

Promoting Women's Voices in Rural Contexts: Reflections from the Literature and Women Sapphire Miners in South West Madagascar

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In recent years both development agencies and research have underlined the vital need to strengthen women's participation in natural resource management. The roles and activities men and women play in the protection and exploitation of natural resources differ be they in relation to marine (Westerman & Benbow, 2014), forest (Agarwal, 2009) or mineral (Lahiri-Dutt, 2008) resources. For example in developing contexts women and children are often those primarily responsible for the collection and use of water and firewood. They are thus directly impacted by the negative impacts of resource extraction on water quality and availability and on forested areas. In mining it is widely acknowledged in the literature that the negative impacts women fall disproportionately on women rather than men (Jenkins, 2014). These negative impacts are likely to be exacerbated by a changing climate for example for those women working on small holder farmer in regions such as Southern Madagascar (Harvey et al., 2014).

The inclusion of women in decisions about natural resource management is thus essential. However there is little in the literature which provides a theoretical framing of, and a thoughtful methodology for, the strengthening of women's participation. Yet this is essential if women's participation is to be effective and critically evaluated as more than tokenistic.

This paper will review the literature around women's participation in meetings and dialogues in developing contexts with a special emphasis on natural resources. It will seek to identify theoretical framing and practical insights for successful engagement with women and the inclusion of women's voices in discussions and decisions about natural resources. It will also draw on the author's recent experience working with women miners in Atsimo Adrenana (Madagascar's South West region) where a process is being put in place to assure the inclusion of women's voices in a national dialogue concerning the future of artisanal and small scale mining in Madagascar. There are strong implications for the training of women especially in relation to the Sustainable Development Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Agarwal, B. (2009). Gender and forest conservation: The impact of women's participation in community forest governance. *Ecological economics*, 68(11), 2785-2799.