GENDER, INSTITUTIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY IN THE CONTEXT OF FOREST
DECENTRALIZATION REFORMS IN LATIN AMERICA AND EAST AFRICA

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INTRODUCTION
Women’s participation in decision making at the user-group level and in forest committees has been demonstrated to have a positive impact on forest sustainability.

The research presented in this paper advances our knowledge of how women may influence forest management. It explores the differences in forest management by groups with different male-female composition (i.e., female-dominated, mixed-gender, and male-dominated user groups).

The study investigates each type of group’s property rights to forest resources, harvesting preferences, participation in rule making, relative investments in forest management and the outcomes of these activities.

The research was conducted in four countries in Latin America (Bolivia and Mexico) and East Africa (Kenya and Uganda) and adopts a comparative approach to identify synergies within regions and to create a learning environment that may lead to improved forest management.

FOREST DECENTRALIZATION
Decentralization of forest management: offer rules related to access, harvesting, and management that are reflective of local needs and knowledge, and thus allow for more efficient monitoring and sanctioning. In addition, local institutions can provide low cost and faster conflict resolution;

Challenges for decentralization reforms: increasing disadvantages for women, poorer individuals and ethnic minorities.

THE CONTEXT
Decentralization reforms in all four countries were initiated and begun implementation during the past 15 years:

Bolivia: introduced forestry reforms in 1996 that transferred substantial power and resources to local governments, but retained national ownership of all forest resources;

Mexico: has decentralized some of its forest governance functions and ownership rights to communities, but has retained more political and financial control at the federal and state levels;

Uganda: has implemented forest decentralization reforms since 1996 and has devolved authority to the district level;

Kenya: had reform in 2005 to devolve authority to community associations but with responsibility in nested hierarchies that overlap both governance levels.

AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Property rights to harvest and actual amounts harvested

INVESTMENT ACTIVITIES

Gender composition affects the user groups’ rights to harvest and actual amounts harvested, with female-dominant groups tending to hold rights to harvest trees and bushes, and to collect more fuelwood and less timber;

While decentralization expands user groups’ right to harvest, it negatively influences the amount the user groups actually harvest from the forest.

MANAGEMENT AND DECISION MAKING

Challenges for decentralization reforms: increasing disadvantages for women, poorer individuals and ethnic minorities.

The implementation of decentralization reforms has strengthened user group rights to forest products yet has reduced user groups’ actual harvest levels; furthermore, decentralization has encouraged user groups to participate in forest management activities.