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FOR DARWIN NEWSLETTER ON GENDER:

Gender Equity and Coffee Conservation

Ethiopia, making coffee, the national drink, is primarily women's work, one imbued with cultural significance. Making sure that women benefit equally from the activities of the Wild Coffee Conservation project in Ethiopia has been an important concern from the start. The project is testing a new approach using Devolved or Participatory Forest Management to the conservation of wild *Coffea arabica* in the Afromontane forests of south west Ethiopia; women have been fully engaged in all stages of this.

Women bear the burden of deforestation as it impacts on firewood and water collection, both female responsibilities. The project aims to preserve forest biodiversity, preventing deforestation and improving degraded forest by adding value to the forest through active forest management / silviculture and the development of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP's), particularly wild coffee, honey and spices and their supply chains. At the same time, Forest Management Associations at the community level manage and monitor forest health and protect the forest from outsiders and illegal activities; women can be members of these in their own right. Forest Management Agreements give legal rights of access and a sense of ownership to communities.

Gender equity was part of the project design initially and all data collection has been gender disaggregated. The challenge for the project from a gender perspective has been to ensure that women benefit more equitably from the development of NTFP value chains and are included as active participants in the Forest Management Associations.

The use of a participatory methodology as a core tenant of the project has facilitated the inclusion of women, though lessons were learnt early on about the need to have separate meetings for women at different times of day from men so that women's domestic responsibilities, particularly child and home care, could be addressed. Subsequently, women have been in all teams engaged in forest demarcation, assessment, forest management plan preparation, byelaw formulation exercises and on the implementation process. At the *got* (village) level a minimum of one of the five places on the PFM committee is reserved exclusively for women, while one is also reserved for forest-dwelling minority groups.

Despite these efforts, so far only 9% of total PFM group members are women, including some who are from female headed households. To address this situation the project has taken advice from senior women in an adjoining project area who have been involved in PFM from the earliest days. Women like Birhane Geremew (pictured), a member of the Ganiti Forest Management Association (FMA) General Assembly and part of the PFM work in the south west since 2008. Says Birhane "*awareness and training have shown them, [women] they can participate and benefit like men*". Women such as Birhane have not only provided advice but also acted as role models in their communities, participating in conferences and workshops with government and encouraging other women. There is evidence to suggest that once women realise the approach is going to stay and that it generates benefits, there is a greater willingness to invest time in becoming an FMA member.

At present women make up 11% of the membership of the forest enterprises developed by the project. Women's involvement in forest enterprises for coffee, honey and spices has enabled them to benefit economically from the development of all three value chains. Women have significant roles in the coffee value chain particularly in harvesting and the drying process with the coffee value chain creating job opportunities for women.

An interesting outcome of the Wild Coffee Conservation project's work on gender issues has been the discussions between this project and its Ethiopian implementing partner, Ethio-Wetlands and Natural Resources Association, on how to facilitate women's engagement, with quotas, meeting arrangements and awareness raising all subject to debate. The development

of a Gender Policy by the partner organisation has led to the introduction of gender training for staff, the adoption of organisation-wide targets in this area and the implementation of gender awareness training for community based organisation in the work of EWNRA and the WCC project.

For more information [click here](#). To access a short film [click here](#). Contact Fiona Hesselden: F.Hesselden@hud.ac.uk