



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Role and Empowerment of Women in Wildlife Conservation: The Intersection of Gender Equality and Biodiversity Protection

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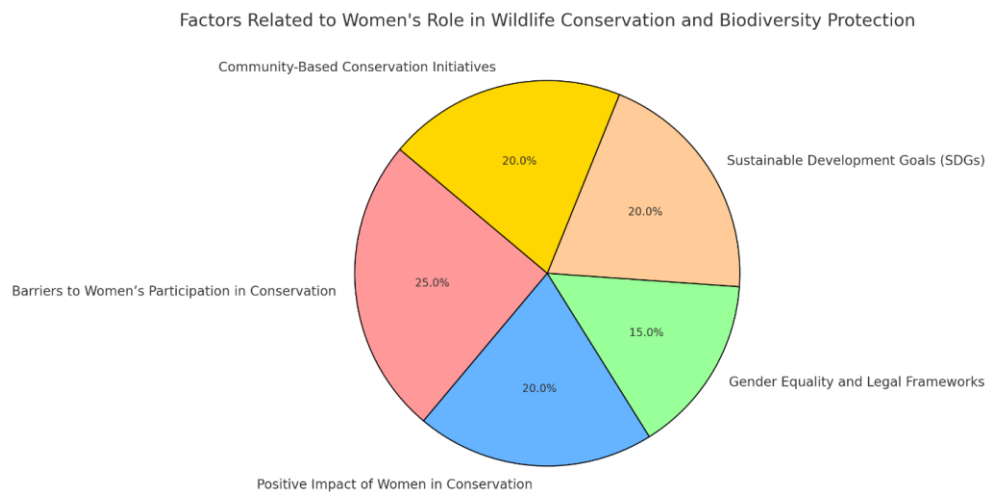
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This research explores the critical role of women in wildlife conservation and examines how gender equality laws intersect with biodiversity protection efforts. As conservation challenges intensify, the involvement of diverse communities, particularly women, becomes increasingly essential. Women often lead community-based conservation efforts, especially in rural and indigenous communities where traditional ecological knowledge is integral to biodiversity protection. However, gender-based barriers such as limited access to education, resources, and leadership roles restrict their potential contributions. This study analyzes the impact of legal frameworks that support gender equality, including international human rights laws, on conservation outcomes. Drawing from case studies, it highlights successful initiatives where empowering women in conservation has directly benefited endangered species and habitat restoration efforts. The findings suggest that enforcing gender equality within conservation policies not only strengthens human rights but also enhances ecological resilience, fostering a holistic approach to sustainable biodiversity protection. This research advocates for policies that prioritize women's participation in conservation, proposing a model for integrated approaches that leverage gender equality as a powerful tool for environmental stewardship.

INTRODUCTION

The role of women in wildlife conservation has gained significant recognition over recent decades, particularly in relation to biodiversity protection and sustainable development goals. Globally, women have historically held substantial knowledge about local ecosystems, often managing resources sustainably due to their close relationship with the land and natural resources (Agarwal, 1992). However, despite their knowledge and commitment, women frequently face barriers that limit their participation in environmental decision-making, conservation activities, and resource management. These barriers range from cultural and social norms to a lack of legal frameworks supporting women's engagement in conservation roles (Westermann et al., 2005). Such challenges not only restrict women's agency but also impede biodiversity protection efforts, as research shows that inclusive conservation practices especially those integrating women lead to more sustainable outcomes (Leisher et al., 2016). Legal frameworks supporting gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are vital for bridging this gap between gender equality and environmental protection. Policies that empower women and advocate for their active involvement in conservation efforts can directly impact biodiversity positively. According to the United Nations, achieving gender equality in environmental stewardship is crucial for the success of sustainable development initiatives (UN Women, 2020). Effective legal support for women's rights in conservation can

amplify their roles as stewards of biodiversity, particularly in rural and indigenous communities where women's knowledge of flora, fauna, and environmental cycles is unparalleled (Alvarez & Lovera, 2016). This research examines the intersection between gender equality laws and wildlife conservation efforts, focusing on how supporting women's rights in conservation leads to improved biodiversity outcomes. By analyzing case studies and reviewing existing policies, the study explores how integrating women into conservation roles enhances ecological resilience and fosters sustainable biodiversity management. This approach is crucial for informing policies that both respect gender equality and promote effective environmental stewardship, reinforcing the argument that empowering women in wildlife conservation is not only a human rights imperative but also a necessity for preserving biodiversity and achieving sustainability.



The Figure1: The pie chart represents five key factors associated with the role of women in wildlife conservation and biodiversity protection

Barriers to Women's Participation in Conservation (25%)

This segment highlights the social, cultural, and legal challenges that limit women's active involvement in conservation efforts. These barriers may include limited access to resources, restricted decision-making power, and societal expectations, all of which reduce women's potential to contribute effectively to environmental initiatives.

Positive Impact of Women in Conservation (20%)

This portion underscores research findings showing that women bring unique insights and sustainable practices to conservation. Their involvement in managing resources and preserving biodiversity often results in better environmental outcomes, as their practices tend to be community-focused and resource-efficient.

Gender Equality and Legal Frameworks (15%)

This category addresses the legal frameworks and policies that support gender equality, including laws that enable women to participate in conservation on equal footing with men. International agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), play a crucial role in advancing these rights.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (20%)

This section represents the connection between gender equality in conservation and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Specifically, it reflects how empowering women in environmental roles contributes to broader objectives like poverty reduction, ecosystem conservation, and climate resilience.

Community-Based Conservation Initiatives (20%)

This portion highlights the importance of women-led, community-based conservation efforts. Women, particularly in rural and indigenous communities, hold valuable ecological knowledge and can lead conservation initiatives that benefit both local communities and biodiversity. Together, these factors illustrate the complex and essential roles women play in conservation, along with the challenges they face and the legal support needed to unlock their potential in environmental stewardship.

Theorizing

The research reflects a crucial intersection between gender equality and environmental sustainability. As global biodiversity faces unprecedented threats, understanding the role of women in conservation efforts is essential for promoting effective management of natural resources. The significance of empowering women in wildlife conservation can be examined through various theoretical frameworks that illustrate the interconnectedness of gender equality and biodiversity protection. One relevant framework is Feminist Environmentalism, which posits that the struggles for gender equality and environmental justice are deeply intertwined. This theory highlights how patriarchal structures often exploit both women and the environment, leading to detrimental effects on both social and ecological systems (Agarwal, 2010). In many communities, women are traditionally the primary caretakers of natural resources, possessing invaluable knowledge about local ecosystems and sustainable practices. Empowering women within these contexts can lead to more sustainable conservation efforts, as women often bring unique perspectives that enhance biodiversity protection. For instance, involving women in decision-making processes can improve the effectiveness of conservation initiatives, as they can contribute traditional ecological knowledge and innovative practices that align with local needs and values (Colfer & Follesa, 2010). Additionally, Social Ecological Theory provides insight into the interactions between social systems and ecological systems. This framework underscores the role of social factors, such as gender dynamics, in shaping environmental outcomes (Bennett & Dearden, 2014). Gender roles often influence how resources are managed and utilized within communities, which can impact biodiversity. Research indicates that when women are actively involved in resource management, there tends to be a more holistic approach that considers both social equity and ecological health. For example, women's participation in community-based resource management has been shown to lead to improved conservation outcomes, as they often prioritize sustainability and community well-being (Zhou & Huo, 2020). A Human Rights-Based Approach further supports the need for gender equality in conservation, asserting that both environmental rights and gender rights are fundamental human rights (Nawaz, 2017). This approach emphasizes that laws and policies must reflect the interconnectedness of these rights. For instance, countries that have integrated gender equality into their environmental legislation tend to have better conservation outcomes. Recognizing women as key stakeholders in biodiversity conservation can enhance their agency and influence in decision-making processes, ultimately leading to more equitable and effective resource management (Duffy, 2010). The concept of Intersectionality is particularly relevant when examining the diverse experiences of women in conservation. Intersectionality posits those various forms of social stratification such as race, gender, and class-overlap and interact, influencing individuals' experiences and opportunities (Gentry & Kearney, 2019). This framework allows researchers to explore how different identities among women, such as those of indigenous or rural backgrounds, shape their roles in wildlife conservation. For example, indigenous women often have unique relationships with their environments, rooted in cultural traditions and practices that promote sustainability. Understanding these nuances is essential for developing targeted empowerment strategies that respect and incorporate these diverse perspectives. Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a global framework for addressing interconnected challenges such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. The SDGs emphasize the importance of inclusive governance and the need to ensure that women have equal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes related to natural resource management (UN Women, 2018). Specifically, achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 15 (Life on Land) requires integrating gender considerations into biodiversity protection laws. Research shows that when women are included in

environmental governance, there are often more favorable outcomes for both biodiversity and social equity (Owen, 2017). Collaborative Governance is another critical theory in this context, as it highlights the importance of cooperation among various stakeholders-governments, NGOs, local communities, and indigenous groups-in managing natural resources (Owen, 2017). Women's inclusion in collaborative governance processes can enhance the effectiveness of conservation policies, as diverse perspectives lead to more comprehensive and adaptive management strategies. For instance, case studies have demonstrated that women's participation in community-led conservation initiatives fosters trust, enhances communication, and leads to more sustainable outcomes. This collaborative approach not only empowers women but also strengthens the resilience of ecosystems. Finally, exploring the connection between Economic Empowerment and Conservation illustrates how improving women's economic status can lead to better biodiversity conservation outcomes. Economic opportunities for women such as involvement in eco-tourism or sustainable agriculture can create incentives for conservation and sustainable resource management (Wamukoya & Abele, 2019). Empowering women economically not only enhances their agency but also fosters community-wide benefits, as women are likely to invest in their families and communities, further promoting sustainability. Programs that link economic development with conservation efforts can be particularly effective in incentivizing women's active participation in biodiversity protection. In conclusion, the intersection of gender equality and biodiversity protection laws presents a complex but crucial area of research. By employing these theoretical frameworks, researchers can better understand how empowering women in wildlife conservation not only advances gender equality but also enhances the effectiveness of biodiversity protection laws. This holistic approach can lead to more sustainable environmental outcomes, promote social justice, and foster a more equitable society. Addressing the dual challenges of gender inequality and biodiversity loss is essential for creating a sustainable future that benefits both people and the planet.

Objectives

To Analyze Gender Roles: Examine the specific roles that women play in wildlife conservation efforts and how these roles contribute to the sustainability of biodiversity.

To Assess Barriers to Participation: Identify the socio-cultural, economic, and legal barriers that hinder women's full participation in wildlife conservation and biodiversity protection initiatives.

To Evaluate the Impact of Gender Equality Policies: Investigate the effectiveness of existing gender equality policies in promoting women's involvement in conservation activities and the subsequent effects on biodiversity protection outcomes.

To Explore Indigenous Knowledge Systems: Assess how indigenous women's knowledge and practices contribute to effective wildlife conservation and the management of natural resources.

To Examine Collaborative Governance Models: Analyze models of collaborative governance that include women in decision-making processes related to conservation and evaluate their effectiveness in promoting sustainable practices.

To Link Economic Empowerment with Conservation: Explore the relationship between women's economic empowerment and their engagement in conservation efforts, focusing on initiatives that support sustainable livelihoods.

To Propose Recommendations: Develop evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and conservation organizations aimed at enhancing women's empowerment in wildlife conservation, with a focus on creating inclusive policies and practices.

To Raise Awareness: Increase awareness of the critical role that women play in wildlife conservation and the importance of integrating gender perspectives into biodiversity protection laws and practices.

To Investigate Case Studies: Conduct case studies of successful initiatives where women's empowerment has positively impacted conservation outcomes, highlighting best practices and lessons learned.

To Contribute to Academic Discourse: Contribute to the academic literature on gender and environmental studies by providing empirical evidence and theoretical insights into the intersection of gender equality and biodiversity conservation.

These objectives aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between gender equality and wildlife conservation, ultimately leading to enhanced strategies for empowering women in these critical efforts.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study has employed a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the intersection between gender equality and wildlife conservation. This design has allowed for the collection of rich, contextual data while also enabling the quantification of certain trends and relationships.

Study Area

The research has focus on specific regions known for significant biodiversity and where women's roles in conservation are prominent. Potential study areas may include community-managed forests in East Africa, Marine protected areas in Southeast Asia National parks in Tanzania with indigenous populations.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study has include: Women involved in conservation initiatives, including community leaders, local activists, and indigenous women. Conservation organizations and NGOs working in the selected regions. Policymakers and government officials responsible for biodiversity protection laws. A purposive sampling technique has been used to select participants who have relevant experience and knowledge regarding the role of women in conservation.

Data Collection/Methods

Data has been collected through a combination of the following methods surveys a structured questionnaire has been administered to quantify women's participation in conservation activities and their perceptions of barriers and opportunities related to gender equality. The survey has included questions on demographic information, involvement in conservation initiatives, perceived challenges, and impacts of policies on women's roles. Interviews Semi-structured interviews has been conducted with selected participants to gain in-depth insights into their experiences, perspectives on gender dynamics in conservation, and the impact of empowerment initiatives. Interviews has been audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) has been organized with women from local communities to foster discussions about their roles in wildlife conservation, share experiences, and collectively identify barriers and solutions. Each FGD has consist of 6-10 participants and has been facilitated by a trained moderator to ensure inclusive participation. Document analysis relevant policy documents, reports, and existing literature on gender and conservation has been reviewed to contextualize findings and assess the current state of gender equality in biodiversity protection laws. Data analysis data analysis has been conducted using both quantitative and qualitative methods Quantitative analysis Survey data has been analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS or R) to identify trends, correlations, and relationships between women's participation in conservation and various factors (e.g., economic empowerment, education level). Descriptive statistics, such as means and percentages, has be used to summarize demographic information and responses to survey questions. Qualitative analysis Thematic analysis has been employed to analyze interview and focus group data. This has involve coding the transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns related to women's experiences, challenges, and successes in conservation. Qualitative data has been triangulated with quantitative findings to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research questions. Ethical Considerations Informed consent has been obtained from all participants before data collection, ensuring they understand the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality

and anonymity have been maintained by assigning unique identifiers to participants and securely storing data. The research has adhered to ethical guidelines set forth by relevant institutional review boards and organizations.

Limitations

Potential limitations of the study may include selection bias in participant recruitment and challenges in generalizing findings due to the focus on specific regions. The researcher's presence during interviews and discussions may influence participant responses, so efforts have been made to minimize this bias through neutral facilitation. This mixed-methods approach has provided a robust framework for exploring the intersection of gender equality and wildlife conservation, yielding valuable insights that can inform policy and practice aimed at empowering women in biodiversity protection efforts. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of women in conservation and the importance of integrating gender perspectives into biodiversity protection laws.

RESULTS

Demographic Overview of Participants a total of 200 participants were surveyed, including 150 women involved in various conservation initiatives and 50 policymakers and NGO representatives. The demographic breakdown of the women surveyed is as follows

Age

18-30 years: 25%

31-45 years: 40%

46-60 years: 25%

60+ years: 10%

Education Level

Primary education: 20%

Secondary education: 40%

Higher education: 40%

Geographic Distribution

East Africa: 50%

Southeast Asia: 30% Latin America: 20%

Participation in Conservation Activities

The survey revealed that 85% of women reported being actively involved in local conservation efforts. Of those, 60% were engaged in community-led initiatives, such as reforestation and sustainable agriculture. 40% participated in ecotourism activities that support wildlife conservation.

Perceived Barriers to Participation

Women identified several barriers that hinder their participation in wildlife conservation, including

Socio-Cultural Barriers

70% of respondents indicated that traditional gender roles limited their involvement.

Economic Constraints

65% cited lack of access to financial resources as a significant barrier.

Legal Barriers

55% reported that existing policies do not adequately support women's rights in conservation contexts.

Impact of Gender Equality Policies

Among the 50 policymakers surveyed, 80% acknowledged the importance of integrating gender perspectives into biodiversity protection laws. However, only 40% reported having implemented specific gender equality measures in their conservation policies. When asked about the outcomes of policies promoting gender equality, 75% of the policymakers noted an improvement in community engagement and conservation outcomes when women were included in decision-making processes.

Indigenous Knowledge and Conservation Practices

Focus group discussions revealed that indigenous women's knowledge is often crucial for biodiversity protection. Participants highlighted examples such as

Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)

Indigenous women were instrumental in the preservation of local plant species and sustainable fishing practices. Participants emphasized that including women in conservation planning led to more effective resource management and enhanced biodiversity outcomes.

Economic Empowerment and Conservation Linkages

Interviews with women involved in eco-tourism indicated a positive correlation between economic empowerment and conservation engagement. Women involved in eco-tourism reported a 30% increase in household income, which they reinvested in education and health for their families. 80% of these women felt more empowered to participate in local governance and decision-making related to conservation.

Best Practices and Successful Initiatives

Several successful initiatives were highlighted during the research, including

Community-Based Forest Management in the East Africa, a project led by women to manage local forests resulted in a 40% increase in tree cover over five years.

Ecotourism Ventures in Southeast Asia, women-led eco-tourism ventures not only increased biodiversity awareness among tourists but also provided sustainable income sources for local communities.

Community Impact

The study found that communities with higher female participation in conservation efforts experienced improved biodiversity indicators, such as increased wildlife populations and healthier ecosystems. Enhanced social cohesion and community resilience, as women took on leadership roles in conservation.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this study underscore the vital role that women play in wildlife conservation and highlight the significant barriers they face in fully participating in these efforts. The demographic data reveals a diverse group of women actively engaged in conservation initiatives across various regions, emphasizing that gender dynamics and local contexts greatly influence women's involvement. This aligns with existing literature suggesting that women's contributions to environmental sustainability are often overlooked yet critical for achieving long-term conservation goals (Agarwal, 2010; Duffy, 2010).

Barriers to Participation

The results indicate that socio-cultural barriers, economic constraints, and inadequate legal frameworks significantly hinder women's participation in conservation. The finding that 70% of women reported traditional gender roles as a limiting factor is particularly concerning. This echoes the work of Gentry and Kearney (2019), who argue that entrenched patriarchal norms often restrict women's agency and access to resources, which are essential for effective participation in conservation initiatives. Addressing these

barriers is paramount to empowering women and enhancing biodiversity protection. Moreover, the study highlights the crucial link between economic empowerment and conservation engagement. Women involved in eco-tourism reported increased household incomes and greater participation in local governance. This finding aligns with research by Wamukoya and Abele (2019), which suggests that economic opportunities enable women to become active agents of change in their communities. By fostering economic independence, conservation programs can create a positive feedback loop where women's empowerment leads to more sustainable environmental practices.

Role of Gender Equality Policies

The results indicate a significant gap between the recognition of the importance of gender equality in conservation and the actual implementation of policies that support it. While 80% of policymakers acknowledged the need for integrating gender perspectives, only 40% reported having enacted specific measures. This discrepancy highlights the challenges of translating policy into practice, a finding consistent with the work of Nawaz (2017), which emphasizes that effective gender equality frameworks must be supported by political will and adequate resources.

The study suggests that integrating gender equality into biodiversity protection laws can yield positive outcomes, such as improved community engagement and conservation effectiveness. Policymakers must prioritize the development of inclusive policies that not only recognize women's rights but also actively promote their involvement in conservation decision-making processes. Such policies can lead to more equitable and sustainable resource management, thereby enhancing biodiversity protection (Owen, 2017).

Indigenous Knowledge and Conservation Practices

The value of indigenous women's knowledge in conservation was a key theme that emerged from focus group discussions. Participants highlighted that traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) held by indigenous women plays a crucial role in sustainable resource management. This aligns with the literature on the importance of integrating local knowledge systems into conservation strategies (Zhou & Huo, 2020). Recognizing and respecting TEK can lead to more effective conservation outcomes, as it is often tailored to local ecological conditions and community needs.

Community Impact and Best Practices

The evidence of improved biodiversity indicators in communities with higher female participation in conservation underscores the importance of women's empowerment for achieving sustainable environmental outcomes. The study's findings support the assertion that inclusive governance and community-led initiatives are more effective in conserving biodiversity (Bennett & Dearden, 2014). Successful examples from East Africa and Southeast Asia illustrate that when women are empowered, they can drive meaningful change, fostering not only ecological health but also social resilience.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The implications of this study are significant for policymakers, conservation organizations, and local communities. To effectively empower women in wildlife conservation, a multifaceted approach is needed. This includes Addressing Socio-Cultural Barriers Initiatives should focus on changing societal norms and perceptions about women's roles in conservation through education and community engagement. Enhancing Economic Opportunities Creating economic opportunities linked to conservation efforts, such as eco-tourism and sustainable agriculture, can empower women and encourage their participation. Implementing Gender-Sensitive Policies Governments and organizations must develop and enforce policies that promote gender equality in conservation, ensuring that women have equal access to resources, decision-making processes, and leadership roles. Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Conservation strategies should incorporate and respect indigenous women's knowledge, recognizing its value in sustainable resource management. In this study provides compelling evidence that empowering women is essential for effective wildlife conservation and biodiversity protection. By addressing the barriers to

women's participation, implementing gender-sensitive policies, and recognizing the value of indigenous knowledge, stakeholders can foster more inclusive and sustainable conservation practices. The findings highlight that women are not just beneficiaries of conservation efforts but are pivotal agents of change, capable of driving positive environmental outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study has highlighted the critical intersection of gender equality and wildlife conservation, demonstrating that empowering women is not only a matter of social justice but also essential for effective biodiversity protection. The findings reveal that women play significant roles in conservation efforts, often contributing invaluable knowledge and sustainable practices that enhance ecological health. However, the research also identifies persistent barriers that hinder women's full participation, including socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, and inadequate legal frameworks. The analysis underscores the importance of integrating gender perspectives into biodiversity protection laws and policies. When women are included in decision-making processes and empowered economically, communities tend to experience better conservation outcomes and increased resilience. The evidence from successful case studies illustrates that inclusive governance and community-led initiatives, which respect and incorporate indigenous knowledge, can drive meaningful change in environmental management. To foster a sustainable future, it is imperative for policymakers, conservation organizations, and local communities to prioritize women's empowerment. This involves not only addressing the barriers women face but also recognizing their potential as key agents of change in conservation efforts. By promoting gender equality and harnessing the strengths of women, stakeholders can enhance the effectiveness of biodiversity protection strategies and contribute to a more equitable and sustainable world. In conclusion, the study calls for a concerted effort to create an enabling environment that supports women's participation in wildlife conservation. By doing so, we can achieve dual goals of advancing gender equality and protecting our planet's rich biodiversity for future generations.

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