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## **Gender and Collective Action: A Conceptual Framework for Analysis**

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents a framework for investigating the intersection of collective action and gender; i.e. how gender-oriented analysis can foster more effective collective action in the context of agriculture and natural resource management and how collective action can be used as a vehicle for gender equity. We begin with definitions of the key concepts and then present three entry points for a gendered analysis of collective action-motivations, effectiveness, and impact on gender equity- vis-à-vis the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework (Oakerson, 1992; Ostrom, 1991). At the heart of this framework is the action arena, which is shaped by a host of initial conditions, including asset endowments, vulnerabilities, and legal and governance systems that influence a range of outcomes. Applying a gender lens to this framework, we present an analysis of how women and men experience the initial set of conditions differently and thus, have different motivations and capacities for engaging in collective action. Next, we look at how the gender composition of groups affects the effectiveness of collective action, and finally, at the impact of collective action on gender equity and women's empowerment. We conclude with a discussion of how this framework can improve our understanding of gender and collective action in order to facilitate more effective collective action while fostering gender equity.

**Keywords:** gender, collective action, motivation, effectiveness, impact, action resources, institutional change

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Collective action plays a vital role in many aspects of human interaction, including income generation, risk reduction, and public service provision. Experience has shown that institutions of collective action play an important role in how people use natural resources, which in turn shapes the outcomes of production systems. Many government devolution policies and community-driven development (CDD) programs are fundamentally premised upon collective action.

Collective action refers both to the process by which voluntary institutions are created and maintained and to the groups that decide to act together. It can assume various forms ranging from voluntary self-help groups to formal organizations that aim to manage a community's natural resources or to advocate for political change at the national level.

Integrating a gender perspective into applied research on collective action is imperative because institutions themselves are gendered and can either challenge or reinforce existing social roles. Gender also serves as an organizing principle for community action and thus may have implications for the efficiency and effectiveness of collective action.

This paper presents an analytical framework for investigating the intersection of collective action and gender; i.e. how gender-oriented analysis can foster more effective collective action and how collective action can be used as a vehicle for gender equity. We begin with definitions of the key concepts and then present three entry points for a gendered analysis of collective action-motivations, effectiveness, and impact on gender equity- vis-à-vis the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework (Oakerson, 1992; Ostrom, 1991). At the heart of this framework is the action arena, which is shaped by a host of initial conditions, including asset endowments, vulnerabilities, and legal and governance systems that influence a range of outcomes. Applying a gender lens to this framework, we present an analysis of

how women and men experience the initial set of conditions differently and thus, have different motivations and capacities for engaging in collective action, with particular reference to agriculture and natural resource management. Next, we look at how the gender composition of groups affects the effectiveness of collective action, and finally, at the impact of collective action on gender equity and women's empowerment. We conclude with a discussion of how this framework can improve our understanding of gender and collective action in order to facilitate more effective collective action while fostering gender equity.

## 2. COLLECTIVE ACTION AND GENDER

### COLLECTIVE ACTION

Collective action as an institution is commonly overlooked or, when recognized, frequently misunderstood. Most basically, this collective action can be defined as voluntary action taken by a group to achieve common interests (Marshall 1998). The action can take place through an organization such as a producer cooperative or members can participate in such action directly. As a governance structure, collective action occurs not only when group members pool labor and resources to build a dam or well, for example, but also when a group establishes rules for resource use or non-use. While collective action can be complemented and strengthened by *de jure* law, its structure is often more determined by the customary law – with which members are most familiar – inherent in a community. It is important to note that collective action includes forming and enforcing rules for use (or non-use) of resources, that determine who is included in the use and management of the resources and how the group is managed.

#### *Group characteristics*

Many researchers have tried to define the situations under which collective action occurs, and the characteristics that allow sustainable collective action (Baland and Platteau, 1996; 1999; Ostrom, 1992; 1999; Wade, 1988). A review of these studies show that the conditions for collective action are multiple and complex (see Agrawal, 2001); however, collective action typically arises in instances where there are significant incentives to cooperate. Based on members' socio-economic characteristics, they may recognize strong benefits in such collective projects as joint investment, maintaining local infrastructure, rule-setting for natural resource use, or representing the group to outsiders. Small group size, shared norms, previous successes in collective action (social capital), effective leadership, and interdependence among group members are factors that can encourage and support effective collective action (Agrawal, 2001: 1654).

Such factors are not limited to *formal* collective action, as in the form of cooperatives or other formal organizations. In fact, *informal* collective action can be more flexible and responsive to members' shifting needs. In both forms of collective action, however, leadership/governance needs to be institutionalized, not dependent on one or two people, to be sustainable.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Importance of Collective Action for natural resource management*

The characteristics of the resources around which collective action is organized also affect the group's effectiveness and sustainability. In many ways, natural resource management (NRM) is a natural fit for collective action, because it requires an expanded time horizon and spatial scale to be effective. Though some activities, such as the use of high-yield variety crops (HYVs) can be employed on a plot-by-plot basis

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<sup>1</sup> Some types of collective action are spontaneous or episodic, in response to particular needs or opportunities. However, in this paper we focus on longer-term forms of collective action.

and provide benefits within a season, most natural resource management technologies have ‘spill-over’ effects that require larger-scale action, and have benefits that accrue only after years and, sometimes, generations. For example, while pest management may be effective within a season, its use on only a few select plots can have negative consequences for adjoining plots to which pests may retreat. Watershed management exhibits a long-term time horizon, as well as the need for regional coordination to accrue benefits. Figure one displays a rough schema of agricultural and natural resource management technologies ranging from short-term, small-scale technologies to long-term, regional scale projects. As the figure shows, most technologies require some degree of coordination over space and time.

Though most management programs for natural resources can benefit from collective action, well-defined boundaries and a limited scale facilitate effective collective management (Ostrom, 1990, 1992; Wade, 1988). This may include a plot of forest reserved for common use to a certain community or coastline/fishery that is used exclusively by group members. The scale and excludability allows the group to regulate use, including prohibiting outsiders and enforcing sanctions on overuse by members. Collective action is also facilitated when the resource is located in or near the vicinity of group members, and all members exhibit a high level of dependence on the resource.

### *Importance of collective action for other development activities*

Collective action and networks among community members can facilitate access to information. Informal networks have always been important in dissemination of innovations, including new plant or animal varieties as well as new practices. Formal group-based extension approaches have been adopted by many NGOs, as well as by large-scale government programs in Uganda and Kenya. As in the case of natural resource management, collective action for research and extension does not always serve all farmers equally. In particular, women are often less likely to be served by extension services; there remain important questions regarding whether groups are more likely to serve women farmers.

Although collective action offers an alternative to state and markets institutions, in practice it can also complement markets as well as government. This can be particularly important for poor and vulnerable groups, who are often at a disadvantage in many market relations, or who may suffer from missing markets. Examples include input and output marketing, agroprocessing, infrastructure development, labor markets, as well as credit and insurance.

In many communities throughout the world, people work together to provide local goods and services they would not be able to provide as single individuals or that the government is not providing. They build and maintain local parks, religious buildings and community halls, operate volunteer fire control groups, and implement rules for local natural resource management. Sometimes local groups share responsibilities for provision with local or central governments, such as in supporting schools and health services (McCarthy 2004). In other cases, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a role in fostering the collective action, or use groups to disseminate information or services such as nutrition and health interventions, water supply and sanitation, infrastructure, and creating voice and capacity. Many of these, along with microfinance and other natural resource management programs, are considered as Community-Driven Development (CDD) programs. There are also numerous programs specifically targeted to women that are premised on collective action that have both economic and empowerment objectives.

### *Benefits, limitations, and difficulties*

Collective action can provide significant benefits in reducing negative externalities in natural resource management, or in providing local public goods that address the needs and interests of its participating members. The greater likelihood of homogenous identity and interests among members allows the group to establish management rules that are simple and easy to understand and enforce. Because collective action

typically exhibits a strong basis in community norms, members are more likely to abide by access and management rules. Finally, when enforcement comes from the group, monitors and other officials are more accountable and the cost of adjudication is often lower than in state-based programs.

These benefits frequently translate into greater effectiveness of natural resource management or other local development programs. But they can also have a positive impact on poverty and gender inequities. Collective action can (though it does not always) result in more equitable distribution of resources that can improve livelihoods for marginalized groups. In addition to improved resource distribution, collective action can also serve as a way for the poor to pool risks so that they can realize bigger benefits through long-term planning.

For the purposes of this paper, however, the biggest limitation to collective action's ability to meet community needs is the entrenched biases in community norms and expectations that disenfranchise certain categories of people. Women, the poor, religious or ethnic minorities may face significant constraints in their attempts to participate in collective action. They may not be able to participate at all (not accorded membership) or their participation may be only nominal or passive. Though needs and interests will align more within a single community, homogeneity among all members is an unrealistic expectation. As such, collective action projects risk capture by elites that promote inequitable participation and benefit distribution. The result, then, is that collective action may benefit the already well-off, while increasing the impoverishment (however defined) of marginalized groups.

## DEFINING GENDER

Gender refers to the "socially determined ideas and practices of what it is to be female or male" (Reeves and Baden, 2000).<sup>2</sup> These ideas and practices are sanctioned and reinforced by a host of cultural, political, and economic institutions, including the household, legal and governance structures, markets, and religion. While gender roles vary among cultures and over time, and are crosscut by a multitude of identities (e.g. ethnicity and class), the gender division of labor usually finds men and women relegated to the public and private spheres, respectively (Agarwal, 1997; 2000; 2001; Beard, 2004; Kabeer, 1994; King and Mason, 2001; Lind, 1997; Moser, 1993; Quisumbing, 2003). Women are thought to be 'natural' caregivers and men 'benevolent dictators' who adequately supply material needs to their families (Bruce, 1989; Moser, 1993; Sen, 2000). This means that men undertake public activities, e.g. remunerative work and market activities, membership in formal community organizations, and participation in political institutions. Women's activities, in turn, often are constrained to household and community management activities (childcare, food preparation, subsistence agriculture). Moser (1993) refers to women assuming a triple role, i.e. they are responsible for reproductive, productive, and community management activities, and receive little recognition for their unpaid work. Another way of broadly characterizing the different roles is that men take the lead in productive activities, and women in reproductive activities, where the latter include the reproduction of the family and even of society itself.

The unitary view of the household suggests that in the gender division of labor, women and men's roles and responsibilities are separate but complement one another. The accuracy of this model however, has been called into question by anthropologists for at least two decades and more recently by economists (Agarwal, 1992; Alderman et al. 1995; Haddad, Hoddinott and Alderman 1997; Pryer 2003; Quisumbing 2003; Sen 1990). For example, Agarwal (1992) and Sen (1990) propose a bargaining model of the household typified by 'cooperative conflict.' Household members cooperate so long as doing so improves their individual position. The extent of cooperation depends on members' contributions to the household,

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<sup>2</sup> Although 'gender' and 'women' are often used interchangeably, they are not one in the same. However, gendered analyses usually find that women are disproportionately disadvantaged, which is why the majority of gendered interventions target women.

access to asset endowments, and the consequent strength of their ‘fall-back’ position. One’s fall-back position also is based in part on the perception of each member’s contributions to the household (Agarwal, 1995; Moser, 1993; Sen, 1990). Because women often undertake more reproductive (household management) tasks and fewer productive (wage-earning) tasks, they are commonly perceived as contributing less to household welfare than men. Finally, because of the social norms that restrict women’s sphere of activity, their access to additional human, social, natural, and financial capital is limited. Women’s negotiating power within the household is low compared to men’s and their reduced ability to negotiate further perpetuates gender inequality.

### THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND COLLECTIVE ACTION: THREE ENTRY POINTS

Gender is both an organizing principle and a source of power dynamics and yet gender is largely absent from the literature on collective action for public goods provision, particularly in the context of agriculture and natural resource management.<sup>3</sup> Also, as noted above, many women’s programs are premised on collective action yet lack a clear understanding of the mechanics of effective collective action. Thus, additional analysis is required to address the question of how gender shapes women’s and men’s incentives and abilities to engage in, and benefit from, collective action on the one hand, and how different collective action institutions affect gender equity on the other. This paper presents three entry points for such an analysis: *motivations* for engaging in collective action, *effectiveness* of collective action (as defined by the group’s objective), and *impact* of collective action on gender equity.

In terms of motivations, collective action programs are increasingly being used as a vehicle for reaching development and poverty-reduction goals; hence a better understanding of women’s and men’s motivations for joining such groups would help development practitioners assess whether their programs are hitting or missing the target. For example, evidence indicates that women have a higher opportunity cost of their time than men so organizations that are able to tap into women’s motivations for participating in collective action may have a better chance of succeeding than those programs which assume that women and men share the same motivations. In addition, understanding the motivations behind groups that spontaneously form may help explain why some groups function better than others.

In terms of effectiveness, certain socioeconomic characteristics, such as class and ethnicity, have been studied in an effort to understand the group dynamics and the power relations which foster effective collective action, but much less attention has been paid to how gender influences group dynamics and patterns of interaction within collective action. This is somewhat surprising given that a wide range of group strategies exist (from women-only groups on one end of the spectrum, to gender blind male groups on the other, and mixed sex groups in between), thus raising the question of whether certain strategies may be more effective than others.

In terms of impact, collective action programs that fail to address gender risk further disempowering women while gender-related programs premised on collective action can provide real opportunities to foster women’s empowerment. Which factors, therefore, can stimulate gender-equitable change processes and how can such processes be measured?

### 3. THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

To explore the intersection of collective action and gender, we have adopted the conceptual framework for institutional analysis (Oakerson 1992; Ostrom 1991) that is used by CAPRI to investigate the relationship

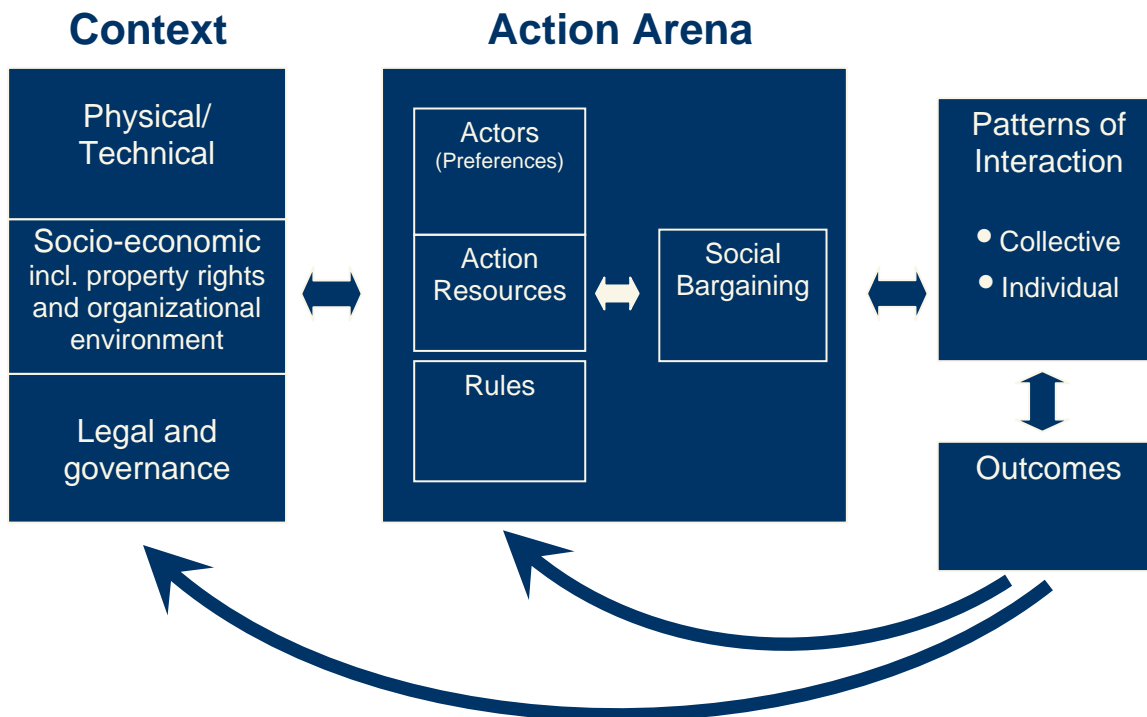
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<sup>3</sup> For exceptions, see Agarwal, 2000, 2001; Meinzen-Dick and Zwartveen 1998.

between institutions of property rights, collective action and poverty outcomes (Di Gregorio et al., forthcoming). This framework is especially suitable for analyzing collective action through a gender lens because it emphasizes the institutions, rules, and actors which create gendered patterns of interaction.<sup>4</sup>

In figure 1, the first box, the context or the external factors, represents the *initial conditions* that people face. It shapes the initial opportunity set of the possible actions, and includes the *physical, technical, and socioeconomic as well as the policy and governance conditions*. In the following section we will focus mainly on the constraints and opportunities the context can provide for men and women in the achievement of their livelihood objectives.

Figure 1 – Analytical Framework to analyze Gender and Collective Action



Source: adapted from di Gregorio et al. (forthcoming)

All of the external factors, as well as property rights and collective action, in turn, affect the *action arena*, the more dynamic section of the framework. This is where decisions are made, institutions are reconfirmed and reshaped. In other words this is where social bargaining takes place. Depending on the subject and level of analysis, this can be social bargaining within households, within collective action groups, but also bargaining between groups or with the state, and other external actors.

These processes lead to patterns of interaction, for example the interaction within a collective action group we are analyzing. The focus here is on the rules and norms of the object of analysis and how they lead to regularized behavior.

These activities (whether collective or individual) will lead to certain outcomes, which may or may not achieve the objectives the collective action group set out to achieve, but may also alter the initial

<sup>4</sup> The sections describing the framework are heavily drawing on di Gregorio et al., forthcoming.

conditions of the analyzed interaction or transaction. The former we will discuss under effectiveness, the latter under impacts.

## THE CONTEXT OR INITIAL CONDITIONS

To investigate the relationship between physical/technical and socioeconomic categories, we focus on asset endowments and vulnerabilities, as well as the basic institutional structure, i.e. the legal and governance systems that regulate and govern basic interactions among people. Particular focus is paid to the socioeconomic context-in which we subsume gender roles as they are defined in a given society- because our analysis is concerned with how gender roles influence the extent to which women and men can use their asset endowments and the institutional infrastructure at their disposition. Put another way, while physical assets such as roads will enhance access to markets, a gender norm which confines women to their homes (e.g. *purdah*) will be a stronger determinant of women's opportunities and constraints toward meeting their livelihood objectives.

### *Asset Endowments*

Asset endowments are defined here as the pool of resources or assets available to an actor (Di Gregorio et al. 2004) and include physical, natural, financial, social, political, and human capital, as well as property rights vis-à-vis these assets. Property rights involve complex relationships between different uses and users of the resources and can only be effective if they are recognized as legitimate, which requires governance structures to enforce such rights. Rights however, do not necessarily imply full ownership of a resource; instead, we often find separate bundles of rights. For example, a woman may have access to a piece of land for firewood collection but have no rights to plant trees on that land, as the latter activity is often reserved for those who own the land. Women's property rights are important for agricultural productivity, women's empowerment and household welfare. For example, there is considerable empirical evidence indicating that property rights raise women's status in the household as well as in the community, and this translates into greater bargaining power (Quisumbing 2003).

A growing body of literature has documented gender disparities in asset endowments between female- and male-headed households and more recently, at the intrahousehold level of male-headed households (see Antonopoulos and Floro, 2005 for a recent review). In terms of collective action, a prerequisite for participation is the possession of asset endowments valued by the group. A community's wealthiest members may be able to opt out of collective action because their need to pool resources is very low while its poorest members are unable to participate because they lack sufficient resources, or endowments, (as defined by the group). Thus, participation is usually greatest among those who possess a minimum level of assets or a skill set useful to a project (Agarwal, 1997; 2000; 2001; Beard, 2004; Johnson, 2001; Lewis, 1976; Weinberger and Jütting, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, we are interested in examining how gender imbalances in asset endowments present constraints and opportunities for women's and men's participation in collective action.

Physical capital<sup>5</sup> comprises the basic infrastructure and physical goods that support livelihoods, including affordable transport systems, water supply and sanitation, and access to information. Other components of physical capital include productive capital that enhances income (e.g. bicycles, rickshaws, sewing machines, agricultural equipment), household goods and utensils and personal consumption items such as radios and refrigerators. Access to roads, transportation, communications technology, and labor-saving devices can

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<sup>5</sup> The definitions of capital build upon the CAPRi glossary (<http://www.capri.cgiar.org>) and the IDS: Livelihood Guidance Sheet No. 8: Glossary, [http://www.livelihoods.org/info/guidance\\_sheets\\_rtf/sect8glo.rtf](http://www.livelihoods.org/info/guidance_sheets_rtf/sect8glo.rtf); Accessed on October 7, 2005.



reduce the costs of participating, which is particularly important for women, who often have a high opportunity cost of their time.

Financial capital is commonly defined as the financial resources that people use to achieve their livelihood objectives. These resources include available stocks, such as savings, and regular inflows of money, such as pensions and remittances.<sup>6</sup> While savings are the preferred type of financial capital of the poor, gender may influence women's and men's motives for saving, as well as the types of assets they prefer to save. For example, in Bangladesh, women prefer not to save assets in the forms of large amounts of cash because their husbands are likely to take control of the money (Antonopoulos and Floro, 2005). In other instances, women prefer to save large sums of money to put toward their dowries (Deolalikar and Rao, 1998; and Kim, 1997 in Antonopoulos and Floro, 2005) because assets brought to marriage are an important determinant of women's future welfare (Fafchamps and Quisumbing, 2004). These examples suggest that gender-based savings preferences may have implications for the types of groups that women prefer to join (e.g. rotating savings and credit associations).

Natural capital is the term used for the natural resource stocks (e.g. trees, land, clean air, coastal resources) upon which people rely. The benefits of these stocks are both direct and indirect. For example, land and trees provide direct benefits by contributing to income and people's sense of well-being. The stake that men and women have in natural resources will influence the extent to which they will take part in collective NRM activities.

Human capital refers not only to the more obvious indicators of education and health but also to less conventional indicators, such as time-use, as well as to the ways in which actors perceive the world and themselves. Human capital will be addressed in greater detail in a later section of this paper.

Social capital refers to the formal and informal social networks and relationships people draw upon in pursuit of their livelihood objectives. It can help women and men gain access to information, to influence or power, and to claims or obligations for support from others. Social capital can also serve as a building block for collective action. Yet, women and men tend to accumulate different types of social capital; i.e. bonding and bridging capital, respectively. For example, Maluccio et al. note that although women's social capital networks are wider than men's, they are also more shallow in the sense that they mobilize fewer economic resources (Maluccio et al, 2000). This in turn, may have implications for whether men and women are equally able to draw upon their social capital to participate in collective action.

Whereas social capital can be visualised as horizontal social organisation and solidarity within communities, political capital is the vertical link to policy and decision-making. Women's relegation to the private sphere and their limited political representation suggest that women's political capital may be weaker than their male counterparts, although increases in the number of women in decision-making roles at all levels of government may reduce these imbalances.

### *Vulnerability*

Opportunities to engage in collective action are determined not only by an individual's asset endowments, but also by his/her vulnerability to economic, socio-political, and natural shocks, the degree to which differs by gender. For example, a huge body of literature has established that structural adjustment policies have adversely affected poor women because women have absorbed the economic shocks of adjustment by working longer and harder in both productive and reproductive sectors to compensate for state-cut social services (Cagatay 1998, Haddad 1991). Other research indicates that women and girl children are often the

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that this definition is different from a strict economic definition of financial capital as it includes flows as well as stocks. (Economists would look only at stocks).

first members of the household to suffer inadequate food intake in the face of drought as food is conserved for male members.

In addition to the more obvious aspects of vulnerability, including a lack of financial and physical assets, women face certain vulnerabilities particular to their gender roles, which in turn, may affect their ability or willingness to engage in collective action. Such vulnerabilities include dependence on, or subordination by, male household members and in-laws, which may result in a husband's refusal to allow his wife to engage in, or control benefits from, collective action. Likewise, gender-based violence (both within the home and at the community level) may impede a woman's physical mobility to access groups if for example, she refrains from leaving her homestead due to the fear of harassment. Indeed, security domains that encompass both domestic and state violence against women are increasingly being integrated into poverty analyses as research reveals that violence against women accounts for significant amounts of lost productivity and impedes overall economic growth (King and Mason 2001).

### *Norms, Legal Structures, and Power Relations*

As noted previously, gender refers to the socially constructed norms that are shaped by, and embedded in, cultural, political, and economic institutions. These norms do not change overnight and in fact, attempts to directly challenge gendered norms may result in backlash and the further disempowerment of women. Thus, the conceptual framework presented in this paper can be used to identify strategic entry points to stimulate gender-equitable change.

Legal structures are both shaped by, and reinforce, gendered norms. While changes in statutory law (e.g. in laws pertaining to inheritance, divorce, and property rights) will not automatically translate into changes on the ground (i.e. changes in gendered norms) they do provide a basis for women's appeals for more substantial rights. Decentralization can also help to change existing power structures by enhancing women's participation in the public arena. However, it is often assumed that decentralization is inherently favorable to women because of its participatory nature, but as Baden (1999) argues, this is not always so and is contingent upon available resources and competition over these resources; the nature of local power structures and; the degree of organization and political visibility of women locally.

## ACTORS AND THEIR PREFERENCES

Actors can be both individual and collective entities, including formal and informal organizations, the state, and NGOs. Although we have seen above that men or women do not constitute a homogenous mass, we may also treat mixed or single-sexed community groups as single actors.

There is also need to distinguish between internal or external actors. Internal actors are those who will have to follow the rules and regulations emerging from institutional bargaining, whereas external actors can influence the process, but are not bound by it or as directly affected.

Another important category of actors is the change agent since change agents can influence other actors and stimulate or facilitate social bargaining. Thus, it is strategic to identify change agents in a given context since they influence other actors and can help induce change. For example, Andujar (2005) found that women over 50 years of age were among those most active in the fight for drinking water and sewage systems in their neighborhood in Villa Jardin, Argentina because they were freed from the tasks of reproduction and childcare and had a history of activism vis-a-vis the Catholic Church.

To understand the motivations of actors, we have to understand their preferences. As we have highlighted in an earlier section, men's and women's preferences can differ quite substantially from another according to the social context. For example, in terms of crop varieties, women's preferences are often based on taste and

cooking properties, whereas men's are based on marketability. These gender-differentiated preferences can have an effect on group formation (e.g. single-sexed vs. mixed groups), as well as on group effectiveness and gender equity.

## ACTION RESOURCES

Not all assets can be used by the actors as action resources in a given context. Action resources are those assets which are relevant to the specific situation, and increase the bargaining power of the actors. Whether a resource is useful depends on the nature of the interaction. For example, for decisions taken in public meetings, having the confidence to stand up and speak in front of the whole community can be an important action resource. However, if women are forbidden from speaking in public this particular asset cannot be translated into an action resource. Siagian et al (2005) found that only one woman in a farmer's group in Lubuk Kambing District, Indonesia was confident enough to seek support for the group's objectives from district officials but because of her obligations as the local school teacher, she did not have the time to meet with them.

All assets can become action resources. This includes the physical, financial, natural, social and political capitals as well as the human capital. As most of these have been discussed in an earlier section, we will focus here on human capital. Most analyses of human capital only use education as a proxy. Sometimes they will also add years of farming, number of people in the household, but rarely do they look at resources inherent in people. Other very important action resources include knowledge, social standing, networks, cognitive schemata (one's way of thinking about the world), and time. For example, women (particularly poor women) often have a higher opportunity cost of time, as most of their time may be allocated to subsistence activities. Human capital thus refers not only to education and health but also the way the actors perceive the world and themselves.

### *Information and the ability to process it*

Information is a power resource (Schlüter 2001; Theesfeld 2004), that allows those who possess it to change the perceived value of the different alternatives (Young 1995). Access to information is costly and spreads mainly through an actor's networks and relationships. This suggests that it will play out differently for men and women since they accumulate different types of social capital. For example, Krishna (2003) found that where local agents had a good understanding of processes outside the locality, they were able to direct collective action toward development outcomes. Since men are more likely to have outside contacts, they are more likely to be able to direct collective action outcomes to their advantage.

### *Cognitive Schemata*

Cognitive schemata provide the limits of what actors perceive as feasible in their lives, and propose a guideline of how the world should be structured. Cognitive dissonance, the difference between mental models and the way the world works, affects how an actor thinks about and acts in actual events. Ideologies, as the vehicles of a shared idea of how the world should be, can play a crucial role in legitimizing group solidarity (di Gregorio et al. 2004)

For example, group members (sometimes including women themselves) may feel that women do not possess the knowledge or skills to effectively contribute to collective action. In community forestry programs in India and Nepal, Agarwal (2001a) finds that women were perceived as having little to add in terms of forest conservation and frequently were not invited to group meetings. Likewise, community members – men and women – may feel that it is not women's place to comment. Feeling intimidated by such a public event, women may sit in the back of the room or on the floor and simply observe (Agarwal,

2001a; Mosse, 1995). Women who do speak up are often viewed negatively; their efforts to gain a voice in group projects are viewed as attempts to subvert gender roles.

Women's exclusion from participation may be a direct result of gender norms, or can emerge from other factors that are determined or exacerbated by such norms. In a study of mixed-sex agricultural cooperatives in Nicaragua, Mayoux found women's participation limited to involvement as day laborers. When women attempted to make their voices heard or gain management positions, they were perceived by others (men and women) as attempting to step out of their appropriate social role.

### *Social prestige*

The social "standing" within a society or group or vis-à-vis powerful actors (state, private entrepreneurs) can be an important action resource. Bourdieu and Accardo (1993) point to two sources for social standing: the *habitus*<sup>7</sup> of an actor and the embeddedness of the actor in social networks.

The *habitus* is often rooted in one's way of thinking about the world, and is reflected in the way one speaks and acts. This plays a major role in gaining leadership roles. Actors can be embedded in both formal and informal networks, which allow them to combine forces with others. Women's savings groups around the world, for example, when successful, often increase the bargaining power and the confidence of women to engage in the public realm. Hence, social networks and the assets that an actor can derive from them depend on the ability of actors to call upon those social networks.

In most societies, tangible assets also convey status. The wealthiest households with most land occupy a higher place in many agrarian societies, while the landless may not even be considered full community members. This has repercussions also for access to information and other collective resources. In many agrarian societies, extension agents are most likely to visit wealthier landowners than landless tenants. Even within the household, control over assets influences the bargaining power of individuals. Fathers who control the household land may exercise authority over their sons. Research has shown that women with control over assets have more decision-making power on intrahousehold decisions (Quisumbing, 2003)

### *Time*

A large body of literature has documented gender-biases in access to, and quality of, education and healthcare (King and Mason 2001; UNDP 1995; UN Department of Economics and Statistics 2005) but less work has explored the gendered-dimensions of time-use, particularly in the context of collective action. Yet, women and men clearly have different time opportunity costs, and poor women in particular often have the highest opportunity costs of time since a large proportion of their day (and night) is allocated to subsistence activities; i.e. providing for their family's daily food needs. Male household members may also force women to take responsibility for their tasks so that they can participate in collective action groups. Because of this additional burden, not only are women more constrained to participate, but they may also call on younger female household members to complete tasks delegated to them. This can negatively impact schooling for girls and young women, reducing human capital stores for the next generation of women and, by extension, their ability to participate in group action.

Hence, the opportunity costs of engaging in collective action on women's time can be extremely high, particularly in labor-intensive collective action schemes. However, time constraints are not constant and may vary according to cultivation cycles, thus providing strategic points of entry to initiate collective action.

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<sup>7</sup> Habitus is the 'individual's ability to absorb the cultural ethos' of the dominant class (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2004)

### *Decision-making behavior*

Insights from new institutional economics, behavioral economics, and other social science disciplines show that the "rational" actor (perfectly informed, forward-looking, utility maximizing, with a coherent set of preference orderings) is not acting as predicted. Instead of making a forward-looking decision, his or her decisions are justified through ex-post rationalizing or are rule-bound (e.g. fairness considerations), cognitively restricted and satisfying rather than maximizing.

### RULES

Rules determine how the initial conditions (norms, regulations, and laws) play out on the ground. They are the decision-making arrangements that affect which action resources are important. Rules also clarify expectations about the costs and benefits of participation. The rules shape the bargaining process and/or may be shaped in the process of bargaining. Rules can be written and unwritten, explicit or implicit.

Which rules are part of the action arena, and which are seen as given in the context depends on the subject and scale of analysis. If we are analyzing the group formation process of a particular Heifer project, for example, the rules and basic conditions set by Heifer are exogenous, as they are not subject to bargaining between the group members, whereas by-laws set by group, will be endogenous, and thus part of the action arena.

## **4. MOTIVATIONS TO ENGAGE IN COLLECTIVE ACTION**

Women and men may vary greatly in their motivations and types of collective action they seek. Motivations are shaped by the preferences and interests of actors, as well as the way they perceive their chances of succeeding through collective action. The latter, in turn, relate to the rules and expected bargaining power of different groups.

### PREFERENCES AND INTERESTS

The role of preferences and interests in affecting motivations links most significantly to the activities for which men and women are most commonly responsible. As a consequence, there may be significant overlap in types of participation: to improve resource access, income, or food security women and men both undertake collective action in the arenas of natural resources management (NRM), micro-credit, and production or market activities. However, Agarwal (1997; 2000; 2001a) suggests that men's and women's motivations can vary, even within the same group. Taking community forest groups as an example, Agarwal notes that the broad goal is resource protection and sustainability. This can involve limits on using forest resources with patrolling to limit violations of rules governing use, as well as planting new trees to replenish dwindling forests. However, male group members, whose use of common forest resources is relatively limited, are motivated more by goals of increased income. Therefore, they promote strict controls (to encourage rapid regeneration) and replanting with eucalyptus trees, which are predominantly cash crops. Women, on the other hand, favor looser controls to ensure that they have access to fuel and other forest resources, and encourage planting trees with a greater use value for household tasks. Lind (1997) and Beard (2004), likewise, argue that women become most involved in collective action linked to the gendered division of labor. But other studies indicate that factors such as security and even non-economic returns (prestige, spiritual enrichment, or friendship) may also motivate group participation, and these factors may differ for men and women.

Table 1 presents key motivation factors and types of groups for men and women from a range of case studies. There is considerable variability in motivations and group types, not only between men and women and between countries, but even between men and women in different ethnic groups within a limited area, highlighting the importance of cultural and contextual factors in shaping gender relations.

Table 1 – Do men and women join groups for different reasons?

Case	Key Motivations		Source
	Men	Women	
Nigeria	Construction and repair of basic infrastructure, Traditional village government	<i>Muslim</i> : Gain access to other women, Form friendships Islamic schools <i>Christian</i> : Savings, House and farm work, Care giving, Community improvement	Abdulwahid 2005
Central Kenya	Access to markets, Social insurance	Social insurance, Building household assets	Kariuki and Place 2005
Eastern Kenya	<i>Luo</i> : Unite clan, Solve problems, Assistance in times of need <i>Kipsigis</i> : Agricultural production (livestock, tea), Assistance in time of need, Improving standard of living	<i>Luo</i> : Assistance in time of need, Agricultural production for HH consumption, Profit from savings and loans <i>Kipsigis</i> : Agricultural production for HH consumption, Profit from savings and loans, Improve living standard (HH improvements)	Njuguna and Valdivia 2005
<b>Gender differentiation: types of groups</b>			
Philippines	Productive and burial groups	Civic groups, including schools	Godquin and Quisumbing 2005
<b>Constraints for women to become more active</b>			
Ethiopia		Workload during pregnancy overwhelming, Lack of money, Shortage of food	Ebato and Van Koppen 2005

Looking at the motivations of men and women is crucial to understand why certain groups are more effective than others and why certain processes lead to changes in the way women and men work together and understand each others roles. The following sections look at the factors that shape bargaining power and motivations of men and women and assess the link between the two concepts.

## BARGAINING POWER

We define bargaining power as the ability of an actor to engage in social bargaining in a given context based on one’s action resources and the rules. Bargaining power is contextual: The type on interaction or transaction and the rules determine which action resources an actor can use and how effectively they can be transformed into power endowments for the given situation.

There are multiple levels of bargaining power (e.g. individual within household, individual within group, or group vis-à-vis the outside). The level of bargaining determines whom the actor is representing and thus, the identity he or she brings to the table. For example, in some African communities, a woman who speaks at public meetings is representing all women present at the meeting since socioeconomic norms dictate that women remain silent during public meetings. In other cases, a woman may remain silent in

the presence of her husband during a public meeting even though she is more informed of the subject matter. This is a good example of women's multiple identities coming into play and how they influence the bargaining power she is able to exert.

Differences in fallback or exit options between actors are another important power resource. The actor with the better exit possibilities will be at an advantage in the bargaining. The actor's exit options are determined by the actor's ability to turn an asset into a power endowment in a given context. For example, a woman who has her own solar cooker can more easily exit a forestry user group than one who is dependent on that wood for her fuel, but this same cooker does not translate into a power endowment within the household.

Women may participate in collective or group action as a response to constraints within the household and broader social environment. The emphasis on micro-credit is one such form of participation. Research from Bolivia, India, and Cote d'Ivoire show that women seek micro-credit and savings opportunities to develop and maintain assets separate from their spouse or partner. Informal rotating credit schemes, chit funds, and institutionalized credit provide women with working capital, savings opportunities, and a way to subvert male control over household finances. However, if a borrower is unable to repay a loan or make payments into a fund, her bargaining power within the group may be jeopardized, to the point where she may be asked to leave the group. In Kenya some women's groups maintain legal ownership of animals distributed to individual households, so that the group may remove them from homes where a husband treats his wife badly. This legal threat of removal can help decrease violence and divorce (Miller 2001).

Another factor that will determine the actor's power is his/her prior bargaining experiences because they alter the actor's perceptions and expectations about the next bargaining process. Evaluating watershed management programs in India, Kerr (2002) found that where NGOs had been working with women and marginalized groups prior to the introduction of watershed management programs, these groups had greater capabilities to bargain for a better share of the benefits from the watershed programs. Siagian et al. (2005) observed that groups whose members had successful and relevant past experiences were more confident they could achieve their group objectives whereas groups without such experiences were lost confidence more easily during the process.

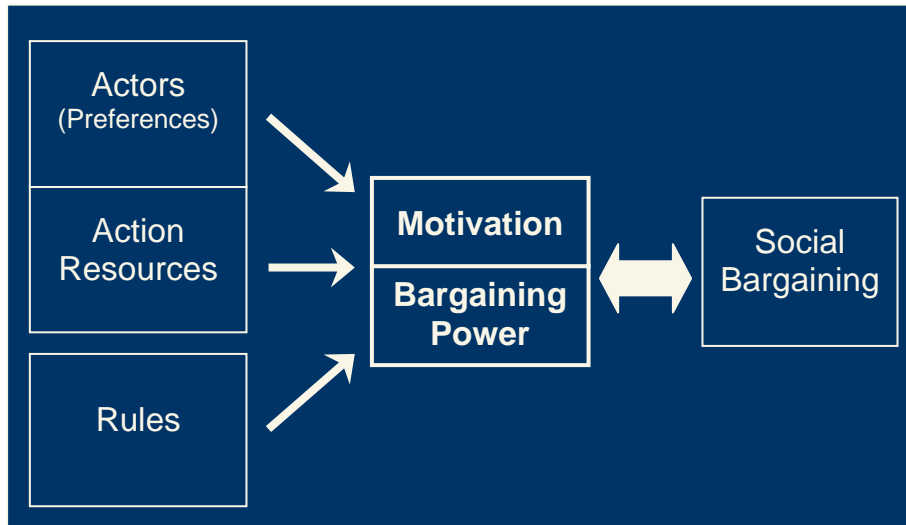
## MOTIVATIONS TO ENGAGE IN COLLECTIVE ACTION

The motivation of an actor is his or her willingness to engage in the bargaining process based on his/her preferences, action resources, and the rules. We have shown in the previous section that the action resources and the rules also affect the bargaining power of an actor. It is thus the power of an actor, or, more precisely the perception an actor has of his/her power, that influences actors' motivations.

In reaction to her own assessment of the probabilities of success, women may opt out and simply not participate, or they may create informal groups in order to meet their needs. In the community forestry example, women who recognized the poor ability of all-male patrols to effectively guard forest resources created all-women's patrols. Because of women's reliance on forest resources, that are better attuned to spot violations. Further, due to social restrictions on interactions between men and women, women are more able to prevent female violators. This is significant, as women may constitute as high as 60 per cent of those illicitly using forest resources. Similar all women activities have taken place in other contexts. In the agricultural cooperatives of Nicaragua, women have undertaken 'consciousness-raising' in the setting of an all-woman cooperative. In Bolivia, Cote d'Ivoire, and South Asia, women's micro-finance projects, formal or informal, have also developed to fill a need not supplied by mixed-sex group programs. All-women microfinance projects—and their informal counterpoint in revolving saving schemes or chit

funds—allow women access to financial capital and increase control over their personal assets (Jhabvala and Bali, 1990; Lewis, 1976; Velasco and Marconi, 2004). Collecting a critical mass of women with similar goals improves women’s ability to make their voices heard in participatory projects or allows them to operate projects targeted to meet the specific needs of women.

Figure 2 – How does motivation fit in?



The above arguments assume that women want to participate in group action, but Mayoux (1993; 1995a; 1995b) finds that women, especially poor women, are not interested in participating unless they see an obvious benefit. Because of their time and resource constraints, the value of institutionalized group action such as producer cooperatives often lie in its ability to increase real incomes. Mayoux gives the example of women in single-sex producer cooperatives in India. Though the development practitioners who initiated the program assumed women would be drawn to the ‘empowerment’ aspect of the cooperative (meaning they would all own and be responsible for management of the cooperative), Mayoux found that most women preferred piece-rate production, where they were not responsible for management decisions. Though this seems to contradict traditional development wisdom, women are often burdened with too much responsibility (albeit unrecognized) in the household, so they may seek more pragmatic ways to improve their livelihoods.

While the action resources and rules determine the bargaining power of the actors, both the perceived power and the preferences of men and women will determine their motivation to engage in collective action processes: whether they engage in social bargaining at all, or to adopt one strategy over another.

These questions might be of help when trying to understand motivations and the way they influence group formation, functioning, and impact:

- Do women and men have different preferences?
- How do their asset endowments differ?
- How does gender determine an actor’s ability to use his or her asset endowments?
- What is the subject of the bargaining?
- In what ways do the action resources represent opportunities or constraints to engage in social bargaining?
- Do the rules strategically favor men vs. women? How?
- How do women and men perceive the degree to which collective action will fit their preferences?



- How can external institutions affect the bargaining position of the poor?

In particular, this approach may help to identify whether there are ways to increase the bargaining power of disadvantaged groups by building up their critical action resources, or to shape the rules to build upon the resources that they do have, rather than those that they are lacking. For example, Parajuli and Enslin (1990) found that functional literacy training can be instrumental in overcoming women's own feelings of incompetence and inhibitions to speak up at meetings in Nepal, and this is likely to apply to other areas with a large gender gap in literacy, and where literacy has become an important indicator of an individual's abilities to deal with the outside world. Increasing women's experience with meetings in other types of organizations may also increase their confidence and ability to participate.

## 5. EFFECTIVENESS OF CA

One major rationale for attention to the gender in collective action institutions is that it can increase the effectiveness of programs. A number of studies provide indications that the gender composition matters, but there has thus far been little systematic assessment of how, and under what conditions. A more comprehensive assessment of this issue would provide valuable guidance to both local organizations and external programs.

The first question to address is what criteria are used to measure effectiveness. Will it be internal criteria—meeting the objectives that the group itself identifies- or externally-defined criteria, set by program funders, or by analysts who are looking for broader patterns that apply across different groups? Both approaches are valid, depending on what the analysis will be used for, but it is essential to be clear about how the criteria are defined.

A second critical question is whether effectiveness is measured over the short or long term. Short-term results may be important for creating momentum in collective action, but longer-term results are more important for sustainability and equity outcomes.

Specific measures of the effectiveness of organizations might include tangible indicators such as the income or economic returns to group members, the distribution of costs and benefits, compliance with rules, or incidence and severity of conflicts. Less tangible indicators might also be important to consider, such as satisfaction of being a member.

How can gender composition affect the effectiveness of collective action institutions? Critical areas to examine include the composition of groups, how the rules shape the ability of men and women to participate effectively, and the roles of men and women within the groups.

## GENDER AND PARTICIPATION

We can broadly define two approaches to gender within many conventional collective action programs: gender-blind approaches and approaches to organizing all-female or all-male organizations. Gender-blind approaches do not explicitly specify whether men or women will be members. This is found in many NRM programs, such as irrigators' associations or forest user groups, that define membership as one person per household. This frequently results in a predominance of male members, except from female-headed households, and even they may send a younger male member rather than a woman. Reviewing the evidence on water users' associations in South Asia, Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen (1998) found women's participation to be much lower than that of men, despite high involvement of women in irrigated agriculture

and agricultural decision making. The few documented cases of a higher female involvement either stem from women-only organizations managing groundwater pumps or from areas where men were not interested or absent.

Though there have been several typologies of participation, perhaps the earliest is Sherry Arnstein’s (1971) ‘ladder of citizen participation.’ In brief, this typology divides eight levels or ‘rungs’ of citizen participation into three groups: non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power. The highest level of citizen participation is defined as ‘citizen control,’ in which citizen groups set and carry out their project agenda. More appropriate for the purposes of this paper is a typology articulated by Bina Agarwal (2001) in reference to community forestry programs in South Asia, in which participation ranges from nominal participation (membership in a group) to interactive participation in which a member ‘[has] voice and influence in the group’s decisions’ (1624). Rather than focus how a project is initiated, Agarwal argues that participation is best measured by members’ involvement and activeness in a project (see Table 2 below for complete typology).

Table 2 – Typology of Participation

<b>Form/level of participation</b>	<b>Characteristic features</b>
Nominal participation	Membership in the group
Passive participation	Being informed of decisions <i>ex post facto</i> ; or attending meetings and listening in on decision-making, without speaking up
Consultative participation	Being asked an opinion in specific matters without guarantee of influencing decisions
Activity-specific participation	Being asked to (or volunteering to) undertake specific tasks
Active participation	Expressing opinions, whether or not solicited, or taking initiatives of other sorts
Interactive (empowering) participation	Having voice and influence in the group’s decisions

Source: Agarwal (2001)

The benefits men and women gain from group participation can also vary along gender lines. The level of participation has a strong influence on the benefits that individuals experience. When membership in a group is limited to one member per household, women may not even get the chance to participate. When they do, they can be limited to the lower levels of participation than men: Nominal, passive, and consultative participation are reflected in lower benefits from participatory group action.

Time-use will also vary. Yet, this ‘time poverty’ is rarely considered in the way group meetings are scheduled. Though women may be interested in attending, they are overburdened with childcare, food preparation, and agricultural activities and therefore cannot fit group meetings into their schedules.

That said, women are not a homogenous group, and may have greater or less ability to participate based on other socio-economic factors including income, ethnic group or caste, religion, and urban versus rural residence. The following section addresses directly the constraints to women’s full (interactive) participation, and the outcomes for efficiency, equity, and sustainability.

## GENDER, PARTICIPATION, AND EFFECTIVENESS

Theories of participatory management suggest that the lack of participation of a large number of the users of a resource would lead to performance weaknesses in the organization, because of weaknesses in communication, representation, democracy and accountability, which may lead to free riding, rent seeking and corruption (Ostrom, 1992). Zwarteveen and Neupane (1996) found that the all-male organization for the Chhattis Mauja system in Nepal faced difficulties in enforcing its rules on women. Female heads of farms in the head end of the system always took more water than their entitlements, while contributing less labor than they should, but it was difficult to solve the problems because women were not members of the organization and could thus not be punished. Women did not steal water or shirk from contributing labor to maintenance only because of opportunism. Water stealing by women occurred partly because women had an interest in applying more water to the paddy-field to reduce their labor requirements for weeding, and rules and prevailing gender norms made it difficult for women to make labor contributions.

Many community forestry programs have also found that the rules determined by men are too restrictive and increase the time burden on women who gather firewood for household use; in other instances, these regulations force women to violate community rules in order to meet their needs. Women who observe regulations are also not directly rewarded for their adherence: If cash or in-kind payments are made, they are typically distributed on a household basis and go to male household heads. Men's greater use of cash income toward leisure activities compared to women has been consistently documented in the literature (Bruce, 1989; Quisumbing 2003; Smith et al. 2003). For forest management in Nepal, Sarin (1995) found that non-involvement of women made it easy for women (especially those from outside the village) to continue to gather firewood, in spite of strict regulatory rules set by the organization. In some communities 90% of the rule offenders were women. Male office-bearers found it difficult to stop these women, since they risk being accused of molesting them. As a result, the need for female participation in organizations is now accepted, but not on grounds of equity, participation or democracy, but because women are needed to help the organization enforce its rules, or to stop other women from taking firewood.

Other positive examples are available from Kenya, where watershed committees with both men and women were more effective than all-male or all-female organizations, because they were able to draw upon the complementary strengths of men and women (Njuki 2002). Men had stronger external connections (bridging social capital), which was helpful, for example, in obtaining external assistance, while women tended to be more highly trusted, especially in managing money. Similarly in the Mountain Province of the Philippines, because of women's roles in agricultural and household decision-making, especially with regard to cash flow, community organizers charged with organizing water users' associations learned that unless women were encouraged to participate, the organizations could not be assured that the member households would pay their fees (Illo 1998).

Therefore, rather than gender-blind or single-sex organizations, a more nuanced, third approach, would be to try to develop mixed male and female organizations that seek to draw upon the strengths of both men and women. However, this will not be easy. Although the evidence on this to date is fragmentary, we would expect that establishing mixed-groups would have a higher transaction cost because of the need to overcome gender barriers. The corollary of that is that the larger the degree of gender inequality, the higher the transaction costs will be. Thus, establishing mixed organizations is likely to be easier in societies in which women already have education levels on a par with men's, and where women are used to going out and mingling with men, and much more difficult in societies which practice female seclusion, with low levels of female education. Under such conditions, working with all-women's groups to build capacity may be an important first step.

Sultana and Thompson's (2005) study of floodplain management in Bangladesh found that all-male community organizations took less time to establish than committees that included women (302 days vs.

340 days), but this was offset by a shorter time for the organizations to start activities (179 days for all-male vs 106 days for mixed groups). All-male groups were able to obtain and disburse more credit, and undertook more fisheries management activities, but also had more conflicts and more rule-breaking, suggesting that involvement of women in decision-making was instrumental for compliance and conflict resolution.<sup>8</sup>

Acharya and Gentle's (2005) study of the SAMARPAN (Strengthening the Role of Women and Civil Society in Democracy and Governance) in Nepal illustrates some of the complexities involved in building gender-balanced organizations. The program provided advocacy literacy training to women, but also engaged with local community group leaders. Community forestry user groups participating in this program showed an increase in women in leadership positions, who became active in auditing of group funds, expanding women's membership, and influencing the group activities to include fodder and multiple use activities, biogas, and a range of activities to help very poor households. The integration of a critical mass of women into the regular user groups led to better outcomes than all-women's user groups, which lacked the support of men, and had smaller overall forest areas and less land per household than the mixed groups.

Despite the higher transaction costs of establishing them, the examples above indicate that mixed groups can also have higher payoffs because they can tap into the differential strengths of men and women and also because they can get higher compliance with NRM, especially if men and women are both using the resource or have resources that are needed. Thus, evidence on the effectiveness of all-male, all-female, or mixed groups depends on whether it is assessed in the long or short-term.

### *Key Questions on Effectiveness*

- How could gender analysis help make collective action more effective?
- What stakes do men and women have in the outcomes of collective action?
- What formal and informal roles do women and men play in the management of resource and of the group?
- What action resources are critical? How are they distributed between men, women?
- If funds are needed for the collective action, how much control of cash do men and women have within their households?
- How do explicit and implicit rules affect ability of men, women to participate?
- Are there enough men and women to create a "critical mass" within the organizations?
- How does participation of men, women in decision-making affect compliance and cooperation in activities?

## **6. IMPACT ON GENDER RELATIONS**

Whereas effectiveness of collective action refers to the ability of groups to meet their immediate purposes (e.g. the management of a natural resource), impact of collective action refers to changes (in this case, changes in gender relations) that go beyond that. For example, a microcredit scheme designed to raise the income of its members would measure its effectiveness in terms of income earned while measurements of impact on gender relations would include the ability of women to control that income within the household.

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, in detailed case studies, Sultana and Thompson found that an all-women's group formed a men's advisory committee, whereas the all-male group did not have a separate advisory committee.

## MEASURING IMPACT

Definitions and measurements of gender equity and women's empowerment, like all social processes, remain contested but in essence, empowerment is the individual or group capacity to make self-informed and effective choices (Alsop, 2005). The concept of women's empowerment is best viewed along a continuum, ranging from emergence from isolation on one end of the continuum to participation in the public sphere on the other.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the criteria selected to measure impact will vary according to where along the continuum an actor is situated.

If we look at our institutional analysis framework through a "gendered poverty lens", we become interested in collective action outcomes in terms of all the critical aspects of poverty, as well as how these aspects are experienced differently by women and men. Impacts on gender equity can thus be evaluated by several indicators, including: the level and distribution of income, as well as the recognition that women may make tradeoffs, or tactical choices, between different material, psychological, and symbolic aspects of poverty (Chant, 2003); the ability to secure basic needs; the degree of social and political inclusion; security against violence (including violence against women); vulnerability to shocks; and more broadly, the opportunity set for livelihood improvement.

## LEVELS OF IMPACT

In this paper, we distinguish four levels of impact on gender relations: relations within the household, relations within the collective action group itself, relations of the group vis-à-vis the community, and relations of the community vis-à-vis the outside.

Analysis of the impact of collective action on gender equity cannot be divorced from analysis of the household because activities undertaken as a collective feed back into women's and men's social bargaining within the household. For example, income-generating collective action schemes may increase a woman's fallback or exit options within the household if she is able to strengthen her asset endowments (e.g. financial capital) and draw upon them as action resources to increase her bargaining power within the household. A study of the impact of group-based fish pond or vegetable technology programs in Bangladesh found that women who participated had significantly higher empowerment levels on such criteria as keeping control over money, and reduced domestic violence (Hallman et al. 2003).

At the community level, collective action groups, particularly mixed-sex groups, may alter perceptions of women's socioeconomic contributions, thereby increasing their status within the community. In the same Bangladesh programs, the group-based fish ponds changed the gendered division of work because, although men were involved at various stages, negotiation over the activities and output took place above the household—men had to negotiate with groups of women backed by an NGO, rather than with their wives individually (Naved 2000).

Collective action groups may also mobilize enough social and political capital to contest the state. A well-known example is the Chipko movement in India, which began as a group of women literally embracing trees to prevent against deforestation in their community, spread across the state, and resulted in a major victory in 1980 with a 15-year ban on green felling in the Himalayan forests of Uttar Pradesh. Anduja (2005) found that women's ability to secure clean water for Villa Jardin rendered them "indisputable interlocuters" with institutions outside of their neighborhood. Collective lobbying efforts have also been influential in strengthening women's legal rights and share of state expenditure at the national level, e.g. in

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<sup>9</sup> James-Sebro (2005) defines gender equality in four stages: engagement of women to come out of isolation; empowerment through acquired ideas, knowledge, skills, and resources; enhancement of lives in households and communities; and emergence into the public sphere.

Uganda, Tanzania, and South Africa. Even at the international level, the global women's movement may be seen as a form of collective action that has had an impact, such as through the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)* and the Beijing Platform for Action.

#### Feedback Loops

As the above examples suggest, changes in gender relations may feed back into the action arena, the initial conditions, or both (see Figure 1). Panda (2005) observes, for example, that women who participated in the Self Employed Women's Association's (SEWA) water campaign grew more confident to participate in the public domain as a collective and thus challenged (male) alcohol consumption at both the village and household levels, resulting in decreased alcoholism in some villages. Applying the analytical framework to this example reveals that impacts on gender equity were observed in both the action arena (women's increased confidence) and in the initial context (decreased alcoholism by men). However, like the "rules" discussed in an earlier section of this paper, whether impacts on gender relations feed back into the initial context or the action arena depends on the subject and scale of analysis.

Alternatively, collective action may have negative impacts on women's empowerment if collective action programs are designed "gender-blind" or with false assumptions regarding women's motivations for joining a given group. For example, Arganosa-Matienzo (2005) notes that women who engaged in collective soap production faced additional time constraints due to the high labor inputs required for soap making while also earning less than they did as paid farm laborers. Clearly then, collective action can be used as a vehicle for women's empowerment, but it can also contribute to women's disempowerment.

#### Strategies for Empowerment

Given the complexity of gendered norms and roles and their variances across cultures, there is no "one-size-fits-all" collective action strategy for fostering gender equity. In some instances, particularly where there are deeply entrenched levels of gender inequity, women's single-sexed groups may be more effective strategies for bringing women out of isolation, fostering their self-confidence, and building their capacity to bargain within the household. In other instances, mixed-sex groups may be more effective vehicles for enabling women to build their asset base and negotiate in the public arena.

Therefore, if we conceive of women's empowerment along a continuum, as suggested above, mixed-sex groups that respond to both women's and men's needs may be more appropriate the further along the continuum women are situated. Such groups may also affect more transformative change in gender roles if, through repeated interactions, women receive greater recognition by men for both their paid and unpaid contributions to the community, although clearly this hypothesis warrants further investigation.

Another factor for external organizations to consider is how to integrate gender issues into collective action groups. In some contexts, groups that explicitly address gender equity as an end-goal may have a greater impact on women's empowerment whereas in other contexts, groups which address gender issues only in terms of the obstacles and constraints they present for realizing the group's (non-gender-related) objective may have a greater impact.

#### Key Questions on Impact:

- What types of impact can be observed? How can these be measured? Are they always empowering, and to whom?
- Which factors within the initial context and action arena facilitate or hinder impact on gender equity?
- How can (poor) women and men increase their ability to bargain? Through collective action?
- What are some strategies for using collective action to stimulate gender-equitable change processes (e.g. increasing women's action resources, changing the rule set)?
- Are their tradeoffs between effectiveness for a bounded goal and impact in terms of gender equity?

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented an adapted version of the Institutional Analysis Development framework to investigate the intersection of gender and collective action. This framework has applicability to research and practice.

For research and analysis, this framework can help clarify linkages we observe in the world. The first part of the framework is useful for identifying key aspects of the environment that may influence collective action outcomes and how these may differ for men and women. The second part helps to go “inside the black box” of collective action, to look at the various action resources that different actors have to draw upon, and how the rules affect the bargaining power of different actors, especially men and women. It thus provides a dynamic way of analyzing collective action through a gender lens: institutions + rules + actors create gendered patterns of interaction, which in turn affect the effectiveness of collective action. These outcomes of collective action, in turn, can have a broader impact, changing the initial conditions, particularly gender roles.

What value does this framework provide for strengthening gender and collective action programs? First, it can help external organizations to: (1) learn from, and strengthen, informal forms of collective action that women (and poor women, in particular) may engage in, and (2) identify entry points for organizing gender-responsive formal types of effective collective action.

In particular, the analytical framework can help us understand the action resources women and men require in order to participate effectively in collective action. It also helps to identify the rules that hinder or foster an actor’s ability to translate his or her assets into action resources. Identifying the motivations of men and women is a prerequisite for building effective collective action which needs to take into account the costs and benefits of men’s and women’s participation. These costs and benefits are shaped by the preferences that people bring to the activity, as well as the definition of roles and rules within collective action groups.

As evidence mounts that reducing poverty and increasing gender equity are fundamentally related objectives, external actors—whether government agencies, NGOs, or others—can support gender equity by increasing the action resources available to the disadvantaged, such as by strengthening tangible or intangible resources and capabilities that are critical for bargaining power. Identifying rules that build upon the assets that women possess (rather than upon those they tend to lack) provides another means to increase equitable collective action. Additional evidence on the contributions of gender-balanced participation in collective action on the effectiveness of organizations can help to justify investments in going beyond gender-blind programs, or even beyond single-sex organizations.

The evidence is still fragmentary, but there are indications that organizations that include men and women may be more difficult to establish, but can be more effective, especially in managing natural resources, when both women and men are users of the resource. However, there are also times when gender disparities or cultural barriers to men and women working together are so great that it is important to work with women’s groups to build their capacity. There remain important questions of whether external agents can be more effective at fostering gender equity by manipulating the action arena as opposed to contesting against the initial conditions, which shape and reinforce gendered norms.

Although poor women and men may be able to influence change in institutions underlying collective action (both organizations and social institutions) in their favor, their lower level of action resources makes such outcomes more difficult to achieve. External change agents can assist in such processes, but the complexity of both gender and institutional change means that favorable outcomes are not automatic,

even if external agents are genuinely interested in reducing poverty and fostering gender equity. However, understanding how to influence collective action institutions merits serious attention as part of both poverty reduction and gender-equity strategies. We hope that this framework will provide a systematic basis for doing so.



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