Linkages and Leakages: NGO Engagements with Gender Mainstreaming and wildlife conservation

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Gender mainstreaming (GM) can potentially improve conservation outcomes because gender roles often shape values, knowledge, use, and access to and control of environmental resources. However, little is known about relevant ‘on-the-ground’ practices as they relate to the community-based wildlife conservation sector, an emerging key arena. Through a mixed-methods study of 52 NGO-led, community-based wildlife conservation projects in the Indian trans-Himalaya, central and lower Himalaya, and other Indian conservation areas, this paper examines project supervisors’ perceptions of the importance and effectiveness of GM in supporting their conservation outcomes. The results suggest that while there is widespread support among supervisors for integrating gender equity issues into wildlife conservation, many also believe that gender is a potentially distracting and secondary issue. Several reasons for the variation in views are identified including a dearth of relevant empirical research about gender issues in wildlife conservation, ambiguities about the concept of gender itself, and a lack of opportunity to critically and openly discuss the role of gender equity issues for conservation. In addition, while many projects are shown to include elements of GM (specifically, gender analysis and support for women’s empowerment), approaches tended to be ad-hoc and not empirically grounded. In illustrating various obstacles to GM objectives as well as concrete ways in which gender and conservation issues do intersect, the study ultimately suggests entry points through which a GM approach can be used to further support sustainable and equitable approaches to conservation in both mountain communities and beyond.