KNOWFOR’s mandate and momentum as a catalyst for gender inclusion in Rwanda’s FLR planning, policy, and implementation

The KNOWFOR programme has been an influential driver of forest landscape restoration (FLR) and particularly as a catalyst for gender-inclusive planning, projects, and measures for FLR. One such example where the mandate for and momentum of a gender-responsive approach in KNOWFOR has spurred action elsewhere is in Rwanda. Rwanda is a country that is currently engaging in FLR with a completed ROAM process and now beginning implementation of activities. The initial phases of FLR (ROAM), completed in 2014, did not include gender in the assessment. However, since this initial assessment, Rwanda—often touted as a leader in recognizing and promoting women’s rights, empowerment and gender equality, especially in decision making—has stepped up to the plate to continue to ensure that the process of implementation, as well as policy and governance around FLR, will be increasingly gender-inclusive, -sensitive, and -responsive.

Beginning in early 2016, IUCN engaged with several of the regional offices and key stakeholders in Rwanda to discuss and share the importance of gender in FLR. Rwanda’s strong political and institutional framework on gender—but not necessarily previously crossing into the environmental sector—sets up an opportunity for gender as a cross-cutting theme to infiltrate into the forestry and landscape sector, especially with agriculture as a crucial element within FLR too. The initial introduction was done through presentation of the linkages of gender and forests/forestry and landscape restoration, with discussion among stakeholders on issues that have arisen in the country regarding gender in the sector. This discussion spurred further interest by the Government of Rwanda to engage with IUCN on building a gender-responsive approach when researching and planning and upon implementation of polices and practices relevant to FLR going forward.

Thus, IUCN Global Gender Office (GGO) embarked upon ongoing support to the Government of Rwanda, through the IUCN Rwanda FLR ESARO Hub office, in reviewing the newly revised national Forestry Policy to ensure that women’s rights issues, regarding access, use and control over resources and services were acknowledged, and with actions to empower them and improve their position in their lives and livelihoods toward enhanced gender equality. This policy revision is accompanied by the forestry indicators, which GGO also reviewed and provided input on to ensure that the framework for monitoring and evaluating the new national policy would go beyond just counting women and men (i.e., collecting sex-disaggregated participation data) toward investigation and lessons learned on including activities that dissolve barriers and challenges to gender equality, and provide tangible opportunities to improve the lives and livelihoods of women and men. These two planning and policy documents are awaiting approval by the cabinet, but should promote the status of inclusion of gender in the final documents in early 2017. In light of this support, and the successful action especially through the collaboration of the KNOWFOR Gender Working Group, GGO is also currently
developing a Regional Gender Strategy, spearheaded by the action in Rwanda to ensure that all aspects of FLR recognize and respond to gender, including: guidance on implementing gender-responsive ROAM; comprehensive support to national instruments and mechanisms; project development; project implementation; and knowledge exchange and communication.

Additionally, in the second half of 2016, IUCN GGO was asked to again support the Government of Rwanda in producing a gender analysis of the situation, impact, and recommendations for addressing a programme proposal for the Green Climate Fund (GCF) that includes a component on watershed and ecosystem management to be implemented largely through FLR interventions. Conducting this analysis on gender in Rwanda in regards to several components of the programme proposal, but specifically around the watershed management, intervention proposals, and business and livelihood options provided a more in-depth look at the gender gaps, inequalities, as well as opportunities for improving the status of women, men and youth in the impacted communities. Information arose from community stakeholder meetings and focal groups, particularly with members from tea and sustainable village cooperatives regarding existing issues women and men in communities are facing that can be resolved with a variety of restoration techniques, but also the needs, interests and priorities of women and men. This is critically important to ensure ownership of the implementation activities by the women and men in the communities, while also providing new information on possible alternative livelihood activities, or entrepreneurial activities that could expand income and boost individuals, families and communities out of impoverished conditions. An analysis that took place that was very insightful, but undoubtedly needs to be validated, provided information on which species of trees—especially those useful in ecosystem restoration—were used and/or preferred by women and men, and what the resources/uses garnered from each are. The information from this should be used in all additional FLR planning and project interventions in Rwanda, and influence/encourage a similar analysis to be done in other FLR processes to ensure equal use and access to species, which are not just considered priority by one group purely because of economic opportunities and benefits often controlled by men. Beyond the species identification, the gender analysis concluded that the business opportunities that could be enhanced due to restoration projects can, and certainly should, engage women on an equal basis to ensure they reap equitable benefits (i.e., nursery development, seed banks, beekeeping, agricultural charcoal production, and/or dairy farming), and can actually benefit from the unique knowledge and experiences women have already had in undertaking their certain roles and responsibilities.

The gender analysis provides accurate information on various aspects of gender in FLR management, use, and opportunities/benefits. It will continue to shed light on elements of the Regional Gender Strategy, particularly around engagement of women in new economic activities that may not have strict gender-differentiated roles and responsibilities already attached to them, and may present opportunities for gender-equitable livelihood empowerment, sustainability and security.