Women in Environmental Decision Making in Ecuador

An Environment and Gender Index (EGI) Country Case Study

INTRODUCING THE EGI

The first accountability and monitoring mechanism of its kind, the Environment and Gender Index (EGI) was launched in 2013 by the IUCN Global Gender Office (GGO). The EGI pilot phase brought together environment and gender variables in a composite index that scored and ranked 73 countries worldwide along 27 dimensions in six categories: Ecosystems; Gender Based Education + Assets; Governance; Country Reported Activities; Livelihoods; Gender Based Rights + Participation.

With some of the best data to date on gender and environment at national level, the EGI found that countries taking seriously their commitments to advancing gender equality in environmental arenas are making strides well beyond survival toward long-term wellbeing for all their citizens.

In partnership with Conservation International (CI), which supported the EGI pilot, this series of EGI country case studies—on Ecuador, Liberia, and the Philippines—complements the global dataset on women in environmental decision making, aiming to strengthen information and analysis of findings at national level.

Ecuador—situated on the northwestern coast of South America—is an ecologically rich and culturally diverse country. While its economy is heavily reliant upon natural resources, tourism revenue, and agricultural products, Ecuador is known as a strong leader for environmental protection. However, women’s participation and expertise related to the environment are not being used to their fullest potential.

Since the 1990s, Ecuador has established a number of policies protecting and promoting women’s rights and political participation, but deeply rooted expectations of gender roles appear to pose significant challenges to enacting these commitments in practice. Even though women’s livelihoods are acutely connected to natural resources, gender-sensitive environmental policies do not yet exist. At more local levels in many regions, cultural ideology appears to prevent women from participating in environmental decision making at all.

Key findings of EGI research show that Ecuador currently:
- Is a recognized leader on environmental issues across Latin America, and
- Has above average participation of women in international spheres, but
- Inconsistent participation in national decision making across levels, cultural groups and socioeconomic status.

Why gender matters in environmental decision making

Every day, in their roles as farmers, marine harvesters, household providers and more, women use and manage natural resources. Women have unique experiences and knowledge with respect to their environments—and offer important perspectives in natural resource governance. Not only does women’s equitable participation and representation in environmental decision making uphold commitments to women’s empowerment and gender equality, but it also makes for better development, sustainability and livelihood outcomes.
**EGI FINDINGS:**
Ecuador’s performance on women’s participation in government, civil society, and international delegations to key environmental decision-making processes

![Bar chart showing percentage of women in various sectors](chart_image)

**GOVERNMENT**
- Ministers of Environment-related Sectors
- Vice-Ministers of Environment-related Sectors

**CIVIL SOCIETY**
- Environmental NGO Presidents/Executive Directors
- Environmental NGO Board Membership

**INTERNATIONAL**
- Government Delegates to UNFCCC COP19 (2014)
- Government Delegates to UNCCD COP11 (2013)
- Government Delegates to CBD COP11 (2013)
- Average representation to the 3 Rio Conventions
- National Focal Points to the GEF

**BUILDING ON PROGRESS AND BRIDGING GAPS**
In recent years, effort has been made to foster the link between gender equality and environmental sustainability; the Ministry of Environment, for example, integrated gender indicators and has taken steps to increase women’s participation. Capacity to fully integrate gender concerns, however, could be strengthened. While women are building technical expertise on key environmental concerns, such as climate change, their promotion into positions of leadership could only improve Ecuador’s environmental, economic and social outlook.

Policy and practice could pay special attention to:
- Ensuring government and non-government environmental programme staff have access to capacity building on gender, and in particular gender budgeting, to be able to implement policy commitments;
- Putting in place initiatives to advance professional women to higher levels of leadership in ministries and offices related to the environment;
- Identifying, especially at community level, the specific barriers to women’s access to decision-making spheres and promoting the benefits of more equitable structures;
- Addressing the need for more education and training for rural women, with specific attention to indigenous groups who bear the multiple burdens of language barriers and cultural/ethnic discriminations; and
- Engaging men and men’s groups to better understand the mutual benefits of gender-responsive approaches and the full engagement of women.

“The last three ministers of environment have been women, and at national levels women occupy many key leadership positions. There are more women studying and working in the environmental sciences than ever before, and in meetings on environmental issues, women are often the majority of participants. However, this does not necessarily mean that gender issues or inequalities are resolved.”

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