

An introduction to the gender box

Carol J Pierce Colfer

In 2013, we published two papers on 'the gender box', an analytical framework for addressing gender in forestry. In its initial form (Colfer 2013), our thought was to include both the range of issues that pertain to gender and forestry, and brief rationales for the various topics covered. In the second

iteration (Colfer and Minarchek 2013), we shortened the discussion – in recognition of foresters' general distaste for wordy documents – and we improved the figure that summarizes the issues, by adding a more robust time dimension (Figure 1).

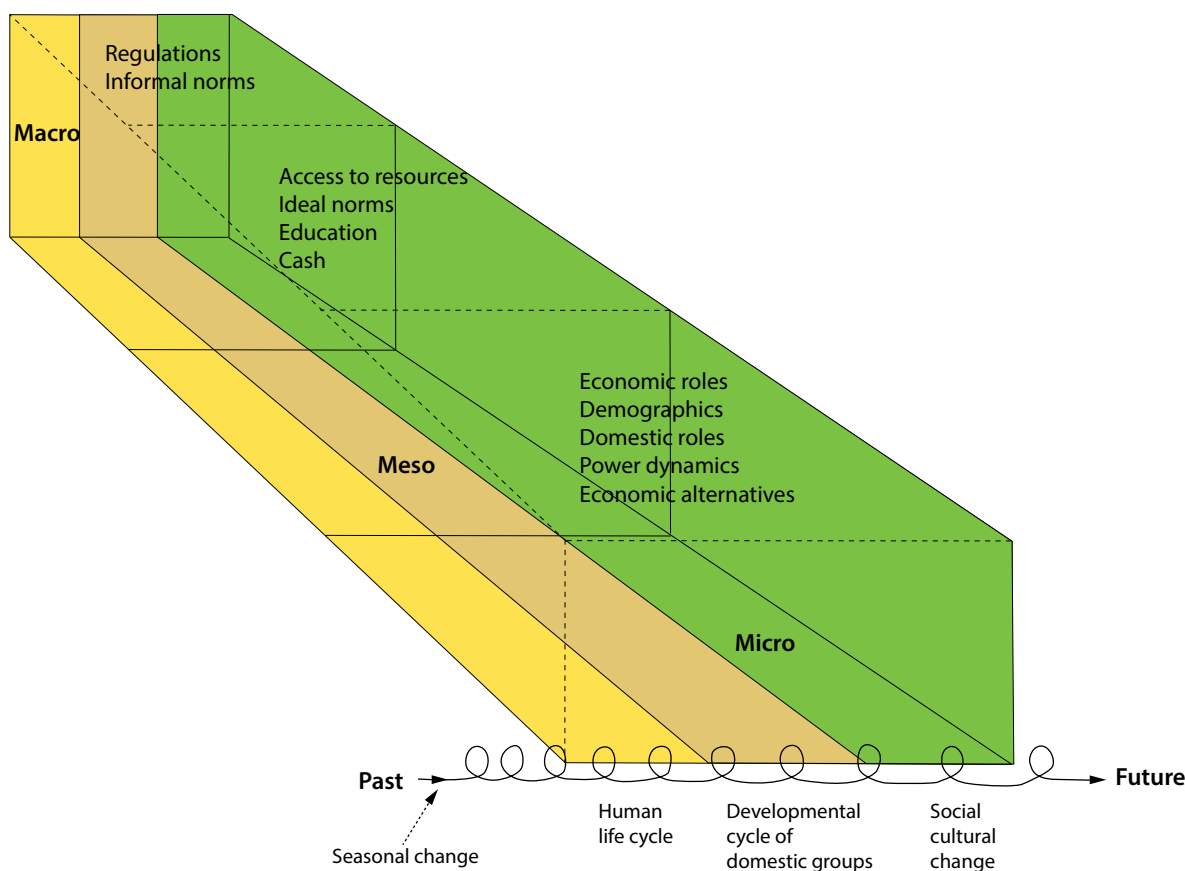


Figure 1. The gender box.

Source: As revised in Colfer and Minarchek (2013)

In an effort to make this discussion clearer for a general audience, we created Table 1, which provides (i) some samples of research questions that are likely to be relevant at any given site; and (ii) a division of relevant sample questions by scale.

In both these efforts to communicate across disciplinary lines, we were guided by an interest in helping biophysical scientists look at the world holistically – since many aspects of people’s lives affect the way they manage forests, and vice versa. We consider this a vital first step.

However, we also want to highlight important subsequent steps. Most scientific endeavors require a narrowing of perspective, a simplification of the world into more manageable chunks. This may be due to resource constraints, or it may simply be related to our conceptual inability to cope with the vastness of the social world in a reliable and replicable manner. We may also have specific issues of interest in our particular field site or topic.

To take those following steps, we begin by examining the three dimensions of the gender box: time, scale and the issues likely to emerge. First, does our work require a focus on change over time (the time dimension)? If we are trying to understand what change has occurred, we may need to take a historical scenario approach (e.g. Chalfin 2004); or if we are examining what direction change is taking, a future scenario approach (e.g. Wollenberg et al. 2000; Evans et al. 2006).

Second, we might think about what scale is of interest to us. These dimensions intersect in useful and instructive ways. Are we looking at particular households in a single village (micro scale)? How does that intersect with the time dimension? Will our work require an understanding of seasonality and its impact on men and women in particular households? Or is our work focused on the landscape level (meso scale) (e.g. Gezon 2012; Colfer et al. 2013)? Seasonality can be of interest at any of these scales. Behrman et al. (2011) looked at gendered land acquisition globally, whereas Quisumbing et al. (In press) studied the gender

Table 1. Framework for analyzing gender implications in forest and tree management.

Consider how these factors function in your site. In what ways might they hinder or reinforce your work at the field level? To what extent do these topics transcend scales?
I. Macro scale – broadly based, global ‘rules’ that affect people’s interactions with forests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there formal, global laws and policies that affect local people and forests? How? • What religious traditions; narratives of modernity or equity; or other less formal, global, intellectual forces affect local people and forests?
II. Meso scale – Social patterns from landscape to national levels that influence people’s behavior in relation to forests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is access to resources gendered? Are there broadly accepted notions that influence land tenure, inheritance and residence? • What are the gendered norms of behavior that affect people’s interactions with trees and forests (e.g. masculinity ideals, seclusion of women, witchcraft beliefs)? • Are there gendered differences in access to education (both formal and informal)? How do they affect men, women and forest management differently? • How important is cash in the regional system, and how has this affected men and women differently?
III. Micro scale – human behaviors, from household to village levels, that affect forests and people’s well-being
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do men’s and women’s day-to-day economic roles differ – especially in terms of agriculture, forest products and livestock? • What gendered demographic issues affect forests and people locally (e.g. migration, population changes, access to birth control)? • What essential/valued domestic roles do men and women play (e.g. cooking, hygiene, child and elder care, health, fuelwood collection) that affect their respective involvement in forests? • What patterns are identifiable in intra-household power dynamics? In what ways do men’s and women’s interests conflict and converge? Are there bargaining strategies used by each? • What are the features of locally available, alternative economic strategies designed to enhance people’s livelihoods, trees and forests (e.g. collective action, access to technology, distribution of benefits, time constraints/conflicts)? How do these affect men and women differently?

knowledge gap at the same scale. We must decide what scale will be most valuable to us in our gender analyses.

Finally, once we've thought through the time and scale dimensions, we must focus on the third dimension– the specific issues that will be most helpful to us in understanding gender in our own context. The placement of the issues in the gender box (within the micro, meso or macro frames) is simply illustrative; any issue can probably be addressed at any scale, depending on the needs of the research. Foresters are likely to be particularly interested in natural resource use, which might mean beginning with gendered access to resources (e.g. Schroeder [1999] at the micro scale; Shackleton et al. [2011], meso scale; Meinzen-Dick et al. [2014]), global). Economic roles are often addressed at the micro scale; an excellent starting point might be the work of Elmhirst (2011), which spans all three scales, or Howard (2003), which examines domestic roles as they relate to plants. Bose (2011) examines the interplay between national level forest policies and local level implications for women, whereas Bandiaky-Badji (2011) gives a history of gender and forest policies in Senegal.

A legitimate and useful study can focus on any one dimension (scale, time, issues) alone. Depending on the scope of one's work and the time and resources available, one can then expand to include other issues that emerge. A study of natural resource access could easily expand to explore ideal norms,¹ for instance, or the gendered availability of cash. A study of demographics could quickly lead a researcher into the realm of intra-household power dynamics and gendered economic alternatives (see Djoudi and Brockhaus [2011] or Mabsout and Van Staveren [2010], for instance). Both the longer publications on the gender box mentioned above (i.e. Colfer 2013; Colfer and Minarchek 2013) include numerous examples of the issues that need to be addressed (with pertinent references) as we struggle to deal constructively with gender in our work.

In general, an iterative approach is particularly useful in gender studies. Retaining the option to address new dimensions that arise in the research can be crucial. This is partly because of the global variety that exists in terms of gender; we may not encounter what we expect. But it is also because we, as human beings – each enmeshed in our own gendered world – often fail to recognize gendered differences in groups that differ from our own. We tend to be blinded by the assumptions that we inherit from our cultural systems. For this reason, we would recommend

a holistic approach, although a focused study on a particular issue can be an excellent beginning.

References

- Bandiaky-Badji S. 2011. Gender equity in Senegal's forest governance history: Why policy and representation matter. *International Forestry Review* 13(2):177–94.
- Behrman J, Meinzen-Dick R and Quisumbing AR. 2011. *The gender implications of large-scale land deals*. IFPRI Discussion Paper 01056:33. Washington DC, USA: International Food Policy Research Institute.
- Bose P. 2011. Forest tenure reform: Exclusion of tribal women's rights in semi-arid Rajasthan, India. *International Forestry Review* 13(2):220–32.
- Chalfin B. 2004. *Shea Butter Republic: State Power, Global Markets, and the Making of an Indigenous Commodity*. New York: Routledge.
- Colfer CJP. 2013. *The gender box: A framework for analysing gender roles in forest management*. CIFOR Occasional Paper 82:46. Bogor, Indonesia: Center for International Forestry Research.
- Colfer CJP, Achdiawan R, Adnan H, Erni, Yuliani EL, Balang and LepMil. 2013. Gender and natural resource governance indicators: A need to assess and address 'sensitive and taboo' topics. *Forests, Trees and Livelihoods* 22(3):143-155.
- Colfer CJP and Minarchek RD. 2013. Introducing 'the Gender Box': A framework for analysing gender roles in forest management. *International Forestry Review* 15(4):1–16.
- Djoudi H and Brockhaus M. 2011. Is adaptation to climate change gender neutral? Lessons from communities dependent on livestock and forests in northern Mali. *International Forestry Review* 13(2):123–35.
- Elmhirst R. 2011. Migrant pathways to resource access in Lampung's political forest: Gender, citizenship and creative conjugality. *Geoforum* 42:173–83.
- Evans K, Velarde SJ, Prieto RP, Rao SN, Sertzen S, Dávila K, Cronkleton P and De Jong W, eds. 2006. *Field guide to the future: Four ways for communities to think ahead*. Nairobi, Kenya: Center for International Forestry Research, Partnership for the Tropical Forest Margins (ASB), World Agroforestry Centre.
- Gezon LL. 2012. *Drug Effects: Khat in Biocultural and Socioeconomic Perspective*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press.
- Howard PL, ed. 2003. *Women and Plants: Gender Relations in Biodiversity Management and Conservation*. New York: Zed Books.
- Mabsout R and van Staveren I. 2010. Disentangling bargaining power from individual and household level to institutions: Evidence on women's position in Ethiopia. *World Development* 38(5):783–96.
- Meinzen-Dick R, Johnson N, Quisumbing R, Njuki J, Behrman JA, Rubin D, Peterman A and Waithanji E. 2014. The gender asset gap and its implications for agricultural and rural development. In Quisumbing A, Meinzen-Dick R, Raney T, Croppenstedt A, Behrman JA and Peterman A, eds. *Gender in Agriculture*

¹ The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) has recently determined that a study of gender norms is important for all their centers; and an international, multisite study is being implemented to look at gender norms and agency at the micro level for cross-site comparison.

and Food Security: Closing the Knowledge Gap. Dordrecht, Netherlands: Springer and Rome: FAO. 91-115.

Quisumbing A, Meinzen-Dick R, Raney T, Croppenstedt A, Behrman JA and Peterman A, eds. In press. *Gender in Agriculture and Food Security: Closing the Knowledge Gap*. Springer.

Schroeder RA. 1999. *Shady Practices: Agroforestry and Gender Politics in the Gambia*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Shackleton S, Paumgarten F, Kassa H, Husselman M and Zida M. 2011. Opportunities for enhancing poor women's socio-

economic empowerment in the value chains of three African non-timber forest products (NTFPs). *International Forestry Review* 13(2):136-51.

Wollenberg E, Edmunds D and Buck L. 2000. *Anticipating change: Scenarios as a tool for adaptive forest management (a guide)*. Bogor, Indonesia: Center for International Forestry Research.



RESEARCH
PROGRAM ON
Forests, Trees and
Agroforestry

This research was carried out by CIFOR as part of the CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (CRP-FTA). This collaborative program aims to enhance the management and use of forests, agroforestry and tree genetic resources across the landscape from forests to farms. CIFOR leads CRP-FTA in partnership with Bioversity International, CATIE, CIRAD, the International Center for Tropical Agriculture and the World Agroforestry Centre.



Fund

cifor.org

blog.cifor.org



Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)

CIFOR advances human well-being, environmental conservation and equity by conducting research to help shape policies and practices that affect forests in developing countries. CIFOR is a member of the CGIAR Consortium. Our headquarters are in Bogor, Indonesia, with offices in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

