



# **How gender norms impact women's role in forest use and forest management—illustrations from Ethiopia's Bale Ecoregion**

KIT Working Paper

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# 1. Introduction

Involving rural communities is important for effective forest conservation, particularly through participatory and community-based forest management (Agarwal, 2009; Tole, 2010). However, women are often excluded from playing an active role in forest-related decision-making because of societal or cultural norms and resource and capability constraints (Coleman & Mwangi, 2013; James et al., 2021). This is despite the high dependency of rural women on forest products such as fuelwood and non-timber forest products (Agarwal, 2002; 2009; Elias et al., 2017), and clear evidence that women's participation in forest management groups can result in better resource governance and conservation outcomes (Leisher et al., 2016; Kahsay et al., 2021).

Similar findings are also registered for Ethiopia—a country which has experienced high deforestation rates over the past decades and where participatory forest management was introduced in the mid-1990s to reduce deforestation and improve social and economic outcomes for rural communities (Ayana et al., 2017). Local communities have been given user rights to extract forest resources in return

for the promise of sustainable forest management. However, forest conservation continues to face different challenges, including weak forest governance and poor inclusion of women (Yami et al., 2021; Birhan et al., 2022). This is also because women's role in forest conservation in Ethiopia remains poorly understood, specifically how their role is shaped by gender norms and relations (Asfaw et al., 2013; Kahsay et al., 2021).

As research underscores, the social relations and power dynamics between genders, so-called gender relations, influence control over, access to, and use and management of natural resources, including forests and forest products, and the benefits resource users derive from these (Sunderland et al., 2014; Bitzer et al., 2024). This is because deep-rooted norms and expectations around how women and men should behave, express themselves and interact with others create disparities in people's choices and prospects based on their gender. In Ethiopia, women and girls continue to be disadvantaged, compared to their male counterparts, in several areas, including literacy, health, livelihoods and basic human rights



Woman transporting fuelwood to the market.

Credits: Denabo Billo, Farm Africa

(Ministry of Women and Social Affairs et al., 2024). Parts of these gender-based disparities are rooted in traditional roles of both women and men, which tend to ascribe reproductive “caretaker” roles to women, including childbearing and housework, as opposed to productive “breadwinner” roles and decision-making power attributed to men (ibid.). Women are meant to be the mother, the centre of the household, who, in case a husband is absent, also need to generate income to support their families (CIFOR, 2019).

## 2. Study site

The Bale Ecoregion (BER) in south-eastern Ethiopia, around 400km south of Addis Ababa, forms the largest continuous area of Afro-alpine habitat in Africa and harbours unique and diverse fauna and flora. It is regarded as one of the most important conservation areas in Ethiopia (Wakjira et al., 2015). An estimated 1.2 million people, predominantly Muslim and from the Oromo ethnic group, live in BER whose livelihoods are shaped by mixed crop-livestock subsistence agriculture (Abebe et al., 2020; Birhan et al., 2021). Wheat, barley, tef and maize are the main staple foods grown, in addition to coffee and khat as key cash crops (Abebe et al., 2020). However, forest products, notably fuelwood, tend to be the main contributor to household income in the area (Yemiru et al., 2010; Fetensa et al., 2019). While better-off households earn more forest income in absolute terms, dependency on forest income is particularly high for low-income groups and increases with household size, reduced access to farmland, and geographical distance to towns (Yemiru et al., 2010).

Rapid population growth over the past two decades has led to the expansion of human settlements in Bale and has aggravated pressures on natural resources. Participatory forest management (PFM) has been introduced in the area to reduce deforestation and forest degradation while ensuring community participation (Birhan et al., 2022). Since 2006, two NGOs—Farm Africa and SOS Sahel

This paper unravels the gender relations in rural forest-dependent communities in Ethiopia by taking a closer look at the country’s Bale Ecoregion, located in the Oromia regional state. Drawing on primary quantitative and qualitative data, we explore women’s roles as users of forest resources and in forest resource management, before reflecting on the construction and dynamics of gender norms in Bale. Our conclusions show the implications of gender norms for women in Bale while reviewing that not all women are the same and face different opportunities and constraints.

Ethiopia—have sought to improve and scale the setting up of community-based structures for PFM and link them to carbon trade through REDD+ (Lemenih & Biot, 2017). Under PFM, subsistence and commercial use of forest products is legal as long as it does not involve felling of live trees and slashing of forest undergrowth. Charcoal production is usually prohibited. However, penalties for illegal forest resource use are often symbolic, and add to conservation threats in the context of mounting population pressures and underdeveloped community infrastructure, including agricultural expansion, forest coffee expansion and intensification of management, overgrazing, forest fires, and other forms of weak law enforcement (Wakjira et al., 2015; Birhan et al., 2022).

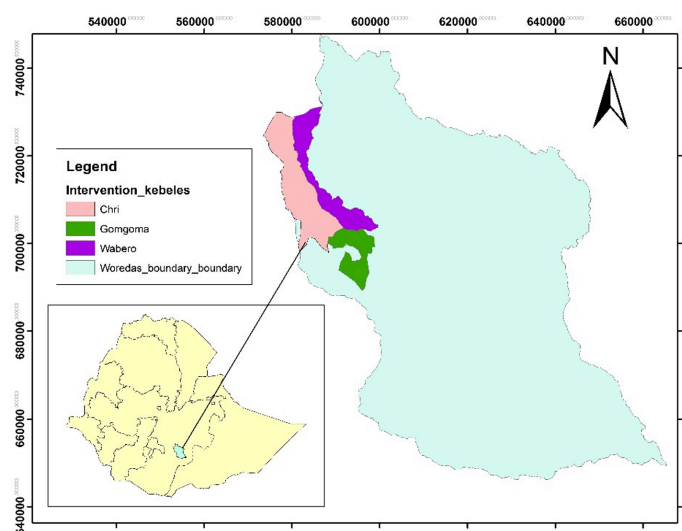


Figure 1. Map of the study area



*A young married woman taking fuelwood to the market as part of her household chores, carrying her six-month-old baby on her back.*

### 3. Data sources

For this paper, we combined quantitative survey data with qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions.

► **Survey.** In May 2022, a baseline survey was undertaken in three kebeles (Chiri, Wabero and Gomgoma) purposively selected from the Delo Mena district of the Bale Zone based on their proximity to forests and people dependency on forest resources. The baseline served a participatory action research project that targeted women's economic empowerment by Farm Africa and KIT Institute. In these areas, targeted participants were randomly sampled out of 1,200 women that applied to participate in the project in an open call posted in their villages. 300 women were randomly allocated to the intervention group, whereas another 300 women were registered as control group. In total, 586 women between 18 and 60 years of age (out of 600) were interviewed by six experienced enumerators who worked under the close supervision and support from the research coordinator, field staff from Farm Africa and KIT researchers.

► **Qualitative interviews.** In order to discuss gender relations at the local community and household levels, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 16 key informants, including experts from the Bureau of Agriculture and Natural Resources, gender experts, extension officers, elders and religious leaders, representatives of the PFM cooperatives, and researchers from the local universities. Most interviews served to identify the most significant issues affecting and affected by gender relations, including division of labour,



Credits: Denabo Billo, Farm Africa

decision making process at the household and community level, access and user rights to forest resources. Other interviews explored issues related to forest management through PFM cooperatives, including management and conservation objectives, challenges in PFM and forest management, and women's and men's participation in PFM.

► **Focus group discussions.** A total of 52 focus group discussions were conducted over a period of two years to discuss women's use of forest resources, their perception of gender relations, and their participation in household and community decision-making. Most discussions took place with women organised for project intervention purposes in ten groups of 30 women each, which were later institutionalised as village lending and savings groups (VSLAs). Eight focus groups were conducted with the husbands of these women to understand their viewpoint on intrahousehold and community dynamics in the relations between men and women. Another four discussions were organised with PFM executive committees to elaborate on women's participation in PFM cooperatives.

## 4. Women as users of forest resources

### 4.1 Gender division of labour related to forest resources

In BER, as is common across many low- and middle-income countries (Bitzer et al., 2024), the collection and use of forest resources is characterised by a gender division of labour linked to traditional roles in the family and community. This division is not specific to forest resources but encompasses wider distinctions on who should do and be responsible for household chores, care work, farming, livestock husbandry and commercial activities.

Women in studied areas in Bale are responsible for collecting fuelwood, aromatic products, medicinal plants, dry coffee leaves called “Quxxii” (used as tea), small quantities of forest coffee, and animal fodder (Table 1). By contrast, men harvest timber, (larger quantities) forest coffee and honey, and make charcoal. Cultural norms make it almost taboo for men to gather fuelwood, aromatic products, coffee leaves and coffee left-over immediately after coffee harvesting, as these are considered women’s activities. Only during sickness and childbirth or for social events like weddings or funerals do men participate in or even replace women in collecting fuelwood and fulfilling other household chores, such as fetching water, cooking food and caring for children. Overall, women devote more time to accessing and utilising forest resources compared to men.

During the baseline survey in 2022, it was found that nearly all responding women collected fuelwood (93%) followed by forest coffee (25%), grass and fodder (38% combined). Dependency on forest resources is very high, as almost all rural households in the study area rely on fuelwood and charcoal for cooking, boiling water and heating. Even urban dwellers in nearby towns such as Delo Mena town depend on fuelwood and charcoal from the surrounding natural forests. Moreover, limited access to modern healthcare drives women to treat human and animal ailments with medicinal plants from forests.

While the majority of forest resources collected by women are mainly for domestic use, around 20% of the respondents also sold some of the products. Those women reporting on their earnings from forest resources made around 3,800 birr per month (US\$ 65). This is an important livelihood activity for married women only—unmarried girls are not allowed to supply wood or other forest products to the market due to cultural norms. Except for fuelwood and charcoal for income generation, women harvest only small quantities of forest products to satisfy household needs. Although charcoal production and trade are traditionally considered a male domain, recently women’s involvement in this activity has increased due to food shortages caused by droughts, as focus group discussions with women revealed. This holds particularly for poor women close to Delo Mena town. For the same reasons, the extent of women’s engagement has also increased for trade in fuelwood and aromatic products such as “Muka Qayyaa”.

Table 1. Forest resources accessed in BER by women and men

Forest products	Women’s responsibilities	Men’s responsibilities
Fuelwood	√	
Timber		√
Honey		√
Coffee leaves (Quxxii) used as a tea	√	
Aromatic products (e.g., Muka qayyaa)	√	
Medicinal plants	√	(√)
Wild coffee	√	√
Cultural items (e.g., Qanafaa)	√	(√)

Table 2. Permission from husband required

Perceptions on "I need consent from my husband to ..."	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	n
Go out of house	2.59%	30.74%	0.17%	65.46%	1.04%	579
Go to the forest	3.47%	30.85%	0.35%	64.3%	1.04%	577
Collect firewood	3.32%	38.74%	0.7%	56.72%	0.52%	573
Do work outside the household	3.13%	21.91%	3.3%	71.3%	0.35%	575

## 4.2 Access to forest resources

Forest resources in Bale are accessed both legally and illegally. Legal access involves obtaining permission from the PFM cooperatives, while illegal access involves collecting forest products in hiding (e.g. at night). The latter is hardly an option for women due to safety concerns. For many women, this means having to pay for forest resources, mostly in terms of registration and membership fees to the respective PFM cooperative in charge of managing nearby natural forests. This gives them access to a specified amount of fuelwood which they are allowed to collect per week (e.g. "two donkey loads", as described by one woman). Many women also are obligated to walk long distances to gather and carry enormous bundles of fuelwood. While half of the surveyed women need to walk less than two kilometres, the other half needs to cover greater distances (for 25% of women this means having to walk more than four kilometres). Women in focus groups claimed that the time taken to collect or harvest forest products has been increasing over time due to scarcity of other income sources and mounting pressure on forest resources. Only around 1% of surveyed women have access to motorised transport (mainly motorbike) when gathering forest resources.

It is therefore not surprising that women feel disadvantaged in accessing forest resources compared to men due to the lack of transport and the time it takes to reach forests as well as

safety concerns. Young women, in particular, are discouraged to go to forest alone due to fear of sexual harassment. This may explain the widespread perception among women that they need a man for protection in the forest. Many women even need the permission of their husbands to go to the forest, which shows that access to forests and forest resources is shaped by gender relations (Table 2).

## 4.3 Decision-making on forest resource use

According to customary practices in BER, men have a dominant position in rural society, while women have limited voice in decision-making processes at the household level. Our survey shows that men are the main decision-makers when it comes to deciding on buying food for the household, making major household purchases, on crops grown and whether the woman can work outside the household (Table 3). Men also tend to control high value resources. For example, selling large animals, large quantity of grains or renting farmland are considered a man's right. They are also the one who control the income gained from such big sales. Women, by contrast, decide on low value resources and small quantities of resources, such as selling animal products or small animals, which they mainly do in order to earn petty cash and cover family's subsistence needs. A positive finding is that many women can decide on how to spend the income they earn.

Table 3. Women's perception of household decision-making

Types of Decision	Primarily I	Primarily My Husband	Both My Husband and I	Other	n
on buying food for the household?	24.61%	47.14%	27.56%	0.69%	577
on making other major household purchases?	10.47%	62.27%	25.99%	1.26%	554
on what crops will be grown in the main agricultural plot?	13.5%	60.92%	25.04%	0.53%	563
on the allocation of labour in agricultural work?	27.19%	37.03%	35.78%	0%	559
on what crops will be grown in the kitchen garden?	25.4%	41.32%	33.27%	0%	559
on how much of the harvest to keep for the household consumption and how much to	18.09%	35.28%	46.63%	0%	564
on selling smaller livestock in the market?	46.24%	16.9%	36.15%	0.7%	426
on selling larger livestock in the market?	12.13%	51.46%	34.94%	1.46%	478
on whether woman can work outside the household?	17.91%	47.3%	34.43%	0.35%	575
on how the money earned by the woman is spent?	37.87%	22.16%	39.62%	0.35%	573
on how the money earned by the woman's husband is spent?	16.58%	42.88%	40%	0.54%	555

## 5. Women's participation in forest resource management

### 5.1 Membership in PFM cooperatives

Just over 30% of the women in our sample are member of a PFM cooperative, which confirms previous research findings of low female membership rates in BER (Abebe et al., 2020; Yami et al., 2021). While women who are member are often motivated by the need to secure access to the forest and its resources, those who are not referred to not having a PFM cooperative in their area (26%), having their husbands participate on behalf of the household (around 25%), lacking time (around 20%) and lacking interest (around 16%). The surveyed women indicated that they do not experience an explicit discouragement barring them from participating in PFM cooperatives.

Participating women indicated to be active members of PFM cooperatives, declaring that they often participate in tree planting in the forest (85% of women members), tree nurseries (67%) and forest control and monitoring activities (55%). Nearly 60% of women members also reported have attended a PFM meeting in the past 12 months, where many of them claimed (sometimes or often) making suggestions and speaking up during decision-making. To some extent, this contradicts prevalent perceptions that women should not sit in front of men or speak loudly in a meeting. At the same time, the surveyed women explicitly rejected ideas that community decisions should be taken by men only or that women should not be involved in committees at community level (Table 4).

Table 4. Women's perception of gender norms related to community participation

Norms	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
In a meeting, women should not sit in front of men	3.28%	42.49%	1.21%	46.11%	6.91%
Women should not speak loudly in a meeting	3.45%	44.66%	0.34%	43.79%	7.76%
Women should not be involved as committee member in any community organisations	8.2%	78.01%	0.52%	10.99%	2.27%
Decisions in any community organizations should be taken by men	8.82%	75.43%	0.35%	13.32%	2.08%

## 5.2 Participation in PFM management committees

Our survey results show that women's participation in PFM management committees is rather low—only 21% of those who indicated to be a PFM member—despite the fact that PFM cooperatives in the region are called upon by the government to increase women's participation. Often this is done by allocating quotas to women's inclusion, although frequently with limited success, particularly if these quotas do not cater to economic empowerment and capacity building specific to women's needs (Yami et al., 2021). Farm Africa, for instance, encourages women's inclusion in PFM management committees as either chair or deputy chair. Qualitative data from two kebeles where Farm Africa is active suggests that women's participation in PFM management committees does indeed correspond to this voluntary 'quota' but is much lower in all other committees that belong to PFMs (e.g. audit committee and credit committee).

Theoretically, all permanent residents of the area above the age of 18 years are eligible to participate in PFM management committees. However, women are clearly less represented than men. Representation is low despite widespread recognition by government officials and forest experts that women hold relevant forest knowledge which differs from men's knowledge, which would be important to include in PFM committees. For example, they tend to have detailed knowledge on biodiversity, traditional

medicinal plants and on the conditions of forests that are (relatively) close to residential areas. Women are also considered dependable information providers on what happens in forests, and they are viewed as reliable law enforcers.

Different constraints were identified when elaborating women's participation in PFM management committees during focus group discussions (Figure 2). Across the board, household chores, leading to time poverty, were identified as the main barrier deterring women from participating in PFM committees. Women's access to resources also plays a formidable role. Women who are literate and who own land or forest coffee trees are respected in the community, whereas landless, single, illiterate and poor women have a low social standing which bars them from taking leadership positions. Women with such characteristics tend to be heavily dependent on forests for their livelihoods; yet, are less likely to be elected and serve as respected committee members. Moreover, women from minority ethnic groups called "Warra Duubee"—who often earn their livelihoods by selling charcoal and firewood—are not respected in the communities, as they are considered "inferior" people who are cursed and ignored. They are almost alienated from public life and stand little chance of getting elected to a committee position. Consulted experts confirmed that middle-aged and elder women with higher levels of education tend to participate more than younger women, and minority ethnic groups participate less compared to major ethnic groups in the area.



Micro level	Household chores	Women are heavily occupied by household chores and have limited time for other activities. This is particularly acute for young women with small kids and single mothers who do not have someone to help them.
	Illiteracy	Most women in BER cannot or only hardly read and write. This affects their ability and confidence to speak in public and participate in PFM committees.
	Incentives	There are limited incentives to participate in activities supporting forest protection, including PFM management committees. Simple membership in PFM cooperatives, by contrast, is incentivized by access to fuelwood and other forest resources.
	Marital status	Unmarried women encounter barriers in participating in PFM committees due to the lower social standing, either because they are not yet married, or they are divorced. Only widowed women enjoy relatively higher social standing.
Meso level	Ethnicity	Women from ethnic minorities like 'Warra Duubee' are considered inferior and have less voice in community affairs. They also have less access to land and education due to their social status.
	Poverty	Destitute community members give priority to daily subsistence rather than group activities. This holds equally for men and women.
	Remoteness	Rural settlements are scattered, making it difficult for women to reach meeting places on foot. PFM activities within the forest, e.g. patrolling, require women to cover long distances walking. Many women also indicated to be afraid of sexual harassment.
Macro level	Corruption	Some women think that PFM committee members are corrupt, and they do not want to be associated with this.
	Social and cultural norms	Cultural norms discourage women to work outside the household and participate in community affairs like PFM committees. There is a widespread belief, particularly among men, that women cannot lead and hold leadership positions.

Figure 2. Scales influencing women's participation in PFM management committees (adapted from Colfer & Minarcchek's gender box, 2013)

Even in case women do participate in PFM management committees, consulted experts and the women themselves recognised that their participation is largely passive compared to men's participation. Again, household chores were identified as a major obstacle for active participation, as women may miss meetings in case of domestic duties or have no opportunity to adequately prepare for the meetings. Women also elaborated that they do not feel encouraged by their male counterparts to participate more actively. Some women added that men are interested in fulfilling formal quotas for women's participation, but do not care about the

level of participation itself. Discussions with male PFM committee members confirmed that they tend to dominate committee meetings. They argued that this is because women have less knowledge of forest sustainability issues and lack leadership skills. Men also often discuss PFM issues in informal gatherings prior to formal meetings to lobby their interests in the absence of women (Yami et al., 2021). Thus, while male PFM committee members argued women's participation in PFM committees has increased in recent years due to the intervention of NGOs like Farm Africa, women's actual access to decision-making processes remains rather low.

## 6. The construction and dynamics of social norms on gender relations

By now, it has become clear that social and cultural norms—which see women as caretakers of family and homestead—affect how women engage with and exercise decision-making power over forest resources. Two aspects stand out in particular.

First, the traditional division of labour allocates certain tasks to women and others to men. In terms of forest resources, this manifests in the women's responsibility to collect fuelwood and other 'smaller' forest resources, whereas men are in charge of timber harvesting, forest coffee and honey production. Men are also culturally allowed to engage in charcoal production, which most women are not because of its dirty and perceived dangerous nature, unless they belong to ethnic minorities in which case prevalent norms and rules do not necessarily apply to them due to their lower habitual social standing.

Second, there are norms dictating what is considered appropriate behaviour for both men and

women. Women, for instance, are not supposed to be out in the forest for too long, they are not supposed to climb trees (e.g. to collect honey), and importantly, they are supposed to obey their husbands and manage their household chores appropriately. These are widespread norms that are accepted and internalised also by women (Table 5). Women who contradict such norms face discrimination by both men and other women. They are considered rude and ill-mannered, and their parents are blamed for wrong upbringing. Gender experts described that married women face the threat of divorce should they act against well-established gender norms.

Similarly, men who collect and carry fuelwood—or fetch water or cook food, for example—are considered weak and subordinate to their wives. Even women themselves seem to disrespect men for carrying out traditionally female tasks and prefer 'strong' men who are providers for the family. Local communities have coined a new term in their



*Market place in Delo Mena town where many women sell their fuelwood*

Credits: Denabo Billo, Farm Africa

Table 5. Women's perception of social and cultural behaviour norms

Norms	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	n
Men and women should share the household chores	2.25%	23.22%	0.52%	68.28%	5.72%	577
Taking care of children is the mother's duty	0.52%	10.03%	0.17%	70.93%	18.34%	578
A good woman never refuses anything her husband says	0.52%	14.86%	0.17%	73.08%	11.36%	572
It is not appropriate for a woman to ask for other people to help finishing her	1.21%	63.62%	0.52%	32.76%	1.9%	580
Women are lazy if they do not conduct the household chores properly	0.35%	7.96%	0%	67.82%	23.88%	578
After marriage, it is the husband's responsibility to take care of the wife	0.69%	17.82%	0.35%	71.45%	9.69%	578
Men should provide women with money to buy food for the household	1.72%	12.59%	0.17%	70.69%	14.83%	580

language to discourage men from certain activities, “dhiira akka durbaa dhalate”, which means “male acts like female”. Men are supposed to behave in ways that meets with the approval of the community and that instils respect by their wives.

The prevalence of such strong norms affecting how men and women act and behave prevent a change of roles, unless under exceptional and mostly temporary circumstances such as illness. Otherwise, both genders are discouraged from norm deviation to avoid social sanctions and gossip and maintain a good image in the community and the family. This leads to a perpetual reinforcement of gender norms. At the same time, there are indications that pressures for change do exist. First, extreme poverty and acute shortage of cash and food are pushing both men and women to go against traditional taboos. For example, some women are taking up charcoal production and others climb trees to

collect dry branches for fuelwood. Second, women are increasingly becoming the main breadwinners in the Bale area, often based on petty cash trade, thereby taking up the traditional role of men as providers for the family. The causes underlying this change are complex and include climate change (which disrupts crop production and challenges food self-sufficiency), limited off-farm job opportunities for men, and widespread khat addition among men leaving them to abandon their family duties. Finally, women themselves are not necessarily satisfied with the traditional role division between husband and wife. For instance, many women expressed the wish that household chores should be shared equally rather than resting mostly with them. Their new status as breadwinners also motivates some women to challenge traditional power dynamics in households and to demand more decision-making power, particularly when it comes to control over income, investments and savings.



## 7. Conclusion

This paper offers a better understanding of women's role in forest usage and forest decision-making processes in the Bale Ecoregion in Ethiopia, specifically our study area of Delo Mena. Women are the most frequent users of forest resources as their domestic responsibilities require them to collect fuelwood often on a daily basis. Most fuelwood collected is for household consumption, although 20% of women in our sample also use it to generate income for their families. Despite the high dependency on forest resources for their livelihoods, women's rights are not adequately recognised and respected in decision-making processes on how forest resources are used and managed. Men tend to be the main decision-makers, at either household or community levels, in view of their traditional roles as providers for the family and notable power imbalances between the genders. This also shows in women's low rate of participation in community-based PFM cooperatives. Their obvious time poverty, stemming from being (over-)burdened with domestic chores which leaves little or no time for other activities, is just one explanation for this. There is a lack of structural encouragement for and recognition of women being important community leaders. Without this recognition, simply increasing women's representation, as PFM members or committee members, may not bring beneficial outcomes.

At the same time, not all women are the same and a diverse group of people are subsumed under the term 'women'. Some women in our study area do access decision-making processes and are able to voice their interests and concerns. This is particularly

the case for middle-aged, more educated and wealthier women with access to land and other productive resources. Middle-aged women are also less restrained by domestic chores compared to women in the early phases of their marriage and are thus better able to participate in communal affairs. Yet, as women's dependency on forest resources increases, their opportunity to participate in decision-making decreases. Women with large family size (dependent children), widowed or divorced women, and women from ethnic minorities are highly dependent on forest resources for their livelihoods but are essentially excluded from forest management decisions. Particularly women from the ethnic minority of the Warra Duube are considered inferior and rarely intermarry with other local communities. They have limited land and less access to education due to their social status. Here it shows clearly that inequalities, based on gender and other social markers, such as ethnicity, are not bound to forest resources, but transcend entire life trajectories of girls and women.

Our paper shows that any interventions seeking to strengthen community-based forest management need to pay close attention to gender equality and should focus on building women's ability to exercise rights—e.g. rights to access forest resources and to hold leadership roles in PFM decision-making. The diversity of women (and their lived experiences) and the structural dynamics of gender relations speak out to the complexities that need to be confronted, denouncing any prospects for quick and easy solutions.

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*Cover Photo: A woman weeding seedlings at a nursery site in Delo Mena.*  
Credit: Denabo Billo, Farm Africa

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