



History of gender studies in the natural resources sector

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Presentation outline

- Definition of key terminologies
- Gender studies in the natural resources sector
 - Ecofeminism
 - Ecological feminism
 - Feminist political ecology
 - Intersectionality
- Conclusion





Definition of key terminologies

- **Sex** refers to a set of biological attributes in humans and animals.
- **Gender** refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people.
- **Gender roles** refer to a set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for a person based on their actual or perceived sex.





Gender studies in the natural resources sector

- Gender has long been recognized as important within the natural resources and environmental sectors.
- Access to and control over natural resources is gendered.
- Gender has closely been linked to biological sex and understood as culturally defined male versus female roles.
- Studies have documented how women are denied access to new technologies, trainings, and other benefits of development projects, and given limited access to and control over land and natural resources (Moser, 1993).





Ecofeminism

Essentialist conception of gender



- The Chipko movement





Essentialist conception of gender - Ecofeminism

- Some feminists have argued that there is a natural or essential connection between women and nature which gives women an innate understanding of ecosystems and environmental protection (Diamond & Orenstein, 1990; Shiva, 1988).
- These studies assume an `inherent' or `natural' connection between women and the land, providing women with privileged knowledge of environmental change and privileged roles in addressing environmental destruction.
 - Ecofeminism challenged the hegemony of (male) scientific knowledge as the privileged source of information about environmental change (Nightingale, 2006).
- Common sayings among feminist scholars in the 1970s
 - Men are rational, while women are emotional.
 - Women are nurturing, while men are competitive.
 - Women are closer to nature, and have a better understanding of the importance of environmental protection.





Essentialist conception of gender - Ecofeminism

- `Women' was a largely undifferentiated category and it was assumed that all women would have the same kind of sympathies and understandings of environmental change as a consequence of their close connection to nature.
- Shiva (1988) argues that Indian women have an inherent connection to nature, and the power that arises from that connection inspires them to risk their lives in front of logging machinery.
- Shiva's work was important in promoting the idea that uneducated people (especially women) could have a better understanding of environmental protection than scientists and policymakers.
- Shiva's work was criticized both within India and by other feminists for inaccuracies.





Ecological feminism

- Agarwal (1992) drew from her own work on women and fuelwood issues in the Himalayas to challenge Shiva's essentialist rendering of women and environment nexus.
- She argued that, although a relationship between women and their motivation to protect the environment could indeed be identified, this relationship was based on their material realities and not on some inherent, close connection to nature.
 - Many Indian women are responsible for the food and fuel needs of their families, which require them to tend the land and gather products from forests.
 - These activities give them intimate knowledge of their ecosystems and a strong need to ensure that resources are used sustainably; failure to do so results in increased work burdens for themselves (Agarwal, 1994, 1997).





Ecological feminism

- Ecological feminism argued for a clear focus on gender, defined as the differences between men's and women's experiences and knowledge in relation to their environment.
- This focus illuminates the importance of material practices, in particular men's and women's work practices, and of culturally specific gender roles in shaping the gender-environment nexus.
- It also builds on ideas already put forward by Shiva (1988) and others that rural women's environmental knowledge is valid and important.
- By basing this claim on material practices, Agarwal (1992) helped to give an empirical basis to the idea that women have unique environmental knowledge and, significantly, brought a political-economic analysis into the debate around gender and environment (Nightingale, 2006).





Feminist Political Ecology

- Three key themes have emerged from feminist theorizing on gender and environment and recent political-ecology work by Rocheleau et al. (1996a).
 1. Gendered knowledge, or the ways in which access to scientific and ecological knowledge is structured by gender.
 2. Gendered environmental rights and responsibilities, including differential access by men and women to various legal and de facto claims to land and resources.
 3. Gendered politics and grassroots activism, including an examination of women within and as leaders of environmental movements.





Feminist Political Ecology

Gendered knowledge

- Gendered knowledge follows much of the feminist environmentalism literature and explores how men and women have differential knowledge of natural resources.
 - For example, men often have privileged access to agroforestry extension workers, new training opportunities, and other knowledge associated with 'science' (Diamond & Orenstein, 1990; Rocheleau et al, 1996b), while women have experiential knowledge gained from their role as subsistence providers in households.
- Rocheleau et al. (1996a) used this information to demonstrate that women often have crucial knowledge of natural resources that allows for household survival and to argue that women should be included more centrally in development projects and extension work.





Feminist Political Ecology

Gendered rights and responsibilities

- Gendered rights and responsibilities, explores the contexts within which women are denied equal access to land and resources.
 - In many Third World contexts, agrarian reforms legally distributed land to male heads of households only, undermining women's de facto claims to use rights and control over land (Agarwal, 1994; Carney, 1996).
 - Current development projects often intersect with these conflicts over land and resources to the detriment of women (Carney, 1996; Rocheleau et al., 1996b), although such negative effects are acknowledged to be spatially and temporally specific (Agarwal, 1994; Carney, 1996).
- The importance of recognizing complex land-rights systems within development processes is illuminated by this theme.
- Redefining land rights in terms of private property often creates significant social-justice consequences, particularly for women.





Feminist Political Ecology

Gendered politics and grassroots movements

- Gendered politics and grassroots movements, examines social movements but includes a specific focus on the role of women within them, highlighting how they have been empowered through involvement in community struggles for control over natural resources (Rocheleau et al., 1996b).





Intersectionality

- Most of the work done within feminist political ecology demonstrate how gender, understood as culturally defined male-female sex roles, structures access to particular types of knowledge, space, resources, and social-political processes.
- “The emphasis within feminist political ecology, however, has largely remained on women.
 - ‘gender’ seems synonymous with ‘women’
- This kind of essentialism **masks** a variety of political-economic, cultural, and symbolic processes by which gender is produced by environmental issues as well as being implicated in the construction of the ‘issue’ itself” (Nightingale, 2006: 171)





Intersectionality

- Intersectionality analysis promotes simultaneous evaluation of social differences like race, ethnicity, caste and gender, rather than unitary or mutually exclusive entities (Burman, 2003; Collins, 2015; Valentine, 2007).
- It overcomes the narrow focus of gender on women in the feminist political ecology (Nightingale, 2011).
- Intersectionality calls for the recognition of the relationships that intersect at the social-relations-environment nexus.





Intersectionality

Community forest monitoring in Ghana

- Asumang-Yeboah et al. (2022) assessed the intersectionality of actors engaged in community forest monitoring (CFM) and its effects on inequality among forest fringe communities in Ghana.
- The findings revealed that CFM has introduced new forms of agency in the study localities, stirred gender norms and practices, leading to the further exclusion of some of the most marginalized actors.
- By constructing CFM as a physically demanding and confrontational activity, and females as nurturers, men wrestle control over monitoring roles, confining women to clerical and household duties.
 - “Educated women are very soft. They cannot hurt a fly. But they can write. The only woman in our monitoring group supports us by taking notes during our meetings”.





Intersectionality

Community forest monitoring in Ghana

- Women who were actively engaged in CFM were associated with some anecdotes in some of the communities.
 - “*Obaadenden*” (meaning, iron lady) or “*Obaa Akokonin*” (meaning, “*female cockerel*”).
 - The *female-cockerel* appellation is used to victimize women forest monitors, insinuating that they were behaving irresponsibly by choosing forest monitoring over their biological role of child-raising.
 - the female cockerel tag is used to dissuade women from participating in forest monitoring and reinforce the broader social view that forest monitoring is a male domain.
- By painting migrants as ‘illegal farmers’ that destroy protected forests, indigenes exclude migrants from participating in CFM. Meanwhile, indigenes are equal culprits of illicit farming as their way of resisting the state’s appropriation of their ancestral lands.





Conclusion

- The concept of gender has been with us since time immemorial and is being practiced unconsciously.
- Gender roles impede women's access to natural resources.
- Different gender frameworks give varying results.
 - Gender scholars and practitioners should move beyond the male-female dichotomy.
 - Other social markings such as age, education, residence status and generation are equally important in gender analysis.





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Thank you

