

*The Borana Collaborative Forest
Management Project from a Gender
Perspective*

**Working Paper No 7 for the Engendering Eden
Project¹**

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Introduction

The Borana Collaborative Forest Management Project (BCFMP) was established by SOS Sahel in 1999/2000. The Project aims to deal with a set of specific problems related to the juniper forests of Borana. The forests are used by settled and semi-settled agro-pastoralist villages for subsistence, income generation and within drought coping strategies, and by pastoralists as a critical source of dry season grazing. However, short-term exploitation of the forest, such as supplying the urban demand for fuel and timber, is not proving sustainable. Underlying these problems are pressures on the rangelands themselves and on traditional Boran pastoralism. War, drought, population pressure and ethnic clashes have combined to threaten traditional pastoralist livelihoods and push them towards a greater reliance on crop production. Many have settled in peri-urban areas and/or around the forests.

The primary objectives of the BCFMP are:

1. Long-term conservation of at least major elements of the forests.
2. Improved and sustainable livelihoods for communities living in and around the forests.
3. Development of the Forest Department's capacity to work with communities on Collaborative Forest Management (CFM).
4. Development of a replicable process for CFM as a contribution towards more widespread adoption of CFM in Ethiopia.

SOS Sahel recognises that gender issues may play an important role in the implementation and success of the Project. Traditionally, gender roles and responsibilities for both men and women within households and within the communities are clearly defined, for example women play no part in the decision making processes at community level and are not represented in 'community' meetings. This is despite the fact that they have major roles in the household including responsibility for gathering fuel wood, grass, other natural resources and fetching water. Such responsibilities means that their active participation is vital for the success of any forest management project.

So far the Project has not addressed gender issues in any great detail. Gender disaggregated data was collected as part of a stakeholder analysis, however, no further investigations and/or analyses have taken place. It has been proposed however that the Project develops a Gender Strategy as part of the BCFMP Social Studies component, which will focus on gender roles in natural resource management. This will then be used for taking a more gender-oriented approach to the Project and its implementation.

Rationale for integrating gender in the Project

Socio-culturally ascribed roles determine women and men's responsibilities within Borana society. Women and men's division of labour and roles at community level and within the household are well defined. For example, women take full responsibility for managing small animals, dairy production, fetching water (which can take up to 9 hours per day) and gathering fuel wood. They share other tasks with men such as working on the farmland.

There is a high illiteracy rate among women and girls as only 3% of girls attend school. This is due to the lack of resources of families, the distance from houses to schools and to the fact that traditionally girls have not attended. All household property is under the husband's control. When he dies it is his family who will take over the control. Other traditional practices continue to diminish women's rights for example early marriage and widow inheritance.

In Borana women's access to natural resources such as water, fuel wood, grass, fodder and other natural resources is key for their families' survival. Women (and girls) have to travel long distances to collect them. Often the sale of such resources provides the only income to the household, particularly during *Bona* (the dry season). The multiple roles played by women have created conditions whereby they influence and are influenced by the environment. As the environment degrades and the forests are depleted this relationship becomes increasingly negative; the scarcity of resources increases, demanding more time and energy to secure them. These linkages between women and the environment need to be acknowledged understood and incorporated into Project development.

Women's participation in decision making at household level is limited to the areas socially assigned to them, while at community level their participation in the decision making processes is almost non existent. This means that decisions that affect their lives and that of their families are taken without their participation. What is more, the experiences and knowledge which women have accumulated about forest management and the environment is rarely acknowledged or utilised.

Summary of information collected through discussions with the Project staff:

- During PRA exercises attempts were made to involve both men and women, however they still tended to be dominated by men. Very few women attend community and Project meetings. No meetings have been held solely for women to allow them more space to contribute.
- There is an awareness of the need to involve women in Project design and implementation. However, traditional structures and roles are the bases of Boran communities, where women's roles are very much defined and difficult to change. This seems a major barrier to fully integrating gender issues in the Project. There is also a fear (justified or not) of confronting the Borana communities.
- It is envisaged that certain components such as the credit schemes will particularly target women and become a tool for empowering women and improving their economic and social situation without antagonising the communities or challenging the traditional gender roles.

Summary of information collected through discussions with the government/other NGOs²:

- Women's high illiteracy rate and girls' low school enrolment are two key problems in the area.

² Discussions were carried out with the Women's Affairs Department at Woreda level and with Mr Reinhold Swoboda GTZ's Team Leader in Borana. Both based in Negele.

- Men's total control of the household's property is a limiting factor for women's empowerment.
- The Women's Affairs Dept. has established credit schemes to help improve women's economic situation. A women's group in Gobicha has used the scheme to set up a successful butcher's shop.
- Addressing gender equality issues in Borana is challenging, as traditional gender roles are very much entrenched and there are few experts on gender issues in the area. There is a need to involve more gender experts on projects, but such experts must either be from the area or have a very good understanding of Borana society.

Summary of information collected through interviews in local communities:

- Three communities around Negele - Gobicha, Bura Dale and Simento - were visited during the research period. 13 women and 9 men were interviewed. Their ages ranged from 20 to 75.
- There is a well-defined division of labour among men and women. However it is not a totally rigid division as some jobs carried out traditionally by women such as making charcoal or fetching water can at times be carried out by men. Women can also be involved in male-dominated tasks such as taking the cattle to the water points.

Main labour divisions:

Women	Men	Both
Transportation of the harvest Planting Building pens for calves Collecting grass and fodder for calves Milking cows Making butter (for household consumption and sale) Fetching water Gathering/selling fuel wood Basket and mat making (for household use)	Land preparation Ploughing Management/sale of cattle	Taking cattle to grass/ water points Weeding Harvesting (this can also be done collectively with the neighbours) Making charcoal

- Fetching water and collecting fuel wood are the two most time consuming and tiresome activities women do (the time required varies from village to village).
- Many women rely heavily on the sale of firewood as their only source of income and despite the risks of being caught by forest guards who will confiscate the wood and even the tools. Some women are also involved in the trading of bought goods. There is some 'adding of value' to basic agricultural products such as through the grinding of maize flour. This can be sold at a higher price than whole maize.
- There is limited butter production though it appeared to have been greater in the past.

- No women were involved in handicraft production for sale though baskets, mats and milk carrying containers were made for own use.
- Women have control over smaller livestock and fowl such as chickens. It would appear that the money raised from these tends to be kept by the women and usually spent on items for the household.
- Households often rely on food aid to see them through drought periods.
- Women's illiteracy rate is very high and girls' school enrolment extremely low. Many interviewees stated that they realised the importance of education for both boys and girls. However they do not have the economic means for all their children to attend and often it means that girls are kept at home to help out with household chores.
- Women expressed their desire to have more access to information and knowledge. They indicated that often such information and knowledge bypassed them.
- Many women belong to a *Buusa Gonfa* - traditional Boran 'self-help' group. Through these groups the women support each other in times of need, such as weddings and funerals.
- In many households, women are the sole breadwinners however this role is not acknowledged. Such households tend to represent the poorest.
- Women, as well as men have a broad knowledge of the forest and its uses. This is not fully acknowledged and utilised.
- Women's participation in community activities and decision-making is very limited however they do play a role in certain community activities. In some villages women are heavily involved in house construction. Huts are very highly woven and this is carried out by the women. Community events involving both men and women include 'jilla' when men sing inside the hut and women outside to celebrate the rainy season and 'better times'. It is also normal for the community to sing if a boy is born, but not for a girl. Women are also involved in the traditional coffee making ceremony.
- The older women suggested that life has become more and more difficult. Successive droughts, conflict and a lack of resources have meant that livestock has been depleted- where before some would have oxen for ploughing the land, now they have none. In addition as life has become more sedentary the burden of labour on women has increased as there is more agricultural work and collection of water to be completed as a result. Such work is still seen as 'women's work' and though men recognise that women's labour requirements have increased, culturally defined gender roles mean that they will rarely take on some of this labour themselves. This is despite the fact that government authorities have been promoting gender equity in the area.
- In general however it was felt that the position of women has improved slightly in recent years. Before, women were not allowed to leave house - today, they can. Yet even now they still have to wait for their husband's permission to attend community meetings. And when women do attend they rarely have the confidence to speak.
- Women appear to be quite active in the Women's Associations (WA). They contribute money to the association, which in one village was being saved to purchase a grinding mill. Training has been given through the WA in hygiene and in treating cattle for illnesses. Immunisation programmes have also been implemented. There is a need to learn more about the role and scope of such Associations so as to incorporate them in to the Project.

Recommendations:

- A more detailed gender assessment needs to be carried out throughout the Project area (the present study could only visit three villages in one area) as the roles, constraints and experiences of women will vary.
- Both the Project formulation, implementation and M&E must fully integrate the concerns and needs of both women and men.
- Gender disaggregated data must be gathered and utilised. Gender indicators must be developed as part of any gender strategy.
- PRA exercises need to include a greater number of women. Separate meetings for women appear to be necessary to ensure their knowledge, experiences and problems are also taken into consideration by the Project.
- There appear to be split roles between women due to age. There was not time within this study to investigate this further, however, it is likely to have some impact on women's involvement in Project activities and therefore should be studied.
- Women must be actively encouraged to participate in the forest management committees that will be set up as part of the Project. A good entry point to ensure their participation and the acceptance of their male partners is to include them as one of the interest groups since women are the main fuel wood carriers and in many households the only breadwinners.
- Lack of resources, increasing poverty and more adverse environmental conditions are forcing many Borana communities to rethink the role that women play in their communities. Today, education and knowledge is considered important not only for boys but also for girls as they can find work in nearby towns and support the family. This can also provide an entry point for addressing gender issues within the Project. Communities will be more receptive to the idea of increased women's participation in the Project if they understand it as a tool to ensure better prospects for the family and as a long term coping mechanism in times of hardship.
- Women's high illiteracy rate will limit the success and sustainability of any credit scheme if extensive training is not provided to them prior to the introduction of the scheme. Furthermore, the credit scheme must include the necessary checks to ensure that it does not result in women (and men) borrowing money and investing it in areas that involve a high degree of risk or for which there is no market. This has been the experience of some schemes in other areas. Some insurance or back-up system is needed to overcome such problems (or maybe a scheme such as "borrow a cow, give a cow" should be considered as a better option).
- Links should be established with organisations working with women and women's groups and/or experienced in local gender issues such as the Women's Affairs Dept. and other NGOs and donors such as GTZ. Sharing experiences and perhaps jointly working on certain aspects of the project would limit duplication of efforts and benefit from the expertise of others on gender issues in the area.
- At a national level the government has prepared various reports on ways to integrate gender into the National Conservation Strategy and the National Strategy to Combat Desertification (NSCD). It is envisaged that the NSCD will actively seek women's participation in any project/activity. Similar processes will be carried out at regional level in the next few months. The NSCD can provide an opportunity for bringing gender issues to the forefront and open a broader dialogue on the role women can and should play in natural resource management.

- The Women's Affairs Office at the Prime Minister's Office has developed a project focused on women's economic and political empowerment - the Women's Development Initiative Project. The project budget is US\$ 8 million. It aims to support the establishment of women's groups and credit schemes around the country. The project will firstly work in four pilot regions (Amhara, Afar, Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa) though within the next 5 years it will extend to all regions. If and when it is implemented in Borana, it will have an impact on the situation of women in the area, and hence on this Project.
- Finally, SOS Sahel needs to clearly define what will be the scope of the integration of gender within the Project. One option is to keep a focus on gender issues as they directly relate to the Project. A second option would be to take the focus beyond the confines of the project and see it as an opportunity to open up space for the empowerment of women throughout Borana society. Greater involvement and decision making power of women both within the household and at community level and an improved economic situation should be key objectives of such a strategy.