



# Pulling together: Integrating gender in Congo Basin forest governance

A transboundary project demonstrates how to benefit from greater gender responsiveness in policy-making and throughout the project cycle.

You cannot win the World Cup by isolating half of your most valuable players in the locker room. Likewise, policies intended to protect and advance society as a whole cannot reasonably be drawn up and implemented while side-lining roughly half the population. Yet, in the Congo Basin as elsewhere, public and private initiatives continue to be developed and brought to fruition without much input from women, or come to that, from other groups of society (Indigenous Peoples, people living with disabilities).

For that reason, the Citizen Voices for Change<sup>1</sup> (CV4C) project recognised the need to develop a transboundary gender-sensitivity component in its Independent Forest Monitoring (IM) project. Using methods that can be replicated in other sectors, CV4C aims to broaden space for women in forest governance, starting with its civil society partners in the Congo Basin, with the understanding that the project partners will then fan the spark of inclusion with other NGOs, in other sectors.

Two Marys laid out a road map for the gender component of the project. Mary SurrIDGE of CIDT cooperated with Mary Nyuyinwi, a gender expert from Bamenda, Cameroon to identify gender 'focal points', or champions, in the CV4C partner organisations. They trained them on what gender sensitivity is all about: not just advancing the situation of specific women, but more broadly, creating policies that integrate and benefit from the 'value-added' that a distinct, female perspective contributes.



First, it was important to set the baseline. With the two Marys' support, partners carried out a 'gender capacity needs assessment', an analysis of forest policy and legal documents, to see how gender was being mainstreamed in their countries. From that starting point, Nyuyinwi developed training materials centred on three priorities: building organisational capacity to understand gender sensitivity and carry out gender analysis; integration of gender into each step of project development, from conception through to final evaluation; support for organisations in defining their gender policies, and in sharing them with peer organisations, throughout their networks, across sectors, in all spheres of work.

Today, all seven partner organisations of CV4C have gender policies and implement them readily; gender policy was repeatedly put forth – by men – as being among their proudest CV4C achievements.

But that wasn't always the case.

## Initial challenges:

Ingrained attitudes required a little skilful navigation at the start. There was a certain resistance to the idea that gender sensitivity should be considered throughout project cycles. Also, couldn't the men just take a step back – did they really need to get all mixed up in this? In fact, wasn't having female representatives amongst the staff good enough?

1. Funded by the European Union and the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

With the initial training, they soon understood that hiring a woman in a secretarial post is a far cry from enabling them in managerial positions, or inviting their contribution – as *articulated by women*, rather than by men trying to guess what women might think – to policies on matters of general interest.

“Initial training involved key members of each organisation. Decisions had to be taken at strategic level to make sure management teams understood the implications of gender sensitivity,” Nyuyinwi explains. And as it would not be very convincing to preach what you do not practice at home, CIDT invited partners to complete a ‘gender audit’ of their own organisations’ integration of gender.



Municipal and parliamentary representatives in an advocacy workshop to promote the participation of women in forest governance fora: Objective Agenda 2030.

“They saw for themselves that, at the end of the day, although women worked on staff, these women were nowhere to be heard,” says Nyuyinwi. “They saw that they were carrying on as if everything were normal, while not considering the interests and needs of a significant category of the population – in effect doing what they decried: excluding the marginalised from forest governance.”

To their credit, the partner organisations quickly came on board with the need to elaborate a gender policy.

And yet practical difficulties remained, especially in forest governance, which is perceived as a male area of work. For some, to envisage bringing women into forest monitoring presented a real challenge.

“In one country, the men asked me how I imagined forest monitoring was done. Did I really think women could go into the forest, and sleep in tents, sometimes for 10 days *or even two weeks*?” Nyuyinwi chuckles. “I just turned the discussion over to the women, and let them respond.”

Yes, they replied, in fact they really did think they could. “The women felt capable, and pointed out that they’d never refused to go into the forest, it had simply not occurred to anyone to consider them.” Something seemed to click: an understanding that, when developing the terms of reference for a mission, and when later gathering input from communities, *all* of those who will be affected by it should be included.

*Gender responsiveness is not just about advancing the situation of specific women, but creating policies that integrate and benefit from the ‘value-added’ that a distinct, female perspective contributes.*

### **Turning over a new leaf:**

Converted to the importance of mainstreaming gender, the CV4C partners began reviewing their basic documents to align them accordingly, and have them approved by their boards of directors.

They undertook practical changes, ranging from the straightforward – differentiating office facilities, for example – to far-reaching initiatives, such as promoting qualified female staff to managerial positions and including them in IM activities. The gender focal points of the five countries developed a Skype group to encourage sharing information and experiences about mainstreaming gender concerns. Gender-responsive indicators were developed, in order to keep an eye on the way gender is being mainstreamed into project cycle development. Women’s perspectives are actively sought, and their voices represented in the feedback from local communities. A “gender minute” was added to internal meeting agendas to assess progress and respond to gaps.

The ripple effect has extended wider: *Centre pour l’Information Environnementale et le Développement Durable* (CIEDD) invited Nyuyinwi to host training to ensure that gender is integrated at the level of Central African Republic government structures; she went to Bangui to lead a workshop attended by 32 representatives of 16 ministerial departments, including the office of the prime minister, and several parliamentarians.

Nyuyinwi is realistic about how far even eager participants can spread the faith, “Their work is really wonderful. Still, imagine: one person, even an important political figure such as the secretary general of the prime minister’s office – how can he go back and bring gender sensitivity to the whole administration? Now they must mobilise financial resources to replicate their training, in-depth. But now they do have the tools.”

## Don't stop us now!

CV4C partners hope that inclusion does not stop at gender. For most projects to proceed successfully, they must integrate all segments of society.

*"Did I really think women could go into the forest, and sleep in tents, sometimes for 10 days or even two weeks?"*

"As leaders in society, now they understand the importance of bringing all social groups into the management of community affairs, into affairs of State. They must consider: 'How do we involve youth? How do we involve people living with disabilities? How can we spread this to other organisations?' With the CV4C project, we now know more about participatory management. We have developed tools that can be shared and adapted to other areas of work," Nyuyinwi concludes. "We have made a mark."

*Interview with Mary Nyuyinwi, 18 November 2020; Nicole Gérard*

## Gender-responsiveness case studies: Turbulence ahead

*Please see the CV4C gender case studies, featuring Laurence Wete Soh, FODER, Cameroon; Norma Guitinzia, CIEDD, Central African Republic; Igerha Bampa, OGF, Democratic Republic of Congo.*

### AT A GLANCE

- 1** Introduction to the issue of gender, questions and concepts to consider when carrying out a Gender Analysis, and the purpose of such an exercise (*Genre : Quelques rappels importants*)
- 1** Helpful PowerPoint about integrating gender-responsiveness into the project cycle, and how to approach a variety of situations (*Intégrer le genre dans le cycle du projet*)
- 162** Civil society representatives – men and women – trained directly by CV4C in the five partner countries
- 7** CV4C partner organisations that continue to share approaches and tools for gender integration with their civil society platforms throughout the Congo Basin
- Multiple** Organisations and networks that are awakening to opportunities to hear not only gender concerns, but also the voices of other marginalised groups among their populations
- 1** Important reminder to include gender considerations in funding applications!



Led by the University of Wolverhampton's Centre for International Development and Training (CIDT), the 'Citizen Voices for Change (CV4C)' project was designed to establish a strong, sustainable partnership of forest monitoring non-state actors (NSAs) or Civil Society actors in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Gabon and Republic of Congo. The project sought to address this challenge by strengthening the capacity, influence and long-term viability of IM organisations to perform essential watchdog functions. Find out more at <https://cidt.org.uk/cv4c>.