

# **Gender dimensions of protected area conflicts and peacebuilding strategies in northern Ghana**

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## **Abstract**

Focusing on the Mole National Park (MNP) and four communities surrounding the park, this paper examines how gender, as a social construct affects how men and women experience and are impacted by protected area (PA) conflicts. Based on a qualitative case study approach involving seven focus group discussions and nine key informant interviews, results indicate that men and women in the study communities experienced PA conflicts in a similar manner. However, the impact of these conflicts on men was mainly economic, while for women, the impact was economic and psychological. Social norms that alienated women from accessing land and making decisions relating to natural resources played a key role in exacerbating the impact of PA conflicts on women. Conflict management strategies employed by the MNP did not consciously incorporate gender considerations but focused on negotiations, provision of economic incentives, technical solutions, and law enforcement, while ignoring the deep-rooted/identity conflicts and other psychological or “hidden” costs suffered by women due to PA conflicts. To promote peacebuilding and sustainable conflict management strategies, the paper proposes that rather than focus on deterrent strategies, economic challenges brought about by conservation as well as the “hidden” and psychological costs of PA conflicts which are often overlooked by managers of protected areas should be addressed.