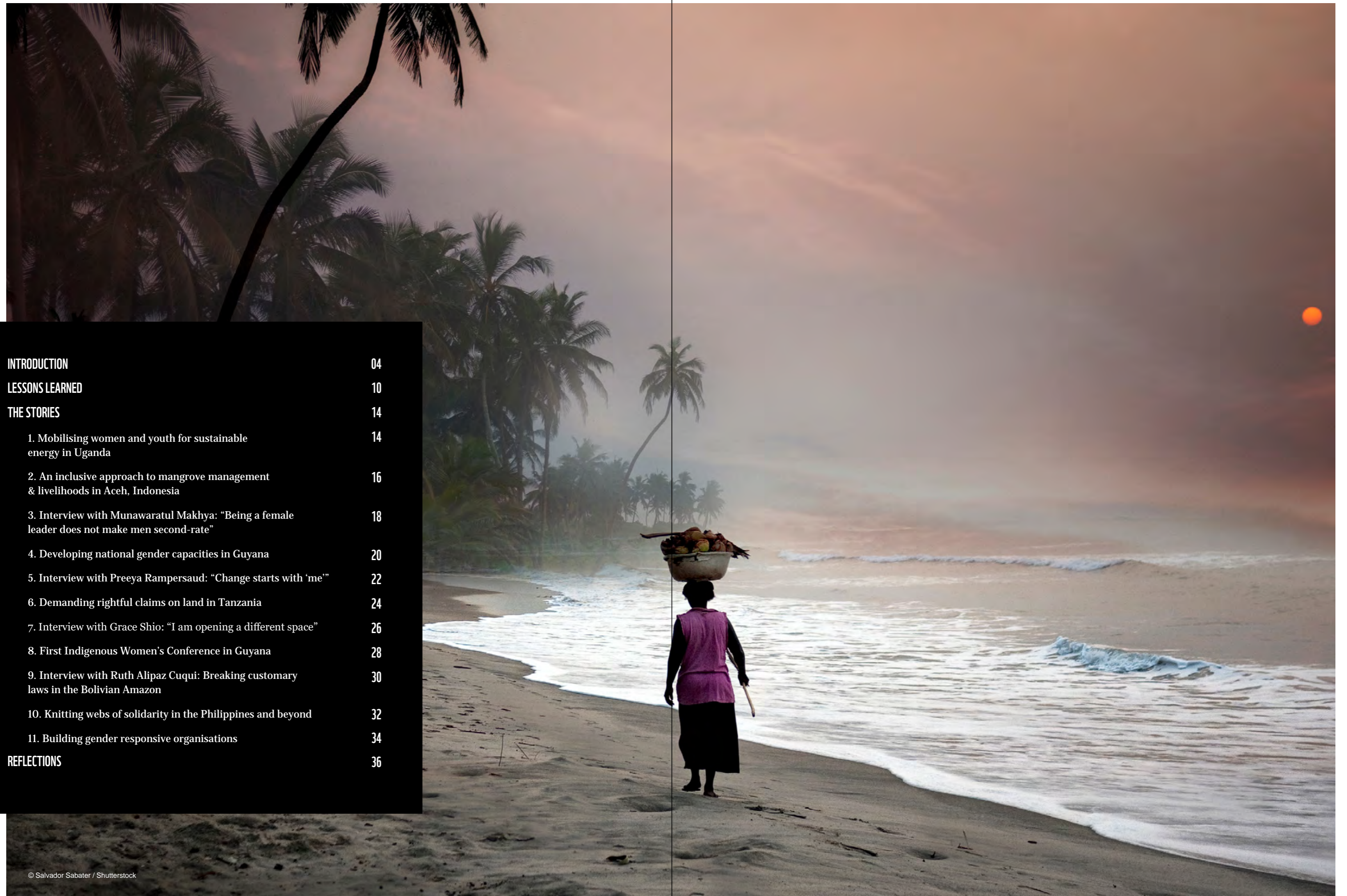




# STORIES OF CHANGE

FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN CONSERVATION

By Frédérique Holle, IUCN NL and  
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## IUCN NL

IUCN NL is the Dutch national committee of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, the world's largest and most diverse environmental network. In the Netherlands, IUCN NL is the platform of the 39 Dutch IUCN member organisations, including large and small nature and environmental organisations, the Dutch Government and knowledge institutions.

## WWF NL

WWF NL is part of the global WWF network. As the world's leading conservation organisation, WWF works in nearly 100 countries. Over the past decades, WWF has grown into a worldwide network of people. Conservationists, local people and indigenous communities, governments, businesses, donors and volunteers: people with the same passion to protect and restore nature and its inhabitants. And who jointly have the same challenging mission: a world in which people live in harmony with nature.

## SHARED RESOURCES, JOINT SOLUTIONS (SRJS)

Shared Resources Joint Solutions is a five-year strategic partnership (2016-2020) between IUCN NL, WWF and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In close collaboration with about 212 local civil society organisations (CSOs), we joined forces with the public and private sector to safeguard important ecosystems and their services to society in 26 landscapes in Asia, Africa and South America.

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# INTRODUCTION

**Female leadership** “Biology doesn’t dictate leadership, but space for female leadership has to be created and a woman must be empowered and confident enough to take on that leadership role. Once she has that leadership position, the hard work begins. She should be able to see the other issues that have been pushed aside and marginalised, along with her. What are those issues? The invisibility of other poor women, the invisibility of care-work, the invisibility of Indigenous communities. Women have important, valuable things to say, that can change the world to a better, beautiful and more nurturing place to live.” *Judy Pasimio, Founder LILAK*

Sometimes life offers you the chance to meet individuals who push boundaries that have been stuck for ages - individuals who create a crack in those rigid walls and open up uncharted new territories, so that others can follow, moving into previously closed worlds and taking up their rightful claims.

This publication is a collection of stories of women who challenged the status quo in their patriarchal societies, and by standing up, have created space for other women. All over the world, women have been denied their rights. For example,

- [< 15% of all landowners are female](#)
- Women have less access to education and make up [more than two-thirds of the world’s 796 million illiterate people](#).
- [Women make up fewer elected representatives in most rural councils](#). In Asia, for example, this ranges from 1.6% in Sri Lanka to 31% in Pakistan.
- Women often have less access to health and education services, to land, credit and income, and have limited decision-making power.



## WOMEN’S RIGHTS

In some countries, it is the legal, formal system that prevents women from taking a fuller role in society. However, often there are also informal obstacles to change. Power dynamics, norms and values, traditions and cultures (‘..as a woman you are not supposed to..’) are sometimes even stronger barriers to women claiming their rights.



Sometimes the marginalisation that women experience is multi-layered. Compounded discrimination (against Indigenous peoples, for instance) could put a woman in a doubly or triply marginalised position.

The COVID-19 pandemic places additional pressure on women’s rights and safety worldwide, linked as it is to an increase in gender-based violence, reduced incomes, and increased pressure on natural resources and thus livelihoods.

In many places, women are responsible for fetching water and wood and for feeding the family. With these responsibilities, they are keenly aware of the importance of safeguarding natural resources for their children and grandchildren. Yet they are often excluded from participating in decision-making regarding natural resources. This is both unjust and sub-optimal for effective conservation work.

Through the struggles of many different leaders, both female and male, cracks are appearing in the traditional systems, letting light shine through and feeding their dreams and those of others. This publication introduces Shared Resources Joint Solutions (SRJS) change makers: strong women who have stood up for the protection of nature, shown leadership on conservation issues, and by challenging the rules (both formal and informal) have shown alternative ways of doing things. In so doing, they have cleared a path for their sisters and daughters.

We present the paths of the change makers as cases, occasionally using personal interviews to show that “all change starts with me”, in the words of Preeya.

So meet Ruth, an Indigenous leader from the Bolivian Amazon who denounced human rights violations in Bolivia at the United Nations (UN) to protect her ancestral territories from hydroelectric dams and logging activities. Meet Grace, who was elected for Member of Parliament in Tanzania with the aim of opening the eyes of women to the rights to which they are entitled. Meet Judy, a Filipina activist who has been fighting her whole life for the rights of Indigenous women in an increasingly violent regime. Meet Muna, who is gently determined to make a difference for women and nature in Aceh, Indonesia. Meet Preeya in Guyana, who followed her heart in protecting nature. Meet all the other women in and behind these inspirational stories of change, who made a difference and marked their way.

This publication highlights the insights and key learnings from these stories of female leadership, showing how these change makers used SRJS to scale up their ambitions to protect nature and transform deeply entrenched power structures around gender norms. Read and be inspired.



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# LESSONS LEARNED

The stories presented in this publication demonstrate the great variety in approaches by SRJS partners to promote female leadership and address gender inequality in nature conservation. Some women share their personal story, some the story of their organisation. Others explain how they have tried to influence the formal system, either through movement building and protesting the patriarchal system, or alternatively through subtle pushing and pulling - whatever is possible given the context and civic space. Still other stories highlight where culture and tradition prevent women from claiming their rights, and show how women are effectively challenging damaging customary norms and traditions.

To make sense of all the different stories, the [Gender@Work Framework](#) was used to distinguish between changing the formal system (such as laws and regulations) and the informal system of norms, values, and traditions.

There is no silver bullet for working on female leadership and gender justice in conservation. Every situation requests its own approach and solution. Nonetheless, some of the lessons *can* be transposed and applied elsewhere. These are the key lessons learned under SRJS on women leadership and gender justice in nature conservation.

## LESSONS ON INDIVIDUAL CHANGE

**1. Be an agent of change:** We cannot expect others to incorporate gender considerations and change behaviour and practices if we do not examine our own gender practices and thinking. “Change starts with ‘me’”, said Preeya, through awareness, knowing your rights and moving forward. “You can be your own obstacle, or your own tool”, notes Ruth. Or as Grace explains, “You need to



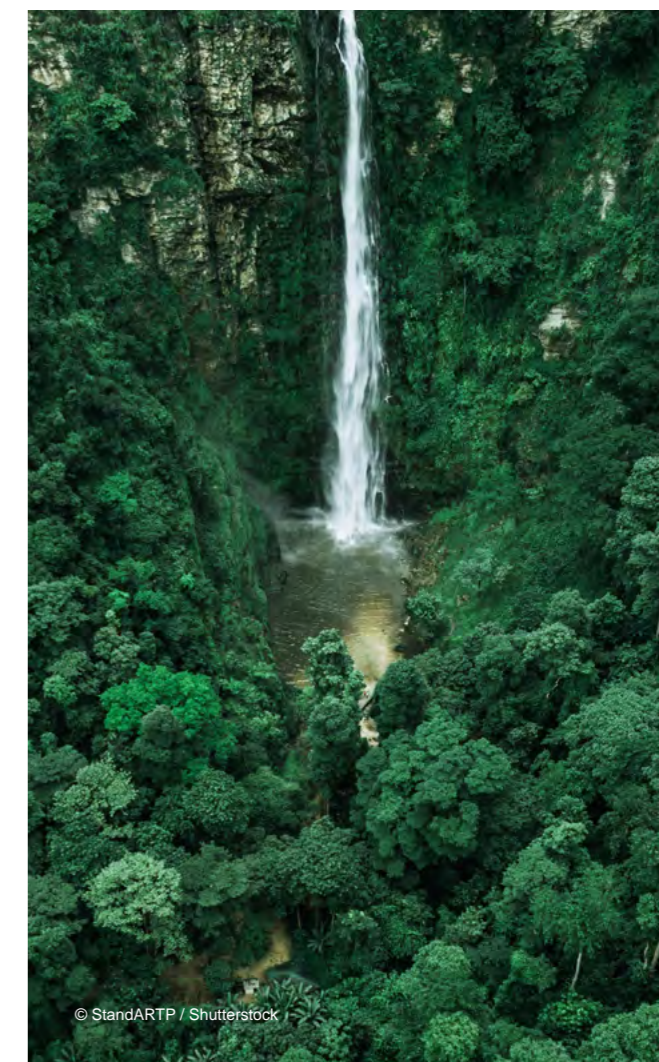
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have a tough skin. Do not back off, know your rights and keep on pushing and moving.” Learn more on this in the stories of Preeya (story 5), Grace (story 7) and Ruth (story 9).

**2. Build confidence in leadership:** Think as Muna: “Even if people underestimate you, do not underestimate yourself. Show that you have skills and capacities. Try to distinguish ‘is it about me or is there something wrong with their perspective?’ Learn from other women and build your capacity as a female leader, and in your turn, inspire other women and strengthen their capacities.” Learn more on this in the stories of Muna (story 3), Grace (story 7) and Ruth (story 9).

## LESSONS ON BUILDING GENDER RESPONSIVE ORGANISATIONS

**3. Start with the basics:** To make gender explicit in your organisation, start by conducting a gender audit, followed by a gender action plan; earmark financial resources; and strengthen staff gender capacities. Learn more on this in the story on Building gender responsive organisations (story 11).



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**4. Move beyond changing policies and securing budgets:** Work on changing the organisational culture with its norms and values as well, as Muna did (story 3), and work with male champions to change men’s attitudes, norms and values.

**5. Follow a twin-track approach:**  
a) Mainstream gender in your topics, themes and programmes to improve your programme and its results, as the story on Tanzania shows (story 6) and the University in Guyana in story 4.  
b) When needed, work with women-only groups first and give them a voice as Grace did in Tanzania (story 7) and Preeya in Guyana (story 8).

**6. Share Resources, find Joint Solutions:** Men and women have different roles, stakes and perspectives and therefore come with different and complementary views and solutions. Use these different perspectives, views and solutions to arrive at better conservation results, as in Uganda (story 1), Guyana (story 5) and the Philippines (story 10).

**7. Women’s rights are human rights:** Addressing fundamental human rights, including gender and Indigenous rights should be at the core of what we do to ensure there is social change. Nature conservation is about changing human behaviour and thus about social change. Learn more on this in the stories of Preeya (story 5), Grace (story 7) and Ruth (story 9).



## LESSONS ON CHANGING THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL SYSTEMS

**8. Promote women's environmental rights:** If policies, laws and regulations are not supportive of women, they need to be changed. Make women, men, communities and policy makers aware of injustice. Include specialised gender organisations in your work. Learn more on this in the story on Guyana (story 4).

**9. Change norms, attitudes and culture:** Sometimes the policies, laws and regulations are progressive and supportive but they are not practiced due to a conservative or regressive informal system of norms, values, and traditions. Challenge those customary rigidities that maintain the injustice. Work with male champions where helpful. Learn more on this in the story of Tanzania where customary norms were challenged on land rights (story 6) and of Aceh where men and women were involved to change the culture (story 2).

**10. Knit webs of solidarity where civic space is limited:** Connect women's organisations to each other, especially around environmental defenders work for support and safety. Use these webs of solidarity to create spaces where women can come together and build confidence, to show them they are not alone in their fight against an unjust system and that "change starts with me". Learn more on this in Judy's story on the Philippines (story 10), where she links environmental women's groups for support, simultaneously creating spaces for women.

# MOBILISING WOMEN AND YOUTH FOR SUSTAINABLE ENERGY IN UGANDA

**THE STORIES** “WOMEN HAVE POWER; WE NEED TO HARNESS THAT POWER.” - ANGELA

“We talk to men and women. But it’s mostly women who listen.” Angela\*, one of the female clean energy champions from Kasese District, reaches out to community members via social events to inform them on the potential harmful impacts of oil and gas exploration developments in her region. Angela mainly targets women and youth since she found that they are often the ones who take both her and her message seriously.

In 2006, commercial oil deposits were discovered in Uganda. The oil is largely located in and around protected areas, such as in Murchison Falls National Park and Lake Albert. Oil companies Total and CNOOC plan to drill over 400 wells and construct a 1,443 km oil pipeline running from Uganda to Tanzania. Massive land grabbing and compulsory land acquisitions are taking place as a result, with many communities already displaced. This trend is threatening livelihoods and the environment, putting pressure on protected forests and lakes. This in turn accelerates climate change, which in a vicious circle puts even more pressure on people’s livelihoods.

In 2016 and 2019, the Ugandan government decided to license several oil blocks. Initially in 2016, the Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO) – a non-governmental organisation (NGO) partner of IUCN NL - and a consortium of NGOs and global partners launched a campaign to stop the licensing of an oil block in Queen Elizabeth National Park and Lake Edward. The pressure created by this action put a temporary halt on the licensing process.

However, in 2019 the government decided to re-open the oil block for licensing. The women and youth movements who were engaged in the previous campaign spearheaded a

new campaign in collaboration with the NGO coalition and international media to stop the re-opening. Empowered by the experiences of 2016, these groups now knew how to mobilise media, build a strong coalition to engage the president and put pressure on the Ministry of Energy. Through the campaign, the voices of the communities were heard by the government. The government committed to an environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA) before oil exploration could commence. As of April 2021, the block is still up for licensing, but campaigns to protect Queen Elizabeth National Park and Lake Edward are ongoing.

AFIEGO has focused on organising sensitisation meetings to raise awareness of the environmental and health issues of oil exploration. They facilitate dialogues between district leaders, environment officers, religious leaders and community members and they offer communities alternatives such as solar solutions and cooking stoves.

Women took a particular interest in the issue, not least because they are the ones disproportionately affected by the impacts of oil and gas exploration. Diana Nabiruma, Senior Communications Officer at AFIEGO, explains: “Women are the life source. They are the ones in our context who provide food and water. They are the ones

that ensure their families are safe. They spend a lot of time at the health centres when their children or husbands are sick. Women provide basic services to their families and they realise that human health is impacted by oil exploration. Yet, women still face challenges of our patriarchal society. Women cannot come to meetings because they are engaged in household chores or are expected to keep out of the public sphere.”

Moreover, women are part of the solution. Angela continues, “We reached out to groups in markets, at funerals and parties. We have been teaching these women about oil and they recognise the importance of the environmental issues. Women have power - we need to harness that power.” Seeing the projected impacts on human health, it was women and youth groups at the forefront, spearheading the campaign against the oil developments.



## LESSONS LEARNED

Women are often natural allies when it comes to nature conservation. A healthy environment supports healthy people. As women often take on care duties of the family, they are many times the first to realise the need for a healthy and sustainable environment. Including these allies leads to enhanced conservation results.



# AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO MANGROVE MANAGEMENT & LIVELIHOODS IN ACEH, INDONESIA

**THE STORIES** GENDER EQUALITY IS ALSO BENEFICIAL FOR MEN. WHERE NEEDED, USE MALE CHAMPIONS TO BRING THAT MESSAGE ACROSS. - MUNAWARATUL MAKHYA



Indonesia has the largest cover of mangrove forests in the world. Almost 70% of the coastal population in Aceh depends on their use for their livelihoods, as mangroves support fish and shrimp production. Mangrove forests are also key in the fight against the increasing impacts of climate change, helping to protect the coastline against natural disasters. Yet, despite their importance, mangrove forests continue to face serious threats, caused by unsustainable forest management, illegal logging and land clearing. Through using a gender equality approach, the SRJS partners have contributed to both women and men playing an active role in conserving and managing mangroves, and in so doing experienced improvements to their livelihoods.

Munawaratul Makhya (Muna), SRJS Programme Coordinator at WWF Indonesia explains how they made mangrove protection an example of inclusive conservation. “Women in most coastal areas in Aceh have no source of livelihood, and are 100% dependent on their men.” Men earn money through cutting mangrove trees. Whenever money is needed, they cut down more. SRJS selected two villages to work with at programme inception. They showed the villagers why cutting mangrove trees is harmful and shared alternative sources of income from the mangrove forests like growing shrimps and oysters. The participants went to other villages to see how community based production works, how to work together, how to do the packaging and eventually how to link to markets.

“We also started working with the women because we believe that if women have their own income, it helps their livelihoods and independence, and reduces mangrove deforestation. Since they now collect oysters from the mangrove roots, it gives them the feeling that they depend on the mangrove system, and the mangroves will therefore be better protected.”

An important step for the SRJS team in Aceh was to start working with Balai Syura, a woman’s organisation that advocates for the inclusion of women in politics and policy-making. “We discussed gender issues with them and learned a lot. In this part of the world, gender is a very sensitive issue due to the patriarchal system and the limited civic space”, explains Muna. Through working with Balai Syura they learned to work with male champions to focus on gender as well. “We trained men, using a male trainer. As men, they have a certain perspective and understanding on gender to share with other men. We also trained government staff, working with male trainers. When women speak about women’s rights, it does not make much impression on men. If men speak about women’s rights it is different. It is a pity, but still a reality.”

Today women and men in both villages work together: men collect shrimps, women collect oysters. “We see that there are positive changes in areas where they collect oysters and shrimps: they do not cut mangroves. Women are earning their own incomes and becoming more independent.”

Read more [stories on Aceh here](#)

## LESSONS LEARNED

Do not re-invent gender wheels. Collaborate with organisations that are specialised in gender. Work with male champions who can promote women’s rights in the community with other men to increase their understanding of gender equality to counter male resistance.

# INTERVIEW WITH MUNAWARATUL MAKHYA: “BEING A FEMALE LEADER DOES NOT MAKE MEN SECOND-RATE”

**THE STORIES** “EVEN IF OTHERS UNDERESTIMATE YOU, NEVER UNDERESTIMATE YOURSELF.  
LEARN FROM THEM!” - MUNAWARATUL MAKHYA

Historically, women in Aceh were involved in trade, defence and leadership. In the 17th century, Aceh was ruled by four female sultanahs who reigned for 60 years. Since then, much has changed in the position of women and not all positive. But female leadership still exists. Read the personal story of the SRJS Coordinator in Aceh - Munawaratul Makhya.

“When I applied for the position of SRJS Coordinator Aceh with WWF Indonesia in 2016, one of the interviewers asked me “Are you ready to lead and coordinate a team of men, and to work with mainly men as stakeholders?” I did not know the real challenges, so I answered, “That is fine, I have been working with men a lot, I can do that.” She laughs, inhales and continues her story. “Little did I know! When I started working, I knew some of the staff members were against gender equality, but I thought as long as they do their job, make no problem, and keep it as their personal belief, that’s fine with me. But then, during the process I ran into the real issue: conservation in Aceh = men. When meeting with the CSO partners, I was the only woman. Most people seemed to think ‘fieldwork and conservation is for men, women can only support in offices’.

“But you know, gender is an important part of the programme, so I had to show that women bring additional value to conservation work. It took me quite some months to blend into the group of men and to show that it could work. Initially, there was denial, negative behaviour, trying to put me down, and it was difficult for me to transfer information to the men in the teams. I had a hard time. But I decided to make it clear that I have this capacity and knowledge, and that I can lead, as a woman. I invested time in building trust and making everyone feel that they are important, and that having female leadership does not make them second-rate. Over the year, it changed bit by bit. They started to listen, and take my opinion seriously. They saw that I can lead and have the knowledge. They saw that female leadership could actually be beneficial, especially in terms of detailed planning and implementation.



## LESSONS LEARNED

### ON MAKING YOUR ORGANISATION GENDER-RESPONSIVE

“Here’s my advice to other young women: Even if other people underestimate you, do not underestimate yourself. Show that you have skills and capacities. Improve your capacity and let the challenges motivate you to go further and grow stronger. Try to distinguish ‘is it about me or is there something wrong with their perspective?’. Learn from them! If you live in Aceh, where people believe that men lead and women follow, there is no limit to explore your capacities as a woman. Just try! One day, after three to four years, like me today, you will look back and see what you have achieved and how much you have grown.”

Muna’s story shows that having a gender policy, reserving budgets for women and recruiting women to do conservation work are important first steps. Changing the culture in an organisation is also important, although usually more complicated. Convincing others that women can do the job can be a lengthy process. Muna convinced her colleagues through ‘leadership by example’. Women-only groups can be a good start toward building confidence.

# DEVELOPING NATIONAL GENDER CAPACITIES IN GUYANA

**THE STORIES** “ONCE THERE IS RECOGNITION OF WOMEN’S RIGHTS AS FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS, WE CAN REDUCE THE POWER IMBALANCES THAT EXIST WITHIN SOCIETY” - PREEYA RAMPERSAUD

Since 2016, WWF-Guianas, with support from IUCN Global Programme on Governance and Rights (GPGR), IUCN NL and WWF NL, has been steadfast in its efforts to promote gender equality and social inclusion in sustainable ecosystem management. Preeya Rampersaud, who coordinates the SRJS programme in the Guianas ecoregion (Guyana and Suriname), explains how the long-term efforts by WWF-Guianas and their partners have empowered the University of Guyana, along with other government agencies, to thoroughly integrate gender in its initiatives.

“In the end it is about understanding that all people have the right to a healthy environment. So addressing fundamental human rights, including gender, should be at the core of what we do to ensure there is social change. Once there is recognition of these fundamental human rights, we can reduce the power imbalances that exist within society,” reasons Rampersaud. This is how WWF-Guianas worked with partners in Guyana on gender and social inclusion - by bringing the conversation round to a fundamental human rights-based perspective.

As a result of their collaboration, the University of Guyana integrated gender, social justice and environmental justice in the curriculum of six natural resource and environmental courses across two faculties. “The intent is that all graduates are aware of these issues, and that they are prepared to take and influence action and decisions that at the end of the day are just to everyone that is involved, including the non-human element - the environment,” explains Mr Bernard, Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences.

The end point sounds self-evident, but the road to this destination was paved with trial and error. Rampersaud explains, “In 2016 we started by asking questions: What does gender inclusion mean for conservation programmes, for sustainable development? There was nothing on conservation, environment or natural resource management (NRM) and gender in practice in Guyana. So we brought practitioners together to discuss conservation and NRM from a gender perspective.” In 2017, they launched with a gender capacity building workshop with government agencies, academia, NGOs and community-based organisations from all over Guyana. Coordinated by WWF-Guianas and IUCN GPGR, the workshop was designed to develop a collective understanding and action plan on gender and social inclusion as a basic human right.

The workshop triggered the interest of the University of Guyana. Dr. Gyanpriya Maharaj, the Director of the Centre for the Study of Biological Diversity at the University of Guyana said, “I had the belief that to start looking at gender in Guyana, the University of Guyana had to be involved through research.”

Dr. Maharaj shared the lessons learned with colleagues, coordinated actors across the University and secured resources from WWF-Guianas to undertake a study on gender balance and disparities in student enrolment, graduation and careers in natural resource and environmental management sectors. The study generated some of the first documented, empirical evidence linking gender and natural resource sector. Moreover, Dr. Maharaj’s advocacy on these issues and the results of the study contributed to building the knowledge and awareness of these issues at the University, sparking additional initiatives led by the Dean for the Faculty of Natural Sciences, Calvin Bernard, and the inclusion of gender in the Faculty curriculum.



## LESSONS LEARNED

Gender is a fundamental human right, a right that is rooted in the understanding that all people have the right to a healthy environment, and have the right to participate in decision making when it concerns their healthy environment. Use that understanding to address power imbalances. This story also shows that gender must be 'mainstreamed' in all topics and issues to strengthen capacities and to address power imbalances.



# INTERVIEW WITH PREEYA RAMPERSAUD: “CHANGE STARTS WITH ‘ME’”

Preeya Rampersaud, SRJS coordinator of the Guianas, tells her story with passion. “I was very much inspired by Christiana Figueres, the former Executive Secretary of the UNFCCC. Just as she commenced her post in 2010, I became involved in climate change negotiations. Her words “We cannot ask others to do what we have not done ourselves” resonated with me and are particularly relevant when working on gender. We cannot expect others to incorporate gender considerations and change behaviour and practices if we ourselves do not examine our own gender practices and thinking. Change starts with ‘me’.

“I had quite some light bulb moments while working for SRJS. Before SRJS, I had the view that gender is a simple donor requirement. It was something that needed to be reported on, instead of being integrated. But through the SRJS process and working closely with the IUCN GPCR and WWF network standards I understood it is more than that – it’s a process, or an approach.

“Maybe that is also the added value of being a female leader: Expressing that openness, turning on the listening mode, being patient, showing empathy. Women are known agents of change – it is said that if you educate a man you educate an individual, but by educating a woman you educate a family, a community and by extension a nation. Women leaders are important in our society because they bring a different perspective, based on their roles, to decision making and finding solutions. Men and women have different relationships and interact differently with their environment, and would therefore find different ways to address the problem or find solutions. Both men and women are needed in this process.”

“Personally I have learned is to be more open, and listen a lot more. Instead of scheduling my own agendas and issues, social inclusion is about listening to others and to what communities want. I became more flexible: I started to listen, to understand. it helped me to grow in that way.

## LESSONS LEARNED

“We cannot ask others to do what we have not done ourselves. Change starts with me.” Moreover, women and men each bring unique and complementary perspectives and skills, both of which are needed in nature conservation.



**THE STORIES** “MEN AND WOMEN HAVE DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS AND INTERACT DIFFERENTLY WITH THEIR ENVIRONMENT AND WOULD THEREFORE FIND DIFFERENT WAYS TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM OR FIND SOLUTIONS. BOTH MEN AND WOMEN ARE NEEDED IN THIS PROCESS.”  
- PREEYA RAMPERSAUD

# DEMANDING RIGHTFUL CLAIMS ON LAND IN TANZANIA

In one of the most isolated areas in Tanzania, customary ideas about the rights of women are strongly embedded in patriarchal traditions. In the Rukwa and Katavi regions, over 60% of women are engaged in farming activities, but few of them actually own land. Although the constitution guarantees that women, like men, have the right to own land, in reality they are often left out due to tradition, cultural practices or ignorance of their rights. Village sensitisation meetings are changing the tide.

“In our society, women are still not valued, and they don’t have a voice,” explains Juliana Samson, an inhabitant from Mirumba Village. “When a woman speaks at a meeting, she will be judged or beaten by her husband.”

Yet women have started to send in their appeals for plots of land to the village council. The councils have in turn begun to assign land titles to women, and special conditions have been set forth to encourage women to own land and maintain their plots to bridge economic imbalances. The general rule passed by the village is if one owns a plot of land and it has not been developed within six months, then that land will have to be given to someone else who is ready and willing to develop it. However, if the land is owned by a woman, she will receive an extra six months to start development as it is more likely that she will have difficulty getting the needed funds.

“The issue of land ownership by women triggered heated debates as most men doubted if it was a right for women to own land,” says Elias Mtinda from [Action Aid Tanzania](#)

(AATZ), partner of IUCN NL. Under the guidance of AATZ, the Tanzania SRJS team integrated gender equality throughout its entire programme on landscape governance.

During any village meeting organised by the team, on any programme topic, such as NRM, land rights or land use planning, the role of women was addressed. For credibility, government officials were invited to the village meetings to recite the laws on women’s rights. A series of such dialogues opened the discussions between women and men on the power dynamics between them. These provided space for men and women to question and challenge their own beliefs, building their understanding on the benefits that come with equal land and resource rights. They empowered women and other vulnerable groups on their right to land. Finally, they encouraged women to advocate for their rights and made men change their attitudes towards women.

Part of the strategy was to engage both men and women. “The dialogues were conducted in ten villages,” says Elias. “The forums brought together 1,086 participants, of which

347 were women.” Julius Mwanakatwe from Kalaela Village confessed that he had a hard time accepting the idea that a woman should own land and be allowed to inherit land from her husband, but after the trainings, he has come to advocate for equal rights, stating “I have now changed my mind and my behaviour towards women.”

Teddy Namgala from Ilambila Village said, “After the training and capacity building I received, I went back to my father and informed him about my rights as one of his children. I told him that I am entitled to a piece of land the same as my brothers, and I requested him to provide me with a piece of land. My father agreed, and I was given two acres of land.”

It is apparent that these initiatives will have long-term impact on women’s empowerment, helping shift perceptions of entire communities. Magdalena Minga of Nankanga Village notes, “I can confidently stand and demand for my rights as I understand that I am entitled to buy, sell, own and inherit land regardless of my gender. Secondly, I also understand that all children have equal rights when it comes to matters related to inheritance. Gender has nothing to do with entitlements.”

Read more on the story: [How this widow in Tanzania retained her land.](#)



## LESSONS LEARNED

This story shows that formal gender responsive laws and regulations are a key condition for gender equality, but laws alone are not sufficient. All adults need to become aware of the rights of men and women, women need to be empowered to claim their rights, and men need to accept equality in the rights of both men and women. So customary norms, values and beliefs need changing too.

# INTERVIEW WITH GRACE SHIO: “I AM OPENING A DIFFERENT SPACE”

**THE STORIES** “ARE WOMEN NOT GIVEN EQUAL RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES OR ARE THEY NOT AWARE OF THEIR RIGHTS TO BEGIN WITH?”  
- GRACE SHIO

An outsider to the remote Rukwa-Katavi region, Grace found out during her work for SRJS that women in other parts of Tanzania are better off compared to women here. A public debate in 2018 in one of the villages opened Grace’s eyes. “During the meeting, there was not one woman raising her hand to give her opinion, even after several attempts to invite women to speak up.” In a follow-up visit, Grace took the women apart and understood from that conversation that these women were not supposed to speak in the presence of men.

“In Rukwa-Katavi women are stepped on their rights. These women are suffering quietly. They are carrying a burden they don’t have to carry. They are not aware that they are equally entitled. Someone just needs to tell them to open their eyes.”

Grace continues, “Suddenly it clicked; I realised that there are cultures in Tanzania where women just don’t speak

Grace Shio was a teenage mother who had to drop out of high school to take care of her newborn child. Still today, in Africa’s top rights court women’s organisations are challenging the Tanzanian law that bans pregnant girls and teenage mothers from attending school. After several years, Grace managed to enrol herself in school as a private candidate and later into university, while having a full-time job. She obtained a bachelor’s degree in Human Resource Management and holds a master degree in Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PMEL). Grace was PMEL officer for the [Lawyers Environmental Action Team](#) (IUCN NL partner), for the SRJS programme in Tanzania, located in the Rukwa-Katavi landscape.

up in groups with men.” It took a concerted effort by the SRJS team: addressing gender issues through the entire programme, constantly repeating the same messages on women’s rights, inviting government officials to recite laws on women’s rights, and organising village dialogues to sensitise community members. “Now, after several years in the SRJS programme, the dynamics in the public meetings have changed big time. Women are talking more than men, some women even complain about the men in public!”

Women have also stood up to run for decision-making positions. Two women in Sitalike village are now chairpersons for their sub village. In every village, at least one third of the members of the village councils are women, and others are on different village committees such as land councils, environmental committees etc. This is a major change achieved by the SRJS programme.

Grace travelled frequently within the region for SRJS and encountered many forms of injustice, especially in relation to women and their rights. Ignited by these injustices and inspired by the gender work of AATZ, Grace decided to become an advocate for women’s rights. In 2019, a position as secretary of BAWACHA in Sumbawanga District opened up. BAWACHA is the women’s wing of CHADEMA, the main opposition party of the government, which plays a central role in the parties’ grassroots mobilisation campaigns. Through her SRJS contacts and exposure, Grace had built a constituency, which helped her get elected as secretary. Soon afterward, Grace was elected as Regional BAWACHA Chairperson. From there, Grace started her campaign to become a member of parliament through the ‘women’s special seats’ with a goal of becoming a voice to represent disadvantaged women in Tanzania. The campaign proved tough: running for the opposition made Grace a target for threats and intimidation.

In Tanzania today, civic space is severely repressed. Running for a post through the opposition party means risking your job, and not just your safety but also that of your family. “The government regards running for the opposition as being against the government, but that is not the case. I represent all women in my region and I am only opening a different space that is part of the political discourse.”

“I have a tough skin. I do not back off. I know my rights and keep on pushing and moving.” Grace also had a supportive network. She received (digital) safety and security training under SRJS and took safety measures around her office and home by installing security cameras and hiring guards in the run-up of the elections to ensure her safety.

Grace gained enough trust from her constituency and was voted as the potential candidate for the MP special seat through CHADEMA. Yet, to this day she has not been able to claim her seat in parliament. Tanzania’s two leading opposition parties refrained from recognising the results of the presidential election in 2020 which, according to the opposition and confirmed by international observers, were marred by allegations of irregularities. The party did not, therefore, send in the names of the special seats women leaders and Grace cannot claim her position and use her voice for the rights of women in Tanzania, and in her constituency in particular.

If she was in parliament, one focus of Grace’s platform would be to have teachings on human rights, and women’s rights in particular, integrated from primary school onwards throughout the entire education system, so that young boys and girls learn from an early age about the equal rights of men and women.



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## LESSONS LEARNED

Grace teaches us that “You need to have a tough skin. Do not back off, know your rights and keep on pushing and moving.” Create a supportive network, especially when dealing with threats, and focus on the necessary safety and security measures.

# FIRST INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S CONFERENCE IN GUYANA

**THE STORIES** “THE CONFERENCE CONVINCED THEM THEY COULD BE THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW, TO SECURE THEIR LAND, AND PROTECT AND MANAGE THEIR NATURAL RESOURCES.” PREEYA RAMPERSAUD

A significant milestone in local stakeholder engagement in Guyana was the first ever Rupununi Indigenous Women's Conference in January 2020. The conference was organised by two SRJS partners - the South Central Peoples Development Association (SCPDA) and the North Rupununi District Development Board (NRDDB), with support from WWF-Guianas, IUCN GPR and Conservation International Guyana. “The conference responded to a need identified by Indigenous women involved in SRJS to strengthen opportunities for leadership in environmental decision making and build capacity and skills related to advocacy and public speaking,” according to Preeya Rampersaud, SRJS Programme Coordinator.

More than seventy Indigenous women participated in the three-day conference, exchanged experiences, and best practices and came up with recommendations to incorporate gender in the Plan of Action for Regional Development led by the Regional Democratic Council. Jackie Allicock, Senior Councillor for Surama Village and Chairperson for NRDDDB, said, “I really appreciate the turnout to the conference. I have seen the interest from women in the different communities and organisations represented here. This conference was a good start for us as women since we are being empowered. I would like to see women take up these opportunities that are coming our way and don't let it go.”

The conference led to drafting of the Bina Hill Declaration. This Declaration reviews the experiences and lessons from the conference. It includes a call to action to village leaders, regional authorities and policy makers to consult women and Indigenous peoples when developing policies that would affect their lives and to support and champion Indigenous women in environmental protection. With this Declaration, the women committed to a common path forward on strengthening engagement and leadership in establishing a green future for the communities and Indigenous women in the Rupununi.

The female representatives from the South Rupununi followed up in February at the South Rupununi District Council (SRDC) statutory meeting, sharing their experiences and the Declaration with the other community representatives. This led to a discussion, particularly on the role of women within the SRDC and to understand and examine how their issues could be better represented, and to the subsequent formation of the Wapichan Women's Movement (WWM), a governance body integrated into the structure of the SRDC to address women's' issues.

Looking back, Preeya Rampersaud is proud, “We did a deep dive with the Indigenous women conference. Imagine when we started we had hardly capacity on gender within our organisation. The conference was the first time for the Indigenous women coming together. They never had a forum before. To recognise these women as leaders in their community - it was never done. It was a good starting point, and it convinced them they could be the leaders of tomorrow, to secure their land, and protect and manage their natural resources.”

Read more on this story: [Guyana and gender and social inclusion in sustainable ecosystem management.](#)



## LESSONS LEARNED

Provide space for women to gain confidence in speaking out and taking on leadership. Work towards tangible goals such as formulating the Declaration to speed up practical action.

# INTERVIEW WITH RUTH ALIPAZ CUQUI: BREAKING CUSTOMARY LAWS IN THE BOLIVIAN AMAZON

**THE STORIES** “MY GRANDFATHER TAUGHT ME THAT I COULD BE MY OWN TOOL TO REACH SOMETHING OR I COULD BE MY OWN OBSTACLE.” - RUTH ALIPAZ CUQUI

“The government needs to ensure that the rights of Indigenous peoples and uncontacted communities are respected. Environmental and human rights defenders should be safe when protecting their land and their rights.” IUCN NL partner Ruth Alipaz Cuqui from the organisation [CONTIOCAP](#) called on the UN to give Bolivia’s government recommendations at the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) pre-session. Every five years, the human rights records of all UN member countries are reviewed at the UPR\*. “At the UN, our government has the image of being a nature protector, but in the country itself, the reality is very different,” Ruth argues.

Ruth is an Indigenous leader from the Bolivian Amazon. She was the first woman in her community to finish school, and the first person in her community to obtain a university degree. “My fight, my struggle, my advocacy started when I was twelve. I broke all the customary laws, I broke the culture that girls could not go to school after fifth grade and had to get married five years later. I couldn’t see myself doing that. I left home when I was twelve. Leaving the Amazon and going to La Paz was like going to the moon.” Ruth seized an unlikely opportunity and was able to get a job in La Paz to continue her education.

Ruth was raised by her grandfather. He was unconventional, and taught Ruth to take life into her own hands. Instead of letting her do house chores, he took Ruth

out to hunt, which is where she found her love for nature. “My grandfather was ahead of his time, he encouraged me to do something with myself. He insisted on the importance of education. He is the one that made me realise that I could be my own tool to reach something - or I could be my own obstacle.”

After moving to Santa Cruz and concluding her degree, Ruth started building a bird watching tourism family business and initiated an eco-tourism project in her community. The area’s bird biodiversity is extremely rich. At the time, logging companies were swarming in and 31,000 hectares of forest were planned to be given into concession. Ruth envisioned that the forest could be preserved through the eco-tourism project as an alternative to the logging

concessions. Yet, when Ruth returned to her community, it proved immensely difficult to convince her community members to keep the forest intact.

“They looked at me as if I was a stranger. I was telling them to not destroy the forest but no one saw me as a member of the community anymore, who was proposing a sustainable alternative. In my case, I suddenly was someone from outside with a different life. They couldn’t accept me anymore as part of my own culture. They rejected the fact that I was born and raised here. Even up until now, they say that I don’t have the right to defend the territory and I don’t have the right to represent them. They refused to accept the ideas of women’s leadership in the community. They told me they would never let me do my project. Ever. Especially the men who were interested in going into business with logging companies.”

There is a strong belief within Bolivian culture that an indigenous person is not educated and cannot obtain high level of education. The indigenous person who does obtain a degree, is perceived as less indigenous. They have separated themselves from their culture according to the belief and are ostracized from the community. Ultimately, they end up facing racism from both sides, an attitude often promoted by the government.

Ruth not only faced rejection from her community as an outsider and as a woman. She was obstructed by Indigenous people’s organisations and the government. She faced challenges including harassment and public denouncements that she was not the representative of Indigenous peoples.

The Bolivian Amazon is under increasing pressure from deforestation, oil exploration, mining and the developments of mega dams. In 2014, Ruth became member of the board that governs the Original Community Land (TCO). She became Secretary of Culture and Tourism, because of her ecotourism project. However, Ruth was immediately discharged from the board, at the government’s instigation, when they planned the construction of two mega dams. “Now I am perceived as the person who is against community developments. But we are losing our forests and rivers, our ‘ourness’. But people don’t see that, they only see the short-term benefits.”

When Ruth and others started to oppose the construction of the mega dams, she got in touch with other communities facing similar challenges. Ruth became involved with the organisation Mancomunidad de Comunidades Indigenas de los Rios Beni, Tuichi y Quiquibey (Commonwealth of Indigenous Communities of the Beni, Tuichi and Quiquibey Rivers), where she learned about human rights for Indigenous issues and the UN and UPR mechanisms. From there she became the representative of the civil society



platform that consists of 50 CSOs. “For almost two years, the platform has been working together and gathering evidence on human, gender, environmental, and Indigenous rights violations,” Ruth explains. “The reports put out by the platform present evidence of these violations, which are often linked to the Bolivian government’s policies and international corporations’ activities. The UPR experience made me realise that these threats that are happening not only in our communities, but they are global issues, it happens in Africa and Asia too.”

Ruth is now working with women and young people in her community and teaches about the rights of the communities and Indigenous peoples, both stated as in the constitution and but as a human being. She continues to fight for her territory.

[Read more about Ruth](#)

## LESSONS LEARNED

Ruth shows how intersectionality works: She is marginalised as a woman and as an Indigenous person by the outside world, and as an educated Indigenous woman by her own community. She is fighting on many different fronts. Ruth shows us that you can be your own tool or your own obstacle to perseverance.

\* The Universal Periodic Review is a process that reviews the human rights records of all UN member countries. This process occurs every five years and allows civil society’s voice to be heard by the member countries, who can give recommendations to the country which is being evaluated



# KNITTING WEBS OF SOLIDARITY IN THE PHILIPPINES AND BEYOND

**THE STORIES** “WE SHOULD CAREFULLY KNIT TOGETHER THIS WEB OF CARE SO THAT WE FEEL CONFIDENT AND STRONG.”  
– JUDY PASIMIO

“It isn’t a good time to be a women environmental defender under this misogynist and violent government. But, and then I quote an Indigenous female leader, ‘We have no choice; it is our obligation to stand up and continue fighting. If we don’t do it, who will? It is not about our lives only, but that of the next generation.’ – Judy Pasimio, Founder [LILAK](#)

On average, four environmental right defenders are killed every week globally (Global Witness 2019). Colombia and the Philippines are the deadliest countries and almost 40% of the victims are from Indigenous groups. They are the ones at the frontline to protect nature and resist eviction from their communal lands, the pollution of their rivers or the disappearance of their forests caused by mineral extraction, logging or the expansion of palm oil plantations. On top of these killings, countless more defenders are being silenced by violent attacks, arrests, death threats, sexual violence or lawsuits. While men are more often the victim of murder, women environmental defenders are more often victims of [gender-based violence](#).

Judy Pasimio founded LILAK nine years ago, together with a group of like-minded feminists in support of the marginalised indigenous women. “They aren’t informed or consulted on policies that affect their territories. They have no voice in decisions taken about their lands or their waters. They are often located deep in the forests or far off in coastal areas, miles away from the power centred metropole areas.” The NGOs that do reach out to these Indigenous communities often work primarily with men, as they are regarded as natural leaders and are easier to reach.

The president of the Philippines annually presents the State of the Nation Address to the country. Indigenous people, and especially Indigenous women have largely been absent from this narrative. Therefore, Judy and the organisation she was with at that time, Legal Rights and Natural Resources Centre (LRC-KsK) started to organise a parallel activity – State of the Indigenous Peoples Address (SIPA). The first was in 2008, where Indigenous leaders came together and discussed the real state of the nation from the Indigenous Peoples’ perspective. During these activities, very few Indigenous women were able to speak up and participate. Therefore, in 2011 an extra day was added especially for Indigenous women to discuss issues and experiences. These they brought to the actual State of the Indigenous Peoples Address. LILAK continued the work, and since then five National Indigenous Women Gatherings have taken place. Several regional gatherings have also been organised on the request of the Indigenous women themselves, so more women could participate.

Judy continues, “We should not stop at ‘we know our rights’ and ‘we are asserting our rights.’ We are now at a point that you feel the backlash, because you know your rights. The attacks and the silencing by the corporations, the government and in some cases the male Indigenous leaders are hurting. So now, where do you get that sense of justice from? Do you get that from the Indigenous political structures? Do you get it from the official legal system that is in place? That system has proven to be bureaucratic,

expensive, inaccessible. The system is patriarchal and anti-woman. So now we are in the midst of discerning ‘how do we define justice?’, which is still a point for discussion.”

Developing female leadership is one of the pillars of LILAK’s work. ‘We believe that Indigenous women have not had that opportunity to be heard as a leader. Today, many of LILAK’s partners hold key positions at national and thematic alliances, such as on anti-mining and climate change. LILAK’s efforts around empowerment and skills-sharing activities contributed to having more Indigenous women being better informed, with the confidence to speak out and to become part of the social and environmental movements.

In 2017 and 2019, in collaboration with other women organisations, LILAK organised the ReSisters Dialogues, a regional event for women environmental defenders in Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand. “Similar trends are happening in these countries,” says Judy. “There were many similarities in terms of expansion of minerals extraction, the profiles of the corporations behind it, the supply chains, the tightening collaboration between local elites and corporations, the intensifying influence of companies in national policy-making. At the same time, another significant trend is the growing intensity of rural and Indigenous women’s participation in the resistance against these forms of encroachment into their ancestral domains, their lands and their lives.” The ReSisters dialogues proved to be an important space for women environmental defenders to share their struggles, to strategise around safety and security, and to build solidarity in the region.

“The government has been actively trying to silence us, through red-tagging or labelling activists as terrorists, rebels; and killings of activists and community leaders. Impunity for these acts of violence is being institutionalised through the anti-terrorist law,” continues Judy. “Just last year a series of killings of Indigenous people has happened. I am sitting here with so much fear, but the fear that I am feeling is nothing compared to the threats these Indigenous women are facing day in, day out. I am afraid of the threats thrown at us on social media. They are afraid of the guns actually pointed at them at every corner.”

“We are now imagining how to strengthen ourselves as women environmental human rights defenders. The most important thing is to recognise our fear and plan around it, making security a primary issue. The best thing that can happen is for us to join hands and make sure that we speak up and stick together. The community is the best line of defence. From there we do what we can, provide support, putting issues out in the media, and reporting to the commission on human rights. When we feel weak, that’s when they attack. We should carefully knit together this web of care so that we feel confident and strong.”

Read more on the [Resisters Dialogues](#) and read more on [women environmental human right defenders](#).

## COVID19

The Philippines has been in the longest COVID19 lockdown worldwide. We supported the women leaders so they could buy, prepare and distribute relief packs. Because of the rules, we could not reach them physically and they had to take all the risks in the lockdown. These women went out, exposing themselves to possible COVID19 infection, going through military checkpoints. These women do this because their families are hungry, out of love for their families, for their community and for their country, they take big risks. Judy points out that she has also learned from the pandemic that “Even in the great love for our family and community, you need to have some love for yourself as well. Women need to take a step back sometimes and reserve some love for themselves to be able to give love to their country.”

## LESSONS LEARNED

Create webs of solidarity for support, safety and for building confidence in female leadership when civic space is limited. Support women networks and groups.



# BUILDING GENDER RESPONSIVE ORGANISATIONS



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**A Rocha Ghana, Ghana** “I was astonished by the responses given to some of the questions. Any time I mentioned gender, most of the staff said they knew what I was talking about, but their answers said otherwise. It clearly showed that people think they know what gender is about, but they are often mistaken.” Emmanuella Kyeremaa, Gender Focal Point at [A Rocha Ghana](#), reflects on the gender questionnaire that was distributed to all her colleagues to assess their knowledge on gender issues on various thematic areas.

Since 2016, A Rocha Ghana and the Development Institute have worked with local gender specialists and IUCN GPGR to build capacity on gender mainstreaming, to support equitable and sustainable outcomes through the SRJS programme. A Rocha Ghana started this process by conducting a gender audit to evaluate the knowledge and capacity of the staff and by reviewing the organisational policies and practices. This audit helped to identify the needs, challenges and opportunities of A Rocha Ghana to improve this capacity. The questionnaire, distributed to all staff, was designed to gather information across seven thematic areas.

The gender audit revealed several areas of work to improve. These include (i) reserving financial resources to integrate gender into the work; (ii) enhancing the capacity of staff to monitor and evaluate gender considerations; (iii) creating equal employment and advancement opportunities for both women and men; and (iv) providing regular gender training for staff.

They developed a policy on how to mainstream gender. A Rocha Ghana had previously attempted to do this, but they will now make a conscious effort to go beyond just adding men and women into activities. A Rocha Ghana’s will strengthen their internal capacity as well as the awareness of communities on gender issues in the coming years.

Commitment is key. The gender policy is linked to a five-year action plan, which is pivotal for the actual implementation of the ambitions, the attainment of the results, and measuring the extent of the impact. Emmanuella continues, “The action plan is subject to review every five years. To me, it serves as the fundamental guideline moving forward, which is essential for reflection and for re-strategising our gender mainstreaming approach, if necessary.”

Read more on [A Rocha Ghana](#).

**Sawit Watch, Indonesia** Patriarchal societal structures can translate into a male dominated culture at the workplace. Inda Fatinaware, the director of [Sawit Watch](#), is keen on gender equality and women’s rights. Her former job was with a women’s organisation, which is particularly useful for her work at Sawit Watch. The Indonesian organisation addresses the impacts on the environment and communities of oil palm plantations, a sector in which women’s rights in particular are often violated.

Inda recognised the need to do a gender analysis to better understand the power dynamics between men and women and issues such as sexual harassment in the communities. In addition, Inda decided to look internally, at the working environment of Sawit Watch itself. She commissioned a gender analysis, in combination with gender training for all employees, to gain insights into the underlying issues of gender inequality. During the workshop, basic concepts of gender roles were discussed, they ran a power analysis, and gave special attention to sexual harassment. After the workshop, a team reviewed internal policies, created a code of conduct, and developed a policy to prevent

sexual harassment and discrimination. These are now up for internal discussion. Sawit Watch has effectively taken the first steps toward becoming a gender responsive organisation. Commitment will be key to success.

Sawit Watch employee Astrid reflects back on the trajectory and changes so far, “There are no longer inappropriate jokes by the male co-workers to the female co-workers during the daily work! The male colleagues have become more sensitive to gender issues and female colleagues now speak up if they don’t feel comfortable. The analysis and training helped create a more comfortable workspace.”



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## LESSONS LEARNED

To make gender explicit in your organisation, it helps to start with the basics: do a gender audit, followed by a gender action plan with financial resources; strengthen staff gender capacities; and create equal employment opportunities. Work both on formal plans and on changing the organisational culture.



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# REFLECTIONS

In this publication, we have shared the diversity in female leadership in conservation that we have experienced through SRJS. Although varied, all touch upon the dual fight confronting women in conservation: protecting the natural resource base against powerful forces of destruction in the face of entrenched formal and informal systems of gender discrimination.

As has been made clear, the personal and political are strongly connected. Some stories presented here are more personal, others focus more on the systemic aspects of gender justice in nature conservation - the rules, regulations, norms and values that keep things as they are and have 'always been'. Creative new leaders are needed to cut through these systemic barriers and invoke both social and environmental change. We see stark differences in style and approach between the Philippines and Aceh examples, the first fighting against the patriarchal system through activism, the latter changing norms and values from within. In some societies, upcoming female leaders take the space for protesting and demanding gender justice while in other countries, they are working within the system using a more nuanced strategy of dialogue to strengthen gender justice. Some female leaders use both approaches.


Whether awareness raising; access to resources and benefits; decision-making; values and norms; or on changing policies and practices, laws and regulations, all of these tactics are needed, often simultaneously. One cannot go without the other. As we have seen in the case of Tanzania, it is often not just the formal system - the policies and laws - that need changing. In many countries, laws are already reasonably inclusive. But customary laws and practices can keep historical injustices intact, and thus

need cracking as well. Further, as we saw in Guyana, and in Ruth's and Judy's stories, for Indigenous women and others with additional intersecting identities, being heard and claiming your rights can be even harder.

Other stories, such as in Uganda, show how women and men are affected differently by and react differently to problems and changes. This calls for more attention for the different roles and responsibilities of men and women in conservation.

With SRJS we have touched upon numerous lives - of men and women, often in leadership roles - and we have contributed to demonstrating that all human beings have the dual right to a healthy environment and to be involved in decision-making on healthy environments. These are basic human rights, and addressing human rights and gender inequality is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving effective conservation outcomes.

What is next? How can we ensure that these valuable stories and lessons learned help to accelerate the creation of more cracks in the status quo, to let the light shine through and better ensure that female leadership in conservation is noticed and supported? We invite you, the reader, to take action where you can. If you are involved in conservation programmes, now and in the future, we encourage you to use the lessons learned for the sake of women's rights and for the sake of better conservation impact. Our organisations must commit to doing the same and continue our work on this front.



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