Gender and forests in Nicaragua's indigenous territories

From national policy to local practice

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Abstract

Local governance of natural resources is a key issue in the autonomous and inclusive development of indigenous territories. However, little attention has been given to the local dynamics that determine who governs what, especially gender dynamics. Through literature and field research, the study **'Gender, Tenure and Community Forests in Nicaragua'** aimed at providing insights into understanding how indigenous women participate in the management of forests and forest resources. The study consisted of two main components. The first of these involved key informant interviews and the analysis of secondary information, national and regional laws and policies, and nongovernmental organisation (NGO) and donor projects regarding gender and natural resource management. The second involved focus groups in 18 rural indigenous communities to analyse women's participation in forest-related decisions.

The study indicates that Nicaragua's laws and regulations on gender and on forests appear useful and reasonably comprehensive when considered separately; nevertheless, there are gaps between the two issues at all levels. That is, national laws are inclusive but have resulted in generic policies. Hence, to the extent that gender has been mainstreamed, it has made women's issues invisible; the result is a lack of particular or targeted actions that would lead to more comprehensive and holistic alternatives for women and for forests.

The study found that government actions on forests and natural resources, although mandated to include a crosscutting approach to gender, are diluted into larger development processes or remain at a simple quantification of men and women incorporated into projects (called 'affirmative actions'). There is little genuine analysis of women's roles or importance for more inclusive and balanced development processes by the state institutions or NGOs that are implementing projects in indigenous communities. Hence, the 'participation' that predominates is incipient and superficial, above all with regard to natural resources.

Although the study cannot give a precise answer regarding the degree of empowerment and interactive participation that occurs inside indigenous communities, in the majority of communities, those holding the power and decision-making posts are men. For example, there are very few successful experiences of women as *wihta* or *síndico* – the key positions with power over forests and other natural resources. NGOs and government entities have not yet contemplated the forest as an arena in which indigenous men and women are co-owners without distinction, in which to integrate equitable management institutions. A new vision for the management of forests means bringing in all of the community members who benefit from forests and forest resources; both communities and outside institutions need to reflect critically on their actions and activities and on their gendered assumptions regarding forests.

Acknowledgments

1. Introduction

The study **'Gender, Tenure and Community Forests in Nicaragua**' began in 2010 through a collaborative research process between the Nitlapan Research and Development Institute of the Central American University (UCA) and the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), with financing from the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). It is part of a comparative study that is also being undertaken in Uganda.

The Nicaragua research focuses on the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN). Nicaragua's two autonomous regions contain about 70% of the nation's forests and the vast majority of the country's indigenous population, who are in the process of obtaining formal title to their historic territories. The regional government has promoted community forestry in the RAAN, but the emphasis has been entirely on timber; women appear to play little role in forest management decisions.

The study was conducted in two parts. The first of these involved key informant interviews and the analysis of secondary information, national and regional laws and policies, and NGO and donor projects regarding the issue of gender and natural resource management. The second involved field research on women's participation in forest-related decisions in 18 rural indigenous communities. The study has produced interesting findings.

Nicaragua's laws and regulations on gender and on forests could be very useful separately, but there are gaps between the two themes at all levels. This has clear repercussions among institutions and local organisations, resulting in a lack of direct actions able to incorporate differentiated strategies for men and women in forest and natural resource management processes. Another issue is that national laws are inclusive but have resulted in generic policies. Hence, to the extent that gender has been mainstreamed, it has made women's issues invisible; the result is a lack of particular or targeted actions that would lead to more comprehensive and holistic alternatives for forests and for women.

This document has been organised as follows. Chapter 2 presents a brief description of the sociocultural particularities of the region and the communities where the research was undertaken. Chapter 3 defines the different methods used and introduces the community-level research sites. Chapter 4 presents the review of national laws and policies and of those specific to the autonomous regions. Chapter 5 presents the results of interviews with institutions and NGOs, while Chapter 6 presents the results of the field work with focus groups in the communities; in that chapter, examples will be explored from the field in light of Bina Agarwal's typology of participation (Agarwal 2001). Chapter 7 provides the main conclusions.

2. The North Atlantic Autonomous Region

Nicaragua's North and South Atlantic Autonomous Regions were established as a result of the approval in 1987 of the Autonomy Statute (Law 28). The two regions together make up 56.2% of the national territory (Envío 1981) and have a history that extends from being a relatively autonomous region, indirectly ruled by the British for over 200 years, to being run essentially by foreign investors with an enclave economy logic, to a slow insertion into the nation's *modus operandum* after the 1979 Sandinista Revolution. The North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN), where this study's research is focused (Figure 1), has an area of 32,159 km² and contains nearly 40% of the country's forests (INAFOR 2009), totalling 1.48 million hectares, including natural reserves and productive forests. The regional capital, Bilwi, is located 536 km from the national capital, Managua.

The regional capital houses the elected autonomous Regional Council and the Regional Government offices, which were also established under the Autonomy Law. In the autonomy process, some important decision-making powers have been transferred to the Regional Council, including certain decisions over forest and other natural resource management. Although the council has veto power over foreign investments, most decisions are made in coordination with central government ministries. The Regional Councils also receives a percentage of taxes on resource extraction.
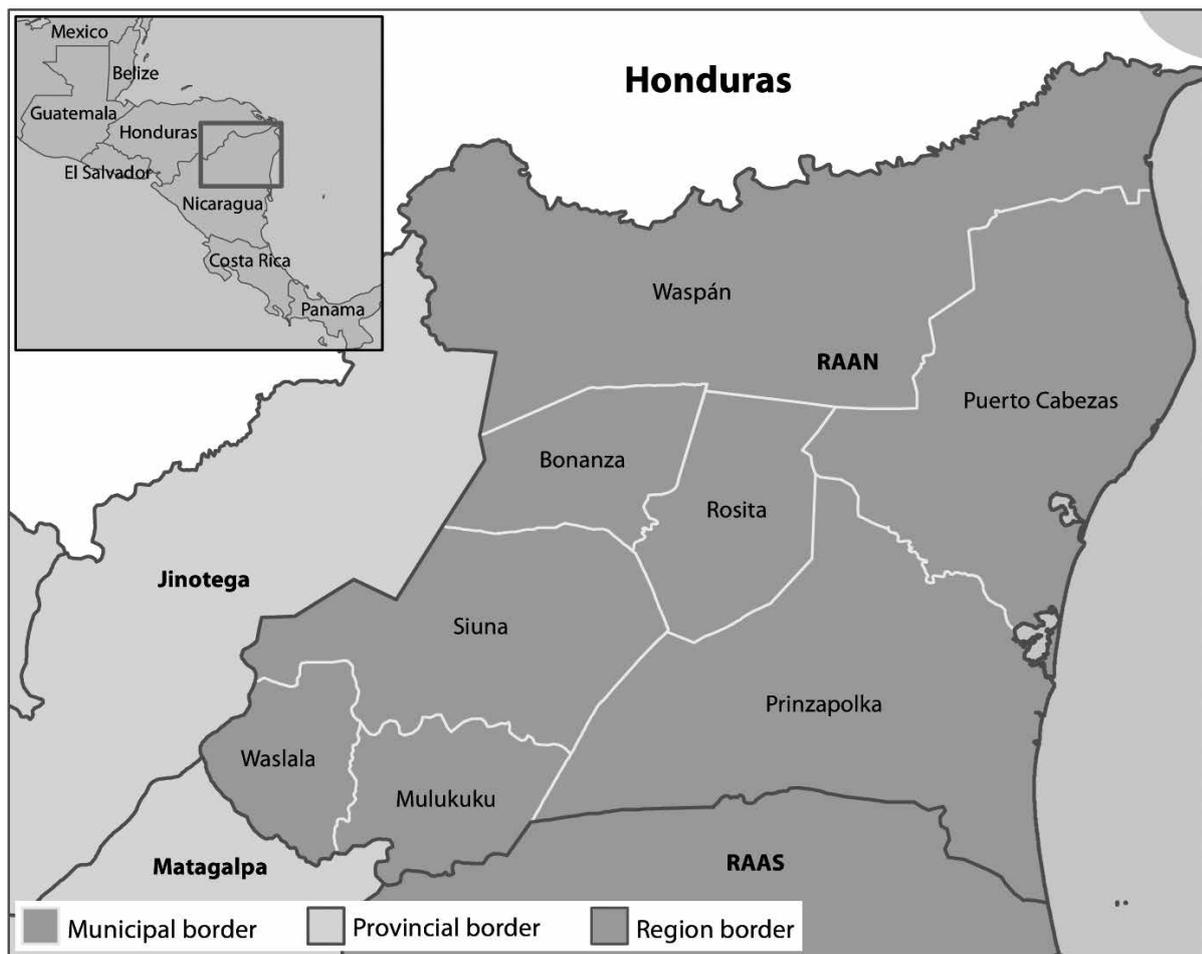
Figure 1. Political map of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN), Nicaragua

The RAAN has 19 indigenous territories, and almost all are now demarcated and titled (for more information, see Acosta 2010b, Larson and Mendoza-Lewis 2009). The formation of territories is a response to the implementation of laws recognising ancestral collective land tenure rights. The territories do not necessarily coincide with the municipal divisions of the region; hence, various territories cross municipal boundaries.

2.1 Demographics

According to the 2005 national census, the RAAN has a population of 314,130 inhabitants, 49.6% of whom are women. This overall population represents a 4.8% increase over the 1995 census, primarily because of a high immigration rate of farmers from the Pacific. With respect to geographic distribution, the RAAN's population is still predominantly rural, as only 28% of the total is found in urban areas (INIDE 2005). This is not only due to scant

migration to urban zones, but also to the fact that there are few urban zones, with Bilwi, in the municipality of Puerto Cabezas, the main urban centre for the whole region.

The 18 communities in the study are all rural, and only four exceed 1000 inhabitants (Table 1). This is an approximation, as not all communities studied were in the INIDE database. Males and females are roughly equal in number.

2.2 Indigenous economy

Most of the Miskitu and Mayangna indigenous communities studied have a subsistence economy based on production for family consumption. Productive activities include hunting, fishing and growing crops such as cassava, rice and banana/plantain varieties (*Musaceae*). There are few markets for the commercialisation of community agricultural production. According to Ocampo (2010), many

Table 1. Demographic data of the study communities

Communities	Population (both sexes)	Population by sex (in numbers)		Population by sex (in percentage)	
		Men	Women	Men	Women
Sahsa	1,647	827	820	50%	50%
Kisalaya	1,476	695	723	47%	49%
Alamikamba	1,272	625	647	49%	51%
San Carlos	1,055	513	542	49%	51%
Wasakin	918	456	462	50%	50%
Awas Tingni	873	432	441	49%	51%
Layasiksa	685	327	358	48%	52%
Tuapi	583	286	297	49%	51%
Miguel Bikan	575	289	286	50%	50%
Santa Fe	561	283	278	50%	50%
Mukuswas	359	186	173	52%	48%
Ispayul Ilna[a]	344	174	170	51%	49%
Fruta de Pan	263	136	127	52%	48%
Butku	n/a[b]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Karata	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Krukira	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Santo Tomas de Umbra	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Saupuka	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

a   The official name, as found on maps of the region, is Españolina, but we were unable to confirm the correct spelling; we have chosen to use the spelling seen on documents held by the territorial government.

b   Data not available.

Source: Calculations based on official INIDE data (2005)

of the RAAN's indigenous communities sell their products in Bilwi, while the communities in the Río Coco area sell their products mainly in the river city of Waspam. One aspect of the indigenous economy is that there are internal community and inter-community networks for the exchange of food products for subsistence.

2.3 Poverty

The RAAN is home to the poorest and least accessible municipalities in the country. The distance from Managua, as well as the history of policies that have virtually excluded or ignored the region, have had serious repercussions on the population's levels of development and access to basic services. Specifically, 58.4% of the region's population is classified as poor, with the poorest municipalities being Prinzapolka, Siuna, Waslala and Waspam, in which an average of about 67% of the population is considered poor (Ortega 2009).

In 11 of the 13 communities with national census data, over 50% of the population is in extreme poverty, while between 83% and 100% are classified as poor. In all 13 communities, over 66% of the population is poor (Table 2).

2.4 Education

The region has a higher illiteracy rate than the national average, at 36.2% (INIDE 2005). According to Ortega (2009), the educational sector of the RAAN has made significant progress since the Autonomous Regional Educational System (SEAR) was created, which stipulated fostering and applying bilingual and intercultural education relevant to the region's context. Nonetheless, the local educational structure has suffered the same challenges as the rest of the region's institutions in that the distance from the national capital makes the distribution and flow of resources and the necessary coordination among educational systems difficult.

This distance from the central government is reflected in relations with the Regional Government and Regional Council; hence, 'access to education [is] low in the rural communities compared to the number of school-aged children (66.7% of whom have no access to education), and 88.0% of the teachers do not have formal education training. The teacher–student relationship is 95-100 students per teacher' (Ortega 2009: 38).

Table 2. Poverty level in the study communities

Communities	Poverty level (% of population)		
	Non-extreme poor	Extreme poor	Total poverty
Alamikamba	0.5	99.5	100.0
San Carlos	14.6	82.5	97.1
Santa Fe	29.3	70.7	100.0
Mukuswas	29.6	68.5	98.1
Ispayul Ilna	33.3	66.7	100.0
Fruta de Pan	16.2	67.6	83.8
Miguel Bikan	25.0	64.8	89.8
Kisalaya	30.9	66.4	97.3
Awas Tingni	30.8	60.6	91.4
Sahsa	28.6	59.4	88.0
Wasakin	33.1	56.6	89.7
Layasiksa	37.4	31.3	68.7
Tuapi	36.3	30.1	66.4
Butku	n/aª	n/a	n/a
Karata	n/a	n/a	n/a
Krukira	n/a	n/a	n/a
Santo Tomas de Umbra	n/a	n/a	n/a
Saupuka	n/a	n/a	n/a

a   Data not available.

Source: INIDE (2005)

In most of the 18 communities in this study, the illiteracy rate is on average slightly lower than the regional rate, although illiteracy for both men and women exceeds 40% in Alamikamba (Table 3). The illiteracy rate of women is higher than that of men in most communities, and there are several cases in which the difference is more than 10 percentage points (such as in Ispayul Ilna, Miguel Bikan, and Tuapi).

2.5 Gender relations

The cultural logic defining gender relations in indigenous communities typically renders women's productive roles invisible. Their domestic roles are highlighted, particularly their roles as initial transmitters and socialisers of indigenous culture, despite their important roles in the communities' productive processes. There is clearly greater male representation in arenas of relations with actors outside the community and territories.

Table 3. Illiteracy in study communities

Communities	% of illiteracy		% of illiteracy 14- to 29-year-olds	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Alamikamba	41.5	43.5	34.7	34.8
Ispayul Ilna	20.4	39.8	16.9	22.8
Awas Tingni	35.2	43.2	11.7	17.1
Fruta de Pan	38.1	37.7	21.9	29.2
Mukuswas	31.7	35.8	13.2	18.8
Kisalaya	28.2	36.4	17.1	19.3
San Carlos	31.4	37.2	30.6	28.9
Sahsa	32.2	33.3	28.4	25.6
Wasakin	20.6	32.1	22.3	27.3
Miguel Bikan	19.4	30.3	15.6	14.7
Tuapi	13.6	25.8	17.3	20.5
Santa Fe	30.2	31.0	17.2	19.5
Layasiksa	20.9	31.0	4.5	7.7
Butku	n/a[a]	n/a	n/a	n/a
Karata	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Krukira	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Santo Tomas de Umbra	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Saupuka	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

a   Data not available.

Source: INIDE (2005)

This logic, however, has been marked by historical processes that have shaped the move to public spheres for indigenous women. In this respect Mairena (2009: 22) states that, '[t]he 1960s and 1970s led the way for change in coast society. During this period women (especially indigenous women) began participating in the demands for local rights, with their incorporation into arenas such as ALPROMISU, MISURASATA, MISURA, KISAN and later YATAMA and the female wing of AMICA'. (ALPROMISU, MISURASATA, MISURA, KISAN, YATAMA and AMICA are indigenous social movement and political organisations.) This participation became consolidated in the 1980s in decision-making arenas as a result of national reflection about the need to promote the participation of Nicaraguan women (García, cited in Mairena 2009).

In the wake of these processes, more attention has been paid to women's visibility in spheres in which they were traditionally invisible, such as politics. In the RAAN, women who had been closely linked to empowerment processes in governmental and political spheres now have positions of power in social and political arenas, but the process has moved more slowly at the community and territorial level with the still incipient incorporation of women in local positions of power such as the *wihta* (local Miskitu leader or judge) or *síndico* (community member in charge of land and natural resources).

In addition to formal political processes, women's role in family dynamics has begun to filter into decision-making about forest resource use, among other aspects of community life. Although in some ways limited to the domestic sphere, women are sometimes able to lift themselves into the public sphere through the interpersonal relations they have established or sustained with leaders, who are generally men. Some key informants mentioned this aspect superficially, but because it was not specifically discussed as 'participation' in forest decision-making, this aspect of women's participation in the community's life and future was not fully explored at the community level; this needs to be studied in greater depth.

3. Methodology

The research on gender, tenure and community forests in Nicaragua seeks to respond to three questions:

1. To what degree are women involved in forest-related decision-making processes, definition of agendas, and participation in benefits at different levels of governance, from the local to the district (or territorial) and regional scales? What are the major impediments to their participation?

2. Do governments (local, regional and national) and external actors such as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) support women's participation in community forest management? In what way and with what results?

3. What kind of governance arrangements, processes and structures can be designed to foster women's inclusion in community forestry? How would this affect the sustainability and benefits of forests?

To be able to properly analyse the country's legal architecture, a review of secondary information was defined as a priority for the first year of the project. This involved defining how and to what extent gender aspects are included in the arenas of civic participation and decision-making, as well as conducting a review of the legal framework that governs access, rights and the use of natural resources. This review also included consideration of the institutional frameworks and the policies they employ to promote gender equity in management of the forest and its resources. This is the topic of Chapter 4.

Primary data were also gathered through interviews with key actors from government and nongovernmental organisations working to promote a gender perspective and/or working in local natural resource management. The purpose was to explore whether support mechanisms and promotion of women's inclusion in forest use and management exist, how they function and their effectiveness. In total, 20 interviews were conducted with key informants, both in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) and in Managua

(a full list of interviews is provided as an appendix to this document). The methodological tool for information gathering was designed by the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), so it could be used in both Uganda and Nicaragua for comparative purposes. This is the topic of Chapter 5.

Information was also gathered with community actors from 18 communities of the RAAN (Table 4), the topic of Chapter 6. These communities were selected based on the following criteria:

1. Territories in five municipalities of the RAAN were selected, taking as a reference their distance from the region's administrative centre of Bilwi. This was intended to address the potential

Table 4. Distribution of the case studies

Municipality	Territory	Communities
Rosita	Tuahka	Wasakin
		Fruta de Pan
Bonanza	Matumbak	Ispayul Ilna
		Mukuswas
Prinzapolka	Prinsu Awala	Alamikamba
	Prinsu Auya Un	Layasiksa
Waspam	Tasba Raya/ Wangki Twi	Miguel Bikan
		Kisalaya
	Wangki Maya	Saupuka
	Wangki Li Aubra	Santa Fe
	Li Lamni Tasbaika Kum	San Carlos
		Santo Tomas de Umbra
	Awas Tingni	Awas Tingni
Puerto Cabezas	Diez Comunidades	Butku
		Tuapi
	Karata	Karata
	Tasba Pri	Sahsa
	Tawira	Krukira

effects of distance from the administrative centre on participation levels, and to assure a broad spectrum of causes of deforestation (from urban to agricultural frontier pressures, or proximity to natural reserves, such as Bosawas).

2. Territories and communities within each territory were selected to try to include communities with both high and low densities of NGOs and external agencies. We hypothesised that there were links between local levels of participation (and of social capital) and such features in the broader society. Although we intended to choose extremes to maximise the variation in levels of participation, this variable turned out to be very difficult to assess from outside the community, and our original classifications had to be adjusted.

3. We sought to include different types of land tenure – private/individual, communal and state (or protected areas, given that there are no purely state areas, as there are in Uganda) – with the understanding that communal land is by far the most common.

Some characteristics of the communities selected are listed in Table 5. We included the territory of Tasba Raya as an example of individual private forests (although there is also a collective title). We also

Table 5. Characteristics of the case study sites

Communities	Municipality	Indigenous group	Distance from urban centre	Type of tenure	Stage of titling	Density of organisations
Wasakin	Rosita	Mayangna	Far	Communal	Titled	Medium
Fruta de pan	Rosita	Mayangna	Far	Communal	Titled	Medium
Santa Fe	Waspam	Miskitu	Far	Communal	Titled	High
Umbra	Waspam	Mayangna	Very Far	Communal & 'State' (protected area nucleus)	Titled	Low
Awas Tingni	Waspam	Mayangna	Medium	Communal	Titled	Medium
Mukuswas	Bonanza	Mayangna	Far	Communal & 'State' (protected area buffer zone)	Titled	Medium
Miguel Bikan	Waspam	Miskitu	Far	Communal & Private	Titled	High
San Carlos	Waspam	Miskitu	Very Far	Communal & 'State' (protected area nucleus)	Titled	Medium
Tuapi	Puerto Cabezas	Miskitu	Close	Communal	Titled	Medium
Karata	Puerto Cabezas	Miskitu	Close	Communal	Titled	Medium
Ispayul Ilna	Rosita	Mayangna	Close	Communal & 'State' (protected area buffer zone)	Titled	Medium
Alamikamba	Prinzapolka	Miskitu	Close	Communal	In process	High
Layasiksa	Prinzapolka	Miskitu	Close	Communal	In process	Medium
Kisalaya	Waspam	Miskitu	Far	Communal	Titled	High
Saupuka	Waspam	Miskitu	Far	Communal	Titled	Medium
Butku	Puerto Cabezas	Miskitu	Close	Communal	Titled	High
Sahsa	Puerto Cabezas	Miskitu	Medium	Communal & Private	In process	High
Krukira	Puerto Cabezas	Miskitu	Close	Communal	Titled	Medium

included communities of the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve – two in the protected area nucleus and two in the buffer zone – as those representing more state involvement. In terms of communal lands, already-titled forest areas were chosen in the territory of Matumbak, which has forested areas in dispute, as well as other areas in the process of being titled.

3.1 Community-level information gathering: Focus groups

We conducted focus group discussions for information gathering, which allowed a rapid exploration of different community perceptions about women's participation in the management of forest resources. In line with the original CIFOR-designed tool, 'user groups' from the different forest ownership regimes (i.e. private, community and state forests) needed to be chosen. In our Nicaragua research, we considered 'user group' to be the same as 'community', as the community has collective rights to the forest. Hence, the focus groups included a variety of community members, with an emphasis on those who work more directly with the forest, such as those linked to community forestry. The focus groups sought to explore local realities and participation and access mechanisms.

To implement the field work, we contracted and trained local professionals (both female and male, and from the two main indigenous groups, Miskitu and Mayangna), so that the process could take place in local people's mother tongues and in order to gain greater access to the communities. The field work was done simultaneously with 18 research groups.

Before conducting the field work, the facilitators consulted with communal authorities for permission to conduct the research in all 18 communities. The facilitators first introduced themselves to a member of the 'board of directors' and requested a meeting with the largest number of members possible to explain the objectives of their visit. Once the authorities endorsed the activity, they were asked to invite different women and men from the community to focus groups that would address issues related to community history and livelihood activities. In some cases, such as in Mayangna communities, facilitators requested access through the territorial authorities as well as the communal authorities, given the nature of the governance structures in those territories. It is important to mention that the research team

already had experience in some of the communities where the case studies were done, such as Layasiksa and Butku. This eased the process of dialogue and acceptance of the research by communal leaders.

The focus groups were conducted with men and women separately, and divided into two age groups (18 to 35 years, and over 35), for a total of four focus groups. Efforts were made to include community leaders (*síndico*, *wihta*, presidents) in order to hear their voices alongside those of other community members. It is important to note that while the presence of community leaders may have affected some responses, the most important topics of interest were not particularly controversial, and the diversity of information generated and subsequent discussions with the research teams helped to address possible biases.

3.2 Adaptation of the methodological tool

The use of the methodological tool in the local context required adaptation to take into account the characteristics of the target population. The question guide was first translated from English to Spanish, and later from Spanish to Miskitu and Mayangna. It had 30 questions that ranged from the general community context to the specific use of the forest, focusing on mechanisms of participation and decision-making regarding forests. First, the questions were reorganised to maintain a logical flow of responses and avoid repetitions that could confuse the informants. Extreme care was taken to minimise modification of the questions, in order to retain comparability with the research results in Uganda.

The questions were divided into four thematic blocs (with further subdivision of the second bloc):
- Knowledge of the community
- Community organisation and its participation mechanisms
- Understanding the terms
- Participation
- Decision-making
- Conflicts and resolution
- Intercommunity coordination
- Mapping of actors (organisations) and their roles
- Uses and benefits of the forest

Then, in the interests of making the methodology as accessible as possible, strategies were established to make the discussion process more inclusive and dynamic. It was agreed to use community maps and timeline techniques to construct the history of the community and matrices so that the participants could jointly respond to the questions in the research tool. We also agreed that each focus group would be divided into four subgroups, with each one working on one of the thematic blocs of guide questions. Afterwards the answers would be presented to the other groups to discuss and enrich the information collectively. The consolidated information obtained from each community was generated by this discussion among all subgroups. Each subgroup ranged from four to five community members.

The factors taken into account to adapt the application of the tool were as follows.

1. The available time for conducting the focus groups: this depended not only on the research time but also on limiting interference with community members' other responsibilities.

2. The diverse characteristics of the community members: given that not all participants could read and write in their own language, much less in Spanish, we used techniques that ensured greater participation, such as speaker maps, timelines and matrices of actors in the community, to address the different themes. Speaker maps consist of drawings made by a smaller group; these are later explained in plenary to the rest of the attendees for feedback and associated comments. These techniques created a space in which all participants could contribute and construct the results together.

4. The legal architecture of Nicaragua: Natural resources and gender

In general, the country's laws are focused on supporting the overall wellbeing, social order and progress of Nicaragua's citizens. In no law that we examined is there open discrimination regarding the actions of men and women, and most have the objective of promoting equality and gender equity, so that each individual can participate in the construction of development alternatives for the country. The majority of the laws reviewed are 'gender blind', and they include women explicitly but abstractly, such that all men and women are defined as equal before the law. Many national regulations are based on international agreements and conventions that the Nicaraguan state has signed and ratified. A full list of the laws, policies and regulations reviewed is included as an appendix to this document.

4.1 International agreements

The Nicaraguan state has ratified the following international instruments regarding women's human rights. The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) prescribes that the state must contribute to eliminating violence against women and provide tools so they can claim their rights and have access to public arenas without distinction of any kind. While Nicaragua ratified CEDAW in 1981, it is one of six Latin American countries that have not ratified the 1999 Optional Protocol and one of three that have not signed it. The Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, 'Convention of Belem do Para', was signed in 1993 and obliges the signatory states to condemn violence against women and prohibit any custom, tradition or religious creed that impedes compliance with its duty to eliminate violence. To this end, the state must abstain from practising violence against women, as well as prevent, investigate and punish any act of violence against them, be these acts perpetrated by the state or by individuals. In the International Conferences on Population and Development, as well as in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995, Beijing+5 and Beijing+10), the state has signed and acknowledged sexual violence, rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution and obliged pregnancies to be crimes against humanity.

With respect to the ratification of international agreements on the protection of natural resources, Nicaragua ratified the Convention of Biological Biodiversity in 1995, and, as a result, the National Biodiversity Strategy was defined in February 2000, an instrument focused on six objectives:

1. to improve conservation, considering its integral role in the country's development
2. to promote the economic viability of biodiversity, considering its wealth and economic value, as well as the repair of environmental degradation in the country
3. to improve the country's field research capacity
4. to provide monitoring and technical advice for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiverse resources
5. to develop and implement tools that develop the country's response capacity regarding environmental degradation
6. to develop and implement legal tools that improve the national response to the degradation of biodiversity and promote respect for the environment within Nicaraguan society, including through incentives and by changing attitudes toward sustainable management of the country's biological resources.

In relation to actions defined following the signing of the Biological Diversity Convention, several measures were taken jointly by Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Honduras, paving the way for the creation of two cross-border initiatives: the Meso-American Biological Corridor (CBM) and restoration of the San Juan River. Other conventions that Nicaragua has signed include the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species, signed in 1973 and ratified in 1977, and the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, directed toward the protection of the habitat of aquatic birds, signed in 1971 and ratified in 1997.

Finally and most recently, Nicaragua signed Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization, which refers to the world's indigenous peoples. This convention was ratified in 2010 and went into effect in 2011. It functions as a guide for the protection of indigenous rights parallel to the Nicaraguan autonomy statute at the national level. There is no specific mention of indigenous women other than in the sphere of equal opportunity in access to employment.

4.2 National laws

4.2.1 General laws

The Political Constitution of the Republic of Nicaragua

The Political Constitution of the Republic of Nicaragua (1987) establishes equality between men and women. Article 4 defines that the state will promote and ensure social and political progress to ensure the common good, assuming the task of promoting the human development of each and every Nicaraguan, and protecting them against all forms of exploitation, discrimination and exclusion. Article 27 defines that all individuals are equal under the law and have the right to equal protection. There will be no discrimination by reason of birth, nationality, political creed, race, sex, language, religion, opinion, origin, economic position or social condition. Article 48 establishes the unconditional equality of all Nicaraguans in the enjoyment and exercise of their political rights and absolute equality between men and women in the fulfilment of their duties and responsibilities. It is the obligation of the state to eliminate the obstacles that in practice impede equality among Nicaraguans and their participation in the political, economic and social life of the country. Regarding the environment, Article 60 establishes that Nicaraguans have the right to live in a healthy environment, which it is the responsibility of the state to ensure.

The Constitution is the foundation of the country's laws, decrees and policies, and it is thus observed that national legislation generally has an inclusive nature, in which it is understood that the obligations and rights stipulated in all articles that are not specifically targeted to either men or women are meant to apply to both men and women.

Law of Equal Rights and Opportunities

The Law of Equality of Rights and Opportunities (Law 648) was approved on 14 February 2008, and went into effect on 12 March 2008, with its publication in the government legal gazette No. 51. The objectives of the law are defined in Article 1:

- to promote equality and equity between women and men in the enjoyment of civil, political, economic, social and cultural human rights
- to establish the general principles underlying public policies aimed at guaranteeing the effective exercise of real equality in the application of the juridical standard in effect between women and men to ensure women's full development
- to establish the fundamental mechanisms through which all public administrative bodies and other branches of the state, and regional and municipal governments, ensure the effective equality of women and men.

This law defines the actions necessary for the promotion of equal opportunities between men and women with the objective of eliminating all possible inequality and discrimination for reasons of gender in the economic, public, private, social and sexual spheres. It establishes actions and measures to promote empowerment and equity processes through the development of employment policies, and resource and environment dispositions. Chapter VI, on the environment, stipulates that the policy of the national institution in charge of environmental affairs (currently the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources) must:

- guarantee the adoption of equal opportunities based on the incorporation of the gender approach as a crosscutting focus in the country's environmental policy, through awareness building and training programmes as regards equity and equality between women and men involved in environmental activities (Article 29, point 1)
- guarantee the participation of men and women in the formulation and implementation of actions to protect and manage natural resources
- define criteria that seek equal opportunities for women and men in access to and the management, use and control of natural resources and the environment

- develop gender methodologies, statistics and indicators with a system for implementing them in environmental management
- assess the impact of the policies for residents
- promote financing for environmental management with funds administered or co-administered by women.

Chapter VI also identifies the National Institute of Women as the lead body for the application of and follow-up to public policies with a gender approach (Article 30).

Law of Promotion of the Comprehensive Development of Youth (Law 392)

This law was passed in 2002 and focuses on promoting the equality, equity, rights and duties of young men and women in Nicaraguan society, on defining actions in the political sphere, and on creating employment and policies for integrating young people into the country's development. This law results from the fact that over 50% of the population is under 25 years of age.

Municipalities Law (Law 40-261)

The Municipalities Law (Law 40-261) defines the mechanism for implementing municipal government actions. This law is inclusive in nature, with a commitment to implement actions promoting the undifferentiated participation of men and women. It also defines that the communities in the autonomous regions have the right to organise equitably, with no discrimination, to comply with social, political, economic, religious and environmental objectives in the different municipalities of the autonomous regions.

Law Creating the National Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Response System (Law 337)

Law 337, approved on 8 March 2000, went into effect on 7 April 2000. This law defines the response capacity of state bodies aimed at reducing risks, emphasising as a main objective the prevention, mitigation and response to the population of natural disasters that could occur in the country. This law does not define specific mechanisms for responding to groups normally defined as the most vulnerable, e.g. women, but it does define in general the response to the whole population.

General Law of Health (Law 423)

Law 423 was passed on 14 May 2002, and went into effect that same month. Its objective is to protect the rights of people to enjoy, conserve and recover their health. Article 32 refers to the health of women, children and adolescents in alignment with the Health Ministry's Program of Comprehensive Attention to Women, Children and Adolescents. The programme includes actions of pre- and post-natal control, attention to birth and the newborn, early detection of cervical and breast cancer, as well as actions for sexual and reproductive health. Article 69 refers to the relationship between health and the environment, defining that environmental sanitation includes promotion, education, improvement, control and management of noise, water quality, liquid and solid waste and air treatment, sanitary surveillance of risk factors and adequacy to ensure environmental health in all spheres of life, as well as the fostering of scientific research on these issues. The Regulations to the Health Law, approved in 2003, define that health care must be equitable for men and women.

4.2.2 Laws in the sphere of natural resources

The national laws in the sphere of natural resources are separated between those directed by the Ministry of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARENA) and those by the National Forestry Institute (INAFOR). According to Faurby (2007), they are two entities with policies and regulations that often overlap and contradict each other, but in essence, both the forestry policies and those of the protected areas have a conservationist bent.

General Law of the Environment and Natural Resources (Law 217)

This law was passed in 1996, and recognises in a general way that the environment constitutes the primordial heritage for humanity, and thus the law advocates rational, equitable and sustainable uses of natural resources. The law defines the importance of considering the country's cultural diversity and the recognised rights of the residents of the Atlantic Coast autonomous regions. Article 109 mentions the right of all inhabitants to enjoy a healthy environment and their duty to contribute to the preservation of natural resources as a mechanism for preventing erosion of the quality of life. This article is parallel to Article 60 of the Political Constitution

of Nicaragua, where reference is made to the fact that Nicaraguans have the right to live in a healthy environment and it is the state's obligation to preserve, conserve and restore the environment and the natural resources.

MARENA is defined as the regulatory authority responsible for enforcing the law. Among other defined responsibilities is its mandate over environmental impact assessments and follow-up to the management plans of protected areas. It is thus one of the authorities that governs natural resources at the national level. It is worth noting that a certain gender perspective is provided through the policies promoted at the central state level; one example is an internal policy, mentioned by Miriam Rojas from INAFOR, that mandates all state institutions to include men and women in their activities, such as in training workshops, consultation meetings, etc. (M. Rojas, interview, February 2011).

Law of Conservation, Promotion and Sustainable Development of the Forestry Sector (Law 462)

The forestry law went into effect in September 2003 and its regulations in November 2003. It is geared to the sustainable use of forestry resources based on management and exploitation, taking into account the aspects of conservation and preservation.

Logging permits are issued by INAFOR, and must take into account authorities such as MARENA and municipal mayoral offices. In the autonomous regions, the Regional Council must approve all logging permits; in practice, this means coordinating with authorities such as the Secretariat of Natural Resources (SERENA) and the Forestry-Environmental Consultative Council (CCF-A). Certain problems result from the fact that forest exploitation in protected areas is defined as being under the mandate of MARENA. The law has grey areas that occasionally make it difficult for local actors to engage in a positive environmental process. This law does not refer to gender or to women.

Law of Moratorium on the Cutting, Exploitation and Commercialisation of the Forest Resource (Law 585)

The logging moratorium law was approved on 7 June 2006, and went into effect on 21 June 2006. The law refers to the importance of the country's forestry resources and defines a moratorium of 10 years for

the following species: mahogany, cedar, *pochote*, pine, mangrove and *ceibo* (cockspur coral tree). There is an exception for the pine forests of Nueva Segovia, Jinotega and the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN).

The law states that in protected areas, the moratorium will be permanent and indefinite and applies to all forest species except for those harvested for domestic use. The moratorium was created under the government of President Bolaños (2001–2006), which was apparently responding to the country's high deforestation levels at that time (reportedly about 70,000 hectares a year). Even so, the passing of this law in a country whose governmental authorities lack human resources and financial capacity could have negative impacts and even serve as a perverse incentive that encourages an illegal timber trade. There is no mention of gender.

4.3 Laws for the Atlantic Coast autonomous regions of Nicaragua

4.3.1 Autonomy Statute of the Atlantic Coast Regions of Nicaragua (Law 28) and its Regulatory Law

National laws specifically directed at the Autonomous Regions include the Autonomy Statute and the Communal Property Law. The autonomy statute (Law 28) was approved in 1987, and its regulations were passed in 2003. The law recognizes the country's ethnic pluralism and the political, economic, social and cultural rights of the inhabitants of the Coast regions. It also promotes sustainable natural resource use and states that indigenous community lands are inalienable and imprescriptible. The law provides regional autonomous governments with important decision-making powers, which are elaborated much further in the regulations, over the region's natural resources.

The regulations define mechanisms for the internal organisation of the autonomous governments and their responsibilities. Article 28 refers to the obligation of the Regional Council to create an entity that will ensure the effective and systematic participation of regional, municipal and communal women's organisations in the process of defining policies and preparing and executing plans and projects developed in the autonomous regions. This same entity is charged with promoting the equitable

participation of women in leadership posts in both Council and Government offices.

Chapter IV, on the rational use of communal water, forests and lands and defence of ecological systems, requires research processes that will provide real data for use in defining regional policies on this issue. It also emphasises the importance of interinstitutional relations for environmental management of and respect for traditional land tenure norms.

Although the law recognises the importance of women in the process of consolidating autonomy, it is understood that gender as an issue must crosscut all actions in the region as part of the search for more equitable processes; there is no clear or specific mention of women's participation in natural resource management and administration.

4.3.2 Law of the Communal Property Regime of the Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Communities of the Atlantic Coast Autonomous Regions of Nicaragua and of the Coco, Indio and Maíz Rivers (Law 445)

The communal property law was created to regulate the property regime of the indigenous territories, recognising communal tenure and ownership rights, as well as the use, administration and management of traditional indigenous lands and natural resources. The law defines the legal mechanisms necessary for recognising and creating the entities that will provide follow-up and lead the process. There is no specific mention of gender issues or women, but there is a crosscutting precept in the law requiring a search for equitable processes for the region's population.

4.4 National and regional policies

4.4.1 National policies

National Human Development Policy: 2009–2011

The national human development policy was presented for the first time in 2008 and the current version was presented in September 2009. It defines the following aspects as fundamental principles: (i) the renewed role of the state in direct actions in economic, social, environmental and cultural spheres; (ii) a social policy with more direct content in favour of the poor; (iii) a social response expressed in a prioritised infrastructure policy; (iv) capital accumulation for the poor with programs highly

concentrated on food production; (v) continuation of the energy policy prioritising renewable energy programs; (vi) guarantees to private investment and the pledge to maintain a climate of coordination with the private sector; (vii) continuing dialogue with the international community in the search for consensus and solidarity in commercial and financial aspects; and (viii) the strengthening of the democratic process.

The priority themes laid out are: economic growth (macroeconomic policy, public investment policy and a productive and commercial strategy), the development of wellbeing and social equity, measures for good public administration, environmental sustainability and forestry development, a policy for dealing with disasters of natural origin and those generated by human endeavour, and a development strategy for the Caribbean Coast.

The issues of environmental sustainability and forestry development are incorporated into the national development plan with the objective of contributing to human development; restoring ancestral cultural values of respect for natural resources and restoring lost habitat; and education via values of responsibility, solidarity and equity for the safeguarding of the natural patrimony. The position on the development strategy for the Caribbean Coast is defined as an integral part of the national human development plan and one of the most important pillars of the country's poverty reduction strategy.

The theme on the environment and natural disasters incorporates aspects such as a national reforestation crusade and natural resources restoration. Gender crosscuts the entire policy.

National Policy of Sustainable Development of the Forestry Sector of Nicaragua

Decree No. 69-2008 was approved in November 2008 and published in the official gazette No. 3 in January 2009. It identifies forestry governance, decentralisation, deconcentration and 'regionalisation' as crosscutting foci, as well as territorial planning of forestry resources. Article 16 of Section III on Community Forestry of Indigenous Peoples, Afro-descendants and Ethnic Communities calls for the promotion of community forestry and sustainable management of forests as a mechanism to improve the quality of life of indigenous peoples,

Afro-descendants and ethnic communities, accompanied by a fostering of communal business capacities and community forestry certification. Nonetheless, there is no reference to a potential gender perspective or mention of women.

National Gender Equity Program

The National Gender Equity Program, or Decree 36-2006, was approved in June 2006 and published in the official government gazette No. 139 on 18 July 2006. Its objective is to promote gender equity between Nicaraguan women and men during the five-year period of 2006–2010. The programme seeks to create conditions that generate gender equity improvements in areas such as the eradication of violence, promotion of education, health, employment, access to and control of productive economic resources and political participation, and to lay the basis for promoting a systematic and sustainable mainstreaming of gender equity. The Nicaraguan Institute of Women is the entity in charge of following up on implementation of the mainstreaming of the gender approach in governmental institutions.

4.4.2 Regional policies

Caribbean Coast Development Plan and Strategy: 'En Route to Human Development'

This plan seeks to revitalise cultural identity and communal life as a means of improving the living conditions and wellbeing of the Caribbean Coast population, which has been identified as the most excluded in the country. To that end it promotes the improvement of human development conditions in three different spheres: economic, political and social.

The objective is to develop an economic, political and social reality that strengthens the rights of the North and South Atlantic autonomous regions' inhabitants by providing basic human services with quality, equitable and fair productive opportunities supported by a dynamic and articulating autonomous civic power; by increasing the populations' socioeconomic wellbeing; by achieving an equitable, sustainable and harmonic economic transformation between human beings and nature; and by strengthening autonomous institutions that strengthen human development in the Caribbean region.

For the latter, emphasis is placed on the following aspects: reduction of illiteracy; security of property rights; equitable, sustainable and harmonic economic transformation developed between human beings and nature; and strengthened autonomous institutional development. To achieve these, three elements are defined as crosscutting foci in the different programmes: equity of gender, children, youth and seniors; climate change; and environmental vulnerability and risk management.

Forestry Development Strategy of the North Atlantic Autonomous Region

The forestry development strategy covers the 2002–2024 period and is currently being updated through an initiative among government actors, civil society and international cooperation agencies (GIZ). The 2004 version combines a number of action plans and indicators for fostering forestry and forest management processes in the region with active participation by the sectors involved. Communities are prioritised as forest owners, with an eye to consolidating community and industrial forestry development processes. These processes are to be based on the local economy, where sustainable forest management and the production of goods and services from forests contribute significantly to poverty reduction, and solving issues of natural resource deterioration, the vulnerability of the region and consequently human development. The strategies specifically defined in this policy do not incorporate a gender approach.

Gender Policy in the Context of the Indigenous Peoples and Multiethnic Communities of the RAAN

The gender equality policy was approved in 2010. Its objective is to create conditions for the effective empowerment of women and their insertion into the social, economic, political and cultural life of the region through the promotion of gender equality between women and men in all aspects of life of the Miskitu, Mayangna, Creole and Mestizo peoples and communities.

Reference is made to the different concepts necessary for implementation of the policy, defining gender practices in public policies as those initiatives that help promote equality between women and men and support the processes of incorporating women into local decision-making arenas and that strengthen

women's capacity and recognition as active subjects in the country's development. Five strategic guidelines are defined for implementation of the policy.

1. Eliminate the political, economic, social, environmental and cultural inequalities that women and men of the RAAN experience for reasons of gender, ethnicity or age, incorporating gender practices into public institutions.

2. Foster capacities of women and men of the RAAN with regard to management knowledge and instruments for local and regional development, applying gender practices in accordance with multiethnic needs and characteristics.

3. Adjust the regional planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation system applied by the regional administrative bodies (the North Atlantic Autonomous Regional Government (GRAAN) and the North Atlantic Autonomous Regional Council (CRAAN), mayors' offices, territories, districts and communities) to a context that ensures public administration with the participation of women and men and the incorporation of improved gender practices.

4. Establish forms of relationships in public administration in which equal gender rights as regards participating, influencing and decision making are recognised in such a way that men and women are subjects of their own development.

5. Transform the administration system, eradicating the judicial, economic, social and institutional barriers that hinder the participation of women and men of all indigenous peoples and ethnic communities.

To that end, it is CRAAN and GRAAN, through their respective Commission and Secretariat of Women, Children and the Family, that will follow up on the process of incorporating these actions into the governmental entities.

In summary, the policies and regulations that focus on gender equity are relatively new, with the demands for gender equity gradually being integrated into national and regional policies and development processes. The gender equity paradigm and emphasis on working with women have focused strongly on aspects of gender violence and health and not on processes of economic, social and political empowerment, which would provide arenas for incorporating women into national and regional decision-making exercises or managerial posts. This problem is exemplified in the laws and policies that were reviewed, which most often separate gender equity policies from those aimed at developing the forest sector or managing natural resources. Gender equity is still a process under construction, and even more so in these arenas, where men have been seen as the decision-makers, while women's participation has been more circumspect and invisible.

5. Institutional implementation on gender and forests

This chapter examines gender and women's participation at the level of institutions and organisations working in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN), particularly with regard to forests. This includes state offices, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), donors and projects, and, as mentioned earlier, is mostly based on interviews.

5.1 Concepts of participation

According to the typology of Bina Agarwal (2001: 1623), there are six levels of participation:

- **nominal participation**, which refers only to the individual's presence as a group member
- **passive participation,** when an individual expresses a point of view without making decisions
- **consultative participation,** when the individual gives an opinion on specific issues but does not necessarily influence the decisions
- **active-specific participation**, when the person voluntarily undertakes specific tasks or is requested to do so
- **active participation,** in which the individual expresses an opinion and takes the initiative in diverse matters whether requested to or not
- **interactive participation** (empowering), when the individual takes the initiative on diverse matters and influences group decisions.

Unfortunately, the way in which 'participation' has been approached by many outside organisations in RAAN communities appears to have reinforced the perception within communities that simply being present is 'participating'.

The organisations and institutions interviewed for this study mentioned some of Agarwal's concepts in their general understanding of 'participation' in the context of natural resource management. In the opinion of one researcher in the region, '*Participation for me isn't just coming and occupying spaces in the assemblies, but taking leadership posts, doing real and objective concrete advocacy; for me that's participation,*

but if you go and aren't taken into account and your opinions and criteria and vision aren't taken into account to develop the policies that the interests of a community or territory then direct, then that's not participation, it's just padding' (A. Bonilla, interview, December 2010).

For Bonilla, the participation that women currently exercise in the communities is not something that flows from community interests. It obeys the need to meet requisites defined by outside actors for the development activities they implement at the local level; it is not a process of community understanding that promotes equitable participation in the decision-making arenas within communities. '*Women "participate" in the governance processes in my judgment because the NGOs, within their own structures and policies, impose women's participation on the territorial government*' (A. Bonilla, interview, December 2010).

In the majority of cases, women's participation in natural resource management is seen as related to activities of forest resource extraction for consumption and domestic use – in activities related to the extraction of firewood or medicinal plants or seeds. However, there are also other forms of participation: in the communal assemblies when decisions are being made about land use planning, women's proposals tend to be more conservation oriented. In that respect, another researcher, J. Mendoza (interview, February 2011) states that men make decisions based on simple economic calculations; that is, they reflect less on whether or not to sell something and do not think much about the possible consequences.

Participation is a term that is '*debated at all levels, even in communities, where people say, "I'm participating because I come to a workshop", or "I come to an event", but really it's not determinant*' (G. López, interview). There has been little effort by public or private institutions to promote initiatives that generate more empowering conceptions of participation within communities. The institutions and agencies are aware of the comparatively passive practices and conceptions about how participation

is understood in communities; they know that 'participation' is considered an arena, such as communal assemblies, for listening and finding out what their representatives aspire to or have implemented for the community. In other words, there is no rapprochement between the community authorities and community members to encourage an active negotiation process from below.

The Center for Research and Development of the Atlantic Coast (CIDCA) has made an effort to conceptualise and accompany members of Mayangna indigenous communities to define what participation is from an indigenous vision. This has triggered a certain awareness, observed in what the CIDCA representative defines as a gradual recognition of the capacities of Mayangna women as holders of valid opinions.

Institutions such as CIDCA consider participation to require a combination of characteristics, such as having influence when giving opinions, voice and vote, and having the initiative to influence decisions and promote positive changes in their surroundings, as well as the disposition to participate – in other words, what Agarwal (2001) calls empowering or interactive participation. However, participation in communities is still incipient and even more so for community women. Empowering or interactive participation is limited to certain leaders or individuals. Women's participation is defined by predominating sociocultural parameters that limit active participation and accept more passive roles.

Women's participation in natural resource management in the RAAN, from the perspective of the institutions that have had experience working in the different indigenous communities, is predominantly passive, only involving their physical presence. There are, however, specific cases where women have succeeded in influencing decision-making as leaders and have been legitimised as communal and even territorial authorities.

5.2 Institutional resources for promoting a gender perspective

5.2.1 State institutions

The existence of a gender policy is a recent development among the main institutions governing the forestry sector from both the central state and regional political structures (Table 6). The central government began to apply a gender strategy no more than two years ago. Formally, since the approval of the Law of Equal Rights and Opportunities (Law 648) in February 2008, the gender issue has been institutionalised through the preparation of gender policies at other levels, such as the case of the RAAN government and Regional Council.

In this specific case, its application corresponds not only to Law 648 but is also endorsed by the Autonomy Statute, the point of departure for any legal framework in the RAAN. In that regard, the document that describes the gender policy states:

> 'The gender equality policy is a regional policy, covering, in accordance with Article 15 of the autonomy law, the administrative bodies – [Regional Council] CRAAN, [Regional Government] GRAAN, seven municipalities, the indigenous territories, the communities, neighborhoods and districts of indigenous peoples and ethnic communities – as well as the political, religious, social, governmental and nongovernmental organisations whose sphere of activity is the RAAN' (GRAAN n.d.).

It should be stressed that the RAAN's gender policy was not approved until 2010 and was based on an institutional assessment headed by the Regional Government's Secretariat of Women and the Regional Council's Commission of Women, Youth, Children and Family. Beyond the recently approved policy, however, both the CRAAN and the GRAAN still face challenges to establish mechanisms that will ensure implementation of the policy in the different levels mentioned, beginning with intra-institutional coordination both among secretariats in the GRAAN and among commissions in the CRAAN. Institutional application of the policy depends on follow-up and monitoring that is expected to be led by one of the two bodies that drafted the policy. In this regard, a member of the natural resources secretariat stated:

> 'It is understood that the scope of the actions of the Secretariat of Women, despite being a promoter of the gender policy, remains limited to issues such as gender violence and defense of women's rights, without having a mechanism that allows it to ensure application of the gender policy in all secretariats of the regional government' (D. Zamora, interview, March 2011).

Another limitation facing the GRAAN and the CRAAN is that the governance process in the autonomous regions is still under construction, both regarding institutional mechanisms and human capital. Both the CRAAN's Commission of Women and the GRAAN's Secretariat of Women lack sufficient trained personnel to undertake the implementation of the new policies and proposals in the territories. This is also reflected in the lack of indicators for follow-up and the lack of personnel dedicated specifically to preparing and monitoring the policies. In any event, the existence of such resources is further limited by the lack of a specific budget for gender matters, with the small budget limited to such areas as defence of women's right to live free of violence, a central topic in the work of the Secretariat of Women. The lack of a specific budget for gender matters is also true of many other secretariats of the GRAAN.

With respect to the general application of the gender strategy, both state institutions and NGOs are informed either by an ill-defined notion of women's inclusion in their work or by a vision of numerical equity, i.e. an equal number of female and male participants. Numerical equity is stipulated in the law of equality of rights and opportunities with respect to state hiring regulations, which promotes the hiring of an equal number of women and men (M. Rojas, interview, February 2011). This generalised application risks the reduction of the gender approach to a quantitative issue, limiting the analysis needed to understand the relations between men and women at the different levels of decision-making.

Finally, the Forestry-Environmental Consultative Council (CCF-A) is an authority recognised by the CRAAN and GRAAN and the National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR) as the arena for dialogue and activity of the forestry and environment sectors (see Figure 2). It articulates the participation of national, regional, municipal, territorial and communal public institutions, private enterprise, universities and NGOs on these issues.

The CCF-A actively functions as a multisectoral body coordinated by the Natural Resources Commission (CARENA) of the CRAAN and the Secretariat of Natural Resources (SERENA) of the GRAAN. Participation in this committee is free and voluntary. Each state and nongovernmental institution that is part of the CCF-A designates its representative, so the distribution of male and female representatives on the committee depends on the members' appointments.

At the level of constructing regional development initiatives, these initiatives lack an adequate gender approach. Work is being done to establish criteria and mechanisms that ensure visibility of the contributions men and women can and do make equally in these processes, to facilitate the evaluation and future comprehensive analysis of these processes.

5.2.2 Nongovernmental organisations

The situation of gender issues in non-state organisations is very similar to that of state institutions. Most NGOs that work either on natural
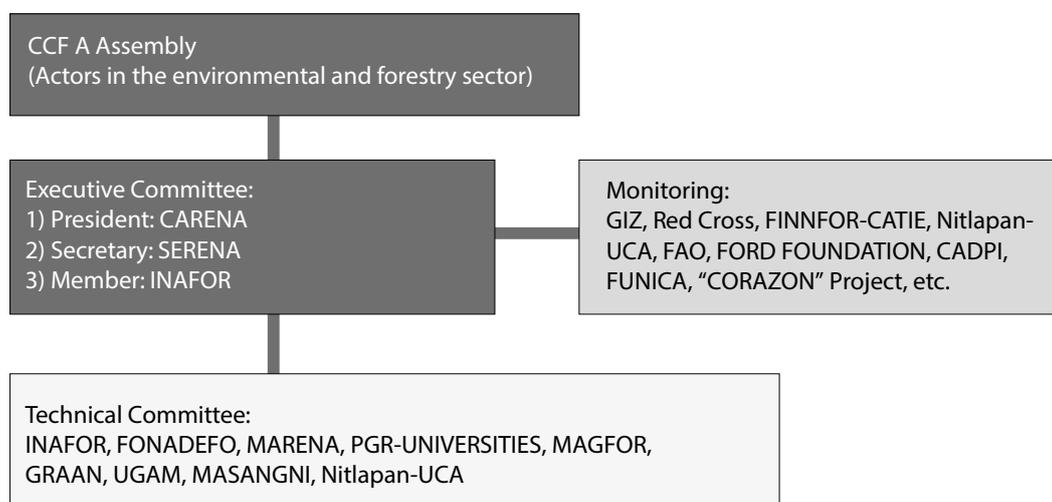

Figure 2. Organisational structure of the CCF-A

resource management or on promoting gender equity lack established internal policies to provide a starting point for developing mechanisms of inclusion for women in the communities where they work.

Of the seven organisations consulted, only three have a gender policy, each with a different approach. Of them, Masangni is the only organisation whose gender policy explicitly includes women's participation in forestry resource management and administration, as well as fostering equality among the personnel of the organisation itself. Nonetheless, the translation of this policy into a gender strategy still requires mechanisms for follow-up and monitoring; these might include developing indicators that take into account or reflect both the different gender roles in the communities and women's inclusion in the activities proposed and implemented by the organisation.

The other two organisations with gender policies – La Gaviota Women's Collective and the Center of Studies and Information on Multiethnic Women (CEIMM) of the University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (URACCAN) – work on gender equity from a rights and empowerment perspective. There is no focus on natural resource management. CEIMM, however, which has an organic relationship with URACCAN, uses URACCAN's policy as a reference for applying and implementing a gender strategy for other organisations within the university, such as the Institute for Natural Resources, Environment and Development (IREMADES), which has a specific project with women in communities in the region. This policy mainly concerns the role and inclusion of women in the activities and projects. There is a danger, however, in promoting gender perspectives only among women or women's groups, without attending equally to building awareness in men about gender equity.

Other organisations consulted, which work on promoting rights, participation and development of indigenous peoples, have gender equity as a crosscutting focus in their projects, but none has an established gender policy (Table 6). Nonetheless, both the Association for the Development of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua (PANA PANA) and the Center for Research and Development of the Atlantic Coast (CIDCA) have gender indicators aimed at

ensuring women's participation in their projects, described in the following section.

5.3 Projects, gender perspectives and forest management

Both governmental and nongovernmental organisations that work on projects and actions for development of the indigenous communities in RAAN with a gender perspective include a variety of projects for women, including micro-credit, mainly for the purpose of empowering women within the local economy. For A. Bonilla (interview, December 2010), one way of encouraging women's participation is by improving their economic status, which empowers women and can lead to participation in decision-making arenas.

The majority of these projects have been of one to two years in duration, and gender has been incorporated as a crosscutting issue. The goals are similar, i.e. certain organisations aim for empowerment, whether through the economy or through the generation of knowledge (training sessions, workshops, diploma courses), while others work through the creation of women's organisations.

The Center for Research and Study of Multiethnic Women (CEIMM) has worked on empowering indigenous women of different ethnicities via diploma courses. CEIMM has also led the formation of a network of indigenous women communicators in each of the territories of RAAN. The purpose is to generate an outreach arena that ensures women's visibility as relevant actors in their communities. Women's right to protection from violence has been CEIMM's main focus. CEIMM advocates for women's access to justice and explores how indigenous women live. It accompanies women in creating an agenda based on their interests, taking into account the differences among territories, promoting rights based on international, national and regional frameworks, and empowering women through the generation of knowledge. It also has economic programmes. *'We work on the issue of women's economic empowerment; we promote women as economic entrepreneurs, such as how to administer their money, getting women to think like businesspeople, […] forming networks of businesswomen'* (A. Marley, interview, February 2011).

Table 6. Gender in governmental and nongovernmental institutions in the RAAN

Name of the organisation	Gender policy	Gender strategy	Person in charge of gender	Budget for actions to develop equitable gender processes	Training on gender for workers	Indicators for monitoring
State institutions						
INAFOR	Yes (the state strategy)	Numerical equity	No[a]	No	Yes, via training offered by the central government	No
CRAAN – Natural Resources Commission	Depending on what is prepared by the women's commission as a whole with the Secretariat of Women	Application of the policy approved in 2010 and prepared by the CRAAN Women's Commission and the GRAAN Secretariat of Women	Not in this commission, but in a separate commission	No	No	No
CONADETI	No	Not very defined; it is understood within the framework of numerical equity	No	No	Very sporadically, only via invitations to events in general, but there are no formal personnel	No
GRAAN – Secretariat of Women	Yes. Approved in 2010 by the council to be applied and promoted	Yes. Derived from the policy and aimed to be applied by the other secretariats	The whole organisation	Yes, but it is very limited and managed by nongovernmental organisations for specific projects	Not all. The few members who have knowledge of the issue have gained it on their own initiative	No
GRAAN - SERENA	No	As crosscutting axes, derived from application of the equal opportunities law	Not within the secretariat, but in a separate secretariat	No	Yes, some members of the secretariat have received training	No
Nongovernmental institutions						
CEIMM – URACCAN	Yes	Yes (designed together with other institutions of the university)	The whole organisation	Yes	Yes	Yes
IREMADES – URACCAN	Yes, by extension	By extension of the policy designed under CEIMM leadership	Yes	Not directly	Yes	No

Table 6. Continued

Name of the organisation	Gender policy	Gender strategy	Person in charge of gender	Budget for actions to develop equitable gender processes	Training on gender for workers	Indicators for monitoring
MASANGNI	Yes	Numerical equity	Yes	Not directly	Yes	No
CIDCA	No	Crosscutting axis	Yes	Partial and temporary[b]	Yes	Not specifically, but they identify the need to systematise
CADPI	No	Together with the CRAAN – as a crosscutting axis	No	Not directly	Yes	Yes
GAVIOTA	Yes	Yes, but focused on specific rights.	The whole organisation	Yes	Yes	Yes
PANA PANA	No	Crosscutting axis	No	Not directly	Yes	Yes
Joint arena						
CCF-A	No	Not defined. Understood that it derives from the strategy of each organisation that makes it up	No	No	No	No

a   The closest thing to a person in charge is the human resources person of INAFOR central, as that is the person who ensures that technicians attend the training sessions and that the strategy of hiring an equal number of women and men is met (Rojas, interview).

b   The issue is included within financing for specific projects (McLean, interview).

Following the same logic as CEIMM, the association PANA PANA promotes local entrepreneurship. PANA PANA provides credit to both men and women, but mainly the latter, and includes gender as a crosscutting focus in its activities. It works mainly with communal banks and joint liability groups. Joint liability groups are a form of micro-credit in which people who have a business join into small groups – of three to six people – for the purpose of obtaining credit and mutually guaranteeing repayment (L. Lau, interview, March 2011). The re-payment deadlines are 12 months and the payment frequency is monthly. The payment mechanisms are more flexible in the case of micro-businesses in the Lumber-Furniture category. They can be weekly, semimonthly, monthly or bimonthly. All group members are responsible for assuming the loan payments. In the case of PANA PANA, women are given preference, and loans are prioritised for home improvement, raising and fattening pigs and fishing. *'The first criterion we establish is that there must be participation, and we encourage egalitarian participation of men and women; second, indicators are established to measure participation, to see if it's true that this egalitarian participation of women is being achieved, and to what degree it existed when the project began and when it finished'* (L. Lau, interview, March 2011).

Women's organisations such as the Gaviota Collective and Nidia White Organization work on promoting and defending women's human rights, whether they be individual or collective, through training processes. The Gaviota Collective works only in five neighbourhoods of the city of Bilwi. Nidia White is involved in other municipalities such as Waspam and the mining region (Siuna, Rosita and Bonanza) through alliances with local women's organisations.

The Secretariat of Natural Resources (SERENA), a regional government entity, has experience in infrastructure, hydroelectricity and mines, all with financing from international agencies such as the World Bank, German Cooperation (GIZ; formerly known as GTZ) and FONADEFO. SERENA has worked to disseminate technical information and as a facilitator of processes in the communities. However, incorporation of gender issues is not a priority and efforts in this area have been in response to donors' requirements for women's involvement. A process that specifically benefits women in projects has not been created to this point.

SERENA, together with the National Forestry Institute (INAFOR), has followed up on community forestry programmes and the National Reforestation Crusade, which began in 2007 and will end in 2014. There is also a mandate from the regional government, based on the gender policy in the region, that all projects must include men and women in order to improve natural resource management, according to D. Zamora (interview, March 2011). The institutional preference is equal male–female participation.

INAFOR has promoted a gender approach as a crosscutting focus in the institute's mission relating to the productive sector. It recognises that both men and women participate, but men predominate in forestry activities. In addition, the Secretariat of Women forms part of the regional government of RAAN and implements the 'Gender Window' programme in two municipalities, Waspam and Bilwi. This programme provides women with loans, seeds, animals such as cattle and hens, childcare while they work, and, finally, computer courses.

Marina Ingram, vice coordinator of the Secretariat of Women, highlighted the organisation of the *pikinera* women as the strongest and most well respected in the region; '*"pikineras" are independent purchasers of lobsters who work in the sea, most of them members of the Miskitu indigenous people*' (M. Ingram, interview, March 2011). These women demand support from the regional government for the fishing sector; '*the companies see them as strong competition, so they have had an influence on communal authorities*' (Acosta 2010a). The project involves a total of 1,300 women workers on the high seas and at the wharf.

Other organisations incorporate a gender perspective as part of their overall community work. The Center for Autonomy and Development of Indigenous Peoples (CADPI) is developing an institutional strengthening project for the autonomy of indigenous peoples in four territories: (1) the Tuahka territory in the community of Wasakin, (2) Tasba Raya – Wangki Twi, (3) Tasba Pri, and (4) a Mayangna community in the Bosawas Biosphere Reserve in the Mayangna Sauni As Territory. Their climate change project goes beyond incorporating men and women among the participants/beneficiaries, but also examines the roles they perform in natural resource management. CADPI serves an accompaniment role and provides training for negotiation processes within political arenas.

Similarly, the Center for Research and Documentation of the Atlantic Coast (CIDCA) has developed its project on civic participation in Mayangna communities, incorporating a gender approach. Commissions, in which men and women are intended to participate equally, have been created at a local communal level. CIDCA provided a technical team to give the men and women of the community the skills needed to make demands on the municipal council authorities or civil society organisations. Despite their efforts and sincere desire to empower women through participation and political advocacy, the results have been disappointing: the women yielded their positions within the commissions to men for cultural reasons. Within certain ethnic groups, the idea that women could represent or make suggestions to the community has not been accepted, so men largely represent the commissions created within the communities.

A Governability Project with indigenous women is being implemented by IREMADES–URACCAN. It is supporting indigenous communities in preparing a plan, among men and women, on political decisions in their territories and on forest resources. At the same time, activities such as workshops with women are being conducted, so the women can gain experience in processes that include '*consensual political agreements of their territories, linked to the territories' governance proposals*' (J. Mendoza, interview, February 2011).

In summary, work specifically with a gender perspective on forest rights is not something commonly visible in indigenous communities; that is, women's participation has been considered via micro-credit, training sessions and education, but women do not yet use the existing participation arenas to make changes in the way natural resources are administered.

This issue seems to result from a not yet mature process of reflection around the issue of gender and natural resources by the institutions, organisations and associations working in the region, which still need to take on the task of assuming gender equity processes alongside natural resource management concerns. It could also be that the institutions are accustomed to following the traditional institutional and legal framework for natural resource conservation. They may not yet have embraced governance processes designed to involve men and women in building a comprehensive joint agenda of natural resource management, responsive to local needs.

In conclusion, cases in which the gender perspective is applied to sustainable forest resource management are few and recent. Masangni has taken the first steps to include this perspective and promote women's participation in decision-making about the use and exploitation of forest resources. Nonetheless, the organisation is more focused on logging, and the incorporation of a gender policy into its work is still new. A recent initiative of the Forestry-Environmental Consultative Council (CCF-A) to develop gender policy is a step forward in mainstreaming gender issues and including indigenous women in the management of forest resources. The results of this inclusion will be subject to discussion and analysis once the policy has been established.

For now, the way in which a gender perspective has been approached in the majority of organisations working in natural resource management still limits the real potential for women's empowerment; women generally only have indirect access to decision-making arenas that should be collective.

6. Communities and forest users

6.1 Mechanisms of participation in forest resource use and management

The traditional organisational systems of indigenous peoples (Miskitu and Mayangna) in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) are rooted in two basic geographic spaces, the community and the territory, which are recognised in Nicaragua by different laws: the law of communal property (Law 445) and the Autonomy Statute (Law 28). Article 3 of Law 445 defines community as '*the set of families of Amer-Indian ascendance established in a territorial space that share feelings of identification, linked to the aboriginal past of their indigenous people and that maintain their own identity and values of a traditional culture, as well as forms of tenure and common use of lands and of their own social organisation*'. Territories are large areas comprised of multiple communities as well as complementary areas that may not belong to any individual community.

Communities are organised such that the communal assembly, comprised of all adults in the community, is the most important decision-making body. The assembly elects, often annually, the communal authorities, including the *wihta*, *síndico* and several others, such as a coordinator, a representative of the elders, and so on, although there is some variation among communities. These communal authorities – for all the communities in a single territory – comprise the territorial assembly, which in turn elects the territorial authorities, or the Gobierno Territorial Indígena (GTI). The GTI is like a board of directors with approximately seven members. The community assembly may meet several times a year, whereas the territorial assembly may only occur once a year.

Community and territorial organisations have a model of governance for social control, a function exercised by the *wihta* (or communal judge) and for natural resource administration, a responsibility delegated to the *síndico* (communal and territorial). Both authorities are elected through open participation mechanisms in communal or territorial assemblies for periods of one of more years, according to norms and agreements established by these authorities.

Natural resource administration occurs at several levels: i) the family, which administers small plots or areas assigned by the communal authority, and with its members internally establishes the usufruct mechanisms for the natural resources in its possession; (ii) the communal assembly, the community's maximum decision-making authority, which delegates this responsibility to the *síndico*; and (iii) the territorial assembly, where the territorial *síndico* is elected to represent the whole geographic area inside the territory boundaries; these represent the sum of all areas of the communities that make up the territory, which were previously agreed to and demarcated. The latter must establish coordination mechanisms with each of the communal *síndicos* within the territory to implement regulations, agreements and responsibilities for the use and distribution of resources and benefits.

In both cases, the communal and territorial *síndicos* should consult the respective communal or territorial assemblies, adhere to the traditional regulations and agreements established for usufruct of natural resources, and establish coordination mechanisms with sectoral leaders to facilitate community administration, monitoring and follow-up relating to natural resources. Figure 3 shows the different levels of resource administration and their arenas of community and territorial governance.

The forms of administering natural resources at the community level present two basic variations: (i) usufruct for household consumption and (ii) exploitation for commercial purposes.

- Usufruct for household consumption. This case applies mainly to each family's use and exploitation of their agricultural plots, which were assigned by the community. The products generated within these family areas (basic grains, root crops, *musaceas*, vegetables and fruits) may be sold, but only in relatively low quantities to supply some basic needs within the home; these products are harvested according to the corresponding productive cycle. In addition, this category includes hunting, fishing, small-scale/family mining and lumber use (such as
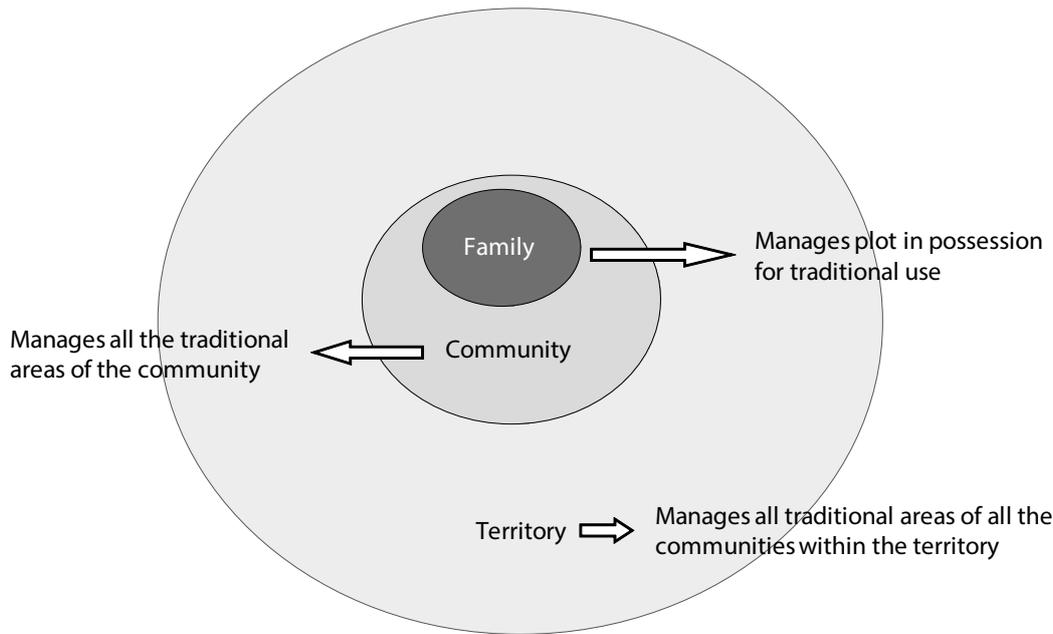
Figure 3. **Levels of natural resource administration in indigenous communities and territories of the RAAN**

for firewood or housing construction), often from established communal areas. In some communities, even domestic use of some resources, such as timber, is monitored and requires permission from the *síndico*.

- Exploitation for commercial purposes. When a resource is used and exploited for the purpose of generating income, the person who exploits the natural resource must meet the regulations established in the legal framework and the internal dispositions or norms established by communal authorities (*síndicos*) for this purpose.

There are two forms of commercial exploitation: in the first, the community directly manages and administers its different forms of natural capital (land, water, biodiversity, forest businesses, tourism); whereas in the second, the community cedes the use and exploitation rights for the natural resources to those with whom prior agreements are established for distribution of the benefits generated (such as mining and forestry concessions). These agreements are usually made with the corresponding *síndico*, but should be consulted at community and/or territorial levels.

6.1.1 Uses of the forest

All of the focus groups in the 18 communities report diverse uses of the forest by community members (Table 7). Agricultural and forestry exploitation stand out among the most important uses. *'The only benefit we have is use of the soil, lumber for building houses and plants for traditional medicine'* (Focus Group (GF) Wasakin 2011). (Note that we use the initials of the Spanish term for 'Focus Group'). On a second level is the use of medicinal plants, the production of charcoal for fuel and sale, the hunting of wild animals, fishing, and in a few cases, handicrafts based on forest resources and the extraction of gold in mining areas.

Some communities consider men to be '*more related to the forest*' (GF Miguel Bikan 2011), and that forest benefits are received exclusively by the leaders, who make decisions about the forest resources. Additionally, the most valuable resource cited in some of the focus groups was timber, although in others agriculture – the benefits of the harvest – was stressed as the most valuable resource. Agricultural crops were cited more in the focus groups of women than in those of men, who cited precious woods more frequently. This could be related to the more timber-oriented vision of forest resources held by the male community members, who have been more involved in forestry projects or forestry extraction and who enjoy the benefits of those activities.

Table 7. Uses of the forest by community (M=Men, W=Women)

Communities	Agriculture		Timber		Charcoal		Medicine		Handicrafts		Mining		Hunting	
	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	W
Alamikamba	X	X	X	X										
Awas Tingni	X	X	X	X				X						
Butku	X	X	X	X	X					X			X	X
Fruta de Pan	X	X	X	X		X								
Ispayul Ilna	X	X	X											
Karata	X	X	X											X
Kisalaya	X	X	X		X	X		X						
Krukira	X	X	X	X	X									X
Layasiksa	X	X	X					X		X				
Miguel Bikan			X	X	X	X								
Mukuswas		X	X		X									
Wasakin	X	X	X	X				X					X	
Sahsa		X	X	X				X						
San Carlos	X	X	X	X							X			
Santa Fe	X	X	X			X		X					X	
Santo Tomas de Umbra	X	X	X								X			X
Saupuka	X	X	X	X				X						X
Tuapi	X	X	X	X	X			X						

Agriculture

The most important forest-related activity cited by all focus group participants was agriculture; it is the activity in which women participate the most. '*The activities we develop as women and men are planting things like rice, beans, maize, taro, malanga and cassava in our little plots*' (GF Mukuswas 2011). Essential resources for the families' food security are obtained from agricultural activities, and women participate directly in maintaining their families. Most focus group participants say that not only do both men and women participate in agriculture, but that they support each other. Depending on yields, some community members sell a portion of their produce to finance the consumption of other basic goods.

Timber

While income from logging, whether through a community forestry cooperative or through a concession to an external company, is limited and infrequent, both men and women cited timber as a resource of great value in many communities. Wood is used for sale, for housing maintenance and for other activities such as the building of canoes and small boats used by community members for transport (GF Awas Tingni 2011).

Logging is often linked to men, since they are the ones who generally work in that industry, either for cooperatives or for outside companies. Nonetheless, in the community of Alamikamba, women have forged their own forestry management plans. However, the current status of the resource has not allowed community members to receive much benefit from timber-related forestry activities. For example, in the case of Krukira, as in many other communities, Hurricane Felix in 2007 knocked down the majority of the trees that were suitable for domestic uses and housing construction, which is why community members commented on the urgent need for reforestation (GF Krukira 2011).

Some communities reported that women are also involved in timber extraction, but usually for noncommercial use related to building and maintaining their homes (GF Fruta de Pan 2011). The women, not seeing any genuine benefit from logging (based, in particular, on men's experiences), no longer have expectations of income derived from this activity. They would prefer to ensure the provision of basic needs such as food through agriculture.

A few communities have community forestry operations. With regard to benefits, many male participants report that these are divided among the entire community, but in some cases, both women and men reported that the *síndicos* tend to end up with the income from the sale of timber.

In other communities, administration of the resource is in the hands of lumber companies, which must get the endorsement of the *síndico* from that community or territory. Community members provide wage labour. In this regard, men from Awas Tingni say that '*the big companies extract lumber and pay the community to extract it, and the benefit is for everyone and for the one who works.*' (GF Awas Tingni 2011).

Charcoal

Another forest-related activity is the production of charcoal, most of which is sold in nearby markets. In some focus groups, community members said that this activity is carried out in groups, and the income is shared among the families involved in producing and selling it (GF Krukira 2011). The sale of charcoal is one of the activities that helps women obtain the income needed to purchase complementary goods, such as salt, sugar, oil and other products only accessible to those who have the cash to acquire them.

Traditional medicine

Women and the elderly, both men and women, mentioned medicinal plants as an important forest resource. These medicines are available to all community members. '*We use the same existing medicinal plants to cure ailments and share our knowledge to cure each other*' (GF Awas Tingni 2011). Women participate in this activity (GF Sahsa 2011), particularly those who have knowledge of the properties of each plant.

Handicrafts

Women in a limited number of communities make handicrafts based on forest products, providing them with a complementary income source. For example, in the community of Ispayul Ilna, male community members said that '*handicrafts … permit … all the women to work in a more organised way within the forest; this activity is considered good for them for the benefits it provides*' (GF Ispayul Ilna 2011).

In the case of Wasakin, a group of women is working to sell bamboo handicrafts. The Institute for Development and Democracy (IPADE) started this project, but the community women said they were not very satisfied because they were not getting enough technical support. Other community women mentioned that the women's groups work with seeds collected in the forest to make costume jewellery to be sold in Bilwi (GF Butku 2011; GF Layasiksa 2011).

Hunting

Another forest-based activity is the hunting of wild animals for daily consumption or sale in nearby markets. A community member of Santo Tomás de Umbra said, '*we obtain many benefits from the forest; we hunt animals to eat and sell the meat to get money, and we also get money from the sale of timber*' (GF Santo Tomas de Umbra 2011).

This activity is common to almost all communities and is done almost exclusively by the men. In some cases, myths were mentioned that regulate hunting so the local fauna are not over-exploited; such is the case of Wasakin, where a community member explained that '*we can't hunt many wild boars because the people hunting could get sick. The boars have an owner, it is a black man with a hat who travels through the forest with his animal*' (GF Wasakin 2011). Nonetheless, after the passage of Hurricane Felix, some communities reported that the number of forest animals had declined considerably (GF Krukira 2011).

Fishing

Fishing was mentioned as another forest use by community members, given that rivers and streams are seen as integral parts of the forest landscape (GF Krukira 2011; GF Saupuka 2011; GF Butku 2011; GF Wasakin 2011; GF San Carlos 2011). The families who live alongside the rivers or on the seacoast obtain part of their food from this activity.

The harvest from fishing is generally for people's own consumption, although in some cases, and depending on the catch, some families sell part of the catch in the local markets of nearby towns or communities for household cash needs. This monetary benefit is generally distributed within the family, but also '*the mayor's office is another beneficiary due to the tax we pay*' (GF Krukira 2011).

Other activities related to the forest

In the communities close to the mining triangle, gold extraction was cited as a use of the forest. Nonetheless, this activity was not discussed in depth at the time of group comments and feedback.

Furthermore, there was also mention in Wasakin of the *'sale of black earth'*, which is used for cultivating the seedlings used in the nurseries promoted by reforestation projects or as part of community forestry activities. The women earn income from the sale of this soil to '*the organisations*' (GF Wasakin 2011).

6.2 Assessment of women's community participation

The selection of the 18 communities was aimed at exploring whether or not three criteria – distance, type of tenure, and the density of organisations – affected the level and nature of women's participation, and if so, how. Although the project originally intended to include an appraisal of women's participation (high, medium and low) in the spheres of natural resource governance in each community, the focus groups and follow-up activities in eight of these communities made it clear that this requires further research to be analysed in a way that is meaningful.

The research thus explored different perceptions among men and women regarding women's participation in meetings and community decision-making. Note that in this and the following sections that include personal interpretations of community dynamics, the names of the specific communities have been suppressed and the order of communities in the tables has been randomised to protect privacy. In Community A, focus groups with both men and women stated that women's participation is not very active, constant or influential because '*they haven't had any interest in being leaders or authorities; they almost never want to go to the meetings*' (GF Community A 2011). The men's focus groups demonstrated, however, that the men appear to have a better understanding of the laws and greater knowledge related to community rights over the forests, especially among those who are involved in government at either territorial or community levels.

In some cases, even though both focus groups report that women's attendance is high and that they actively speak up in meetings, the male community members limit their vision of participation to the number of women who attend and speak, without going into depth about how women's opinions are taken into account in decision-making. The women, however, did refer to the lack of attention from generally male authorities to their demands, opinions and considerations about resource management and other community situations. This was especially evident in Community E, where, even though women's participation is relatively high compared with cases presented in other communities, women did not show satisfaction with the way their participation in the community arenas was received (GF E 2011).

In other cases, the difference between the reports of the men's and women's focus groups is more evident. In the case of Community C, for example, the women said they only attended meetings when they were invited, while the men said that women attend meetings and that a record of their attendance is kept (which was not available). The men maintained that when women do not attend it is because of '*personal reasons*' so that '*to improve attendance people have to be made aware*'. The men also said that '*women can express themselves openly; the most influential women are the ones who will participate in different activities*' (GF C 2011). Both groups maintain attitudes that limit women's participation, with the men not promoting open participation, in spite of their statements to the contrary, and the women feeling embarrassed and fearful of expressing ideas and wopinions.

In Community P, women's opinions are only requested when the participation of the whole community is needed, such as for the election of community leaders. The procedure for such elections varies among communities; in some they are done through secret ballots and in others by showing hands. Even in those cases, however, it is not clear whether women's opinions regarding the future leaders are their own or if they follow the lead of more influential people in the community or within their families. In Community H, both groups noted that participation depended on the subject, pointing out that '*the women get more involved in social decisions than in natural resource management [and sale]*' (GF H 2011).

In some communities, the problems with participation appear to be less gendered and more political. For example, in Community N, all focus groups stated that there is little participation by either community women or men in decision-making that concerns the community. The men particularly emphasised the political divisions within the community, which prevent open and active involvement of community members in the governance bodies (GF N 2011).

In fact, this was a common complaint. It was heard in communities such as Community Q, where disputes between families limit the participation of men as well as women. This community consists of two large families whose members, at the time of the research, did not agree over who the community leaders were. In this community, both men and women said that decisions are always polarised and made by a few. The women said, in their focus groups, that '*community decisions are only made by a group of older men; they don't pay attention to anyone else*' (GF Q 2011), referring to the leaders. Similarly, in Community I, the women said '*there's not much participation by women. The council of elders is who decides*' (GF I 2011), a view seconded by the focus groups with men.

Finally, Community G shows signs of being an example of women's effective participation. Both men and women said that women's active and influential participation is notable. In this regard, one of the women's focus groups mentioned that '*the leaders, community elders and the territorial president consider women's opinions in the community meetings and assemblies, taking into account [women's] proposals*' for development and economic, social, political, legal and cultural projects (GF G 2011). Similarly, community men said that '*the women participate in each assembly, meeting, workshop and training session because women participate more than men*' (GF G 2011). Follow-up research, however, suggests this may not be true regarding forest decision making specifically.

6.2.1 Attendance in community arenas

The research demonstrated that the majority of the 18 communities studied hold community consultation meetings, known as community assemblies, to make decisions about community wellbeing, including natural resource management.

The frequency varied by community, from once a year (in the case of Community C) to three times a year (in the case of Community L), specifically to talk about forest management.

Attendance at the assemblies is recorded only in a few communities, such as Community C, where attendance is noted by the assembly chair, generally the *wihta* or *síndico*. In most cases it was reported that the record is only in the possession of the leaders. It was also said that the agenda discussion points in the communal assemblies are established by the communal authorities, usually the *wihta* and the *síndico*. These points are discussed and decisions are made with those present at the assembly.

However, it was also reported in some communities (for example, Communities N and Q) that the invitation to these assemblies is not open, but is exclusively managed by the circle close to the leaders. This, of course, increases difficulties for those sectors of the population who do not usually participate. The law requires that decisions about the future of local resources be made communally; and community members resent the actions of elites who make these decisions, typically deriving individual benefit from the concessions, agreements and projects approved in assemblies. Table 8 presents perceptions on women's participation in the community.

6.2.2 Knowledge of laws and participation rights

In most communities visited, both men and women reported having some knowledge of the laws that recognise their rights as indigenous peoples, such as the Autonomy Statute (Law 28) and Law 445 on communal land (GF N, GF K 2011). '*We know that the laws have changed and have been changing, because before men were superior to women but not anymore because the law is even-handed. But when meetings are held within the community, women's participation is low, so at times we don't attend the meetings because of the same old problems, even though participation is open*' (GF E 2011).

This change, reported as recent, is the fruit of the promotion of these laws in the community via different media; for example, via radio, and more frequently, via training and education workshops held locally by different organisations such as IPADE, CADPI, URACCAN-IREMADES, UNDP,

Table 8. Perceptions about women's participation in meetings and community arenas by community (by focus group)

Community	Young women	Older women	Young men	Older men
A	Many women cannot participate because they don't have time because of domestic chores. Others, however, do not fail to attend because they know there is good news regarding community benefits or activities.	Women have a lot to do in the house so they don't attend the meetings, although some do attend, but at a low level and don't suggest anything about the issues.	Women miss meetings because the majority are occupied in the house, playing their role; when one doesn't go, the neighbour does, to report on the orientations or activities to be conducted in the community.	One of the problems we have with women is that they say they don't have time. They have no idea about the issues because they don't study.
B	Not all women participate in the meetings but some are chosen by the *síndico* and the judge. The men don't take the women's ideas into account or don't advise them of the meeting until too late.	Women aren't taken into account when they attend the meetings.	Women virtually don't go to the meetings because some aren't interested and are embarrassed. If they go, they don't like to participate and are thus not taken into account.	In these meetings all people go, including women, but the women's problem is that many of them don't participate, so they haven't taken any leadership post – but they have every right to express any opinion they choose.
C	Women don't regularly attend the meetings – only when they are invited.	Women are the ones who attend most and participate most and decide what will be done.	Women don't attend for personal reasons, but they can express themselves openly. The most influential women are the ones who participate in different activities.	They haven't held meetings for a long time, so no one goes.
D	Women participate in the meetings, but their opinions aren't taken into account.	Women don't participate in these meetings because they don't want to talk.	Not many women participate in the meetings because they aren't aware of their right to participate. Those who do attend only listen.	Some women don't attend the meetings because they don't want to or their husband doesn't allow it.
E	The women do attend the meetings but they don't talk much.	Although participation is open, the men are the ones who participate most in the meetings. Only they talk.	Women are the ones who have the greatest attendance in these meetings and are the ones who decide what will be done.	Women attend and participate. Many contribute and all men and all women participate.
F	The women of Wasakin want work but the authorities don't support the women's project.	Women are virtually not invited to the community assembly or meetings. Women make decisions in the home and within the women's organisations.	Only some women attend the meetings by custom and it's hard to improve their situation. The majority of women don't offer an opinion, although some express their feelings about decisions that have been made.	By custom, not all women participate in the meetings. Few go to the meeting. Some women speak up when they are interested, but most of them don't say anything.
G	We women participate in everything that has to do with the community because we also have the right to participate and make decisions.	The men make decisions and we accept: but equally we make our decisions and no one can change it.	Women always demand their rights in the meetings they attend and they have to be taken into account.	Women come sometimes and at times more women participate than men. They don't take notes. Sometimes they note down attendance – when it is important they do it now.

Table 8. Continued

Community	Young women	Older women	Young men	Older men
H	Women's decisions aren't taken into account in many things, only in social processes, such as community conflicts.	In social matters, women express their different opinions and in forest management they only work for self-consumption. It's the men who make the decisions in the commercialisation negotiations.	Women are involved in social matters through meetings and communal assemblies.	They get more involved in social decisions than in natural resource management.
I	Our husbands don't allow us to participate in the meetings because of machismo. We women are afraid to contribute in the meetings because those who direct the community are men; they make the decisions regarding natural resources. We have never filled a leadership post within the community.	The young women are afraid to assume leadership posts in the community. It has been proposed to many of those who are young and strong and they haven't accepted. That's why we don't have representation of women. It seems like they prefer to always be in the kitchen.	Women don't participate regularly because they have responsibilities in the house. They aren't given much importance in the meetings within the community.	The great majority of women participate but they aren't active at the times we elect our authorities.
J	They say that when a woman directs, the men don't respect her, so they elect men so that they'll respect them; before, they never elected women, but now they do. When they have these kinds of meetings, the women don't participate; it's only done with the men.	There's no women's leadership because the women in this community are very mystical and don't like to go into the forest. Nonetheless, we women participate in meetings but not in meetings about the forests because it's just not done.	More women than men participate in the meetings; they come and now they say that the women have more rights than the men.	There are also some men who don't let the women say anything. Although we'd like to elect them, they won't respect them, so we can't do anything.
K	Women go to the meetings, but not many women participate. They don't give the women rights; they don't invite them to all of the meetings when they're going to have them.	Yes, we women attend the meetings and at times anyone from children to adults can make decisions in consensus with all the community inhabitants; then it's approved and it can be said that we have a voice.	Many women come to the meetings to participate and the *síndico* has records, but participation could be improved if they gave them their right to voice an opinion as a woman.	Gender equity exists in everything, so women are taken into account; in some cases they also propose items for discussion and make decisions.
L	We women have our rights, so we cannot keep quiet. We have to fearlessly express our ideas.	Women can also make decisions like men, since in our community we have a female judge and a sub-coordinator who's a woman.	Yes, various people defend their rights and express their ideas without fear.	Women can speak openly during the meetings like men. We community members give them the opportunity so they can freely express their ideas in the meetings.

Table 8. Continued

Community	Young women	Older women	Young men	Older men
M	Women want to participate and believe that their voice is equally important, but some mention that the men still don't let them talk and say that men's voices are the ones that count.	Men don't take women into account and much less so in decision-making.	Men are very respectful of women in every aspect and consider that they have the same rights as men. They recommend that all those who have anything to do with or live with a woman must respect her to live in peace within the home and the church.	Men say they enforce women's right to be part of the communal authorities, but according to men, it's the women who don't want to and are always afraid of taking on leadership posts.
N	Machismo in the community doesn't allow women to be given a chance. When a man gives power to a woman it is for life. The few women on the board are there because they are 'obedient' and 'let themselves be bossed around'.	A woman has never been in power because there's a lot of machismo on the part of the men and they don't give way to women. In addition, the women have many responsibilities with the house and children. While a woman may participate, they never consider her.	Participation in general is very difficult, since the community members almost never participate in the meetings because of the existence of political parties.	Women can express their feelings and are given the equality and liberty each woman has. A person of any capacity knows how to express what they want to say.
O	More women than men attend the community meetings, but they feel that as they aren't taken into account, it's better not to say anything.	Women say that 'we're effective in all the meetings but it's a pity that the elders [men] don't take our opinions into account'.	Women's attendance in the meetings is frequent. Women do go to the meetings but because of shame or fear don't offer opinions about community resources.	The community leaders provide women with opportunities in everything, but because of fear they themselves don't do anything.
P	Meetings exist but women generally don't attend.	Women sometimes come to the meetings when they are abused, to seek their rights there.	All women attend and participate.	Women meet to learn and protect their rights and are heard.
Q	In the meetings women do express what they feel, without any problem, but the men nearly always make fun of the women, and there's always a fight between meetings.	Now women are trying to go more to those kinds of meetings, to be able to defend themselves from the men who are very ambitious.	Women can make their own decisions, and they can also make their own laws, because they live in and are part of the community and can't be excluded.	Women are an obstacle to community development; they believe they only have to be in the house working as a housewife. That's why women shouldn't be invited to the meetings. When they come they fight too much.
R	When meetings are held, women virtually don't participate. The women often don't participate in the meetings because they claim they have a lot to do at home.	Women can voice their opinions freely about what they think but they don't have much opportunity to express it because of timidity.	Women can make decisions through their board of directors. They have their own forms of making their decisions, both in the field and in the house and elsewhere.	We do not have problems with the women in the community because we all work together.

Ayuda en Acción, etc. Various communities have community radio receivers, which have been defined as a very effective means of outreach. It is known that the issue of inclusive participation is a crosscutting focus in the projects implemented by some of these organisations, with equitable inclusion of women being one of the most important components. In this way, the laws have been disseminated in the community through each organisation's educational activities and processes.

6.2.3 Concept of participation

The concept of participation held by the communities differs enormously from one community to the next (Table 9). Each definition offers certain clues about internal cultural dynamics and the expectations that 'participation' processes entail, whether endogenous or induced by outsiders. Bina Agarwal (2001: 1623) acknowledges that the concept of participation is at the mercy of many interpretations, both from the institutional point of view and from local perspectives. Her six-level typology of participation, as previously explained, stipulates that 'participation' is always a function of and determined by 'rules, norms, attributes and *perceptions*'.

Based on this reflection, one can find that many of the definitions of the concept seen in the communities studied (and thus the reading of its practice) fit with the typology offered by Agarwal. The most notable examples are:

1. Those that correspond to nominal participation (defined by membership), in which any type of association with a group or institution (endogenous or exogenous) is defined as 'participation'. For example, in Community D, the term was defined as '*the association of a group of people*' (GF D 2011).

2. Very similar to this concept is the one that defines participation as '*the creation of a group of people that through the opinions of each one reaches a conclusion*' (GF O 2011), or as '*a group of people who jointly carry out an activity*' (GF F 2011). Nonetheless, membership in an already established group needs to be differentiated from membership that includes the founding of the organisation, particularly when considering the initiatives of community women themselves. These examples correspond to communities that have women's organisations, which, as discussed previously, can be important forums for empowering community women. One notable

Table 9. Concept of participation by community (differentiated by focus group)

Community	Concept of participation			
	Young women	Older women	Young men	Older men
A	Participation is when one works in an organisation, at the community, municipal, or regional level. It can be an assembly or a training workshop to build knowledge and try to take up some project, etc.	It is helping to share and open the mind more to learn things that we haven't heard, like these topics.	It is when we go into a workshop and start to talk about the topic and build knowledge among everyone.	It is the development of ideas where you go into a workshop or meeting and build your knowledge more every day.
B	It is the participation of men and women. We men and women have to respect each other.	It is that every person talks, whether they are educated or not.	Participation in all activities is very good when one helps the other.	It is like when a project comes into the community, helping: seeds, animal raising … The municipal government does this, helping in little ways, as do the territorial government, regional government, and central government.

Table 9. Continued

Community	Concept of participation			
	Young women	**Older women**	**Young men**	**Older men**
C	Being present at an event, by invitation.	To participate in this study, for example.	It is when the community is supported with public works: hospitals, footpaths, schools and others.	It is when you are united and everybody comes; that's participation.
D	It is the free participation that both men and women have.	It is ideas that people contribute in a workshop.	It is the association of a group of people.	Training to take care of our resources.
E	Participation is the support given among community members within the community, or by community leaders.	Participation is when we all participate within the community, for example, in this meeting among ourselves. If a friend doesn't know about a question and the other reinforces: that's participation.	Participation is when community leaders hold meetings and give community members space to make their contributions and state their ideas, based always on a topic and when it's for the community good	It is the help between community members and community leaders.
F	Participation is community unity at the communal level, out of which comes ideas, as well as the promotion of diverse activities.	It is to support a group of workers who need to get ahead.	To comprise a group of people and support each other (participants).	Work united with the community.
G	To participate and support an activity or to attend an event.	To propose an alternative in meetings, attend training workshops, and offer opinions about internal development for the internal community organisations for equitable benefit.	Participate and provide opinions in a workshop or meeting.	It is to give your opinion and propose alternatives for the wellbeing of the population, including participating in internal and external organisations.
H	They are opportunities the community is given to participate in different activities.	They are opportunities the agencies give us to be able to participate in the different activities assigned	It is the most important thing for people so they can make decisions and participate without any problem.	It is the opportunity provided in the different activities.
I	To give ideas for the betterment of the community.	That we have access to more opportunities without anyone overturning our decisions.	Women have had little participation. The *síndico* now doesn't give them the chance to contribute.	That each community member has the right to give an opinion and participate actively.
J	There are various forms of participation, for example: when a person needs help and the other gives a hand; that's a form of cooperation and participation.	For example, the building of churches, pastoral house and when there's a problem within the community we meet and there's participation and we resolve the problems.	It's when a person needs help and all of us from the community help him; that's a form of participating	Participation is opinions that one contributes within a meeting or a communal assembly.

Table 9. Continued

Community	Concept of participation			
	Young women	**Older women**	**Young men**	**Older men**
K	The community directors give free participation to men and women in work, in decision-making, because we community members chose them and they have to listen to us.	It's that we come to the meetings but they don't let us talk, or decide, but now with the woman *síndico* she gives us our right. We talk and decide.	It's that we all come to the meetings and participate in the different activities within the community.	It's when we meet in workshops and we participate in both community meetings and other activities within and outside the community and give our opinions and decide what to do.
L	It's when within a community the leader discusses the problem and meets to give solutions.	It's when a leader participates actively with the community members, whether men or women, within the community.	It's when there's a person or leader within the community who expresses his ideas and supports the others with their ideas.	Participation is the will of a person to contribute within a group of people to share and exchange ideas with the population to bring more progress to the community.
M	When there's some problem it is coordinated with the communal authorities and it is resolved and they also replace the leader when he can't be there.	There are authorities and leaders within the community who participate in the different decisions and set laws to put them in practice.	Participation is when we call meetings and give our point of view.	It's the structure, the communal leaders and their functions and forms of government and that the man has the last word.
N	Participate in any kind of activity that's necessary in the community. Exchange ideas among friends.	It's attending the different activities or being part of activities, talks, meetings or activities outside of or within the community.	It's the will of each community member or citizen to value his/her rights democratically within a social framework.	Participate in all meetings held in the community.
O	It's the creation of a group of people that through the opinions of each one reaches a conclusion.	It's the meeting of community members to support an initiative or proposal.	It is to give the idea or opinion of each member of a community freely and in sovereignty.	It is the ideas of each one of a given group or community.
P	It's to meet within a given group and exchange ideas.	It's to attend meetings called within the community, whether to elect its directors or those in the church.	When a group meets, both men and women, it's to discuss and exchange their ideas.	Participation is being together in a group that exists.
Q	It is a way to have influence in the meetings and community assemblies.	It is when one is always doing something in coordination with other women, always in favour of the community.	It is to participate and make decisions in meetings along with other community members.	n/a[a]
R	Attend meetings or other gatherings at the invitation of the institutions that come to the community.	n/a	Coexist in accord with our ancestral way.	n/a

a   Data not available.

aspect is that in Community E, the creation of arenas such as these, or spaces open to the whole community, are conceived as the initiative and work of the community leaders: '*Participation is when communal leaders call meetings and give space to the community members to offer their contributions and ideas based on an issue, as long as it is for the good of the community*' (GF E 2011). In this context, then, participation is not defined only as the action of the community men and women (attendance, presence, expression and/ or initiative), but also of the structures in which these actions unfold and how they are created.

3. Related to this last dynamic, 'participation' is defined in other communities (L, E and B), as the action of the leaders. For example: '*Participation is when there is a person or a leader within a community who expresses his ideas and that others contribute to with their ideas*' (GF L 2011). Extrapolating from Agarwal's classification, it would be understood that leaders are the only ones who enjoy 'interactive participation', given that in all communities of the study, communal leaders were cited as those with the final word (sometimes consulted, sometimes not) about the future not only of resource management but also about situations that arise in the community.

4. Following Agarwal's typology, the conception of participation that is called 'passive' is present in several communities (R, M and N). In this regard, in one of the focus groups 'participation' is defined as the act of '*attending meetings at the invitation of institutions that come to the community*' (GF R 2011).

5. Similarly, Agarwal's 'active participation' is seen in communities such as G and I, where they mention that participation is '*to promote alternatives in a meeting or training workshop, giving an opinion for the development of the organisations within the communities for an equitable benefit*' (GF G 2011) or '*to contribute ideas for the improvement of the community*' (GF I 2011). Here, women (in certain communities) have been able to take part (as will be explored further in the following section).

6. Another definition throws light on aspects that Agarwal's typology does not consider, such as those of resource distribution or benefits linked to decision-making in the community assemblies: '*participation means receiving part of something*

given to the community' (GF I 2011); or the acquisition of knowledge, which has been key to community-level empowerment processes, '*participation is learning of value [for] a group of people that helps them work in a more organised way within the community*' (GF B 2011).

7. Finally, there is a definition that encompasses not only spaces or actions, but also the traditional organic dynamic of the indigenous communities, i.e. the way each community member acts socially according to his/her cosmovision. As was expressed in a focus group of older men: '*Participating is coexisting in accord with our ancestral way*' (GF R 2011).

6.2.4 Women in leadership

Women's leadership in the indigenous communities of the RAAN is part of a process that external and governmental organisations have been promoting. This process is aimed at strengthening women's leadership roles and making them more visible within communities, families and society in general. These initiatives have been increasing in number. Women have argued for their own development, through their active participation in decision-making within their communities. The experience of Awas Tingni, where there was a woman *síndico* at the time of the research, exemplifies a high participation level by women in leadership posts, which has been legitimised at different levels of government, from local to district levels, and even from territorial to regional.

There have also been cases in other communities where women have represented the interests of the community under the region's governance structures, but they have not all been equally influential in decision-making. The variation in communities' experience with women leaders depends in part on the extent of community support, how women's performance is evaluated, and whether it is linked to projects being developed in the communities. Gender appraisals have helped in some cases, leading to women being able to make proposals and gain recognition within communities.

Higher levels of schooling have provided an opening for indigenous women to become leaders in some cases, while low levels have limited the opportunities of others. Yet this variable does not appear to be the main determinant in the ability to assume leadership

roles. Rather, the determining factor appears to be how participatory the decision-making processes are and how much they involve a gender perspective.

6.2.5 Women in meetings

Women's participation in community meetings is an issue that has barely begun to catch the attention of community members, given that the issue of gender equity is recent. It has been introduced little by little based on the promotion of laws for inclusive participation, which in some cases have made men more aware of the importance of women's participation in community processes: '*previously men thought that women had no right to express themselves or be a leader within the community, but over time they see that women do have the right because there are laws that protect them*' (GF L 2011). Despite recent attention to gender equity, however, women's participation in assemblies and other community activities in most communities (e.g. in B, C, E) continues to be limited to attendance and not to sharing or voicing opinions about the topics discussed in the meetings.

Nevertheless, in a few communities women have progressed to more inclusive participation, at least on certain topics. For example, in Community G, women regularly attend local assemblies and workshops. In this community, both focus groups with men said that, '*women participate in each assembly, meeting, workshop and training session, because the women participate more than the men*' (GF G 2011). Women also actively participate in Community L. Women there express their opinions openly, '*yes, it's possible, because we have our right, so no one can silence us; we have to express our ideas without fear*' (GF L 2011).

In some cases women believe that their input has an impact on decisions. The women from Community G say that, '*the leaders and community elders and territorial chief take women's opinions into account in the community meetings and assemblies, considering our proposals*' (GF G 2011). Thus, there is a growing consensus calling for women's inclusion in the community's sociopolitical processes.

In contrast (e.g. Communities J and P, among others), it was reported that while women attend meetings, their contributions, ideas and opinions are not seen as relevant by those who chair the meetings.

In other cases, women's participation is limited to certain issues of community life. In this respect, the focus group of young women of Community H said that '*women's decisions are not taken into account in natural resource management, only in social processes such as community conflicts*' (GF H 2011). In other cases, such as Community C, women are not even invited to many meetings (GF C 2011) or, in the case of Community D, women in the focus groups differentiate between community meetings and meetings on forest management where men are '*the only ones who participate*' (GF D 2011). In such cases, the actions of the leaders limit and place conditions on these women's attendance.

In some communities, however, it is reported that few women take a strong stand and express their opinions and give input on the issues discussed in the community assemblies. For example, in Community F, older women expressed that there are only a few women who '*express their feelings for the decision-making process*' (GF F 2011).

In the worst cases, women's participation is undermined by obstacles such as the macho attitudes of community men (GF N 2011), who do not let their spouses participate or who dismiss women's opinions out of hand during the meetings (GF M 2011), sometimes even by *making fun* of them (GF Q 2011). In fact, in Community O, elders were specifically mentioned as the ones who do not pay attention to women's contributions during the meetings (GF O 2011). This situation is also reported in the communities of I and J, where both attendance at meetings and influence – at least direct influence – in community decision-making is nil.

Both men and women recognise that obstacles for women's participation include their '*fear of participating*' (emphasised more by the men) (GF M 2011; GF O 2011), '*their lack of time*' or their shyness (GF R 2011). In addition, in Community A, women said they did not participate because it would be '*one more burden*' in addition to the housework for which they are culturally responsible (GF A 2011).

We found that there was some kind of women's group in most communities (Figure 4), whether organised endogenously or at the initiative of an outside organisation, and hence there was no apparent correlation with women's degree of

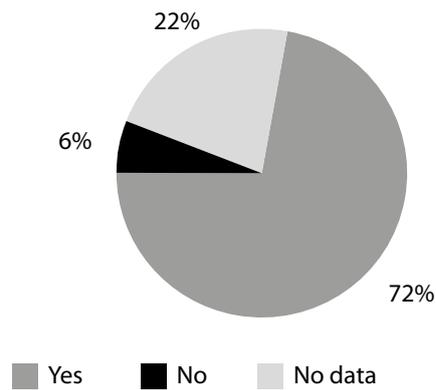**Is there a women's organisation in the community?**

Figure 4. Women's organisations in the communities

participation. Nevertheless, anecdotal evidence suggests that some of these groups have been important in increasing confidence levels, improving public speaking and so on. Hence, further research is needed on the role of different women's organisations. Table 10 summarises women's participation in several arenas in each community.

6.2.6 Women and natural resources

On the issue of natural resource management and decision-making, the importance of including women in these processes was acknowledged, but so far there has been little real or effective participation. In community forestry experiences, for example, the integration of women as at-large members or secretaries is accepted by the boards of directors, but women's ideas and proposals are usually not taken into account in decision-making about specific business actions. Women in the indigenous territorial governments in the region have had a similar experience. Women's participation in natural resource management is seen primarily as obtaining firewood and non-timber resources from the forest, while it is the men who log, sell trees and timber to external actors, and make the decisions.

Community government, in which boards of directors have been formed that are headed by judges (*wihta*) and *síndicos*, has been (and in most cases continues to be) dominated and monopolised by male community members. Occasionally, however, spaces have been opened up for women to take on leadership positions. For example, nine of the 18 communities studied had had women *síndicos* at some time, for at least a month (Figure 5).

Table 10. Summary of participation and arenas for women

Community	No. of women in leadership	Female *síndico* at some time	Women's organisation	Knowledge of laws or rights of women and indigenous people	Projects working with women
A	4	no	yes	no	3
B	1	no	yes	yes	3
C	1	yes	yes	no	1
D	2	no	yes	yes	3
E	1	no	n/a[a]	yes	3
F	1	yes	yes	no	2
G	2	no	yes	yes	2
H	1	yes	n/a	yes	3
I	1	no	no	no	1
J	1	no	n/a	yes	4
K	n/a	yes	yes	yes	2
L	2	no	yes	yes	2
M	3	no	yes	yes	3
N	1	yes	yes	yes	1
O	1	yes	yes	yes	1
P	1	yes	yes	yes	4
Q	1	yes	n/a	yes	1
R	1	yes	yes	yes	2

a   Data not available.

Has the community had a female *sindico?*

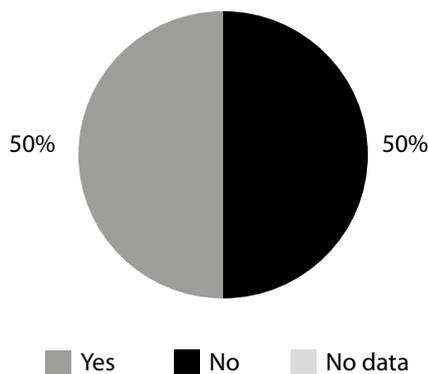50%   50%

■ Yes   ■ No   ■ No data

Figure 5. Women in positions of power

Certainly, the rise of women to positions of authority has not been easy, particularly when it has occurred in the context of economic and political crisis, from which the Atlantic Coast has not escaped. The case of Awas Tingni is important, as the ascent of its current *síndico* from community coordinator shows that, given arenas of inclusive participation, women can take actions that earn them legitimacy within the community. Only then will both the men and women of the community continue to vote them into higher offices:

> *'She was communal coordinator, then the alternate* síndico. *Now she has succeeded in becoming* síndico *and may possibly even become a communal judge (*wihta mairin*) and leader of the council of elders, as we all have the same rights and work together'* (GF Awas Tingni 2001).

The case of Awas Tingni is exceptional. In her first three months of administration (at the time of the field work for this study), the *síndico* maintained broad support from the community for her work. This contrasts with other cases, such as in Communities C, F and R, where the men complained of corruption, poor coordination with the community and lack of accountability – problems associated with many previous male *síndicos*.

It is notable that none of the other eight prior female *síndicos*, in fact, held the post for the stipulated year. Hence, this first opening – what could be a first step to opening governance arenas to community women – may have done more harm than good, if women were not sufficiently empowered, skilled or given sufficient support to succeed in filling

the expectations of the men and women of the community.

6.2.7 Factors that promote or limit women's participation

According to the focus groups, the factors that facilitate women's participation, in meetings and in positions of leadership, are the following:

1. Knowledge of the laws of participation that promote women's inclusion (in equal number) in community governance processes. Both men and women stressed the importance of such knowledge, recognising women's rights to participate and to be taken into account. Such knowledge is partly a product of the level of attention given to this by the organisations seeking to promote gender equality within communities. *'Previously women were never invited to the meetings, but now they know their rights and for that reason [they attend] the community meetings to [give] their opinions in decision-making'* (GF F 2011).

2. The level of men's awareness in some communities regarding women's participation and the differing gender roles in these contexts. This factor is linked to promotion of gender policy by both nongovernmental organisations and the state. In this regard, *'the men previously thought that women had no right to express themselves or be a leader within the community, but over time people realised that women have rights, because laws exist that protect them'* (GF L 2011).

3. Having a relatively high education level, i.e. greater than other community members, creates a certain feeling of security in the leadership capacities of women proposed for such positions. This includes knowing Spanish as well as the mother tongue (and in the case of the Mayangna communities, it means knowing three languages: Mayangna, Miskitu and Spanish). '*"They don't want to get ahead because they are used to only men being able to and not them"; that's what some think, but the community gives space as long as the person has studied and can speak three languages and knows how to write'* (GF A 2011). This factor is also a problem, however, as the education levels of the majority of women in the communities are very low and the opportunities are still scarce. Even so, some women have managed to achieve a certain educational level and have been reference points and leaders within their local contexts.

4. The role of women's organisations in establishing precedents and creating arenas for exchange among the women. These arenas then serve as the entryway for participation in communal spheres shared between men and women. The organisation also strengthens the participation of and links among community women, offering them arenas for growing, learning and feeling empowered to participate and get involved. '*Now, with these training sessions the organisations are implementing, they know their rights to participate and make decisions, so they have the chance to cooperate with the community*' (GF B 2011).

The factors that inhibit women's participation in decision-making arenas are the following:

1. The diminishing frequency with which community assemblies are called. This factor is an obstacle not only for women, but for the whole community. This reduction is related to cases of corruption and poor management of the funds that community leaders receive. Leaders avoid having community assemblies to avoid demands being made on them publicly because of their bad administration. '*Although these meetings are only held once a year, when they are held there are many problems because neither the* síndico *nor the* judge *are very respected due to the things they do outside the community*' (GF R 2011).

2. Domestic work, in accord with traditional gender roles. This is even more of a problem if their attendance means constantly investing time in community activities and in assuming new responsibilities (GF A 2011, GF I 2011, GF Q 2011). These appraisals came up in focus groups of both women and men, demonstrating that neither women nor men are yet questioning the traditional gender roles reproduced at the community level, '*it would be a burden for them as they have responsibilities at home*' (GF A 2011).

3. No permission given to participate in community activities, whether they be educational workshops or assemblies, by husbands or male partners. '*[The] men [...] think that women are an obstacle to community development. They think that they should only be in the house working as a housewife*' (GF Q 2011).

4. The lack of initiatives for men to share the domestic chores. '*The majority of adult men said that the wives are also to blame, because many times*

the women don't participate because they say they have to take care of their children, who cannot go. The few women who participate in the communal assemblies are single women' (GF J 2011). In addition, women in these communities do not have regular access to birth control. Some of the women have received sexual and reproductive education, but this has not been accompanied by strategies that increase access to birth control, which is only available in health centres in urban areas. This situation, a product of a lack of awareness from a gender perspective, perpetuates and reproduces the restrictions that culturally prevent women from having a more active and leadership role in managing resources that, by right, they share.

5. The avoidance of arenas in which national-level politics are at play. Community members, primarily women but men as well, tend to avoid meetings in which national politics are likely to be involved, because of the associated danger of exacerbating existing conflicts related to party affiliations or lack thereof. '*The community members virtually avoid participating in meetings due to the existence of political parties, where party involvement is very apparent; that means that they can't work democratically in the community because [the people who will be involved] are already chosen*' (GF N 2011).

Table 11 summarises the responses of the focus groups regarding obstacles to participation.

6.2.8 Factors that hinder indigenous women's participation in forest resource management

There are numerous additional obstacles to women's participation in natural resource decisions specifically. The observations here were based on the analysis of outside observers and researchers. On the one hand, negotiations regarding natural resource use are limited to certain interest groups. Hence, if women are not *síndicos* or at least members of the community leadership, they will not participate in these decisions. On the other hand, additional social and cultural norms play a role. These obstacles originated for a variety of reasons, according to the different opinions of those interviewed for the study, including ethnicity, norms associated with being a woman, religion, paucity of knowledge, history reproduced through the generations, and culture.

Table 11. Obstacles to the participation of women, according to the community (by focus group).

Community	Obstacles to participation			
	Young women	Older women	Young men	Older men
A	Low self-esteem, lack of time, attention to their roles as women, prevalence of illiteracy.	Fear of being a *síndico*; absence from meetings to attend to family roles; low academic level.	Lack of interest in being a leader or authority. Attention to family role. Their spouses don't let them because they have to take care of the children.	Lack of educational preparation. Ignorance of laws. Greater attention to their role as mother. Marital dependence.
B	Lack of motivation by the leaders (*síndico* and *wihta*) to call them to meetings.	Lack of promotion of women's participation by the organisation.	Fear of participating. Lack of interest and motivation.	They don't like to participate.
C	Women attend only if invited.	Women do participate, so there are no obstacles to women's participation.	They don't attend for personal reasons.	It's been a long time since they were invited to meetings.
D	Little interest in participating because only men are taken into account.	Little attendance at meetings because of lack of knowledge about and capacity to understand the issues.	There's no interest in participating.	They don't attend meetings because their husbands don't allow it.
E	There are no obstacles. Women attend regularly.	Good attendance but little participation because of discrimination by the men on the issues discussed.	There is no obstacle. Women attend and participate.	There is no obstacle. Women attend and participate.
F	They go to the meeting with little interest and little participation.	Little participation because they aren't given space.	There's no interest.	Little participation but they don't know why.
G	There are no obstacles. Women attend and participate effectively.	There are no obstacles. Women attend and participate effectively.	There are no obstacles. Women attend and participate effectively.	There are no obstacles. Women attend and participate effectively.
H	Men don't take them into account.	Men don't take them into account.	There is no interest.	There is no interest.
I	Little participation because of attending to responsibilities for home and children.	Little participation because of attending to responsibilities for home and children.	Little participation because of attending to responsibilities for home and children.	Little participation because of attending to responsibilities for home and children.
J	As there is no leader, women aren't invited and they aren't respected as leaders because they are women.	They are informed and participate in meetings.	They don't go because they are busy at home or attending to their children.	Women aren't interested in attending.
K	They don't give them the right to participate because they don't invite them.	They attend meetings but have no voice, only men do.	Women come to the meetings, but they aren't given the opportunity to voice their opinions.	They don't have the right to speak or give opinions.
L	There's good participation by women and the men support them.	Women always go to the meetings and are the ones who participate most.	Women do participate, so there are no obstacles to participation.	Women are the ones who come and participate most, while few men go.

Table 11. Continued

Community	Obstacles to participation			
	Young women	Older women	Young men	Older men
M	The men still impose themselves.	Attitude of the men toward women's opinions.	Women do not attend when they have to do work, but besides that, there are no obstacles.	The women are afraid to assume leadership posts.
N	Many women go but are discriminated against because their opinions aren't taken into account.	They go to the meetings but the men don't give them the opportunity to opt for leadership posts because of machismo.	50% of participants are women. The women have a high participation level; there are hardly any men in the meetings.	n/a[a]
O	Women participate in meetings more than men but don't offer opinions because they aren't taken into account.	They are effective in all meetings but the elder men don't take their opinions into account.	Women's participation in the meetings is very effective but because of shyness they don't give opinions.	In these meetings 50% of the participants are women, but out of fear they don't participate.
P	Abuse and domestic problems.	n/a	n/a	n/a
Q	Bad attitude on the part of the men.	The men don't leave space for their opinions.	n/a	Women's participation is unnecessary.
R	Little participation because of attending to responsibilities of house and children and lack of expression because of timidity.	Little participation because of attending to responsibilities of home and children.	Men said that women do participate, so they did not see obstacles to participation.	n/a

a   Data not available.

With regard to ethnicity, there are different limitations regarding the participation of Mayangna, Miskito and Black-Creole women. For example, some researchers have noted that Mayangna women are much more timid than Miskitu or Creole women; they are also less likely to speak Spanish, and hence participate less in workshops and training sessions run by outsiders. There are also cultural differences: '*it seems that … in the Miskitu culture, the perception of women is that they have a much more belligerent participation, so do the black Creole – more belligerent and much more independent, and they occupy influential spaces*' (A. Bonilla, interview, December 2010).

Forests are also associated with men's work. According to G. Torres (interview, February 2011), forests are seen as rough, women are supposedly not agile, they are slower, the forest is dangerous; men give a variety of justifications when it comes to women entering into an activity that men have traditionally occupied.

The religious factor is a strong and delicate point that has not minimised the discourse that women must attend to things at home. '*Religion contemplates a [certain] structure, a division of labour, and it can be used to perpetuate or strengthen the rigidity of the division of labour from the perspective of women's submission, because … religion in that regard is very disproportionate*' (A. Bonilla, interview, December 2010).

The institutions that are determined locally, regionally and nationally constitute another factor that limits women's participation. According to Marley, '*I would say that the government structure itself, the authorities themselves, and the whole patriarchal system means that women have less access to all resources and greater opportunities*' (A. Marley, interview, February 2011). On the other hand, Moreno thinks there are arenas in which women can have influence, impact and opinions, '*I think the spaces are open, there are legal spaces; what doesn't exist is a mechanism of access. They [haven't been] constructed; these access*

mechanisms, procedures, have to be constructed'
(E. Moreno, interview, February 2011).

Some argue that women cannot participate or hold leadership posts because they cannot conduct activities that are 'only for men'. For example, one of the roles of the *síndico* is to negotiate and reach understandings with other authorities, who are men; and if a problem has to be resolved, the *síndico* has to travel many kilometres, and the roads are dangerous for women. Protagonism is wrested from women because some local authorities use violence to address land invasions by mestizos in the indigenous communities – another role that is inappropriate for women.

Women in leadership may be subject to social punishments, such as gossip and criticism. When community women try to behave differently from other women, win spaces and participate in arenas occupied by men, they are called 'a tramp who is abandoning her children', a woman who 'likes to hang out with men', or a whole series of similar judgements to discredit them.

The discourse of indigenous men mainly reproduces patterns that establish that women are in charge of household matters. This view holds that, by taking a position of community leadership and leaving their homes, these women abandon their obligations, leaving households and communities to suffer undesirable alterations. To some organisations that have worked on gender issues and human rights, the political system at the community level is a tool constructed and directed by men, in which no institution regulates the participation of the whole community.

7. Conclusions

There are a number of obstacles to women's participation in political processes generally and in natural resource management specifically, at all levels, ranging from the level of national and regional policy to the level of local practice. Although there are national and regional policies on women's participation and equity, the discussion of incorporating these approaches into economic and political development processes is relatively new. This has impacts on the lack of openings for incorporating women into decision-making arenas regarding natural resources at different decision-making levels.

A response to the lack of substantial changes in inequitable gender relations has been the definition of national policies and mandates to incorporate the gender approach as a crosscutting focus in the actions of governmental and nongovernmental institutions. We found, however, that such actions are diluted into larger development processes or remain at a simple quantification of men and women incorporated into projects, called affirmative actions. These superficial indicators limit a deeper analysis of gender biases and inequity, and fail to seek solutions that would improve or change such relations. Incorporating gender analysis presents many challenges at the national level. Such challenges are even greater in the autonomous regions.

So far the emphasis on gender issues at the national level has been on violence against women, as the banner of the women's struggle has been headed by organisations with a strong bias toward the issue of violence and sexual and reproductive health. While these are clearly important, they fail to address women as social, political and above all, economic actors, and the need to strengthen their participation in the country's development processes.

The North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) now has a gender policy that establishes the in-principle guidelines for regional authorities and institutions with regard to equity in society. This is also a recent process and is facing numerous challenges. Some of these challenges are inherent in the ongoing construction of multiethnic autonomy in the region: the spaces where decisions are made

and strategies are created are comprised of a small team of politicians and government staff who often lack the budget, capacity and time to provide follow-up to all actions defined in their plans.

In many cases the integration of gender into community management processes, such as community forestry businesses, territorial governments and even the organising of women's groups at the community level, obeys mandates of nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) that are implementing development projects in the communities. There is little genuine analysis of women's role or importance for more inclusive and balanced development processes. Hence, the 'participation' that predominates is incipient and superficial, above all with regard to natural resources.

For many of the organisations and institutions that work in RAAN, however, participation is seen as not only attending meetings, but also striving to influence decisions and produce positive changes – Agarwal's empowering and interactive participation. We cannot give a precise answer regarding the extent of this kind of participation in indigenous communities, but in the majority of communities, those holding the power and decision-making posts are men; there are very few successful experiences of women as *wihta* or *síndico*.

Among factors that facilitate women's participation in decision-making arenas, we found that a higher level of education was helpful, although not necessarily formal education; that is, other kinds of courses and training sessions were also valuable. This implies that education and training can promote empowerment and the acquisition of communication and negotiation skills that improve women's potential to be community leaders. Similarly, community women's organisations can help empower women.

The family – and women's traditional role in the home – is one of the principal barriers limiting women's participation in arenas of power at the community level. On the one hand, women's work outside the house is devalued and even ridiculed: some women will withdraw and stop participating

in local processes. On the other hand, men fail to take on work within the home in order to facilitate women's participation in the community.

Perhaps more importantly, although in some communities women participate actively in meetings and feel their opinions are taken into account, it was also common to find communities where *neither men nor women* felt that leaders actually made decisions based on broad-based community input. The institutions for the local administration of power, such as community assemblies, should be arenas in which women's participation in consensual decision-making about community resources is genuinely integrated; currently, however, these arenas tend to be limited simply to providing information, rather than opening to discussion and debate. There are no follow-up mechanisms supporting internal community processes that stimulate or motivate residents to collaborate, express their ideas, or influence or implement specific tasks that seek the common good of the community. Lack of confidence in the local authorities is a problem that has paralysed community members' participation more generally. Clearly, a redistribution of power at the community level is needed. This finding suggests that political leadership and effective governance are issues that need to be addressed more broadly, and not only from a gender perspective. In fact, efforts to address women's participation may be ineffective without efforts to address the local governance and accountability processes in which they are embedded: this constitutes an important hypothesis for future research.

There are few experiences currently that link the issue of gender and forests. What we have seen locally is that what many projects define as incorporating the gender approach into natural resource management is the creation of arenas for women to implement differentiated projects such as handicrafts. This does not include women in a meaningful way in decisions or benefits regarding the more valuable timber resources or in planning regarding the future of forests more generally. NGOs and governmental institutions have not yet considered the forest as an arena in which indigenous men and women are co-owners without distinction, in which to integrate equitable management actions.

Thus, the challenges of natural resource management with a gender approach involve not only reconfiguring strategies at a community level, but also among regional and national decision-makers – and among

NGOs, which are the entities that work most closely with communities. A new vision for the management of forests means bringing in all of the community members who benefit from forests and forest resources; communities and outside institutions both need to reflect critically on their actions and activities and their gendered assumptions regarding forests.

7.1 A step forward?

A few months after this research was completed, a new law was passed by the National Assembly requiring gender parity in all municipal government positions, subject to elections. The law mandates that all political parties ensure that every pair of candidates for Mayor and Vice Mayor consists of a woman and a man, as well as all other candidatures for membership of the municipal council. In addition, the law requires the inclusion of gender statistics and other qualitative data in the records of any municipal assembly and other meetings, budget proposals and reports, diagnostic reports, municipal plans and other official documents in order to measure the impact of municipal investment and activities in the reduction of gender inequity (Government of Nicaragua 2012).

This new law could help ensure equal 'representation' or at least the physical presence of women in municipal governments, which in the autonomous regions are currently slated to act as the intermediaries between indigenous territorial governments (in which communal governments are included) and the central government. Additionally, this law could contribute to the general visibility of women's political participation in governance processes through the systematic recording of data.

Nevertheless, the implications are not clear even for the municipal level, let alone for the way in which women will participate at the community and territory levels. The law only addresses municipal governments. It was presented and passed very quickly without, according to some analysts, sufficient attention to important details such as how to comply, sanctions for non-compliance or financial resources (Orozco 2012). With regard to communities and territories, the political model in the RAAN grants autonomy regarding the way in which leaders at these levels are elected in indigenous communities. Nevertheless, the new law could also set an example for the inclusion of women. Only time, and future research, will provide the answer.

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Appendix

List of people interviewed

No.	Interviewee	Organisation	Interview date	Interviewer
1.	Jorge Canales	INAFOR	December 2010	Tania Ulloa Hidalgo
2.	Alejandro Bonilla	Consultant for GIZ – German Cooperation	December 2010	Tania Ulloa Hidalgo
3.	Jadder Mendoza	Director of Iremades	February 2011	Gema Lorío and Xochilt Hernández
4.	Edda Moreno	CADPI	February 2011	Gema Lorío and Xochilt Hernández
5.	Reynaldo Francis	CCF-A/CRAAN	February 2011	Xochilt Hernández
6.	Cristina Poveda	CONADETI	February 2011	Gema Lorío and Xochilt Hernández
7.	Guillermina Torres	Masangni	February 2011	Gema Lorío and Xochilt Hernández
8.	Lisbeth Howard	Iremades	February 2011	Gema Lorío and Xochilt Hernández
9.	Marina Ingram	Secretariat of Women, Children and Family of the GRAAN	March 2011	Gema Lorío and Xochilt Hernández
10.	Anny Marley	URACCAN-CEIMM	February 2011	Gema Lorío
11.	Melba McLean	CIDCA	February 2011	Gema Lorío
12.	Miriam Rojas	INAFOR	February 2011	Xochilt Hernández
13.	Dona Zamora	SERENA	March 2011	Gema Lorío
14.	Lucila Lau	PANA PANA	March 2011	Gema Lorío
15.	German Lopez	CCF-A	March 2011	Gema Lorío
16.	Cony López	Women's Forestry Cooperative	February 2011	Gema Lorío
17.	Lectalía Herrera	Colectivo Gaviotas Women's Collective	March 2011	Gema Lorío
18.	Isabel Guadámuz	Businesswoman	February 2011	Gema Lorío and Xochilt Hernández
19.	Bismarck Vega	CONADETI	February 2011	Gema Lorío, Pilar Muller and Xochilt Hernández
20.	Constantino Rommel	President Tasba Raya – Wangki Twi Territory	December 2010	Tania Ulloa Hidalgo

List of laws, policies and regulations reviewed

No.	No. of Law/ Decree	Name	Date approved	Date published	La Gaceta No.
1.		Political Constitution of the Republic of Nicaragua	August 2003	August 2003	
2.	648	Law of Equal Rights and Opportunities	14 February 2008	12 March 2008	No. 51
3.	290	Law of Reform and Addition to Law No. 290, Law of Organization and Competency and Procedures of the Executive Branch	24 January 2007	29 January 2007	No. 612
4.	28	Autonomy Statute of the Atlantic Coast Regions of Nicaragua	7 September 1987	30 October 1987	No. 238
5.	Reform, 28	Reform: Regulations to Law No. 28 Autonomy Statute of the Atlantic Coast Regions of Nicaragua	9 July 2003	2 October 2003	No. 186
6.	445	Law of the Communal Property Regime of the Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Communities of the Atlantic Coast Region of Nicaragua and of the Bocay, Coco and Indio Maíz Rivers	13 December 2002	23 January 2003	No. 16
7.	392	Law of Promotion of the Comprehensive Development of Youth	9 May 2001	4 July 2001	No. 126
8.	Reform, 392	Reform and Addition, Regulation of Law 392, Promotion of the Comprehensive Development of Youth	14 May 2002	23 May 2002	No. 95
9.	40-261	Municipalities Law	28 June 1988	26 August 1997	No. 162
10.	217	General Law of Environment and Natural Resources	2 May 1996	6 June 1996	No. 105
11.	337	Law to Create the National Disaster Prevention, Mitigation and Response System	8 March 2000	7 April 2000	No. 70
12.	423	General Law of Health	14 March 2002	17 May 2002	No. 91
13.	462	Law of Conservation, Promotion and Sustainable Development of the Forestry Sector	26 June 2003	4 September 2003	No. 168
14.	585	Law of Moratorium on the Cutting, Exploitation and Commercialisation of the Forest Resource	7 June 2006	21 June 2006	No. 120
15.	69-2008	National Policy of Sustainable Development of the Forestry Sector	4 November 2008	7 January 2009	No. 3
16.		National Human Development Plan	August 2009		
17.	36 – 2006	National Gender Equity Program	4 June 2006	18 July 2006	No. 139
18.		Development Plan of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast			
19.		Gender Policy in the Context of Indigenous and Multiethnic Peoples of the RAAN	May 2010		
20.		Forestry Strategy of the RAAN	2004		

Women in Nicaragua's indigenous territories face substantial obstacles to participation in decision making regarding forests and forest resources in their communities. Though national laws and regional policies promote gender equity, forests are still seen primarily as the realm of men. Projects on women are rarely concerned with forests, and projects on forests rarely pay attention to women or approach forests from a gender perspective. At the community level women confront still greater obstacles: even when women are influential in other realms of local life, forests remain largely out of bounds.

This working paper presents the results of preliminary research on "Gender, tenure and community forests" in the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) of Nicaragua. It is based on a review of national and regional laws, policies and literature; interviews with governmental and nongovernmental organizations; and focus groups in 18 rural Miskitu and Mayangna indigenous communities. The research was conducted by Nitlapan-UCA with the support of CIFOR and was funded by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA). This report documents perceptions about, the meaning of and obstacles to women's participation from diverse points of view and lays the groundwork for further work at multiple levels.

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