

POLICY BRIEF

How Bringing Gender Perspectives into REDD+ Policies Could Enhance Effectiveness and Empowerment

Abidah Setyowati – WOCAN



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We are all aware of the importance that forest resources hold for members of poor communities around the globe, including women (70% of the poor worldwide are women) (UNDP, 1995). What we may not be aware of is the degree to which women contribute to forest management and the extraction of forest resources. Women's practices include those of traditional agroforestry systems, which include gathering wild plants for food and medicinal purposes; collecting honey, fodder and firewood for household consumption; sourcing organic matter for their farms and to generate supplemental income. In some countries, including Indonesia and Vietnam, women also engage in nursery activities, forest patrolling and monitoring. Based on their prominent roles in forest management, women are entitled to access benefits from REDD+ (Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation); a mechanism to create financial value for the carbon stored in forests, which offers incentives to developing countries to reduce emissions from forests and invest in low-carbon paths to sustainable development.

However, international agencies, governments and project designers have failed to consider gender differentiated impacts of REDD+ or taken the necessary measures to address these. The REDD+ community needs to ask: What barriers are preventing women from meaningfully participating in and obtaining benefits from REDD+ initiatives?; What risks do women bear if REDD+ policies fail to incorporate gender perspectives and include women's concerns?; How can gender perspectives be included in REDD+ policies and projects? These questions require answers as REDD+ policies begin to transform the ways in which forest lands are governed and benefits shared.

Civil society and other stakeholders who are concerned about the impacts of REDD+ on women must develop wider networks and ensure coordinated actions with a larger range of women's groups who also advocate for gender responsive policies. Building vertical and horizontal alliances between local women's groups and national/international women's organizations is crucial for learning skills and knowledge to support women champions and develop collective action to advocate women's rights to forests, carbon and REDD+ benefits.

REDD+ policies should move beyond the 'do no harm principles' to provide processes that advance women's rights to forest resources and REDD+ benefits. While we are keen to ensure that REDD+ brings benefits for forest dependent communities, it is important to ensure that gender issues are not being subsumed within the greater debates in REDD+ negotiations, using the argument that 'women are part of communities and indigenous groups'. Gender issues will be more effectively addressed if we put these issues on the negotiation table.

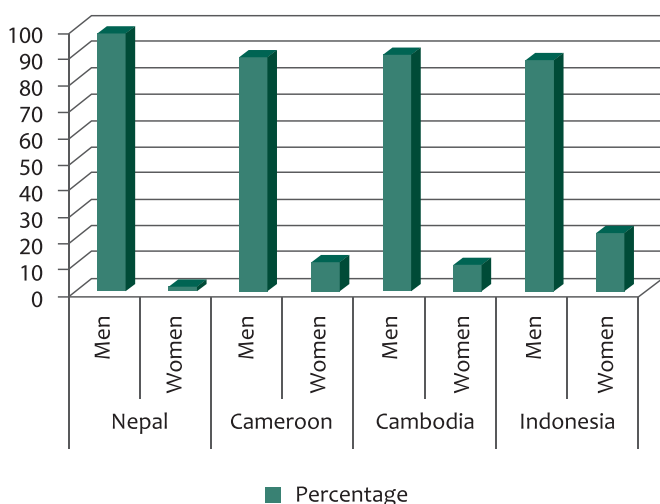
Women's Exclusion in Forestry Sector

Women are likely to be affected differently from men and are more likely to be disproportionately affected by REDD+ policies. This is due to the fact that in the forestry sector, women experience ongoing exclusion because of socio-cultural norms and legal impediments that limit their access to forests and decision making processes:

- *First*, women are rarely recognized as primary stakeholders of the forest, which restricts their opportunities to voice their concerns and be involved in forest management decision making that affects their lives and livelihoods. Moreover, with low levels of formal education, employment, and personal networks, women struggle to influence the allocation of resources that originate from outside their traditional areas of control-their households;
- *Second*, the lack of recognition of women and men's distinct roles, rights, responsibilities and knowledge in the forest sector results in inequitable benefit sharing and a widening of the gap between men and women. Thus, women are often denied access to the provision of services, technologies, capacity building and other opportunities;
- *Third*, women continue to be disadvantaged because of their insecure access to and limited property rights over forests, trees and land under both statutory and customary regimes. Significantly fewer women have secured access and control over forestlands and resources compared to those of men. Even in countries where laws acknowledge women's and men's equal access to land and forests, women are often not aware of their rights. Customs may also exclude women from de facto access to and control over forest ,lands and resources. This has hindered women from accessing other supportive services, such as extension programs and training, and influenced their long term commitment to manage forests in a sustainable manner. In Zimbabwe, for instance, women are less likely to plant trees for food, medicine and fuelwood in areas with uncertain future access.
- *Fourth*, women are generally underrepresented in forestry agencies and local forest organizations which limits their opportunities to influence forest related decisions and to take leadership roles.

Without addressing women's exclusion in forestry and ensuring gender perspectives in REDD+ policies, REDD+ will bring greater risks to women and is likely to reinforce gender inequality and stereotypes by following a 'business as usual' approach, adhering to existing socio-cultural norms and placing high er value on men's work. Therefore, women should be more deliberately engaged in the design, implementation and monitoring of REDD+ policies, with the support of men. Failing to include women, whose livelihoods depend on forest resources, may have serious implications for food security, poverty eradication and the condition of forests.

Figure 1. Percentage of women vs men officers in forestry agencies in Nepal, Cameroon, Cambodia and Indonesia (from various sources)



Some potential risks of REDD+ for women:

- Women can be displaced from or denied access to forests;
- Women may suffer higher workloads when they are displaced from forests without compensation;
- Women may be denied or not receive a fair share of benefits;
- Women may be left out of consultations and capacity building activities.

Source: Gurung et al. (2011)

Women are Central to the Success of REDD+

Because of their dependence on forests, women in many rural areas of the world have unique knowledge, skills and experience that will positively contribute to the successful implementation of REDD+ policies. Women's groups have proven to be effective structures for community based forest management, as well as the management of other natural resources and financial resources. Engaging women in REDD+ programs is not only critical to the achievement of equitable and sustainable results, but also complies with international laws for gender equality, particularly that of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that has been ratified by 187 out of 193 countries and the Economic and Social Council Resolution 2005/31 on mainstreaming gender into all policies and programs of the United Nations system.

REDD+ can potentially reverse women's exclusion from the forest sector and become an instrument to provide women with new rights to forests and other resources while enhancing their capacities to better protect forests and improve their livelihoods. This can be achieved if women are recognized as stakeholders in all REDD+ policy making and their secured access to forestlands and resources—as well as carbon rights—is required by REDD+ financing mechanisms, donors and private investors. REDD+ policies could offer opportunities for women to enhance their economic and social status. REDD+ benefits could potentially contribute to women's increased access to new markets, as well as education, health, and other services.

Key Issues on Gender and REDD+

Some interconnected key issues affect gender aspects of REDD+ policy development and implementation:

Participation and Representation in the Decision Making Process

Women's participation and representation in the REDD+ decision making processes is critical to ensure that women's needs and perspectives are considered and addressed. However, additional and perhaps unplanned benefits also accrue to women participants, as they increase their self-esteem and take advantage of opportunities to assume leadership roles and build networks. Women's effective participation first requires recognition of women's substantial rights (e.g. rights to land and forests) and procedural rights (e.g. rights to be engaged in consultations).

Unfortunately, various levels of consultations on REDD+ have been marked by an absence of women representatives. Many existing REDD+ projects also reinforce gender inequality as they fail to acknowledge women as equal partners in design, consultation, decision making, and benefit sharing mechanism. Women's heavy work burdens and socio-cultural factors have kept them politically and culturally marginalized from REDD+ decision making structures at the local level. Furthermore, limited capacities to participate in meetings restricts women's roles in decision making processes. The complexity of the REDD+ framework and the highly technical language have also created barriers to women's meaningful participation.

Forest Tenure and Carbon Rights

The implementation of REDD+ policies will involve large forest areas upon which forest dependent communities rely. In most developing countries, however, clear forest tenure arrangements are rare. Communities' forest tenure rights are often ill-defined in statutory laws and weakly enforced. With the potential value of forests increasing, rights of individuals and communities who control forestlands may be challenged under REDD+. Adding to this complexity are rights to forest carbon. Carbon is a new commodity and policies on rights to carbon are still unclear in many countries. Some propose the rights should be attached to land ownership. As large areas of forests in Asia and Africa are owned by the state but de facto managed by local communities, including women, using land ownership as the only grounds for granting carbon rights will not be practical.

Thus, clear and secure tenure over forestlands, and clarification on what groups have the right to access benefits from carbon, is a necessary precondition for the successful implementation of REDD+. This will enable individuals to participate in decision making processes and allow them to benefit from REDD+. It will also allow the project proponents to devise equal and just benefit sharing mechanisms, determine incentives for behavioral change and ensure the long-term security of the project. Despite the need to clarify tenure arrangements, a case study in Paraguay shows that rushing the process to meet validation requirements can cause project developers to simplify complex patterns of forest use and marginalize local populations, including women, with traditional usufruct rights (USAID, 2011).

The recognition of women's rights to access forestlands and resources and forest carbon is critical to enabling their access to revenues. It will increase women's confidence and bargaining positions in the REDD+ decision making processes. Furthermore, women with strong property rights over forests will have stronger bargaining power in household decisions and will be less likely to become economically vulnerable. When women have secured tenure to forests and carbon, it will give more incentives to women to practice sustainable forest management. Nevertheless, women's rights to land and forest resources have not been part of REDD+ discussions at the international, national or local levels. Because of the limited acknowledgement of women's rights, women could be displaced from or denied access to forests under the REDD+ initiatives.

Benefit Sharing Mechanism

Benefit sharing mechanisms have been highlighted as a key aspect of REDD+ policies, as they will determine the ways in which financial benefits accrued from REDD+ are allocated among different stakeholders engaged in the initiative. If designed and implemented correctly, benefit sharing can be an avenue for affected communities, including women, to further economic and political empowerment. It also presents an opportunity for governments to practice social inclusion; to ensure the social, economic and environmental balance in all aspects of REDD+ initiatives; and for investors to reduce project risks. As most REDD+ initiatives are still in the early phase of development, many countries and projects have yet to clearly define benefit sharing mechanisms. Some countries that have developed policies to regulate REDD+ benefit distribution are Indonesia, Costa Rica, Tanzania, and Brazil. Yet, even these country policies do not specifically address gender issues.

As women often have weaker rights over forestlands and trees, it is unlikely that REDD+ initiatives would bring benefits to women unless they gain secured access to forestlands and resources. In the benefit sharing debates, there is relatively little discussion about how benefits are actually shared within communities and what their gendered impacts would be in terms of economic opportunities, empowerment and vulnerability; this is due to a common and misleading assumption that transferring benefits to community organizations will result in a trickle down to all community members, including women. This assumption ignores the dynamics of gender and power relations that are embedded in cultural and social structures within communities. As most village-level forest organisations are dominated by men, it will be difficult to ensure women's interests and needs are considered and that they are allowed meaningful participation in the decision making processes.

What happens if women are not included benefit sharing mechanisms?

Lesson learned from previous experience:

- Some cases of Payment for Environmental Services (PES) projects in Indonesia reveal that when women are not clearly included as beneficiaries, such as including their names on certificates and contracts, they are unlikely to obtain project benefits;
- In community forestry projects in India, cash income distributed for men is often spent on activities from which women could gain little benefits;
- Even if a policy mandating women's inclusion in the project is in place, gender audits should be done to ensure women receive REDD+ benefits. In the case of a Nile Basin forest carbon project, requiring community groups to include women led to male participants registering their wives' names without providing additional access to decision making processes (Pesket, 2011).

Policy Recommendations

As most international and national policies on REDD+ are still on the negotiation table, opportunities to advocate for gender perspectives in the REDD+ policies still exist. Key recommendations include:

- 1. Collect and analyze sex-disaggregated information to inform gender sensitive REDD+ policies.*
This is the first step towards developing gender-responsive REDD+ policies and programs. Such data will inform women's and men's resource use, access to resources and participation in REDD+ decision making and gender-differentiated needs.
- 2. Acknowledge and confirm women's rights over forest resources and carbon rights.*
Develop land tenure policies that officially recognize women's rights over forest products and forest carbon. This policy is crucial to ensure women get an equitable share from the revenue of REDD+ and ensures that their traditional access to forests for fuel wood and livelihoods is not restricted due to REDD+ activities.
- 3. Assure equal access to benefit sharing.*
Develop mechanisms of benefit distribution that recognize and equitably reward women's and men's contributions to REDD+ activities, such as explicitly stating that women are targeted beneficiaries in the contracts. It is important to analyze gaps and opportunities in current benefit sharing systems to incorporate gender equity into the design. Gender audits should also be conducted periodically to see how REDD+ revenues may be used for women's empowerment activities.
- 4. Provide equal access to decision making structures and processes.*
Develop measures to support increasing levels of women's participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of REDD+ policies, through mandating a minimal percentage of women representatives. This can be done through setting aside seats (30% of women representatives is usually the tipping point for affirmative action) to support increasing women's membership in governing bodies for REDD+ in local and national development bodies, including those that make decisions related to REDD+.
- 5. Strengthen capacities of women and men.*
Women's meaningful participation in REDD+ cannot happen overnight. Women need to develop certain skills and conditions to fully participate, such as public speaking, literacy/numeracy, advocacy, community organizing and negotiation skills. Reducing women's household workloads through technologies is important. In order to enable women to make informed decisions, they should also have full access to knowledge and information on REDD+ risks and opportunities. As women's needs are varied in different areas, assessing women's capacity building needs and allocating significant budgets to support leadership and skill building is crucial.
- 6. Men should support women's participation and leadership.*
Gender awareness training and modeling by men who support women's leadership and gender equity in REDD+ policies and implementation would bring about a conducive environment for gender-sensitive REDD+ policies.

Some important questions to be considered in developing gender sensitive REDD+ programming:

- What are women's and men's roles that affect resource use and management in the project site? Are there gender differentiated responsibilities in forest use and related activities?
- What are the gender issues that determine access and control over forest resources and REDD+ benefits?
- Will the project affect the level of women's engagement in these activities? How?
- What are the time, financial and social constraints for women's participation in REDD+ project activities? What do women need to enhance their participation?
- What practices that are harmful to women might be supported or exacerbated by the project?
- What practical and strategic needs of both women and men are affected by the project? How can the project leverage social change?

Key Sources

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Secretariat

c/o RECOFTC - The Center for People and Forests, Kasetsart University Campus
P.O. Box 1111, Kasetsart Post Office, Pahonyonthin Rd., Bangkok 10903, Thailand

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