Gender and forest decision: A Case of Community Forest Monitors in Ghana

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Most rural dwellers depend on forest resources for their livelihoods. Women particularly rely more on forests for food, energy, water and medicinal supplies, and are highly vulnerable to deforestation and forest degradation. However, gender inequalities in community level structures that handle forest related issues exists, and remain a concern to policy-makers, practitioners and development partners. Ghana’s implementation of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) under the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) makes provision for community involvement in forest monitoring activities. To this end, Community Independent Forest Monitoring (CIFM) Committees have been established in some forest-fringe communities to help monitor and curb illegalities that destroy forests. Although, women dominate the population in Ghana, only few are part of these community structures after over nine years of implementation. My study sought to understand the gender imbalance in the (CIFM) committees. This qualitative research was done through focus group discussion, and interviews of 144 women and other key actors including NGOs implementing monitoring projects on monitoring, chiefs and assembly members. Respondents were purposively selected from 40 communities fringing forest reserves with active logging activities in eight forest districts across the High Forest Zone of Ghana. The findings show that the perceived patriarchal nature of forestry which makes women automatically shy away; socio-cultural dynamics at play at the localities; reluctance of women to report partners involved in illegalities; unfavourable meeting time; and no/low level of education of women in these communities account for the low/non-participation of women. Since the existence of the forest is vital for survival of women there is the need for conscious efforts to integrate women in forest protection and management especially at the local level. This will enhance a holistic approach to addressing the issues in the forestry sector, and safeguard the forest to continuously provide for their livelihood needs.

Key words: Community, Gender, Forests, Livelihoods, Monitoring