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WITH GENDER EMPHASIS

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**Gender, Local Communities, and Natural  
Ecosystems in Tambopata, Peru**

*Avecita Chicchón*  
*Rosario Lanao*

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# GENDER, COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

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The MERGE Case Studies Series on Gender, Community Participation and Natural Resource Management, supported by grants from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and WIDTECH, is designed to show how a gender focus has been relevant and useful in natural resource management projects. The cases focus on concrete examples from extension, applied research, and participatory planning activities involving rural communities, especially those in and around protected areas primarily from projects in Latin America with which the MERGE program has collaborated. The format lends itself to practical applications as well as training in gender and natural resource management. The cases are translated into English, Portuguese and Spanish, and are available on the Internet (<http://www.tcd.ufl.edu>).

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# **Gender, Local Communities, and Natural Ecosystems in Tambopata, Peru.**

*Avecita Chicchón  
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**April, 2020**

# Gender, Local Communities, and Natural Ecosystems in Tambopata, Peru.

Avecita Chicchón and Rosario Lanao

Translation by  
Marianne Schmink<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

### Gender and conservation of nature

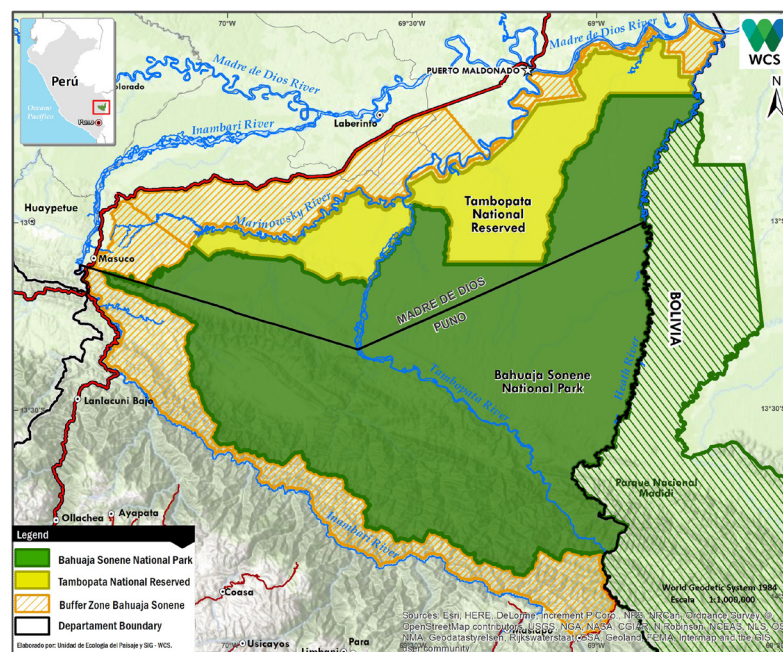
Biological diversity in the Amazon region is decreasing rapidly because of the destruction of the natural ecosystems that contain it. The loss of biological diversity has grave natural and social consequences in the short, medium and long term. The severe transformation of natural habitats affects the climate, the quality of air and water, the local extinction of flora and fauna and – no less important – the landscape. Moreover, it endangers food, medical and biotechnology security of traditional and modern societies. Facing this crisis, a variety of responses by governmental and non-governmental organizations seek to diminish or avoid the loss of biological diversity in natural ecosystems.

This case study focuses on a nature conservation effort in Tambopata, Peru, through analysis of relevance of a gender perspective to strengthen conservation initiatives. In the context of promoting participation by local populations in conservation, gender takes on vital importance. There are relatively few documented experiences of analysis

of gender in conservation initiatives; those that do exist often emphasize management of agricultural and forestry resources (Rocheleau et al. 1996; Schmink 1999). A gender lens allows us to see the differences inside domestic units. The key is to assure that planned interventions do not accentuate possible gender differences which lead to one gender (normally women) being at a social disadvantage.

### The Tambopata-Candamo National Reserve, the Pampas del Heath National Sanctuary (SNPH) and the Bahuaja-Sonene National Park (PNBS)

The Tambopata region in southeast Peru covers zones ranging from the highlands of Puno department to the lowlands of the department of Madre de Dios. The Tambopata River flows into the Madre de Dios River, one of the most important tributaries that make up the Amazon basin. The Tambopata region includes highly diverse ecosystems that range from 200 to 3,300 meters above sea level (see map). This region, the Heath River basin (affluent of the Madre de Dios River) and the neighboring region of Madidi in Bolivia, traditionally were occupied by indigenous peoples from



<sup>1</sup> Extracted and translated from a portion of the following publication: Avecita Chicchón and Charo Lanao, Comunidades locales y ecosistemas naturales: La perspectiva de género en la conservación de Tambopata, Peru, pp. 465-488 in Verónica Vázquez García and Margarita Velazquez Gutiérrez (compiladores), *Miradas al Futuro: Hacia la Construcción de Sociedades Sustentables con Equidad de Género* (Cuernavaca, Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de México).

the Ese'ejá ethnolinguistic group, of the Tacana linguistic family. Due to inter- and intra-tribal conflicts, epidemics and the impact of extractive activities (especially rubber), the number of Ese'ejá families declined significantly at the beginning of the 20th century. A 2017 publication estimated the number of Ese'ejá in Peru to be approximately 1,500 (Pacheco Medrano 2017: 33). The Ese'ejá are hunter-gatherers and practice slash and burn agriculture.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Tambopata region began to be visited by outsiders interested in extracting natural resources like rubber, quinine and zarzaparrilla. Once external demand for these resources declined and, in addition, the resources were exhausted, extraction camps were abandoned. Not until the 1940s did permanent, sustained migration from the Andes begin. In the 1960s the waves of Andean migration increased after road links were consolidated from Cusco-Puerto Maldonado. The upper Tambopata region in Puno experienced a different population dynamic more linked with migration by Aymara and Quechua populations to the valleys, principally to cultivate coffee (Chicchón et al. 1997). A singular characteristic of the Tambopata region is the existence of extensive salt licks or *ccolpas*. *Ccolpa* is a Quechua term that denotes a place that is rich in clay, salts, and minerals. These places attract a large diversity of birds and mammals, depending on where they are located.

At the end of the 1980s, a group of conservationists and members of the government promoted and in January of 1990 were able to establish the Tambopata Candamo Reserved Zone, over an area of almost a million and a half hectares. In accordance with Peruvian law, a Reserved Zone is a transitory protected area that permits planning according to the potential of its resources. Initially, local people were opposed to the establishment of a new protected area but gradually they became involved in conservation planning activities (Chicchón 1995; Pacheco Medrano 2017). The participatory planning effort subsequently carried out in the Reserved Zone, using strategies to build alliances with local populations and organizations of natives, farmers, Brazil nut collectors and miners was a pioneering model of citizen participation in conservation planning and the first experience of local consultation in Peru (Pacheco Medrano 2017: 61; 64; 81).

The planning process followed the scheme for Biosphere Reserves in which there is a nucleus for strict protection (in this case, a national park), along with use areas in accordance with the capacity of the environment: Brazil nut areas, and areas for agricultural, forestry and mining activities. In July of 1996 a portion of the proposed nucleus area was declared the Bahuaja Sonene National Park (Tambopata-Heath) covering approximately 322,000 hectares, which was nearly doubled in 2000 (Pacheco Medrano 2017). This new National Park included, in addition, the Pampas del Heath National Sanctuary which was created at the beginning of the 1980s covering

105,000 hectares, to protect the only tropical moist savanna ecosystems present in Peru. Two-thirds of the original proposal were excluded from the area of the new National Park due to a superposition over a concession for hydrocarbon exploration. In spite of this, an article creating the Park established that it would grow in size, as the concessionary companies "released" areas that they would not incorporate into their hydrocarbon exploitation plans. The Tambopata National Reserve was created in northern portion of the Reserved Zone in 2000; since 2006 the Reserve faces growing pressures from illegal logging, coca cultivation, and gold mining (Pacheco Medrano 2017).

The design of the Conservation-Based Development Program in Tambopata (Prodescot) of Conservation International's Peru program was a product of the planning process that was generated around the Tambopata Candamo Reserved Zone (Pacheco Medrano 2017: 68). Prodescot's focus was holistic, multidisciplinary and participatory (see Piland and Varese, 1997), seeking to establish a "social pact" with local populations (Pacheco Medrano 2017: 62). The first two years of the program included a series of biological and social research projects that were used in the design and application of plans for management of natural resources, for institutional agreements, as well as capacity-building and extension activities. Evaluations included mapping of types of vegetation, management of terrestrial fauna, fisheries management, sustainable forest management, mining evaluations, legal diagnostics, health studies (traditional and modern medicine), and socio-economic studies.

Within Prodescot, the component of capacity-building and extension with a gender focus was key to promoting the use of participatory techniques in specific projects of the program and in the projects of other organizations that managed conservation and development projects in Madre de Dios. This component included the Gender and Environment Project (Progema) and Participatory Communal Planning (PPC). The program began in January of 1995 in collaboration with the University of Florida, FLACSO and TNC within the MERGE project (Managing Ecosystems and Resources with Gender Emphasis) (see <http://uftcd.org/associated-programs/merge/>). The principal purpose of the project was to respond to the local demand to serve equitably both men and women as direct beneficiaries of the conservation and development projects present in Madre de Dios. To achieve this, a capacity-building program was designed for professionals and local leaders who worked in conservation and development projects. The training program focused on the analysis of gender themes related to natural resource management, with the conviction that these projects should not reinforce or create inequalities between men and women.

In this framework the training and extension team of Prodescot began to follow up with the Cui'ao project: a project carried out by a local non-governmental organization,

**Within Prodescot, the component of capacity-building and extension with a gender focus was key to promoting the use of participatory techniques**



Pro-Naturaleza, which (at the time) was responsible for the administration of a strict protected area, Pampas del Heath National Sanctuary (later incorporated into the Bahuaja Sonene National Park). This project sought, on one hand, to generate participation by the Ese'ejá in conservation projects and, on the other hand, promote the conservation of eggs of the *taricaya* turtle (*Podocnemis unifilis*) on the beaches of the Heath River, an affluent of the Madre de Dios River along the border with Bolivia.

The PPC project's objective was to strengthen local communities so that they themselves could become aware of the challenges they faced, and develop plans for their own solutions with their own community resources. The PPC was nourished by the work carried out in Progema that incorporated a gender focus in project activities. The work team for PPC was the same as that of Progema. PPC activities were carried out in various communities along the Cusco-Puerto Maldonado highway, Puerto-Maldonado-Iberia highway, along the Tambopata River and also in Sonene, the native community where the Ese'ejá started the follow-up activities of the Cui'ao project (meaning turtle eggs in the Ese'ejá language).

As a first step in their participatory approach, the Prodescot team contacted the two most important grass-roots organizations in Madre de Dios, the Federación de Agricultores de Madre de Dios (Fademad) and the Federación de Nativos del Río Madre de Dios y Afluentes (Fenamad). Each of these organizations assigned a leader to participate in the PPC. Those responsible for the project elaborated a pamphlet called "Participatory Communal Planning." This was disseminated through the communications bulletins of Fademad and Fenamad, "El Pijuayo" and "Avance Indígena," respectively. Later the team visited communities to generate interest in participating in the PPC.

As a second step, the team (normally one person from Conservation International and one leader of one of the federations) trained local promoters (in the communities) so that they could also participate as facilitators in the self-diagnostic workshops and so that they could follow up with the work after the team left the community. In the workshops they used creative participatory techniques that were flexible depending on the community's situation. The activities included workshops with all the community members or with women only, personal interviews, community maps, drawings of the ideal farm, and structured interviews.

The subsequent steps included *planning*, *project elaboration*, and *permanent evaluation*.

**Planning:** The community met to develop a strategy for solutions to face a common challenge. The facilitators promoted discussion and decision-making based on a

prioritization of solutions to reach specific goals, assigning responsibilities to persons, with defined deadlines. During this step, a self-diagnosis was carried out: the community identified challenges they faced, possible causes, and the possible solutions using the resources the community could count on.

**Project evaluation:** The community developed a project prioritized to resolve one of their main challenges. The project had specific objectives, activities aimed to reach these objectives, terms of reference for the personnel who would be involved, and a budget that responded fully to the needs of the project.

**Permanent evaluation:** In each section of the development, the PPC emphasized the need to reflect on what was done in order to improve the community's actions in the future. The team gave great responsibility to the local promoters to provide follow-up for the evaluation phase in the medium-term, after the main workshops.

## Cui'ao: a conservation project in Heath

An important step to launch a conservation project is to carry out an analysis of the social groups who have an interest or interests in the protected area and the resources it contains. In the case of the National Park, those interested in protecting the area were the functionaries of the National Institute for Natural Resources, the local conservation NGO, and the international NGOs that directly or indirectly supported the park guards in their work in protection, and in promotion of environmental education with local people. On the other hand, there were groups who were interested in using the resources inside the protected area: Ese'ejá indigenous people, riverside-dwellers, agricultural colonists, and the Bolivian population that lived on the border. Legally, only the Ese'ejá had the right to use the resources inside the protected area for subsistence, since this was their area of traditional occupation.

Relations between the park guards and the local population varied from very tense to relatively harmonious. The Heath protected area was created at the beginning of the 1980s, but did not have effective protection until the 1990s. The park guards took on their function of breaking the extractive use that the colonist and river-dwelling populations had been making of the resources inside the protected area. This caused the gradual depopulation of the border, causing discomfort among state employees in Puerto Maldonado who promoted the establishment of "live borders," meaning Peruvian settlements to "defend" the border with Bolivia. Relations between park guards and the indigenous were tense at first but gradually improved when guards began to analyze closely the benefits of managing the savannas by burning pastures as the Ese'ejá did: if the objective of the protected area was to conserve the *pampas*,

the Ese'eja had been doing this through periodic burning of the ecosystem. This "discovery" motivated greater respect on the part of the park guards for the knowledge and traditional management practices of the Ese'eja.

The Cui'ao project also contributed to the approximation between the protection team of the Bahuaja Sonene National Park and the Ese'eja indigenous of the Sonene native community. This project sponsored two-way training: for the park guards, how to deal with local populations, and for the indigenous, how to negotiate with agents outside their society.

The objective of the Cui'ao project was to "motivate the community with regard to the formal conservation activities, evaluate to what extent they were committed, and provide the formal conditions so that later they would collaborate and participate in more formal activities" (Rubio 1994, translation by the authors). Work on the beaches to protect *taricaya* eggs was considered to be an experiment with minimal risk because if it failed it would not endanger the *taricayas*, since these were not in imminent danger of local extinction.

The Cui'ao project started during the dry season of 1994 with the Sonene native community. There were 17 families in Sonene that included 76 persons (36 men and 40 women). Although legally they were called a "native community," as in many other indigenous settlements in the Amazon, decisions were made at the level of the nuclear family or the extended family depending on the case. The "community" had a meaning only for ritual activities that by that time were limited.

The Cui'ao project consisted of caring for three beaches along the Heath River, previously selected for harboring the largest number of *taricaya* egg nests. Between August and October (when the *taricayas* lay their eggs), patrols worked in shifts to make sure no one entered to extract eggs from the beaches selected for protection. The shifts lasted 15 days each and each shift was covered by two Ese'eja families. The park guards provided basic food supplies, canoe transport and the fuel needed to travel. The Ese'eja provided the motor and the time spent patrolling. The distance from Sonene and the farthest beach was a day and a half trip with a 16-horsepower motor. In 1995 and 1996, Progema/Prodescot contributed to the collection of information about the project through the delivery of materials and training to park guards about relations with the native community. The participants received a camera, rolls of film and notebooks to write or draw relevant information about the patrols. In addition, a first aid kit with basic medicines for the trip was provided.

#### Project Activities

- A Before the patrols: the park guards conducted a meeting with the Sonene Ese'eja community to propose and plan the project. The Ese'eja were designated, along with the park guards, to select the beaches. Families were identified to participate in the patrol shifts.
- B During the patrols: the selected beaches were

signaled by red flags. The beaches were watched during August, September, and October. Only the man's name was registered even though it was the whole family that carried out the patrol. The shift lasted 15 days and consisted of moving to the beaches and watching to make sure that no one entered to extract eggs. Before arriving at the marked beaches, each group had to register at the park guard control post. There they were given materials (tools, foodstuffs, cameras, notebooks and first aid kit). The name and age of all the travelers was registered as well as the day/time of departure. In some cases the patrol coincided with the activities of the park guards (ecological monitoring). In this case, they shared camps.

- C After the patrols: at the end of the beach-care shift, the boat reported to the control post where they deposited the equipment and referred to the events of the trip. After the six patrols an evaluation was to be made of the whole season, evaluating the conditions of the beaches and the accomplishments/difficulties presented during the activities. At the end of 1995, the Progema team along with the park guards delivered the participatory information-evaluation with the Ese'eja using puppets as a communication technique.

The Ese'eja who participated in the project indicated that they became involved for the following reasons:

*For the eggs.* Taricaya eggs could be found only in the dry season (August to October) and were a food considered to be very delicious. The Ese'eja indicated that the eggs contained large quantities of oil and could be salted to preserve for later consumption. The families that carried out the patrols couldn't collect eggs on the beaches selected for protection, but they could on other beaches.

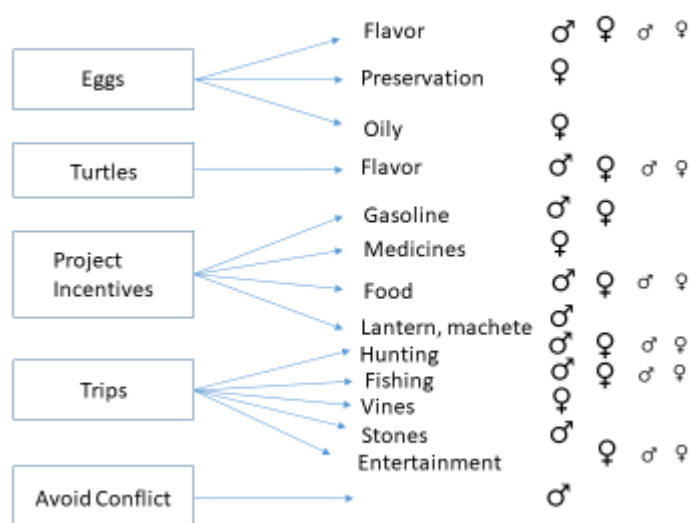
*For the incentives offered by the project.* When they went out to take care of the beaches, participants received foodstuffs, fuel, lantern, machete and a basic first aid kit.

*For the opportunity to travel upriver and carry out other activities.* The Ese'eja used these trips to carry out their traditional activities of hunting, fishing and gathering in places where these resources were more abundant.

*To avoid conflicts with park guards.* Some said that if they didn't participate, the park guards might get annoyed; for this reason, it was better to participate.

Taking a gender perspective into account allows us to see the diversity underlying the reasons for interest in the project, so that we can distinguish more finely that interests in participation are related to the roles individuals have inside the domestic unit, as shown in the following chart.

## Interests in the Cui'ao Project (by gender, adults and children)



*For the eggs.* The flavor: for the Ese'eja, *taricaya* eggs were a delicacy. Women and men (adults and children) recognized this attribute and valued it. Storage: after collecting eggs it was possible to salt them and save them for up to a month. For adult women who were responsible for preparing food, this was important because they could store the food and ration consumption. The oil: adult women mentioned that it was important for children to consume a good dose of the oil because it was good for health. Some men indicated that they could sell the eggs in town, even though the park guards discouraged this proposal.

*For the taricayas.* The women prepared a soup dish based on newly-hatched *taricayas*. They allowed the eggs to hatch and then collected the baby turtles. This meal was highly-desired by adults and children (male and female).

*For the incentives offered by the project.* Gasoline: valued by adult men and women. Medicines: valued by adult women. Foodstuffs: valued by men and women of different ages. Tools: valued by adult men – a new machete and a lantern with batteries facilitated the execution of subsistence activities in the field.

*For the trips.* It was fun: the Ese'eja traveled as a family; the rivers were low and they could fish and hunt. Valued by men and women of all ages. The women could collect *tamishi* (a native vine) which was scarce near their community, to make highly-appreciated objects for domestic use such as baskets, brooms, fans and others. In the upper Heath River zone stones could be obtained to sharpen machetes. The men were especially interested in obtaining these stones.

*To avoid conflicts with park guards.* The men preferred to maintain good relations with the park guards, so they participated in the project so that the guards would not

be offended. The men saw the park guards as eventual allies for the services they could receive from them, such as for example, travel in their boats to Puerto Maldonado.

Just as there were strong interests in participating in the project, there were also disincentives for participation. Some women indicated that they enjoyed the boat trip while they were moving, but they weren't interested in participating in the care of beaches because at that time of year there were many flies and mosquitoes. On the other hand, the work rhythm and the notion of time among the Ese'eja was very different from the guidelines the park guards sought to establish. Not fulfilling the responsibilities taken and the strict schedules was a source of conflict between park guards and Ese'eja since, in the eyes of the park guards, the Ese'eja would not be complying with "what was agreed" (Busse and Solizonehua 1997).

At the beginning of the project, the park guards involved the Sonene Ese'eja population in the protection of some beaches, giving instructions primarily to the men for the patrol activities. After the project began it became evident that it was necessary to involve not only men but also women and children in specific protection activities. In the Ese'eja culture it was very important to teach children to take care of themselves from an early age. This included food provision and decision-making about the use of some natural resources. Thus, children learned to use slings to hunt some birds, and to find bait for fishing. In this way, women's participation in the patrol expeditions meant that they also took their children on the expedition. When the children began to collect *taricaya* eggs from the nests, the parents wouldn't do anything to impede them from this activity, because this would go against the learning mechanisms to live in nature that the Ese'eja developed in their society. One clear lesson from this case tells us that it is necessary to understand the reasons underlying the

Without a gender analysis, and special attention to age clusters, it would have been difficult to be able to determine the possible consequences of incorporating the whole family in protection of the beaches

behavior of populations that are intended to benefit and their possible impact on the project. Without a gender analysis, and special attention to age clusters, it would have been difficult to be able to determine the possible consequences of incorporating the whole family in protection of the beaches.

In 1996 it wasn't possible to conclude the role of beach care (only three shifts of six planned were carried out) for various reasons that had to do with changes in the administration of the protected area, with the reduction of resources assigned to the project, and due to the pillage of one of the beaches that was controlled by the project. The latter reason was analyzed in a workshop in December and various versions were collected that placed the responsibility for the use of *taricaya* eggs away from people in Sonene: neighboring settlers from Bolivia entered the beaches to collect eggs from the nests that the Ese'eja



were taking care of<sup>2</sup>. What did become clear from the analysis was that it was actually very complex to nail down a protection project if it wasn't clear from the beginning what is the assigned responsibility of each individual involved. Cultural conditions that frame project activities must be analyzed in terms of the interests that motivate participation in the project according to position in the family inside the community, according to the age and gender of participants.

## Towards a critical analysis of the PPC

In the process of elaboration of the PPC activities, the local population became conscious of the importance of identifying gender roles in the planning for community activities. One important aspect was to emphasize that even if we have strongly-rooted notions of what men and women are and do, these are cultural notions, specific to a determined time and place, and for this reason, they may change. It was particularly important to carry out socio-dramas in which men's roles were assigned to women and vice-versa. Having to think about how to act in their new women's "role," men began to more consciously value the work women did.

After "sensitizing" community members about gender, it was important to emphasize the use of the concept to see the diversity of responses of attitudes and behaviors facing a common challenge. A gender perspective in the collection of data at a detailed level was extremely important for planning community actions. They themselves put this in practice in community workshops.

The most important challenge faced during the execution of the PPC was that they tried to encompass a broad region where some communities were dispersed along the highway while others were located near the principal rivers. Later we recognized that we should accompany just one community at a time during the whole PPC process instead of several at one time as was attempted. We had a serious problem of follow-up and return of information in a rapid and timely manner. This point began to be corrected in 1997 activities.

Another important lesson was to recognize that the facilitation process had its limitations and we couldn't expect that residents would readily have appropriate solutions to the problems they faced. We recognized that it was more important to save some of the steps by presenting to the communities some semi-elaborated proposals of potential solutions, to be discussed and modified together, with appropriate content on economic, ecological and social viability.

## Gender focus in conservation projects

Within the conservation strategy for the Tambopata region, having as a nucleus of protection the Bahuaja

Sonene National Park (Tambopata-Heath), the analysis of the Cui'ao case reminds us of the lessons from development projects: that in addition to responding to the interests of its promoters (in this case, conservationists), activities of a project must also respond to the interests of local residents. They are the permanent current and potential users of the resources to be protected.

On the other hand, it is necessary not to forget that the interests of local residents are dynamic and differ according to their cultural patterns, age, and gender. Involving women and children means developing activities specific to their interests according to the moment and the place where they are located. Working with indigenous populations weakly integrated into western society is very different from working with populations of Andean migrants who go to the jungle to improve their levels of income.

Even in egalitarian societies like the Ese'eja there is a division of labor and defined roles that provide the context for power relations between genders. The knowledge domains related to nature, and the activities and practices of use and management of natural resources, vary according to practical (short-term) and strategic (long-term, structural) interests that each gender may have in a given reality (Molyneau 1985; Moser 1989). There are many examples of how even well-intentioned external interventions to improve the quality of life of indigenous populations have had negative effects for women's social position because of failing to take into account at the correct moment their real situation within their own society (see Stocks and Stocks 1984).

The case study of fauna management (*taricaya* eggs, in this case) gave us guidelines to understand a social dynamic conditioned by ecological elements that have to do with the seasonal availability of a highly-valued resource for an Amazonian indigenous society. Nature, not local populations, controlled where and when the *taricaya* nests would be established. Local residents were rather skilled and knowledgeable at recognizing the indicators that nature revealed: what was the seasonality of nest establishment? Which beaches were most appropriate to harbor the largest quantity of nests? What effects might human manipulation have on the nests for egg hatching?

On the other hand, the opportunity offered by external agents to rapidly reach zones of difficult access (due to distance, lack of fuel or appropriate means of transport) to better take advantage of natural resources stimulated the appearance of a new element that could provoke divisions within the community and a rearrangement of power relations: the families that tended small agricultural plots had a better chance of undertaking a two-week trip than those who had to use their time to weed the plots where they had planted rice. Within the family or domestic unit,

2 It wasn't clear who was responsible for the "pillage" of the protected beaches in 1996. Were the eggs taken by the first families that patrolled? By Ese'eja from the neighboring community of Palma Real? By the Bolivians?

there were also incentives and disincentives to participate in the project: women as food processors might at one moment prioritize undertaking a patrol trip to be able to access the advantages of varying their diet (*flavor*, an element not considered in many projects) and to be able to store the eggs (and other resources encountered on the trip) and consume them in the future. Thus, women decidedly influenced within their domestic units as to *how* to assign major efforts to obtain *which* resources offered by nature, taking into account poorly-considered elements, such as the facility of storage and the time/form of cooking the resource.

The gender focus offers us richer detail about the diversity of social responses to conditions determined by environmental factors. It is key to promote the creation of appropriate spaces so that no gender (especially women, due to their greater vulnerability in western society) occupies a position of subordination or domination. The responsibility of external agents is clear in this regard.

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The links between gender, environment and development are understood much better when reality is analyzed in an integral way. Development has been understood as a means of pointing to economic growth, but it is now evident that long-term development will not happen without considering the environmental limits to growth. A gender focus permits us to see with greater rigor the particularities of social relations among human beings, and between these and nature (see Van den Hombergh 1993).

With this essay we sought to contribute to the understanding of the conceptual value of a gender perspective in conservation projects. There are not many areas of high biological diversity left on the planet. Those that exist constitute the last frontier of science and, furthermore, the last frontier of human occupation. We are certain that only with an analysis of diversity at all levels of human relations can we manage to find and pursue the pathway towards a just society with development based on the conservation of nature, our source of life.

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