

Forests

Gender and value chains

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Key points

- Value chains for forest products provide full and part-time work for women in many developing countries. Jobs are poorly paid but offer flexible working arrangements.
- Women have a low profile in these value chains because their input is either informal or is perceived to have little worth.
- The invisibility of women in forest product value chains means that policy makers often overlook women's needs. Policy and practice rarely directly support women and may, in some cases, even criminalise them. Broad policies that promote women's development seldom translate into action on the ground. Specific policies that support women working in forest product value chains may substantially improve benefits for women.
- Socio-cultural, religious, technical, policy and institutional barriers prevent women from working and trading in forest product value chains. Overcoming these is challenging. Understanding the roles women take in forest value chains is a pre-requisite for finding ways to help them overcome these obstacles.
- Encouraging and strengthening collective action among women can improve their opportunities in value chains for forest products. Women only groups encourage women more than mixed-gender groups. Groups for women working in value chains for forest products can build on existing women's self-help or social groups. However, women only groups need to be provided with literacy and skills training, and technologies suited to women.
- The diversity of value chains mean there is no single way forward. Nevertheless, a better understanding of the position of women in value chains and their preferences is a step towards devising strategies to empower specific groups of women, in specific value chains in specific contexts.

Introduction

International trade in processed forest products generates jobs in developing countries and can bring in considerable export earnings. Exports of teak and mahogany furniture from Indonesia, for example, were worth USD 1.5 billion in 2011.

Analysing value chains from a gender perspective provides an understanding of the roles women play. The work done, the control over operations, and the costs and benefits differ between men and women. Culture and tradition, religious beliefs, accepted divisions of labour and authority, household and family responsibilities, and physical abilities also play a large part in determining what men do and what women do. Women tend to fill lower paid and less responsible positions in value chains than men.

Even when they do the same jobs as men, women are usually paid less. Men are better paid than women because

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there is a perception that women are less able both physically and mentally, are risk averse and should focus on their responsibilities in the home.

Shackleton *et al.* (2011) examined gum Arabic (Figure 1), frankincense and honey value chains in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Zambia, and Purnomo *et al.* (2011) studied the furniture value chain in Central Java, Indonesia. These two studies point to ways to empower women in forest product value chains that take account of their needs, interests and strengths.

Mapping gender in value chains

Mapping the interactions between men and women at each stage of a value chain provides an understanding of the tasks undertaken by each gender and the division of labour between them (Shillington 2002). Detailed examination of non-timber forest product (NTFP) value chains can expose less visible components of the chains, such as processing done by women at home and informal trading in neighbourhood markets. Close investigation also shows that what women do in value chains depends on the environment in which they live and their preferences. For example, women living in towns may trade full time whereas women living in rural areas may trade part time. Rural women may work part time or seasonally because it fits in with their other responsibilities or because they have fewer opportunities to trade than women who live in towns. Women in both rural and urban areas prefer flexible working conditions that do not clash with their household responsibilities.

Collecting

In the primary stages of forest product value chains women often take on roles that take account of the socio-cultural environment in which they live and their physical capacity. Women are often responsible for collecting, for example, gums and honey. But, where this involves spending days or weeks in remote areas, the collecting is done by men. Family responsibilities and social norms preclude women from physically taxing work and work which would take them away from home. Gathering gum locally, caring for homestead beehives or selling NTFPs to neighbours or in local markets can be fitted in with women's day-to-day activities. Felling and hauling timber, for example for the furniture industry in Indonesia, or placing beehives deep in

the forest, however are tasks more suited both physically and socially to men.

New technologies can give women a bigger role. Cell phones, becoming more and more widely available and cost effective in Africa, mean women can get information on market prices and negotiate with buyers without leaving home. New beehives are lighter and easier to use than traditional hives made of bark. Women can place new hives near their homes and do not have to trek into the forest to collect honey or rely on men to set out hives.

Processing

In processing stages women are often given the most labour-intensive tasks, and tasks that require dexterity and patience. Jobs involving this kind of work tend to be part time, require less skill and be poorly paid. They are often taken by the poorest women.

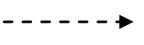
Women can also play significant roles in processing stages although these roles are often informal and so are not recognised. In Zambia, for example, women monopolise homestead taverns where they make and sell honey beer (*mbote*). They work at home and the money they earn contributes to the cost of educating their children. Their enterprises give them a degree of independence and boost their self esteem.

While improving value-adding at various stages along a value chain may make an industry more competitive, it may not improve the lot of women. Modernisation or mechanisation may remove the niches occupied by women, as is the case in Namibia where the introduction of mechanical fruit presses meant that men took over collecting and processing *marula* fruit into juice and alcohol, previously only done by women (Shackleton and Shackleton 2005).

Trading and marketing

Women's roles in trading and marketing forest products are also often not part of formal value chains and are likewise overlooked. Sometimes the only way women in remote rural communities can earn any cash is by trading NTFPs in local markets. The low profile of women in trading and marketing means initiatives to promote trade in NTFPs do not factor in how they can benefit women (Schreckenber and Marshall

Key

-  Predominantly men involved
-  Predominantly women involved
-  Both men and women involved
-  Final stage (Consumers, Formal Retailers, Wholesalers/Transformers)
-  Association facilitates trade

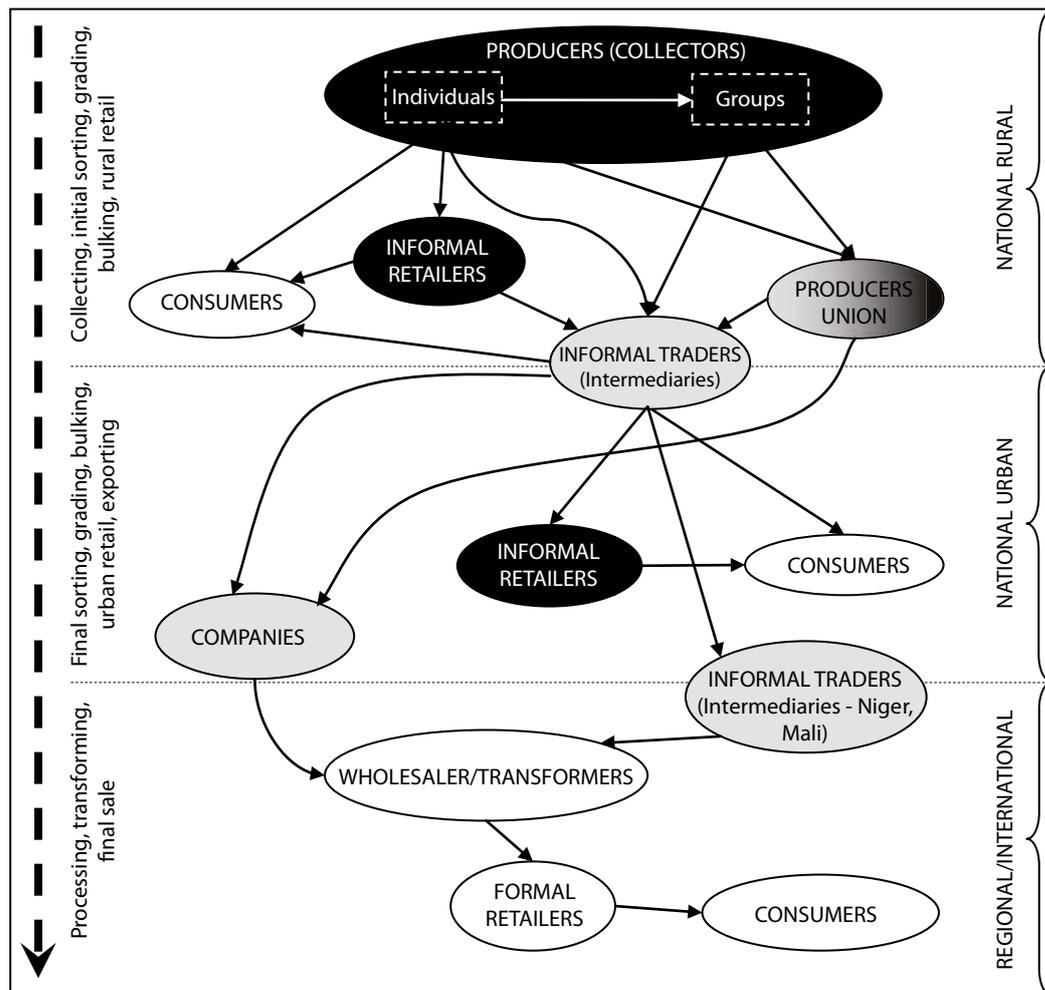


Figure 1. Gender roles in the gum Arabic value chain in Burkina Faso (Shackelton *et al.* 2011)

2006, Hasalkar and Jadhav 2004, Neumann and Hirsch 2000). In some cases women can even be at a disadvantage, for example where development agencies encourage value chains to become more commercially oriented and men become dominant (Kusters and Belcher 2004, Sunderland and Ndoye 2004).

As well as being overlooked, women can also come up against tradition and social norms in trading and marketing. Buyer-producer negotiations in the Indonesian furniture industry are still influenced by entrenched patron-client relationships dating back to Javanese court practices in the 1700s that favour men. Social norms restrict women from trading and marketing activities that involve time away from home or travelling.

Opportunities

The most promising opportunities to enhance the socio-economic situation of poor women in value chains of forest products are to provide them with training specifically designed to develop their skills and abilities, and to help them act collectively.

Training

Women can be helped to take a bigger part in value chains and move up by giving them training in specific areas. Currently, training targets men rather than women. This can widen the gender gap. For example, all the attendees at courses provided by the Indonesian Ministry of Trade to help furniture makers comply with standards for certified eco-labelled products were men. Training needs to include women as well as men.

However, training should be sensitive to gender differences and cater specifically for women. Half-day rather than full-day training sessions, for example, take account of women's responsibilities in the home. Training that focuses on adding value in the areas where women are most active, and that targets the specific needs of women, could be beneficial.

Collective action

Helping women organise themselves collectively to overcome barriers, such as into beekeeping groups, gives them a chance to share experiences and knowledge, build their confidence, strengthen their voice when negotiating prices and credit, and advocate for their specific needs.

Producer associations can give producers a voice, in local government meetings for example. Although these associations may be gender neutral, social customs may discourage women from getting involved. In other cases women may be barred by lack of skills. Only 13 percent of members of specialised gum cooperatives in Ethiopia are women because tapping is generally considered to be a male speciality.

Encouraging women to form their own producer associations can overcome these kinds of barriers. Women can be encouraged to act collectively to further their interests through existing women's groups, such as the traditional *arisan* in Indonesia, where they already meet regularly. In Zambia, for example, separate beekeeper

groups for men and women have proved relatively successful in expanding opportunities for women. Women are finding ways to overcome barriers and enter traditional male domains. In Zambia, women hire men to make and place bark hives in the forest, and to assist with heavy tasks in beekeeping.

Threats

Women mostly work in jobs where flexibility, patience and dexterity are needed. The introduction of labour-saving machinery and central processing may do away with this kind of work and make women redundant. While donors often encourage new technologies to make value chains more efficient the result may be that women no longer have work. Donors often also ignore stages in value chains where women are more active than men, such as in local trade or home processing. Legislation also often neglects women. A recent directive by two regional states in Ethiopia prevents the transport of raw gum from production areas to storage and processing centres in major towns. This meant that the women who used to do the trading in these towns were cut out of the value chain.

Conclusions

Gender discrimination is the most common form of discrimination worldwide (DFID 2000). Actions to empower women must be mindful of context and women's preferences, and designed specifically for them.

Empowering women to change their roles in value chains means changing gender relations, and changing social and religious norms. Changing the way society views women as a supply of flexible labour—to be employed as and when needed according to women's physical characteristics and household responsibilities—is challenging. Women need flexibility so that they can care for their families. But ensuring women retain this flexibility should not disadvantage them. Raising awareness in government and non-government organisations of the roles of men and women in value chains may help develop policies and legislation that remove the barriers women currently face.

In particular there needs to be more consideration of how informal markets contribute to export industries. Women often play a significant role here but are largely invisible.

Support that helps women have more say and build their negotiating power, such as encouraging them to act collectively by setting up women only producer groups, can help overcome some of the barriers they face. Training can also play a big part. Although there is no single recipe for success, these kinds of measures are some of the ingredients that will benefit not only women, but men, children, and society as a whole.

Action points

- Understand gender roles in the entire value chain. Target interventions to overcome specific constraints encountered by women.
- Support value-adding by women, for example by putting in place national quality standards, certification and training women to meet them.
- Build value-adding opportunities around an understanding of women's time, constraints and mobility.
- Assess the gender impacts of interventions to raise production, profits and efficiency in value chains so as not to displace or disadvantage women.
- Support women trading in domestic markets, for example by legalising informal trading.
- Help women form groups for collective action to voice their concerns, obtain credit, technologies and support, and work together, for example to consolidate the small amounts each collects for market.
- Provide training in literacy, numeracy, technical skills, business skills and adapting to markets specifically geared towards women.
- Take cultural sensitivities into account, for example by employing women extension workers to work with women.
- Advocate for minimum wage and equity legislation that supports women.
- Introduce technologies that work for rather than against women.

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