengthen their roles within both decision making and commercial activities.

The survey results led to direct benefits. In Nepal, the Association of Family Forest Owners of

Figure 2. Research framework for exploring collective action and the three R's at different levels



Nepal (AFFON), the National Farmer Group Federation of Nepal (NFGF), the Federation of Nepal's Cottage and Smallscale Industries (FNCSI) and the Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) used the surveys to develop their own gender strategies. Trainings led by women peers promoted new discussions on gender roles, and key challenges.

All the organisations saw record numbers of elected female members during the 2017 provincial and local elections. Women's economic empowerment was identified as important to this success.

## 2: Building a business incubation approach for women

In Kenya the Farm Forest Smallholder Production Association of Kenya (FF-SPAK) collaborated with GROOTS Kenya<sup>12</sup> on a business coaching programme providing tailored support and mentoring to 21 women entrepreneurs led by women mentors. Discussions uncovered internal power dynamics, including 'gate keeping' of opportunities by men. Despite having a relatively equal gender balance among members, women's participation in the associations was weak with fewer opportunities and benefits compared with men. The mentor support helped break down resistance to addressing these issues, beginning the process of change.

## 3: Linking groups to national and regional women's networks

The preceding work triggered intra-group dialogues on how gender dynamics can promote collective action. Women's networks and movements were key intermediaries in this process. Their engagement helped form 'women for themselves' groupings within FFPOs. For

example, the African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests (REFACOF) supported the involvement of women in regional and global policy and learning events. It also shared knowledge with over 110 farmer-based organisations, strengthening women's role in these groups.

## Towards social equity

With the three strategies above, FFF has begun addressing gender issues and empowering women, moving from being a gender-aware programme towards being gender transformative. Understanding and monitoring progress on socio-cultural norms will be a priority. As illustrated in Figure 2, we will use proxy measures to track changes<sup>13</sup> at household, institutional and national levels using the 'three Rs': (i) representation in democratic processes at different levels; (ii) recognition of the equal standing of women and men in social, economic and political interactions; and (iii) redistribution of resources, both between and within economic classes (where gender creates differences).

Scholars argue that focusing on these proxies will allow for a 'third movement' of emancipatory politics of gender — one that is better equipped to deal with the structural changes required.<sup>14</sup> The Swedish government uses a similar framework to ensure its foreign policy<sup>15</sup> leads to concrete results on gender equality abroad. When FFF embarks on Phase II (2018-2023), it will contribute additional evidence on how gender transformative action can lead to better lives for both women and men.

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## Knowledge Products

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ISBN 978-1-78431-615-0

This research was funded by the FAO however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the FAO.



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United Nations

## Notes

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