

Natural resources valued differently by men and woman, study shows

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Men and women value, access and use resources from the natural environment in distinct and different ways, a new study has shown.

The new study, led by Professor Katrina Brown at the University of

Exeter, has identified how gender matters when looking at what benefits communities can garner from nature through ecosystem services.

While the range of benefits, in terms of food, clean water provision, [soil fertility](#) and physical and [mental health](#) – are known to critically underpin the livelihoods worldwide, very few studies have explored how the benefits are distributed according to gender.

Now, this new study has identified the benefits to health and wellbeing that ecosystem services can bring and, crucially, how these are valued differently by men and women.

Studying eight communities in coastal Kenya and Mozambique, the researchers found that the genders often use, experience and benefit from ecosystem services – such as mangrove forests, coral reefs and fisheries—in vastly different ways.

The research also insists that, if the management of global ecosystem services will support internationally agreed UN Sustainable development Goals and so ensure 'no-one is left behind,' it is vital for policymakers to place a greater emphasis on the different perspectives, knowledge and interests held by men and women.

Dr. Matt Fortnam, lead author of the paper said: "These findings address a critical gap in knowledge. Although Ecosystem Services are widely promoted to support [sustainable development](#) and poverty alleviation, very few studies have actually looked at how men and women are affected.

"This is really important gap, especially when there is a risk that investments in conservation and development could disadvantage women."

As well as the different values that are placed on [ecosystem services](#) by men and women, the study also shows how they are inherently embedded within cultural and traditional gender roles, as well as in the institutions and governance of the natural resource systems.

As a result, the study argues that these "gender trade-offs" should be integrated into ecosystem assessments and management so Sustainable Development Goals can be better represented in ecosystem service research, policy and practice.

Professor Brown added: "Time and time again the failure to account for social diversity means that the poorest and most vulnerable fail to benefit from development interventions.

"We know that there are no easy 'magic bullets' to remove the inequalities experienced by women in benefitting from [ecosystems](#), but there is the opportunity to make inroads into them and help create equitable opportunities for the fair sharing of ecosystem benefits amongst men and [women](#)."

More information: M. Fortnam et al. The Gendered Nature of Ecosystem Services, *Ecological Economics* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ecolecon.2018.12.018](#)

Provided by University of Exeter

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