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For Better or For Worse: Gender and the Congo Basin Forests

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Running head: GENDER AND THE CONGO BASIN FORESTS REGION

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE:
GENDER AND THE CONGO BASIN FORESTS REGION

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Abstract

Gender is increasingly an element of program design in international development and education. Given its inherent significance in cultures around the world, gender shapes and molds the ways in which we perceive the roles and responsibilities of men and women. This study seeks to understand the intersection of gender and natural resource management in the Central Africa region. In this region, where tradition often guides the roles men and women play both at home and in the work place, it is critical to understand the role of gender and how accounting for it in project design can both support, and unravel, the best of intentions.

But what is gender and how is it understood by practitioners in Central Africa? To get to the root of this question, a survey was distributed to over 100 practitioners in the government, non-governmental and private sectors in the Central Africa region to better understand how, or if, gender is a part of their development strategy. The survey asked participants to reflect on their understanding of the concept of gender, to what degree gender is part of their national development strategy and what obstacles development practitioners face as they seek to integrate gender into their work. The responses capture a snapshot of the intersection of gender rhetoric and implementation. The conclusions drawn from these responses offer suggestions for those working at the crossroads of gender and environmental work and how to proceed when seeking to develop programs that offer localized solutions to universal gender concerns.

For better or for worse, the title of this study, refers not to whether it is better or worse to consider gender while developing programs but rather to *how* the notion of gender is incorporated as an element of projects. Do you think there is more to uncover about how gender is perceived and understood by those working and living in the Central Africa region? I do.