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**Women are Water Carriers, Men are Decision Makers –
Gender Issues in NRM – North Western Frontier Province, Pakistan**

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Abstract: We cannot speak about the natural resources, without looking at the society related to these resources.

As gender differentiates the relationships that people establish with natural resources and ecosystems, regarding knowledge, use, access and control, their impact on natural resources, and attitudes with relation to resources and conservation; it is important to view management of the natural resources from a gender perspective.

The North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan displays its traditions and culture most conspicuously in rural areas, where social polarities in terms of power dynamics, various strata in society on cast basis and gender inequities dominate. For example with respect to education; literacy ratio of women is half of that of men in the same region. Frequently girls have to miss school, in order to transport water, help mothers in household chores or take care of younger siblings. Women in rural areas are generally over-burdened with household chores, have restricted mobility, limited access to resources, and no decision-making power. In particularly conservative areas women's' mobility is limited to working on the family land. Once the crop is harvested they have no say regarding its utilization nor over the generated income.

Most conflicts concerning water or land arise less from the lack of these resources than from the manner in which they are distributed, managed and controlled. Sources of conflicts include unsecure ownership rights, rival claims, unequal access, and symbolic religious systems. In the traditional tribal culture women have no ownership rights over maternal or paternal property, let alone any political right, though Islam gives ownership rights to women, even at the time of marriage.

It is a great challenge to ensure equal participation of both women and men in the management of natural resources. Their needs and interests related to natural resources may be different and even conflicting.

Frequently women's voices and their interests are silenced when decisions are made on natural resources and their management. The agenda may be of conservation or use of natural resources; the real users, who are often women, must be consulted regarding its management.

Various projects of Intercooperation have successfully worked on ensuring participation of women in NRM. Focus has been on:

- First working with men and gaining their trust, before engaging in activities with women
- Women empowerment by increasing their income opportunities against their dependence on men's income.
- Functional literacy contributing to self esteem and negotiation/bargaining skills of women
- Capacity building of community based service providers (women) to ensure skill and knowledge transfer despite mobility issues.
- Facilitation to women in their access to input and output markets, and building of relevant capacities.
- Promotion of women project staff (through conducive working conditions) to ensure outreach to women.

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