



CGIAR systemwide program on
COLLECTIVE ACTION AND
PROPERTY RIGHTS

Women's rights, forests and climate change *New Urgencies, Old Problems*



A workshop co-organized by the [Rights & Resources Initiative \(RRI\)](#) and the [CGIAR Systemwide Program on Collective Action and Property Rights \(CAPRI\)](#)
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Worldwide attention is being paid to forests as a tool to mitigate climate change. The RRI-RFN conference *Rights, Forests and Climate Change* highlighted the role of forest communities' rights in mitigating climate change and the potential threats they face due to REDD and adaptation strategies. Yet, little attention has been devoted to unique pressures that community members face individually and as a social group. This event highlighted the role of women and the pressures they face as countries and communities implement measures to counter climate change. Beyond highlighting the pressures the event focused on concrete actions that can be taken to ensure that the rights of women are not overlooked or undermined and their livelihoods are strengthened.

The presentations and discussions during the event confirmed that the title of the workshop (new urgencies, old problems) is indeed valid. There are continuing issues that women face in fulfilling their daily duties as food gatherers, knowledge keepers of food, medicinal plants, seed and cultural practices as well as in their reproductive tasks. Climate change makes these challenges worse, but can also be seen as a window of opportunity to address them.

To do this there is the need to "denaturalize" the discussions around climate change and include social and economic factors into the discussions about the right adaptation and mitigation schemes. Issues like gender and collective rights run deeper than climate change and are even seen as its root causes. Yet, governments and large transnational environmental NGOs have so far chosen to focus only on the technical aspects of climate change, leaving out political and socioeconomic aspects.

The discussions also revealed that there are two hurdles to realizing women's rights that are of different nature and require different sets of strategies: (1) in many cases the legal framework exists (e.g. mandating joint titling of land), but it is not applied in reality; or (2) the laws that are asked for by local populations do not fit into the existing legal framework (e.g. demand for group ownership, when the country's constitution only recognizes private property).

Presentations

Jeff Hatcher provided some introductory comments on Rights and Resources and some of the climate-related challenges for women that highlight the need for secure land tenure.

A short video on women's reactions to climate change, created by RRI and CAPRI, was also shown. Indigenous women leaders expressed their view on women's situations and climate change. It is worth noting that women from both Latin America and Asia found that changes in the weather have made it more difficult to access firewood, water, find medicinal plants for women, thus increasing the challenges they face to nurture and take care of their families.

Watch the video at <http://rightsandclimate.org/2009/02/10/women-and-climate-change-video/>.

Noemi Miyasaka Porro from the Universidade Federal do Para (UFPA) presented an overview of the situation women face in Brazil with regards to their rights to natural resources.

Her presentation in collaboration with Iran Veiga is available online at <http://www.slideshare.net/rightsandclimate/direitos-das-mulheres-terra-e-aos-recursos-florestais>.

Following this general overview, the workshop featured a presentation by one of the leaders of the *Quebradeiras de Babaçu*, Maria Adelina Chagas "Dada". Their interstate movement of Babaçu Breaker Women represents around 300,000 women in four Northern and Northeastern States of Brazil: Pará, Maranhão, Tocantins and Piauí.

Dada described the process of establishing local regulation to allow her and other women free access to the *babaçu* palm forests (a type of coconut used for consumption and as a raw material in the cosmetics and edible oil industry). In the 60's and 70's, cattle ranchers illegally took over their traditionally occupied lands, eliminating several communities and slashing thousands of palms, which women call the "mother-of-people". The women started realizing that they needed to recover their land and keep access to more trees in order for them to continue their work. Since forests were cut at larger scales, rains have been coming only 4 months of the year, instead of the usual 6 months, according to local people. This meant that they had to go further and further to find *babaçu*. As a result they started to associate and demand access to those now privately held lands, which sported *babaçu* trees but were otherwise unused. *Babaçu* is one of the fastest growing palm tree species to come back as part of the secondary forest following clearing; the work done by the *Quebradeiras de Babaçu* is helping to conserve these forests.

Once this culturally established regulation, referred to as *Babaçu Livre*, became better known to the public, *quebradeiras'* grassroots organizations managed to get it legally approved in 17 municipalities, allowing them free access to any *babaçu* palm forests. In addition, three of their participating grassroots organizations managed to secure rights related to the Convention of Biological Diversity over their traditional knowledge, which allowed the group to discuss their own terms and sign a Benefit Sharing contractual agreement with Natura, a producer of cosmetics, to supply *babaçu* mesocarp flour for further processing. When Natura wanted to enter into an agreement with only one group, the women insisted that it had to be a contract with all the known organized grassroots groups who wish to participate, as they all hold the traditional knowledge, thus forcing the company to make addenda to the contract.

Dada further explained that the group worked together with local authorities, men and others to ease passage of *Babaçu Livre*. She also described a social dilemma that arose while fighting for the law, as some women were aligned with land lords and lobbied for their exclusive access to *babaçu* trees. When *Babaçu Livre* was passed, Dada and her group of *quebradeiras* could not exclude these women from the palm trees, despite their previous opposition.

Further information on the Quebradeiras de Babaçu:

- <http://www.miqcb.org.br>
- <http://www2.natura.net/Web/Br/Home/src/>
- http://www.geografia.fflch.usp.br/revistaagrararia/revistas/3/3_rego_e_andrade.pdf
- <http://ayres1000.wordpress.com/2008/01/10/minha-dissertacao-a-organizacao-das-quebradeiras-de-coco-babacu-e-a-refuncionalizacao-de-um-espaco-regional-na-microrregiao-do-medio-mearim-maranhense/>

Next, **Fabiana** presented the challenges faced by the *Quilombolas*. Fabiana is one of the 25 women brought to the World Social Forum by Espaço Feminista and the Huairou Commission. She is one of the leaders of the *Associação Quilombola de Conceição das Crioulas*, which has earned the rights over a large amount of land. While the community owns a title to the land, they only have access to 30%. The rest of the land (roughly 12,000 hectares) is occupied and controlled by a landlord.

Originally, the group made their living from cotton production, but with the advent of the Industrial Age, they could not compete anymore. Not wanting to destroy the land, they joined forces with researchers from a nearby university to develop sustainable agriculture practices. The researchers recommended the use of a plant that is growing wild on the land: *caroa*, as it could be used for handicrafts. This choice fit well with their desire to use the land sustainably and to use best what they already had. The group now produces crafts from *caroa* and is so successful that a foreign company was requesting a large amount of their crafts for export. When they calculated the amount of *caroa* needed to satisfy the order, the group realized that it would use up all the resources they had available on the 30% of land to which they had access. They decided thus to forego the offer and are now focusing their attention on getting access to the rest of their land and to farm *caroa*.

Further information on the *Quilombolas*:

- http://www.portalsalgueiro.com.br/conheca/distrito_conceicao.htm
- www.conceicaodascrioulas.com.br
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quilombo>
- <http://www.huairou.org/>

Groupwork

We asked the question "What can you do to strengthen women's rights to natural resources in the context of climate change?" and divided the groups into small groups of 5-6 participants following the "World Café" method (<http://www.theworldcafe.com/>).

Some of the strategies suggested were:

- Preserve springs to guarantee water
- Raise awareness that the inhabited areas can provide for livelihoods, e.g. from banana leaf, bee honey, clay and mud (for handicrafts), etc.
- Promote dialogue between universities and women movements to research, teach, and develop relevant questions to discuss in group.
- Put in practice all local knowledge in order to have a sustainable income
- Raise awareness of women about the importance of sustainable harvesting so that they can earn their livelihoods from nature without using up the resources.
- Guarantee conservation of natural resources not only by women's movement but also by government responsibility (efficient enforcement).
- Recycle, be selective about what gets thrown away.
- Organize, mobilize, unite.
- Search for information
- Search for partnerships/ public policies
- Educate and reeducate
- Pharma-cultura (medicinal plant culture and access)
- Have fruit and vegetable gardens

- Knowledge of regulation and laws
- Empirical knowledge
- Female empowerment
- Contribute to decreasing pollution
- Enhance the forms of group action
- MST woman talked about the difficulty to promote medicinal use of barbosa because they are women and from the social movement.
- To enable women to politicize environmental questions about their legal rights, broadcast emission over BBC Somali.
- Increase visibility of actions developed by women and exchange experiences
- Implement public policies that guarantee rights of women
- Women have the right to denounce abuses (by their partners, society) and discrimination
- Have law that guarantees access to natural resources: *babaçu*, water, *mangaba*, and *açaí* and access to land to plant: *mandioca*, *acerola*, and *caroa*.

ANNEX: List of Participants

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