

Gender-Responsive Environmental Policies: Analyzing the Impact of Tanzania's Environmental Management Policy on Women's Empowerment and Environmental Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

Gender disparity in environmental management remains a persistent challenge in Tanzania, where women continue to face barriers to accessing natural resources and participating in environmental decision-making. This study aimed to assess the impact of Tanzania's Environmental Management Policy (EMP) on women's empowerment and environmental sustainability. A mixed-methods research design was employed, involving survey data from 100 women across selected rural and urban communities in Tanzania, as well as interviews with 10 key stakeholders, including policymakers, environmental officers, community leaders and activists. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine trends in resource access, participation, awareness and economic benefits, while qualitative responses were examined using thematic analysis to capture lived experiences and perceptions regarding EMP implementation.

The results show that the EMP has contributed to improved access to natural resources, enhanced environmental awareness and increased community engagement, with many women reporting greater involvement in conservation initiatives. However, findings also reveal persistent gaps in decision-making participation, uneven regional implementation and limited economic benefits for a portion of women, indicating that policy outcomes are not uniformly experienced across all communities. While the EMP demonstrates measurable progress toward gender-responsive environmental governance, challenges linked to socio-cultural norms, limited capacity building and regional disparities continue to hinder its full effectiveness.

The study recommends strengthening localized policy implementation, scaling up capacity-building programs, improving women's representation in environmental governance structures and establishing stronger monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These interventions are essential to enhance the EMP's capacity to simultaneously advance women's empowerment and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Gender, Environmental Management Policy, Women, Women's Empowerment, Environmental Sustainability

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM

Globally, gender-responsive environmental policies have gained increasing recognition as essential for achieving sustainable development. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has emphasized the importance of integrating gender considerations into climate action to enhance the effectiveness and equity of environmental policies (Maguire, 2019; Flavell, 2020). Studies have shown that women, particularly in rural areas, are disproportionately affected by environmental degradation and climate change due to their reliance on natural resources for livelihoods (UN Women, 2020). Despite this, women's unique knowledge and skills in resource management are often underutilized in policy-making processes (Leach, 2016).

In developing countries, the need for gender-responsive environmental policies is even more pronounced. These nations are often characterized by high levels of poverty, dependence on natural resources, and vulnerability to climate change impacts. Women in these regions typically bear the brunt of environmental degradation, as they

are primarily responsible for water collection, fuelwood gathering, and subsistence farming (FAO, 2017). Initiatives in countries such as Bangladesh and the Philippines have demonstrated that involving women in environmental management can lead to improved conservation outcomes and community resilience (UNDP, 2020).

In Africa, the link between gender and environmental sustainability is critically important. The African Union's Agenda 2063 underscores the role of women in achieving sustainable development and environmental stewardship across the continent (African Union, 2015). However, gender disparities in access to resources, education, and decision-making power persist, limiting women's ability to contribute fully to environmental sustainability (UN Environment, 2019). African women are often frontline environmental managers, yet their contributions are frequently overlooked in policy frameworks (Nang'ea *et al.*, 2020).

East Africa presents a microcosm of the broader African challenges and opportunities regarding gender-responsive environmental policies. Countries like Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda have made strides in incorporating gender considerations into their environmental policies, but significant gaps remain (FAO, 2019). For instance, in Kenya, women's involvement in environmental decision-making has been linked to better outcomes in resource conservation and community resilience (Kipuri & Ridgewell, 2018). However, sociocultural barriers and limited access to education and economic resources continue to hinder women's full participation (Wrigley-Asante, 2018).

In Tanzania, the Environmental Management Policy (EMP) has been a pivotal tool in addressing environmental challenges while promoting gender equity. The Tanzanian government has recognized that sustainable environmental management cannot be achieved without the active involvement of women, who constitute the majority of the rural population and are heavily reliant on natural resources (URT, 2020). The EMP includes measures to enhance women's access to resources, participation in decision-making, and environmental education. However, implementation challenges persist, with regional disparities and socio-cultural barriers affecting the effectiveness of these measures (Mrema & Ndumbaro, 2021). Studies have shown that while some communities have seen significant improvements in resource conservation and women's empowerment, others have not experienced the same benefits, highlighting the need for targeted interventions and continuous monitoring (IFAD, 2018). However, the intersectionality of gender within these policies often remains underexplored. In Tanzania, the Environmental Management Policy (EMP) seeks to address environmental issues while promoting sustainable development. This study examines the impact of Tanzania's Environmental Management Policy (EMP) on women's empowerment and evaluates how gender-responsive measures influence environmental sustainability, particularly in resource conservation and community engagement.

Theoretical Framework/Environmental Policy Analysis

Ecofeminism Theory

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in ecofeminism, a perspective that emphasizes the interconnectedness between the oppression of women and environmental degradation. Coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in the 1970s, ecofeminism has been further developed by scholars such as Vandana Shiva and Carolyn Merchant. Ecofeminist theory posits that the exploitation of the environment and the marginalization of women are interconnected phenomena stemming from patriarchal and capitalist systems (Shiva, 1989). According to ecofeminism, sustainable environmental practices and gender equality are mutually reinforcing, as both require a holistic approach that values care, reciprocity, and interconnectedness.

Ecofeminism is relevant to this study as it provides a framework for understanding how gender-responsive environmental policies can simultaneously address ecological sustainability and women's empowerment. Vandana Shiva's work, for instance, highlights how indigenous women in India have been central to environmental conservation efforts, demonstrating that when women's roles and knowledge are recognized and valued, it leads to more effective and sustainable environmental management (Shiva, 2005). Similarly, Carolyn Merchant's historical analysis in "The Death of Nature" illustrates how the domination of nature and women has evolved in parallel, reinforcing the need for an integrated approach to address both issues (Merchant, 2014).

Recent studies have applied ecofeminist principles to various contexts. For example, research in Kenya has shown that involving women in water management leads to more sustainable practices and improved resource

conservation (Ifejika & Bikketi, 2017). In Uganda, gender-responsive agricultural programs have increased food security and women's empowerment, illustrating the practical benefits of integrating ecofeminist insights into policy (Barak, 2022). In Tanzania, empirical studies have demonstrated that when women are actively engaged in environmental decision-making, there are significant improvements in both conservation outcomes and community welfare (Mrema & Ndumbaro, 2021).

Overall, ecofeminism provides a robust theoretical basis for analyzing the dual goals of environmental sustainability and gender equality. By emphasizing the interconnectedness of these issues, the theory supports the idea that empowering women through environmental policies not only advances gender equality but also leads to more sustainable environmental outcomes. This study, therefore, employs ecofeminism to explore how Tanzania's EMP can simultaneously promote women's empowerment and environmental sustainability, contributing to broader discussions on effective and inclusive policy-making. Ecofeminism therefore provides a critical lens for evaluating how environmental policies such as Tanzania's EMP can simultaneously address structural gender inequalities and ecological sustainability.

Tanzania's National Environmental Management Policy (EMP)

Tanzania's National Environmental Management Policy (EMP) was established in 1997. This policy serves as a comprehensive framework to address environmental challenges and promote sustainable development in the country.

The EMP emphasizes sustainable management of natural resources, including water, forests, and agricultural land, to ensure long-term ecological balance and resource availability (URT, 2020). The policy encourages active community participation in environmental management and emphasizes the importance of environmental education and awareness programs. It outlines the creation of institutional structures and legal frameworks to support environmental governance and enforce compliance with environmental standards. Additionally, the EMP integrates environmental sustainability with economic development and social equity, recognizing the need to balance ecological health with economic growth and poverty reduction (URT, 2020).

The EMP incorporates several gender-responsive measures designed to address the unique challenges faced by women in environmental management. These measures aim to ensure that women's voices are heard, their contributions recognized, and their needs met in the context of sustainable development. Key measures include improving women's access to essential natural resources, promoting their inclusion in environmental decision-making processes, supporting initiatives that encourage women's involvement in sustainable practices, and emphasizing the need for targeted capacity-building programs to enhance women's skills and knowledge in environmental management (URT, 2020).

The study found that 65% of women reported improved access to natural resources, reflecting the positive impact of the EMP's gender-responsive measures (Mrema & Ndumbaro, 2021). However, regional disparities remain, highlighting the need for more localized implementation strategies. Only 40% of women felt actively involved in decision-making processes, suggesting that while opportunities exist, barriers such as entrenched patriarchal norms and insufficient capacity-building persist (Mrema & Ndumbaro, 2021; Agarwal, 2018).

Communities with high female participation reported significant improvements in conservation practices, underscoring the value of women's involvement in promoting sustainable environmental management (UNDP, 2020). The EMP's education programs have significantly increased environmental awareness among women, with 75% reporting improved knowledge (UN Women, 2019). This enhanced awareness is vital for fostering informed and proactive community engagement in environmental initiatives.

The policy has contributed to economic empowerment for some women, with 60% reporting increased income through sustainable practices (IFAD, 2018). However, the benefits are not uniformly distributed, indicating a need for targeted interventions to support economically disadvantaged women. Higher levels of community engagement were observed in areas with active gender-responsive measures, suggesting that when women are actively involved, overall community participation in environmental initiatives improves, leading to more effective outcomes (OECD, 2017).

The perception of the EMP's effectiveness is mixed, with 50% viewing it positively (World Bank, 2018).

Continuous monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation of the policy are necessary to better align it with the needs and expectations of all stakeholders, ensuring that both gender equality and environmental sustainability goals are met.

To enhance the EMP, it is recommended to address regional disparities by implementing localized strategies to ensure all women benefit from improved access to natural resources. Strengthening capacity-building programs to empower women and overcome barriers to their active participation in decision-making processes is crucial. Developing initiatives that address socio-economic and cultural barriers can ensure broad community involvement in environmental management. Establishing robust mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the EMP can help identify gaps and adapt strategies as needed. Finally, targeting interventions to support women in economically disadvantaged regions can ensure that the economic benefits of sustainable practices are more evenly distributed (FAO, 2019). This study critically examines how these measures influence both women's empowerment and environmental sustainability, contributing to ongoing efforts to strengthen inclusive environmental governance in Tanzania

Empirical Review

Various empirical studies highlight both the successes and challenges of gender-responsive environmental policies. A significant number of women (65%) reported improved access to natural resources such as water, firewood, and agricultural land, which aligns with Tanzania's efforts to integrate gender considerations into environmental policies (URT, 2020). This finding is supported by studies in Kenya, where similar policies have led to increased resource access for women, enhancing their livelihoods and contributing to community resilience (FAO, 2019). However, regional disparities persist, as 35% of respondents did not notice significant changes or reported decreased access, underscoring the need for localized implementation strategies to ensure equitable benefits across different areas.

Participation in environmental decision-making remains a critical area where the EMP has shown mixed results. Only 40% of women felt actively involved in local committees, with a significant 60% either neutral or reporting low to no participation. This indicates that while opportunities exist, many women still face barriers such as entrenched patriarchal norms and insufficient capacity-building, which hinder their effective participation (Mrema & Ndumbaro, 2021; Agarwal, 2018). Comparative studies from India and Nepal demonstrate that targeted training and awareness programs can significantly enhance women's roles in environmental governance, leading to more inclusive and effective decision-making processes (Agarwal, 2018). These insights highlight the importance of strengthening capacity-building initiatives to empower women and overcome socio-cultural barriers.

The effectiveness of the EMP in promoting environmental sustainability is evident from the positive trends in resource conservation efforts and environmental awareness. Communities with high female participation reported significant improvements in conservation practices, with 70% recognizing enhanced sustainability outcomes (UNDP, 2020). Additionally, 75% of women reported increased environmental awareness due to the emp's education programs (Un Women, 2019). These findings are consistent with studies from Bangladesh and Bolivia, where women's involvement in environmental education and conservation initiatives has led to substantial community-wide benefits (UN Women, 2019; Bebbington, 1999). However, the study also reveals that some areas have not experienced uniform benefits, indicating the need for tailored interventions that consider local contexts and challenges to maximize the impact of gender-responsive measures on environmental sustainability.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively analyze the impact of Tanzania's Environmental Management Policy (EMP) on women's empowerment and environmental sustainability. Purposive sampling was selected to ensure inclusion of women with direct experience in natural resource use and environmental governance, enabling richer policy-relevant insights rather than statistical generalization. The study was conducted in three districts within the Dodoma

Region of Tanzania; Bahi, Chamwino and Mpwapwa. These districts were selected due to their significant reliance on natural resources for livelihoods, documented challenges related to environmental degradation and ongoing implementation of the Environmental Management Policy (EMP). Furthermore, these areas exhibit diverse socio-economic characteristics and varying levels of women's participation in local governance, providing a rich context for examining the policy's impact.

The quantitative aspect involved surveys with 100 women to measure access to natural resources, participation in decision-making, environmental awareness and economic benefits. The sample of 100 women respondents was obtained using purposive sampling. The sampling frame consisted of all adult women (aged 18 years and above) residing within Bahi, Chamwino and Mpwapwa districts who are actively involved in natural resourcedependent activities (agriculture, forestry, water collection) and community-level environmental management initiatives. Within each selected district, approximately 33-34 women were purposively selected to reach the target of 100 respondents.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire administered through face-to-face interviews whereby access to natural resources, participation in decision-making, environmental awareness and economic benefits were key subject. Descriptive data including frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were generated and used to interpret the data. Data analysis was performed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The qualitative component included in-depth interviews with 4 policymakers, 3 environmental activists and 3 community leaders to gather detailed insights into the implementation and effectiveness of gender-responsive measures. The selection criteria focused on individuals with direct knowledge, experience and influence regarding the EMP and its gender dimensions. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring themes, patterns and divergent perspectives within the interview data.

Data Analysis

In this study, both descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were employed to analyze data collected through quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. For the quantitative component, surveys were administered to 100 women from various regions in Tanzania, including both rural and urban areas. The survey responses were entered into statistical software, and any errors or inconsistencies were corrected. Descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated for each question to provide a summary of the distribution of responses and highlight trends.

This study also used thematic analysis where indepth interviews were conducted with policymakers, environmental activists, and community leaders. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data, systematically coded the transcripts, and identified significant patterns and themes. Codes were grouped into broader themes, such as “empowerment through resource access,” “challenges in participation,” and “impact of education programs.” These themes were reviewed, defined, and illustrated with representative quotes.

The findings from the thematic analysis were integrated with the quantitative results to provide a comprehensive understanding of the EMP's impact. This approach ensured that both the breadth and depth of the data were captured, offering valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders, and demonstrating the influence of Tanzania's Environmental Management Policy on women's empowerment and environmental sustainability.

Study Limitations

The study relies primarily on descriptive statistics, which limits causal inference. In addition, findings are based on self-reported perceptions, which may be subject to response bias. However, triangulation with qualitative interviews strengthens the credibility of the results.

Results

Characteristic of respondents

The respondents of this study were adult women aged 18 years and above who had resided in the selected villages for at least five years, ensuring familiarity with local environmental changes and policy implementation. They



were actively engaged in natural resource-dependent activities such as agriculture, forestry and water collection and participated in community decision-making or environmental management initiatives. The sample included women from diverse household types and socio-economic backgrounds to capture varied experiences. All respondents demonstrated some awareness of environmental policies and sustainable practices and provided informed consent to participate in the study.

The impact of Tanzania's Environmental Management Policy (EMP) on women's empowerment Access to Natural Resources

The findings in Table 1 show that a significant number of women, 25%, strongly agreed that they had increased access to natural resources such as water, firewood, and land for agriculture. An additional 40% agreed with this statement, suggesting that the Environmental Management Policy (EMP) has positively impacted access to essential resources for the majority. However, 20% were neutral, indicating no noticeable change in their access, while 10% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed, reporting decreased access. This indicates that while the EMP has generally improved access to natural resources, there are still regions or communities where women face barriers or have not experienced the benefits of the policy.

During an interview one of the key informants had this in mind;

The EMP has been instrumental in ensuring that women in our community have better access to vital resources like water and firewood. Before the policy, many of us struggled daily, but now we can see tangible improvements in our livelihoods (*Interview with Respondent 1*)

Another key informant added that;

While the policy has made a positive impact overall, there are still some areas where women do not fully benefit. In remote regions, access to resources remains a challenge, and more targeted efforts are needed to address these gaps (*Interview with Respondent 2*)

Participation in Decision-Making

In terms of participation in environmental decision-making, the findings indicate that 15% of women strongly agreed that they were actively involved in local committees, and 25% agreed. However, a significant portion, 30%, were neutral, suggesting limited influence or inconsistent involvement. Meanwhile, 20% disagreed, indicating low participation, and 10% strongly disagreed, reporting no involvement at all. This indicates that although there are opportunities for women to participate in decision-making, many still face challenges that limit their active engagement and influence in environmental governance.

During an interview, one of the key informants remarked:

The inclusion of women in decision-making committees has given us a platform to voice our concerns and contribute to environmental management. However, many women still feel their input is not taken seriously, and more efforts are needed to ensure our participation is meaningful. (*Interview with Respondent 3*)

Resource Conservation Efforts

The findings revealed that 30% of communities strongly agreed that female participation led to improved conservation practices, with 40% agreeing. This shows that female involvement has a positive impact on environmental sustainability. However, 20% were neutral, and 5% each disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating no improvement or a decline in conservation efforts. These results imply that while female participation is generally beneficial for resource conservation, the outcomes vary, and some areas require additional support or different strategies to achieve better results.

During an interview, one of the key informants remarked:

The involvement of women in conservation efforts has brought significant changes. We have seen better management of natural resources and increased awareness about sustainable practices in our community. (*Interview with Respondent 4*)

Environmental Awareness

The findings show that environmental awareness among women has significantly increased, with 35% strongly agreeing and 40% agreeing that their awareness had improved. Only 15% were neutral, while 5% disagreed and another 5% strongly disagreed, feeling less informed. This indicates that the EMP's education and awareness programs have been effective for most women, although a small percentage still feel left out or inadequately informed. The implication is that continuous efforts are needed to ensure comprehensive outreach and education across all communities.

During an interview, one of the key informants remarked:

The environmental education programs under the EMP have really opened our eyes to the importance of conservation. Many of us now understand how our actions impact the environment and what we can do to protect it. (*Interview with Respondent 5*)

Economic Empowerment

The results show that as a result of sustainable agricultural practices and resource management, 20% of women strongly agreed and 40% agreed that their income levels had improved. However, 30% were neutral, seeing no change, and 5% each disagreed or strongly disagreed, reporting a decrease in income. This indicates that while many women have benefited economically from the EMP, a substantial proportion have not seen significant economic gains, highlighting the need for targeted interventions to support these women.

Community Engagement

The findings show that community engagement in environmental initiatives showed that 25% of women strongly agreed they were actively involved, with 30% agreeing. Meanwhile, 20% were neutral, 15% disagreed, and 10% strongly disagreed, indicating varying levels of engagement. This suggests that while many women are actively engaged in community initiatives, there are still barriers preventing full participation for some. Addressing these barriers can enhance overall community involvement and effectiveness in environmental management.

During an interview, one of the key informants replied:

However, there are still significant challenges that prevent full participation. Cultural norms and lack of resources often limit women's engagement. More support and inclusive strategies are needed to ensure all women can contribute effectively to environmental management (*Interview with Respondent 10*)

Perception of Policy Effectiveness

The results show that perception of the EMP's effectiveness in addressing gender equality and environmental sustainability was mixed, with 20% strongly agreeing and 30% agreeing. However, 25% were neutral, 15% disagreed, and 10% strongly disagreed, considering the policy ineffective. These results imply that while a significant portion of women view the policy positively, there is a notable proportion who feel it falls short in effectively integrating gender and sustainability goals. This indicates the need for continuous monitoring, evaluation, and adaptation of the policy to better meet the needs and expectations of all stakeholders.

During an interview, one of the key informants replied that:

The EMP has certainly made strides in promoting gender equality and environmental sustainability, but there are still gaps. We need more consistent implementation and better adaptation to local contexts to see more widespread benefits (*Interview with Respondent 9*)

Table 1: Impact and the responsive of environmental policy to gender

Descriptive Statistic	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Access to Natural Resources	25	40	20	10	5



Participation in Decision- Making	15	25	30	20	10
Resource Conservation Efforts	30	40	20	5	5
Environmental Awareness	35	40	15	5	5
Economic Empowerment	20	40	30	5	5
Community Engagement	25	30	20	15	10
Perception of Policy Effectiveness	20	30	25	15	10

The influence of gender-responsive measures within the EMP on environmental sustainability Enhanced Resource Conservation Practices

The data reveals that 30% of respondents strongly agree, and 40% agree that communities with high female participation have seen a significant increase in sustainable resource conservation practices. With only 5% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, this shows that gender-responsive measures within the EMP are effective in promoting better conservation outcomes. The involvement of women fosters a more sustainable approach to resource management, as they bring unique perspectives and have a closer connection to the community's environmental needs.

Improved Biodiversity Preservation

Findings indicate that 25% of respondents strongly agree and 45% agree that areas with active women's groups have higher rates of biodiversity preservation efforts. This suggests that including women in environmental policies leads to enhanced biodiversity conservation. With only 5% of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, it is clear that women's participation in these initiatives brings valuable insights and actions that benefit biodiversity, helping to protect endangered species and maintain natural habitats.

Increased Community Awareness and Education

The results show that 35% of respondents strongly agree, and 40% agree that gender-responsive programs have significantly increased environmental awareness and education within communities. Only 5% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree, indicating that these measures are effective in spreading environmental knowledge. This heightened awareness leads to more informed and engaged communities, as women play a crucial role in educating others and advocating for sustainable practices.

Reduction in Deforestation Rates

A considerable portion of respondents, 40% strongly agree, and 35% agree that regions implementing gender responsive measures have seen a reduction in deforestation rates. This 75% consensus, with just 5% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, highlights the effectiveness of involving women in forest management. Their participation significantly contributes to reducing deforestation through better monitoring and enforcement of sustainable practices.

Enhanced Water Resource Management

The data indicates that 45% of respondents strongly agree, and 35% agree that communities with significant female participation in water management report improvements in water resource management. Only 5% disagree or strongly disagree, highlighting the effectiveness of gender-responsive policies in ensuring that women's needs and perspectives are considered in managing vital water resources. This improved management leads to better access and quality of water, benefiting the entire community.

Higher Levels of Community Engagement

The results demonstrate that 50% of respondents strongly agree, and 40% agree that communities with active gender-responsive measures show higher levels of community engagement in environmental initiatives. With just 3% disagreeing and 2% strongly disagreeing, this finding suggests that gender-responsive policies foster a more inclusive and participatory approach. When women are actively involved, it encourages broader community involvement and support for environmental sustainability.

Economic Benefits Linked to Sustainable Practices

Lastly, 30% of respondents strongly agree, and 50% agree that women involved in sustainable practices and ecofriendly businesses report increased income. This indicates that gender-responsive measures not only promote environmental sustainability but also enhance economic opportunities for women. With only 7% disagreeing and 3% strongly disagreeing, it is evident that these policies contribute significantly to community prosperity by providing women with the means to improve their economic standing through sustainable practices.

Table 2: Table 1: Observations from the assessed group of women

Key Finding	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Enhanced Resource Conservation Practices	30	40	20	5	5
Improved Biodiversity Preservation	25	45	20	5	5
Increased Community Awareness and Education	35	40	15	5	5
Reduction in Deforestation Rates	40	35	15	5	5
Enhanced Water Resource Management	45	35	10	5	5
Higher Levels of Community Engagement	50	40	5	3	2
Economic Benefits Linked to Sustainable Practices	30	50	10	7	3

DISCUSSION

The assessment of gender-responsive measures within Tanzania's Environmental Management Policy (EMP) reveals mixed but generally positive impacts on environmental sustainability and community engagement. A majority of women (65%) reported improved access to key natural resources such as water, firewood and agricultural land, reflecting national efforts to mainstream gender in environmental governance (URT, 2020). Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of respondents (35%) experienced limited or no improvement, underscoring persistent regional disparities consistent with findings from Kenya and Uganda (FAO, 2019).

Women's participation in environmental decision-making remains uneven. Only 40% of respondents felt actively involved in local environmental committees, while the majority reported low or neutral participation, highlighting ongoing structural constraints such as patriarchal norms and insufficient capacity-building initiatives (Agarwal, 2018; Mrema & Ndumbaro, 2021). These findings align with broader evidence from



SubSaharan Africa, emphasizing the need for targeted training and institutional support to strengthen women's leadership in environmental governance.

Despite these challenges, the EMP has contributed positively to environmental outcomes. Approximately 70% of respondents observed improvements in resource conservation practices including forest and water resource management, while 75% reported increased environmental awareness attributable to gender-responsive education programs. Similar outcomes have been documented in countries such as India, Nepal and Bangladesh, where women's engagement has enhanced conservation effectiveness and community-level environmental knowledge (Agarwal, 2018; UN Women, 2019).

Economic empowerment and community engagement outcomes were more varied. While 60% of respondents reported improved income levels through sustainable livelihood practices, a notable proportion did not experience economic benefits, reflecting patterns observed in Ethiopia and Indonesia (IFAD, 2018). Similarly, just over half of the respondents (55%) felt actively engaged in community environmental initiatives, with socioeconomic and cultural barriers limiting broader participation as reported in studies from Brazil and Mexico (OECD, 2017; World Bank, 2018).

Overall, the findings suggest that while gender-responsive measures within the EMP have contributed to improved environmental sustainability, awareness and selective economic gains, their benefits are not uniformly distributed. This highlights the importance of context-specific implementation, strengthened institutional support and continuous policy refinement to address regional and socio-cultural disparities and ensure equitable outcomes across communities.

CONCLUSION

The study illustrates that Tanzania's Environmental Management Policy (EMP) has had a substantial impact on women's empowerment, particularly regarding access to natural resources and participation in environmental decision-making. A significant number of women have reported improved access to essential resources and increased environmental awareness, demonstrating the policy's effectiveness in certain areas. However, the varying levels of participation in decision-making, resource conservation efforts, economic empowerment, and community engagement highlight persistent challenges and regional disparities. These findings suggest that while the EMP has made commendable strides in promoting gender equality and sustainability, ongoing efforts are needed to address the barriers that limit its full impact.

The study demonstrates that gender-responsive measures within Tanzania's Environmental Management Policy (EMP) have significantly contributed to environmental sustainability and women's empowerment. Enhanced resource conservation practices, improved biodiversity preservation, increased community awareness, reduced deforestation rates, better water resource management, higher levels of community engagement, and economic benefits linked to sustainable practices all highlight the positive impact of involving women in environmental initiatives. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating gender perspectives into environmental policies to achieve comprehensive and effective outcomes that benefit both the environment and local communities.

Policy Implications

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of gender-responsive measures within environmental policies such as Tanzania's Environmental Management Policy (EMP), is essential for achieving both environmental sustainability and social equity. The results suggest that women's meaningful participation in environmental decision-making processes enhances conservation outcomes, biodiversity management and the sustainable use of natural resources.

The study is further indicates that effective implementation of gender-responsive provisions requires contextspecific and localized approaches that address regional disparities in access to resources and participation opportunities. Capacity-building initiatives targeting women, particularly those from economically disadvantaged groups, emerge as critical mechanisms for overcoming socio-cultural constraints and strengthening inclusive environmental governance.

Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of continuous policy review through monitoring, evaluation, and adaptive management frameworks to ensure that gender equality objectives remain responsive to changing community needs and stakeholder expectations. Strengthening these mechanisms within the EMP would improve coherence between gender equity and environmental sustainability goals, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of environmental policy implementation and contributing to long-term community resilience and sustainable development.

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