

Reforestation and the gender agenda

An ITTO project has created new opportunities for women through reforestation

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Teak time: villagers pose in front of their teak plantation, which was established with ITTO assistance. Photo: J. Gasana

PRINCIPLE 20 of the 1992 Rio Declaration states that women have a vital role to play in environmental management and development and that their full participation is therefore essential to sustainable management. Such a principle is easy to formulate but difficult to adhere to. Nevertheless, some attempts are being made and lessons are being learned. For example, an ITTO project in Ghana that has been attempting to empower women through reforestation offers some very useful lessons on how principles can become practice in the tropics. This article presents the findings of a recently conducted ex-post evaluation of the project.

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ITTO PROJECT PD 27/94 REV. 2 (F): 'Women and tropical forestry development program' started in April 1995 and spanned 51 months. It aimed to alleviate pressure on existing tropical forest resources and improve the standard of living of women and rural communities by supporting community-based and private-sector tropical reforestation and by involving women in the development of Ghana's forest resources. Specifically, the project aimed to: 1) enable women to establish and sustainably manage nurseries for non-timber forest products (NTFPs), timber and fruit trees to supply the 31st December's Women Movement (DWM)—a community-based non-governmental organisation—and private-sector tropical reforestation initiatives; 2) demonstrate the potential for

women to support tropical reforestation; 3) encourage the involvement of women in West African sub-regional consultations on tropical reforestation; 4) support the establishment of community-based NTFP, timber and fruit tree plantations through an extension program; and 5) create employment opportunities for women. In the project's last stages, a second phase—ITTO PROJECT PD 49/98 REV. 1 (F): 'Participatory tropical development by women in indigenous communities'—was formulated and is now under way.

The first project (and also the later one) was implemented by the Ghana Forestry Department in cooperation with DWM. DWM is dedicated to mobilising Ghanaian women at the national level and to securing a political space for their socioeconomic empowerment. It aims to integrate women in the mainstream of socioeconomic and cultural development through sensitisation, workshops, training and extension services and has acquired considerable experience in mobilising women for community development activities. Its membership of nearly 1.5 million makes it a force that can work effectively to influence policies and practices affecting women.

An evaluation of project achievements was made difficult by a lack of data, since an internal monitoring and evaluation system was not set up. In conducting the evaluation I used field observations and interviews with project staff, DWM leaders, administration authorities and stakeholders and villagers in the project activity areas to complement information from project reports.

Project rationale and background

Although women are actively engaged in the use of forest resources in Ghana, the role they can play in the sustainable management of forests is not always recognised in forest policies and practice. The need to pay attention to this role was raised at a workshop convened under ITTO PROJECT PD 119/91 REV. 1 (F): 'Workshop on women and forestry: a look at African experiences in the sustainable development of tropical forests', which provided a forum for women in Ghana and other African countries and critically analysed the role of women in forestry. It recommended, among other things, programs at a country or regional level to provide women with the training and other assistance they required to become more involved in sustainable forest management. Ghana subsequently submitted, and the International Tropical Timber Council funded, ITTO PROJECT PD 27/94 REV. 2 (F), which aimed to implement the ideas and recommendations developed in the workshop.

Three hypotheses underlie the project concept. The first is that a reforestation program can help improve the livelihoods of rural women by enhancing their involvement in the creation and management of tree plantations. The second is that a separate forestry program targeting women

may advance their position in the creation, management and use of tree plantations. The third concerns a paradigm of aid delivery to rural communities: that projects implemented by a government agency in cooperation with a national NGO will be an effective way of mobilising rural women and communities. In each hypothesis the beneficiaries of the project are mostly rural women, but also individuals, groups, DWM and other NGOs engaged in rural forestry activities, the Forestry Department and private-sector operators. The project was implemented in three ecological regions: High Forest, Guinea Savanna, and Coastal Savanna.

Findings

Effectiveness of the conceptual framework

The overall impression given by the technical and physical achievements of the project is largely positive, given the scale of operation and the duration of the project. The implementation rates of most activities, as will be shown, are high, particularly in seedling production and reforestation. This success can be attributed to the partnership between the Forestry Department and DWM, to the dedication of the project's staff, and to the commitment of the DWM leadership at all levels.

The project had some unexpected effects. In all three regions, women and their families are deriving important socioeconomic benefits from interplanting trees with agricultural crops, a technique introduced by the project. Fuelwood is already harvestable in some of the older plantations created in the savanna zones. In all three regions, community assets have been created that now represent a potential source of income. Beneficiaries are aware of the possibilities of income generation from their plantations, and the communities have expressed their desire to pursue the planting effort.

However, an analysis of the project design shows a lack of effectiveness in the conceptual framework as well as weaknesses in the definition of approaches, strategies and objectives that ought to have been corrected in the earlier stages of project implementation. In the very beginning, the project was not prepared on the basis of a social survey and did not include such an important exercise in its activities. Although it is implicitly a highly gender-sensitive scheme, there was no gender analysis to identify key operational women-related issues in reforestation and to describe their socioeconomic needs and the specific gender-related constraints to meet those needs. Such a weakness is particularly significant in a project implemented in a large diversity of geographical, social and cultural conditions. Further, participatory development requires a long-term vision and strategies rather than the planning of short-duration project phases. In this regard, the project design should have placed more emphasis on developing processes instead of focusing on activities. For a project facing sociocultural constraints to the changes it is attempting to

Seeds of change

Seedling production in the three project central nurseries—up to the completion of PD 27/94 Rev. 2 (F)

SPECIES	ZONE			TOTAL
	Coastal Savanna	High Forest	Guinea Savanna	
<i>Senna siamea</i>	200 552	56 200	225 932	482 684
<i>Acacia</i> spp.	148 002	—	58 031	206 033
<i>Khaya senegalensis</i>	33 000	—	49 200	82 200
<i>Tripl. scleroxylon</i>	—	15 200	—	15 200
<i>Terminalia superba</i>	—	18 006	—	18 006
<i>Terminalia ivorensis</i>	—	12 033	—	12 033
<i>Maclura excelsa</i>	—	4 503	—	4 503
<i>Tetrapleura</i> sp.	—	6 880	—	6 880
<i>Anac. occidentale</i>	27 052	2 000	24 020	53 072
Coconut	880	—	—	880
Citrus	9 863	5 300	500	15 663
<i>Mangifera indica</i>	6 523	1 050	8 600	16 173
<i>Leuc. leucacephala</i>	63 800	—	31 631	95 431
<i>Tectona grandis</i>	408 763	283 200	12 202	704 165
<i>Eucalyptus</i> spp.	76 500	—	18 004	94 504
Blackberries	2 200	—	—	2 200
<i>Albizia lebbek</i>	83 650	—	—	83 650
<i>E. angolense</i>	—	10 100	—	10 100
<i>Cedrela odorata</i>	—	21 000	—	21 000
<i>Aningeria robusta</i>	—	3 550	—	3 550
<i>Ceiba pentandra</i>	—	12 300	—	12 300
Avocado	3 200	500	—	3 700
TOTAL	1 063 985	451 822	428 120	1 943 927

bring, this means that *how* the outputs are reached is more important than the outputs themselves, and the focus of this kind of project must be on the internal social dynamics generated in beneficiary communities.

The impression gained from the reports and field observations is that, with a few exceptions, the project delivered at the activity level. Indeed, there are impressive performances in the implementation of most technical and physical results, while there are varying degrees of under-achievement in many outputs and specific objectives. This situation is certainly due to the abovementioned problems in project design and would have justified an early revision of the design.

Outputs

Three nurseries were established, one each in the High Forest, Guinea Savanna, and Coastal Savanna zones, producing almost two million seedlings (*see table*). Forty women were trained in various nursery techniques and 70 DWM members were trained in forest extension. In the project design, women in their communities were to have managed these nurseries themselves. However, this activity is still organised by DWM, and there seems to be a lack of separation between women as beneficiaries and DWM as their organiser. Despite this, the local ownership of the project's results, and the strong local commitment to the project's objectives, are impressive.

The project had positive results in tree plantation establishment and the cultivation of NTFPs. Plantations of teak and other species were created in the Ashanti region and community woodlots for fuelwood production in the Volta. DWM played an important role in promoting these activities by negotiating with chiefs and the Forestry Department to provide land for reforestation. The project also trained women in plantation management, techniques for budding and grafting citrus, mangos and avocados, mushroom cultivation and snail rearing, and the identification, collection and cultivation of NTFPs.

The most impressive effect wrought by the project on the potential of women to support tropical reforestation is the consolidation of their aspirations towards the forest resource and the catalysis of desires for further access to land and credit. In most communities I visited, women expressed concern about how they might further consolidate the links between their plantations and other needs in the community. The most pressing needs mentioned concern health and education facilities, which require immediate income rather than the income that might be generated from trees that will be cut in a more remote future. In this regard, DWM and new phases of the project should try to catalyse the emergence of women as socially and economically autonomous groups participating in the project as beneficiaries. A development project targeting women will have achieved a large measure of success if it supports them in organising themselves to



Going bananas: the planting of agricultural crops inside timber plantations, such as banana in this High Forest teak plantation, ensures that benefits accrue to villagers as the timber trees grow.
Photo: J. Gasana

meet their socioeconomic needs as independent persons or production groups.

Although the creation of employment opportunities for women was one of the specific objectives of the project, its design did not include explicit outputs and respective employment creation activities. No data are available on the number of jobs the project helped create because of the lack of a monitoring and evaluation system to assess project impacts. However, the potential for income generation can be inferred from field interviews and observations. The newly acquired techniques of grafting encouraged an increase in the demand for fruit-tree species alongside tree seedlings and presented a new opportunity for income generation. Nurseries for timber trees alone do not yet appear to be a commercially viable concern in the project areas.

Overall impacts

Women are collectively planning and managing a reforestation program through DWM, with impressive results. This is not yet fully achieved at the district or local community level, where further capacity-building is required. Perhaps the factor that is most limiting for further progress in community-based reforestation is the access of women to land. In its second phase, the project seems to be near the limit of what it can achieve to facilitate this, and only government intervention can bring about further improvements. Concerning income generation, the plantations are still too young to have had a significant economic impact where timber is the objective of production. Nevertheless, the project helped create potential sources of income from trees, particularly where they were scarce in the savanna regions. There are good prospects for the sale of firewood and NTFPs.

Although there is no doubt about the potential of the plantations to improve the standard of living of women and rural communities, it is perhaps still too early to fully assess how large that impact will be. What can be said is that if beneficiaries have taken

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seriously the responsibility of planting and managing their plantations it is because they see good socioeconomic prospects for their communities. The most visible impact is the creation of assets that did not exist before. Moreover, harvests from intercropping and the production of firewood are adding income and, in the case of the latter, alleviating the burden of firewood collection for women in the Volta region. The time spent by women on firewood collection will continue to reduce as the firewood crops mature.

The project achieved a considerable mobilisation of beneficiaries and their communities behind its objectives, and there is a great ownership of its achievements. However, there is still a need to develop a coherent approach to allow this participation to cover all aspects of project design, implementation and evaluation. There remain obstacles in the post-project situation. For example, selling seedlings remains difficult despite increased awareness and planting needs, although demand may increase when the national reforestation program (see below) is implemented. Where longer-rotation species have been promoted, the sustainability of plantation management will depend on the diversification of income-generating activities.

The unexpected impacts include the following:

- DWM succeeded in giving a high political profile to the project, and the project helped focus political attention on the need to integrate women in forestry;
- other women's organisations and NGOs are applying the extension methods for reforestation used by the project;
- similarly, the government has launched a national reforestation program aiming at planting 20 000 hectares per annum, using the project's experience in community reforestation;
- the practice of intercropping in plantations served as a powerful incentive for reforestation and the maintenance of young plantations;
- the taungya system practised on forest reserves in the High Forest zone has demonstrated a potential for forest stewardship, but this needs to be reinforced by a clear official statement on the sharing of future timber harvests between the state, the customary authority and the women who planted; and
- there has been capacity-building among foresters involved in the project. They improved their extension approaches and learned how to conduct dialogues with beneficiaries. This contributed to strengthening the confidence of the communities.

Lessons learnt

The project demonstrated the usefulness of government partnership with an NGO for reforestation and community development. The cooperation strategy between DWM and the Forest Department enabled the project to benefit considerably from DWM's experience in community

mobilisation. Moreover, the gateway activities which address priority needs and concerns of communities, such as intercropping and NTFPs, constituted a key success factor in the project.

The mobilisation of women for reforestation has merit in the creation of community assets. However, it may not lead to fundamental changes in the existing gender biases as far as access to land is concerned. If women in the community are not seen as co-participants in natural resource management, reforestation extension targeting only their group may, rather, add a new role of tending tree plantations to their burden.

Thus, a gender approach starting from the identification of women's needs and constraints for meeting them may lead to better results. Indeed, the best gender approach would aim to establish women's participation in forestry as a right and as a means to expand their options. It would recognise that women must have equal access both to land and to community resource management decision-making processes.

Recommendations

The ex-post evaluation made a number of recommendations for the new phase of the project and for the project partners. Here, I relate the three main recommendations specific to ITTO.

- For projects where social and cultural factors must be taken into account to achieve the expected changes, project-design teams should include experts with sociocultural and gender analysis skills wherever necessary.
- For such projects, the emphasis of implementation should be put on initiating or strengthening development processes.
- Finally, projects targeting rural communities, particularly those that have to empower certain sociologically weaker groups, may best reach their objectives if government agencies promoting them relinquish their implementation responsibilities to NGOs. ITTO should promote such partnerships and publicise its experiences.

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