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Adriana Delgado Herrera

From an Intuitive to a Systematic Gender Perspective

Experiences from Peru

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FIGURE 1 Today, local people, including women, are increasingly being involved in development projects in Peru. (Photo by Florencia Zapata Kirberg, TMI)

New directions in conservation and development have fostered participation by local people. In Peru, people in Andean communities are now considered to have valid objectives, desires, and interests. Peru is finding new ways of building a nation of different people learning from each other. The present article presents experience in incorporating a gender perspective in Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs), as gained by The Mountain Institute's Andean Program in the Huascarán Biosphere Reserve.

In 2001, a number of nongovernmental organizations formed the Conservation and

Gender Group–Peru in order to strengthen efforts to incorporate a sound gender perspective in their activities. On the basis of results from the National Balance Document on the current situation related to gender perspective, this article shows how an intuitive approach to gender helped facilitate an ICDP and its positive impacts. Various tools, methodologies, and approaches were applied, depending on the specificities of local communities. The aim was to integrate all family members in ICDPs. But this intuitive, unsystematic approach limited positive impacts, aggravated conflicts, and reinforced gender inequality.

A gender perspective in development and conservation

Historically, the relationship between Andean communities and external institutions, including government, has been a paternalistic one. The perception of Andean farmers as “others” who are completely different and exotic has reinforced the division between social sectors. This underlying philosophy does not allow for sustainable projects or initiatives because it starts from “external” views and objectives, commonly considered as the only proper ones that can lead to “happiness.”

The new direction in development and conservation issues emphasizes the participation of local people (Figure 1). Local communities are considered to have their own valid objectives, desires, and interests. In this context, a gender perspective broadens the range of possibilities and helps improve relations with local people, in the interest of working together toward a world where different people learn from each other.

Two initiatives to establish gender-sensitive approaches

A regional meeting devoted to “Conservation and Natural Protected Areas Management with Gender Perspective and Local Participation” was held in Lima in 2000. It was a gathering of governmental and nongovernmental organizations from all over Peru with different approaches to conservation, gender, and participation. Each



organization shared its experiences with a gender focus in conservation projects.

The Conservation and Gender Group–Peru (C&G Group) was constituted in March 2001. After this initial meeting, 5 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) jointly prepared a report entitled *Balance of Tendency About Gender and Participatory Conservation Issues in Peru*. The C&G Group aims to integrate conservation and development, which requires a participatory approach and a gender focus.

Both initiatives allowed exchange of experiences and positions and helped to improve the methodological and theoretical framework of gender and conservation issues. This is an important step toward sustainable incorporation of a gender perspective. The report provides an overview of gender and conservation issues at the following levels:

- **Discourse:** Peruvian organizations usually treat conservation, gender, and development issues separately. But there are efforts to bridge the gap and work in a more integrated way. Although many institutions dealing with conservation engage in discourse on participatory and gender perspectives, practice does not usually coincide with discourse.
- **Conceptualization:** There is general consensus about gender and conservation concepts, but a solid conceptual framework and a process of reflection are still lacking.
- **Design:** All Peruvian institutions express a need for clear, validated indicators and tools. But little successful experience is available, and lack of reflection hinders the development of better tools.
- **Practice:** The majority of Peruvian organizations apply an “intuitive” gender perspective. A few organizations try to treat gender issues in a more systematic way, but their theoretical and methodological frameworks are still weak.

The intuitive gender perspective

Efforts have been made in Peru recently to promote solid integration of gender in

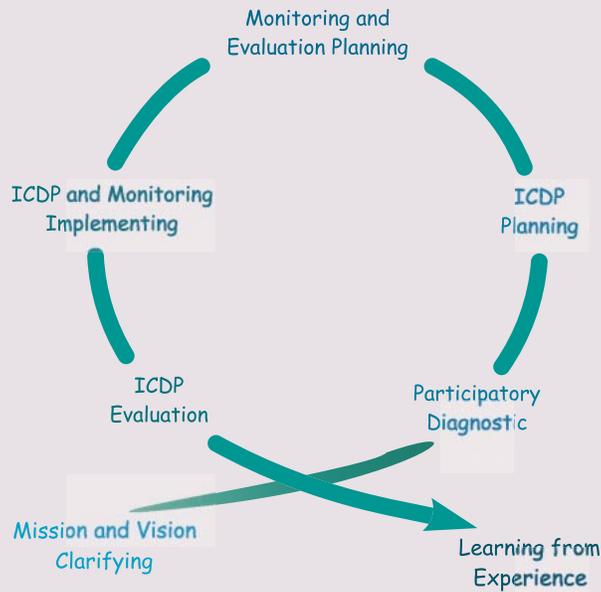
conservation programs. Although most institutions recognize the importance of gender in their participatory focus, a gender perspective is not fully applied in their projects. All institutions are characterized by what the report referred to as an intuitive gender approach, meaning that implementation is not planned or based on a solid theoretical and methodological concept.

The intuitive approach is sufficient to attain some of the objectives of conservation and development projects. Flexibility and sensitivity to the reality of the local context make it possible to come up with necessary adjustments and solutions to project problems. But because this approach is neither solid nor systematic, its effects are also limited. If the gender perspective has not been considered as an institutional option at the stage of project planning and design, it is very likely that new project impacts will be negative.

Because it is not based on gender theory and methodology, the intuitive approach risks promoting a false understanding of gender, reducing its focus to women only or merely to roles, while ignoring power relations and other variables such as ethnicity or class, which make the context more complex.

The experience of The Mountain Institute

The Mountain Institute (TMI) is a non-profit scientific and environmental organization committed to preserving mountain environments and advancing mountain cultures. In Peru, TMI has implemented a project called Strengthening Local Capacities for Conservation and Development (SLC) in the Huascarán Biosphere Reserve. The project operates on multiple levels (local, regional, national) with a variety of stakeholders (local communities and governments, the administration of Huascarán National Park, governmental organizations and NGOs, mining companies, and other private enterprises). The project focus is on the facilitation of different Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDPs) in Andean communities of the Cordillera. To facilitate the projects, TMI incorporated an intu-



itive gender perspective. The strengths and weaknesses experienced with this intuitive gender approach are illustrated in the following.

During the first year of the SLC project the Andean staff contacted local communities. At the same time, in order to achieve positive, sustainable impacts, they elaborated a solid theoretical and methodological framework for this specific context. The ICDP work cycle was defined as a result of the analytical and interdisciplinary process of methodological development and was based on initial contacts and experiences with local communities (Figure 2). To make this a real learning cycle, all steps link conservation and development through a dynamic relationship involving adjustment, monitoring, and assessment of experience.

FIGURE 3 Thanks to gender-sensitive projects, Andean women have assumed new roles. Here, the manager of one ICDP checks the quality of naturally dyed wool. (Photo by Florencia Zapata Kirberg, TMI)



FIGURE 2 The ICDP project cycle defined by TMI. (Source: TMI 1999)

The methodological framework, based on local thinking and elaborated with local people, is a very effective guide for fieldwork and has a positive impact on actual participation by local people. But benefits were limited because the gender perspective was not incorporated in a sound way. Without this perspective, existing differences and conflicts inside the families were exacerbated.

Positive impacts and limitations

Positive impacts include the improvement in existing abilities and acquiring of new abilities and knowledge of all project associates, men and women (Figure 3). They found a place to listen to others and be heard themselves, to take their own initiatives and exchange their thoughts—a place where anyone is valued as an actor. This is especially important for women, a traditionally powerless and unacknowledged group. Improvement of organizational abilities among the project associates was notable.

If the methodological and theoretical approach had included the gender perspective in more than an intuitive way, these benefits would have been much more far-reaching and sustainable and some of the difficulties avoided. One of the first obstacles was the way ICDPs were defined. In accordance with the philosophy and methodological framework, this definition was left to local people. TMI made a list of possible economic activities that promote sustainable resource management called the *Options Menu*.

The *Options Menu* was discussed with local communities and this discussion resulted in a list of activities that defined the gender division of labor. At the outset, TMI staff did not take into account the fact that different actor groups have different interests and expectations. As a consequence, different actor groups proposed different types of ICDPs: young and middle-aged men opted for a Native Pastures and Agroforestry ICDP, young women and recently married couples preferred an Ecological Textile ICDP, and young men chose a Community-Based Tourism ICDP. Considering this division, it was very difficult to create space for accommodating new actors inside each ICDP.

On the basis of this lesson and in accordance with the objective of promoting real participation, TMI staff worked to incorporate other family members in each ICDP. This was not an easy task because it was necessary to consider gender roles and relations.

- It was most difficult to include women, young people, and children in the Native Pastures and Agroforestry ICDPs. By their nature, these projects correlated better with male roles: they usually required fluency in Spanish and heavy work.
- In the Ecological Textiles ICDPs, the majority of the associates were women, perhaps because manual labor and handicrafts are considered part of their role. These projects allowed for incorporation of other family members (Figure 4). Textile production requires activities such as dyeing with natural colors, building looms, elaborating sample books, and simple labor such as cutting dye plants.
- Textile ICDPs are based on the work of women as well as their husbands and children, the final product being a result of efforts made by the whole family.
- Community-Based Tourism ICDPs also provide opportunities for all family members to participate. The project associates are the men, but their wives and children participate in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the projects. Managing a lodge requires the effort of the entire family.

Whereas it was easy to incorporate family members in some projects, this was not true of others, especially productive projects. Participation of the whole family made it possible to increase the positive impacts and the sustainability of the initiative (Figure 5), but the benefits were still limited because aspects such as gender roles and power relations had not been considered.

FIGURE 5 Children participate in ICDPs, helping their parents, strengthening their self-esteem, and building the basis for more sustainable and equitable social relations. (Photo by Florencia Zapata Kirberg, TMI)





FIGURE 6 Andean women are the guardians and transmitters of important cultural traditions and knowledge. Here, women exchange native seeds at a traditional Andean fair. (Photo by Florencia Zapata Kirberg, TMI)

Exacerbation of conflicts

Inside ICDPs, women were not only able to perform their traditional roles (Figure 6) but also acquired new roles, knowledge, and abilities. This was a source of problems with their husbands and other family members as well as with other women and community organizations. Consequently, most female associates in nontraditional projects were widows, single mothers, or young single women, almost a class of “outsiders” who had broken through the barriers set by gender roles. Some of these women even acted as technical or organizational facilitators to teach male farmers.

In general, women who acquired “new roles” were more enthusiastic, paid more attention, retained new knowledge more readily, took decisions easily, and participated in the projects with minimal absence. At the same time their workload increased because they had no household help.

Problems relating to power relations were common inside the ICDPs. Conflicts over decision-making, distribution of work, money, and benefits among project associates were apparent. Sometimes conflicts were not resolved properly, and this weakened the organization. Some ICDPs that integrated women and men had difficulties on account of traditional power relations because the roles, power, and expectations of project associates depended on their belonging to a particular social group, ie, women, men, youth, adults, farmers or cattle owners, and on being Quechua-speaking or Spanish-speaking.

Conflicts also arose between the ICDPs and other community organiza-

tions. They usually concerned community benefits or use of communal resources. A detailed analysis of existing power relations and sociocultural organizations would not only help avoid these problems but also distribute benefits more equitably.

Increased workloads for women

The most problematic impact of the intuitive gender approach was increased workloads, especially for women. Men were involved largely in seasonal labor and had some spare time, whereas women were permanently engaged in domestic work and hardly had any spare time. A thorough analysis of gender roles and relations could prevent project associates from having additional and sometimes excessive work. Increased workload was one of the main reasons associates left the ICDPs.

Outlook for the future

The TMI experience is somewhat representative of the findings and needs of other institutions in describing the national situation and context in relation to integrated gender and conservation issues in the Peruvian context.

Conservation and development institutions will need to take decisive steps to integrate a coherent gender perspective and promote more equitable participation. The following steps are necessary:

- Systematizing and sharing theoretical and methodological approaches and experience.
- Making common efforts to create a solid theoretical and methodological framework.
- Incorporating a gender perspective as an institutional policy at all levels.
- Training all staff in aspects of gender.

The link between gender and conservation is still hypothetical. Only through solid experiences, processes of reflection, and common initiatives will it be possible to test this link and achieve positive impacts on conservation, gender equity, and cultural diversity.

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