Women’s participation in wood-based value chains in voluntary partnership agreement countries

Constraints and opportunities for women in wood-based value chains in forestry cooperatives in Honduras

The experience of the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme
Women’s participation in wood-based value chains in voluntary partnership agreement countries

Constraints and opportunities for women in wood-based value chains in forestry cooperatives in Honduras

The experience of the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme

Filippo Del Gatto and Elaine Marshall
The designations employed and the presentation of material in this information product do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) concerning the legal or development status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The mention of specific companies or products of manufacturers, whether or not these have been patented, does not imply that these have been endorsed or recommended by FAO in preference to others of a similar nature that are not mentioned.

The views expressed in this information product are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of FAO.

Some rights reserved. This work is made available under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO licence (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/igo/legalcode).

Under the terms of this licence, this work may be copied, redistributed and adapted for non-commercial purposes, provided that the work is appropriately cited. In any use of this work, there should be no suggestion that FAO endorses any specific organization, products or services. The use of the FAO logo is not permitted. If the work is adapted, then it must be licensed under the same or equivalent Creative Commons licence. If a translation of this work is created, it must include the following disclaimer along with the required citation: “This translation was not created by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). FAO is not responsible for the content or accuracy of this translation. The original [Language] edition shall be the authoritative edition.”

Disputes arising under the licence that cannot be settled amicably will be resolved by mediation and arbitration as described in Article 8 of the licence except as otherwise provided herein. The applicable mediation rules will be the mediation rules of the World Intellectual Property Organization (http://www.wipo.int/amc/en/mediation/rules) and any arbitration will be conducted in accordance with the Arbitration Rules of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL).

Third-party materials. Users wishing to reuse material from this work that is attributed to a third party, such as tables, figures or images, are responsible for determining whether permission is needed for that reuse and for obtaining permission from the copyright holder. The risk of claims resulting from infringement of any third-party-owned component in the work rests solely with the user.

Sales, rights and licensing. FAO information products are available on the FAO website (www.fao.org/publications) and can be purchased through publications-sales@fao.org. Requests for commercial use should be submitted via: www.fao.org/contact-us/licence-request. Queries regarding rights and licensing should be submitted to: copyright@fao.org.

Cover image: ©Marca País Honduras

The authors would like to thank Doña Norma Rodríguez, Leonel Ulloa and Sara Lagos from FEHCAFORD, Deborah Sanchez and Rafael Meza from CFV and FSC, Leticia, Mirna, Debora, Irma and Thelma from COASUAL, Juan Amaya from Rainforest Alliance, Marcos Rodríguez, Eliana Talavera, Sonia Vásquez, Leonora Bustillo, Argentina Rodriguez, Jenni Rivas and Terri Quiñonez from Fronteras de Oriente, Miryan Colindres from Guadalupe, Miryan Sánchez and Michelle from COATLAH, Nelly Escalón and Thelma Santos from Nombre de Dios, Elizabeth de la Roca from Las Camelias, Belinda Villafraca and Vilma Arqueta from UNICAF-BRP, and Reina and Elva from the Cooperative Ebanistas de Guaimaca for all their time and kindness during the interviews, Angelica Barrero and Beatriz Del Gatto for their treasured assistance in organizing and systematizing the interviews and Anni Vuohelainen, Mauro Bottaro, Daphne Hewitt, Guillermo Navarro, Melanie Duran, Nelly Bourlioni, Rosa Abruzzese and Julia Guimarães for their respective contributions to this document.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acronyms</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Key findings</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Introduction</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Country context</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Socio-environmental conditions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 The status of women in the economic landscape of Honduras</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 The VPA process</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Methodological approach</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Findings</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Description of the cooperatives</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Role of women in forestry cooperatives</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 Challenges and opportunities for women in forestry cooperatives</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 Potential impact of the VPA process on women in forest cooperatives</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Discussion and recommendations</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACRONYM</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CH-CFV</td>
<td>Honduran Council for Voluntary Forest Certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil society organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEHCAFOR</td>
<td>Honduran Federation of Agroforestry Cooperatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FLEGT</td>
<td>Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INAM</td>
<td>National Institute of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSMEs</td>
<td>Micro, small and medium enterprises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PATH</td>
<td>Land Administration Project in Honduras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSF</td>
<td>Social Forestry System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPA</td>
<td>Voluntary Partnership Agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. KEY FINDINGS

- Stakeholders, including the Honduran Federation of Agroforestry Cooperatives (FEHCAFOR), underscored the positive impact of gender equity approaches and policies for increasing women’s participation and influence in community-based forestry cooperatives. The Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) process has contributed to raising awareness and political buy-in for these initiatives.

- Women undertake a wide range of roles in the forestry cooperatives of Honduras, working directly and indirectly with timber and non-timber forest products. These roles occur predominantly in the informal sector and need more visibility in order to ensure that more sustainable and equitable socio-economic benefits accrue.

- Cross-sector interventions that promote gender equity beyond the forest sector may be necessary to address some of the systemic inequities underlying women’s participation in both decision-making spaces and non-traditional entrepreneurial activities.

- Socio-economic activities that women can undertake collectively while sharing duties and responsibilities are associated with greater levels of participation and stronger perceptions of empowerment and success.

- The participation of women in wider decision-making spaces is positively influenced by external support that delivers education and awareness, training and capacity building, to both men and women together.
2. INTRODUCTION

Forests play an important role in rural livelihoods across the developing world. One in four people globally – including one billion women – depend upon them for income generation (FAO, 2018). Promoting women’s knowledge and skills, formalizing their rights and strengthening their participation in productive activities and decision-making contributes to sustainable forest management and rural livelihoods. However, women’s roles remain largely invisible and poorly remunerated in the informal economy, their knowledge inadequately enhanced and their contribution to biodiversity conservation, resilient livelihoods, good governance and sustainable forest management poorly recognized (Arora-Jonsson, Agarwal and Pierce Colfer, 2019). Globally, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are important in meeting the growing demand for forest products, representing around half of all forest-related employment (IIED, 2016); yet, little information is available on the proportion of women working in forest sector MSMEs or on the possible impacts on their participation of regulatory changes in the sector.

As part of the European Union (EU) Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan, the EU and tropical timber-producing countries are negotiating and implementing VPAs, which are bilateral trade agreements aimed at streamlining legal trade in licensed timber. They can be positive mechanisms in the long term for improving organizational skills
and the business performance of MSMEs, but legal compliance comes at a cost. Given that women’s employment in the forest sector is so often informal or temporary, many observers underscore the need to monitor potential unintended negative impacts on gender equity and women’s work opportunities (Cerutti et al., 2020; Richards, Canby and Basik, 2019). This case study is part of the FAO-EU FLEGT Programme’s work to identify the knowledge gaps and opportunities around gender equality in the forest sectors of Côte d’Ivoire, Viet Nam and Honduras. The three case studies assess women’s participation in selected wood-based value chains and identify possible interventions to mitigate gender disparities during VPA implementation processes.

Key objectives include understanding income and employment opportunities for women in forest-based businesses, particularly in forest sector MSMEs; challenges and opportunities currently faced; and expected impacts of the VPA implementation. Findings will inform policymakers, practitioners and donors in future work across the forest and development sectors.

This report presents the findings from Honduras, where legal obstacles, a lack of training, machinery and access to finance have all been highlighted as barriers to women’s entrepreneurial activities and employment in the forest sector (Santamaria and Cerna, 2017). The case study draws examples from a selection of community-based forestry cooperatives with significant female participation in different roles.
3.1 Socio-environmental conditions

Honduras has enjoyed stability and economic growth in recent years due to its strategic location, ongoing efforts to diversify exports and a young and growing population. It remains nevertheless one of the poorest countries in the world, with significant income and resource inequalities. Moreover, two-thirds of the country’s rural inhabitants live below the poverty line, resulting in elevated levels of migration (WAGE, 2019; World Bank, 2019; INE, 2020). Due to high rates of natural resource degradation and deforestation, Honduras is also particularly vulnerable to the impacts of biodiversity loss and global climate change (DNCC, 2020).

An estimated 80 percent of Hondurans depend on the informal economy for their livelihoods, actively contributing to economic and social development through market and non-market activities that are not protected, regulated, recognized or valued, raising the question of how to improve their livelihoods and employment security (OECD/ILO, 2019). Although the informal economy can provide a “training ground,” especially for young people and women who otherwise have limited access to formal vocational education, opportunities to participate in decision-making are reduced and workers face greater poverty due to informal/formal wage gaps (ibid.).
3.2 The status of women in the economic landscape of Honduras

A number of laws have been enacted and policies developed to advance gender equity in Honduras. The National Institute of Women (INAM) was established to promote women’s "economic, labour and employment rights, [and] access to sustainable use of biodiversity and natural resources." Women’s entrepreneurship and economic empowerment have been bolstered by the recent establishment of the Brigades programme (Brigadas MIPYME), which provides MSMEs with training as well as technical, legal and financial assistance, in part helping to address female entrepreneurs’ lack of business knowledge, often identified as a key barrier for women (WAGE, 2019).

Obstacles to entering the formal labour market have motivated many women to start their own businesses, including in the handicraft sector (Larsson and Raudales, 2013). Important government-led initiatives exist aimed specifically at promoting women’s entrepreneurship and access to credit. These include the National Solidarity Credit Programme for Rural Women (CREDIMUJER) and the Solidarity Credit initiative (Crédito Solidario). However, direct and indirect barriers to women’s participation in entrepreneurial activities still include a lack of access to information, markets, services and technology, as well as physical constraints and sociocultural norms. Reports continue to highlight how traditional norms dictate the division of labour and childcare duties in households, along with other factors discouraging women from seeking jobs, such as the risk of exposure to crime and violence in travelling to work, and discriminatory workplace practices (World Bank, 2019; Santamaria and Cerna, 2017). Secure land tenure is also recognized as a critical factor in helping poor households improve their livelihoods, and although women’s property rights are explicitly recognized by law, the Land Administration Project in Honduras (PATH) notes that these rights are often not upheld in practice. The PATH interventions (World Bank financed with FAO technical assistance) highlighted how poorer households have fewer opportunities to independently obtain land titles, and when they do, the recipients are often men (FAO, 2017).

The 2007 Forestry Law and the 2013–2022 National Forest Policy endorse broad commitments to social equity and gender inclusion, but neither propose concrete action to ensure equitable participation of women in local decision-making spaces or promote gender-sensitive approaches to forest management (Pastor Ferri, 2015). The same can be said about the National Community Forestry Strategy, approved in 2013. Broadly speaking, the overarching forest sector policies give limited attention to women’s involvement in forest sector MSMEs.

In Honduras, the wood-based value chain generates around 26 000 permanent jobs. While women account for 25 percent of the labour force in silvicultural activities (nurseries, planting and forest protection) and 25 percent in trade, marketing and sales, they represent only 5 percent in primary processing industries and 16 percent in secondary processing industries (Santamaria and Cerna, 2017).
All these percentages are markedly lower than the women’s share of the country’s overall working population, at 36.1 percent (USAID, 2016). Societal norms that associate women with subsistence needs and household responsibilities are critical in explaining women’s limited participation in forest sector employment (World Bank, 2019; Santamaria and Cerna, 2017). By contrast, constraints to participation appear unrelated to educational attainment, as girls currently perform better at school than boys. As a result, young women with a better education than their parents may be reluctant to take poorly paid or physically demanding jobs, and might prefer to wait for opportunities that better match their skill set (World Bank, 2019).

3.3 The VPA process

Honduras and the EU signed a VPA in February 2021. The VPA and its commitments will become legally binding once each party has ratified it in line with their internal procedures. Many Honduran stakeholders believe that the full implementation of the agreement, including the issuing of FLEGT licences, could take at least an additional five years, but are committed to a regulatory process that represents a new opportunity to harness greater and more secure rights for forest communities.

In 2014 and 2015, civil society organizations (CSOs) assessed the VPA’s potential impacts on vulnerable groups, including small artisans, carpenters and cabinet-makers, and concerns were raised regarding the implications for livelihoods based on small-scale informal production (FDsF, 2015). The findings highlighted the potential risks for women’s employment and entrepreneurial
activities, given that both are often carried out informally. On the other hand, some stakeholders believed the VPA could help strengthen participation in decision-making around resource use and reduce competition from illegal timber, thus enhancing the use of forest resources by women and their access to markets (FDsF, 2014).

This case study focuses on community-based forestry cooperatives related to the Social Forestry System (SSF) of Honduras, a government programme that has existed since the mid-1970s (Del Gatto, 2013). These forestry cooperatives have been essential for forest conservation despite organisational, market and illegal logging challenges (ibid.). Leaders from these cooperatives were actively engaged with the FLEGT VPA negotiation process, highlighting the importance of mitigating negative impacts on resource access and use by local communities and promoting discussions around regulatory barriers, land insecurity and external drivers of deforestation.
4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

The objective of this brief is to explore the role women play in forest sector MSMEs in the context of wood-based value chains and how their role can be further supported, in particular in the context of the VPA implementation. To do this, the following guiding questions were formulated:

• What distinguishes women-owned MSMEs or with significant female participation in this typically male-dominated sector? What has made this participation possible?
• What are women’s roles in these MSMEs?
• What are the current difficulties faced and opportunities offered?
• What are the expected impacts – positive or negative – of the VPA process on the status and economic/productive activities of women who work in the MSMEs?
• How can negative impacts be mitigated and positive impacts increased?
In order to collect this information, various methodological tools were developed and used, including:

- **An extensive literature review** to help situate these questions in the Honduran context.

- **Stakeholder mapping and consultations** carried out in collaboration with FAO Honduras, to help select key informants from forestry cooperatives and CSOs, introduce the project concept, generate "buy-in" and identify additional stakeholders. Global COVID travel restrictions rendered it impossible to spend time in the region, and all data was gathered through online consultations with in situ cooperative members. As a result, it was not feasible to undertake baseline wealth ranking, household income assessments or other research methods focused on collecting empirical data. This document, therefore, focuses on the personal perceptions and opinions of the people interviewed.

- **Leaders and members of various forestry cooperatives interviewed** to elicit personal experience and opinions during March and April 2021 (see Appendix 1, Table of Respondents). Initial interviews were undertaken with senior representatives of FEHCAFOR, Rainforest Alliance and the Honduran Council for Voluntary Forest Certification (CH-CFV / FSC Honduras), as key intermediary organizations. Collectively, they provided an overview of income-generating activities, the type of support and project interventions available to date and the perceptions of women’s participation over time. The established trust-based relationship between key informants of the intermediary organizations and cooperative members enabled the research to be carried out without prior community contact.

- **Ten semi-structured interviews conducted with 28 respondents in a combination of individual and focus group settings** (see Appendix 1). The majority of respondents were female, aged 18 to 50. Respondents’ views were gathered around a semi-structured questionnaire with open questions to enable discussions around women and young people’s participation and roles, productive activities, challenges and strategies to overcome them, and potential impacts - positive or negative - of the VPA process. Respondents were fully engaged in the process and findings were crosschecked and validated.
5. FINDINGS

5.1 Description of the cooperatives

This case study focuses on seven community-based forestry cooperatives located in different parts of the country. Four cooperatives are located in the broadleaf forests of Atlántida, in the northern Coast of the country, and three in the predominantly coniferous higher elevation pine forests of El Paraíso and Francisco Morazán, in central and south-eastern Honduras (see Figure 1 and Table 1). Four cooperatives (Fronteras de Oriente, Guadalupe, Ebanistas de Guaimaca and COATLAHL) are affiliated to FEHCAFOR, an umbrella organization that advocates for the rights of forestry cooperatives at the national level. The cooperatives collectively manage their communal areas of pine and broadleaf forests, and some households have access to privately owned land. According to data provided by the Honduran forestry authority, there are 142 registered forestry cooperatives in the country, of which more than 100 have operational forest management plans. Nearly 1,900 women are members of these cooperatives, representing nearly 40 percent of their entire membership (IFC, 2020).
5.2. Role of women in forestry cooperatives

Women’s roles vary somewhat between cooperatives, fulfilling a range of activities and juggling domestic and traditional roles. In addition to participating in wood-based activities (timber sawmilling and carpentry) and administrative, legal and accounting roles, women work in agricultural and non-wood forest product activities for subsistence and cash income. In the evergreen broadleaf forests of Atlántida (locally called bosque latifoliado), women engage in various productive activities including coffee, cocoa, rambutan, palm hearts and other fruit production, apiculture and rearing tilapia and chickens. In the two cooperatives of El Paraíso with mixed broadleaf and coniferous forest, activities involving women include beekeeping, fruit production, small scale-livestock, collecting pine needles and resin harvesting. In the pine forests of Francisco Morazán, resin tapping, timber processing and joinery and cabinet-making are their main income-generating activities. These women particularly value resin tapping and handicraft activities (from pinecones and needles) as accessible part-time activities that allow them to earn an additional income when needed. Some cooperatives are not currently extracting timber, but women work with men to ‘clean the forest’ to reduce fire risk, promote natural regeneration and implement enrichment planting. Typically, men undertake heavy labour in the forest, but women accompany them to prepare food for the team. Safety concerns were often cited as reason for women not to travel into the forest alone.
Some women work full time in one activity when work is available, but it is more common to participate in different income-generating activities. Women stressed that the possibility to combine income-generating activities with domestic chores is crucial for them. Activities comprising shared roles and responsibilities, such as beekeeping, are popular in many communities, being 80 percent of the beekeepers women. Several respondents commented on the growing success of beekeeping because women were also able to make and sell hives as an additional carpentry business linked to the honey value chain.

Other women hold administrative, accounting, legal and management positions, overseeing quality control in sawmills and timber extraction and processing permits. Technical and administrative roles are usually contracted for legal compliance, but other employment is generally informal. A female interviewee from one of the cooperatives stated that "some of us have contracts and some of us don’t – most of our jobs do not comply fully with labour rights yet." Most women are content with the remuneration, but others who have worked for several years in cabinet-making consider payment insufficient and the lack of contracts and sick pay problematic. "We don't earn good money," said another female interviewee, who has three children aged 23, 16 and 11, adding, "the 16-year-old has special needs and when I don’t have anyone to look after her, I can't work and I don't earn any money."

Typically, women's roles are diverse, relatively unskilled, low paid, informal and part-time, which could result in them being perceived as less important and meriting less influence in decision-making processes. FEHCAFOR observes that "women do different jobs according to what they like, and we support them with project-based training to encourage them in new productive activities.” Indeed, notwithstanding the small sample size, it appears that women’s own perception of their equality, empowerment and participation in decision-making is more favourable in those cooperatives that have carried out specific training activities directed at women or that permanently employ women.
### Table 1. Main forest value chain activities in which women participate by cooperative and region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cooperatives</th>
<th>Forest region</th>
<th>Main wood-processing and related activities in which women participate</th>
<th>Other types of forest-related activities in which women participate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Fronteras de Oriente | El Paraíso    | - Timber sawmilling (mainly quality control)  
                  - Cabinet-making and construction of beehives  
                  - Administrative, legal and accounting tasks | - Pine resin harvesting  
                  - Handicraft activities                                                                                            |
| Guadalupe            | El Paraíso    | - Cabinet-making  
                  - Administrative, legal and accounting tasks                                                                                     | - Pine resin harvesting  
                  - Handicraft activities  
                  - Collecting pine needles                                                                                                    |
| Ebanistas de Guaimaca| Francisco Morazán | - Timber sawmilling (mainly quality control)  
                  - Cabinet-making  
                  - Administrative, legal and accounting tasks                                                                                     | - Pine resin harvesting  
                  - Handicraft activities  
                  - Small-plant nursery                                                                                                        |
| COATLAHL             | Atlántida     | - Cabinet-making  
                  - Marketing  
                  - Administrative, legal and accounting tasks                                                                                     | - Forest conservation, enrichment planting and promotion of natural regeneration                                                   |
| Las Camelias         | Atlántida     | - Furniture-making  
                  - Administrative, legal and accounting tasks                                                                                       | - Forest conservation, enrichment planting and promotion of natural regeneration  
                  - Handicraft activities                                                                                                         |
| Nombre de Dios       | Atlántida     | - Administrative, legal and accounting tasks                                                                                             | - Forest conservation, enrichment planting and promotion of natural regeneration  
                  - Production and processing of palm hearts                                                                                      |
| COASUAL              | Atlántida     | - Administrative, legal and accounting tasks                                                                                             | - Forest conservation and promotion of natural regeneration                                                                         |
5.3. Challenges and opportunities for women in forestry cooperatives

The majority of women perceived their participation and involvement in decision-making to be good, attributing improvements in recent years to national pro-gender policies and external project interventions that have supported women’s socio-economic activities. Norma Rodríguez, president of FEHCAFOR, admits that “it has been a struggle for women to be included and to participate in decision-making, but their involvement has been helped by the reform of the Cooperative Law aimed at ensuring that there is a minimum of 30 percent of female members in each cooperative, including in their governing bodies.” In addition to FEHCAFOR’s president being a woman, two of the seven forestry cooperatives interviewed also have a female president or vice-president. Other cooperatives have various women in important positions, including treasurer, president of the Oversight Committee and head of marketing and trade. Mirian Colindres, president of the Cooperative Guadalupe, notes:

The way women participate in the cooperative has changed over the years and now they feel more comfortable sharing their views and opinions. The cooperative’s support has opened doors for us, in the beginning it was complicated for mothers, between childcare and the distance [to travel] to training. This limited many women, but little by little, we have worked to find timetables to allow us to participate more. I believe that if we had had more agreement earlier on, we would have more women involved.
The constraints of working outside the home were mentioned by all respondents, and as the female president of the COASUAL cooperative notes, “in Honduras, women have the burden of housework, so you can’t give them too much work in the cooperative because they already have work at home.” Traditional networks of mutual support provided by families, friends, relatives and neighbours, including unpaid childcare, are an essential but often unrecognized element of the social fabric. When women are organized and able to share duties and responsibilities, they are better able to undertake external work and training. Many women remarked how getting out of the same daily routine, learning new things and earning an income all boosted their feelings of self-worth.

Young men and women reportedly want to join cooperatives and become leaders but are reluctant to speak up in front of experienced elders. As recognized by Juan Amaya, technical coordinator of Rainforest Alliance Honduras:

There is work to be done in breaking down barriers. Few young people participate in forestry because of a lack of employment opportunities. Young people need additional opportunities.

One interviewee, who has coordinated activities for four years in the carpentry workshop of Fronteras de Oriente, acknowledges reasonable participation levels from young people (18–35 year olds), but that currently only 3 out of 18 are women.
5.4. Potential impact of the VPA on women in forestry cooperatives

Respondents commented on the many benefits of moving towards increased legality and an emphasis on sustainability, which the VPA promotes, recognizing how this process helps preserve their forests. Respondents from the COASUAL cooperative note that through the training they have received, they have learned to plant as well as cut trees, and when the mahogany, cedar and margozo trees flower, they let the seeds regenerate. The female president of COASUAL notes that many organizations do not permit the sale of illegally harvested timber anymore and fully support a "no permit, no sale" approach. FEHCAFOR is helping cooperatives raise awareness around legality compliance, and respondents have received training on the anticipated role of the VPA in enabling access to more rewarding markets for their products, including potential access to international markets. Women cite the importance of taking this training to cooperatives and extending it to everyone to increase involvement, since "when it is centralized, participation decreases."

Some believe the VPA will help access better timber prices. The CH-CFV is looking at income-generating opportunities and how product development could improve access to more lucrative markets, and the role women could play in administrating this process, including overseeing administrative and legislative procedures from forest to warehouse. CH-CFV associates note that VPA requirements may be time consuming to comply with and make paperwork even heavier, but they recognize their increasing importance for accessing more rewarding markets. Several interviewees underscored that benefits of
community compliance will need to be financially significant and equitable to deliver enough gains against unlawful competition.

Female interviewees from the pine forest cooperatives expressed some concerns related to VPA requirements. They believe that continuing to harvest resin and honey will be possible as these do not appear to fall under the VPA, but it is not yet clear how the agreement will impact the wood-based value chain. Nonetheless, they remain hopeful that their cooperatives will be able to access more lucrative timber markets to sustain their families’ economies and avoid migration.
6. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Societal norms that associate women with subsistence needs and household responsibilities seem as relevant as ever to women’s participation in forest sector MSMEs in Honduras. Women appear limited by what they perceive they can and cannot do, a perception most likely exacerbated by these social norms. When Mirian Colindres was elected president of the Guadalupe Cooperative eight years ago, there were only nine women members and now there are 19. She explains:

> It is an achievement because since that time the participation of women has grown, and I am very proud to be the first woman president. I like to participate but it is a challenge to be a woman and work in administrative roles when we have not even been allowed to manage our own household economy. We need to train more women to be involved, and these women need to explain to their husbands all the benefits of getting out of the house. I don't have this problem because I don't have a husband!

Both women and men view training opportunities as hugely beneficial, and FEHCAFOR underscored that increased organizational capacity, leadership skills and participation in formalized labour activities can transform gender relationships within cooperatives, increasing women’s visibility and improving equity and livelihoods across communities. Many respondents noted that only those women who have received training will go on to access more senior roles in the cooperatives, yet outside project interventions, there appears to be few opportunities for training and capacity building. “It is not always easy to participate with domestic commitments, but you have to keep trying and I think I have been very fortunate to have received these opportunities,” said one female interviewee.

Consensus on the most effective approach to overcoming barriers to women’s participation is, wherever possible, to undertake education, raise awareness and deliver training to men and women together. When men and women both participate, overall participation is greater. The multiple benefits of this increased participation and social strengthening pave the way for additional projects and interventions seeking to increase women’s belief in themselves and their engagement and drive to be more proactive and productive. Although women reported not always feeling sufficiently self-confident to take decisions, when they do, results can be impressive. The recently reformed Cooperative Law supports a minimum of 30 percent female participation in cooperative activities, which is consistently cited as helping level the playing field for women’s participation and boost their self-belief. We have heard accounts from women who recognize that initial changes
are the hardest, and others then follow, leading to more partnerships, better organization, greater participation in decision-making and increased equality and inclusion. As one respondent said:

**Before, men went to the meetings alone, but now with the impulse from outside projects, they say we should go too. We are proud of and appreciate the training we receive.**

Fundamental questions remain around gender dynamics and power relations along the value chain, as we observe how forest sector employment does not explicitly address gender inequality nor necessarily increase women’s participation, but rather highlights the different opportunities for participation by men and women in different activities and roles. “Collective engagement” and sharing responsibilities are more common between women, but when promoted between men and women, they appear to enable the participation of the latter, increasing the perception of female empowerment. Women consistently perceive more opportunities in activities that can be undertaken collectively, allowing them to share responsibilities and the workload with other women and men, such as beekeeping, tilapia ponds and collecting pine needles.
All respondents consider women’s participation to be key to the success of productive activities, and strive to have women and men equally participating and leading. Marcos Rodríguez, president of Fronteras de Oriente, notes that "even though it feels strange to think of them as our bosses and it makes some of us jealous, when in powerful positions, women make good leaders because they are very dedicated and work efficiently!". Some respondents noted that men did not appear to trust women to lead on more traditional timber processing activities, while other women had more positive experiences working in traditionally male-dominated roles, such as carpentry and cabinet-making, acknowledging that male colleagues had actually taught them how to undertake the work. Women currently in leadership roles hope that getting more women into cooperative boards will help increase their participation in decision-making spheres.

While the tangible positive impacts from gender equity policies help increase women’s participation and influence in forest-based cooperatives across Honduras, women continue to disproportionately fulfil a range of demanding domestic duties, often constraining the socio-economic opportunities that they could pursue. These systemic inequities continue to play out across the informal employment sector and need to be explicitly addressed by interventions that seek to raise women’s participation in both decision-making processes and non-traditional income-earning activities. When these inequities are formally recognized and made visible, interventions to provide sustainable and equitable socio-economic benefits for women will be more successful. Until then, rural women remain largely reliant on collective action with – and support predominantly from – other women, sharing duties and responsibilities in order to participate in the workforce. Opportunities to mainstream gender across forest-based cooperatives and other MSMEs need to be tailored, and external support, including education, awareness, training and capacity building interventions, must be targeted at both men and women to achieve collective action.

As the regulatory environment of the forest sector in Honduras transitions under VPA implementation, affirmative actions, both to safeguard and promote women’s participation in wood-based value chains, have been identified during this case study analysis. They are summarized in the following recommendations aimed at the Honduran Government and the international development community:

- Ensure gender perspectives and the goal of gender equity are central components of cross-sector policy and legislative development and implementation at national and regional levels (including, but not limited to, decisions around resource allocation and planning, research, investment, capacity building, and monitoring and evaluation across forestry, agriculture, trade and development ministries).
• Identify and support government and non-government actors to promote technical, administrative, managerial and practical skills through training programmes and targeted interventions for forest management, value-added processing, entrepreneurship, credit and microfinance, and marketing and trade. These gender-positive awareness and training initiatives should target both men and women and place particular emphasis on expanding flexible income-generating opportunities for women, as well as integrating young people into the local economy.

• In line with FEHCAFOR’s pro-gender equity policies, which highlight scalable opportunities to establish and maintain minimum participation levels for women and young people in wider capacity building initiatives, promote progressive local attitudes towards women and young people’s rights, and increase their visibility and empowerment in rural areas and forestry cooperatives.

• In recognizing the importance of a diverse activity portfolio for rural women, ensure VPA implementation does not negatively impact their access to forest and non-wood resources integral to their livelihood needs. Ensure permits are available and accessible where necessary for women to continue using natural resources to sustain their livelihoods and generate an income. Identify and deliver additional training and interventions that are necessary for them to meet VPA standards.

• Support forestry cooperatives in appointing dedicated gender and youth focal points in each cooperative to identify and coordinate the training and capacity needs of women and young people across the wider forest sector, and mentor them in product development and marketing, legal compliance standards and decision-making processes on all aspects of VPA implementation. Promote knowledge sharing between cooperatives through learning exchanges and communication networks at local and national levels.

• Undertake regular impact assessments and VPA implementation evaluations on sustainable forest management, reduced illegal logging and most notably, community use and access, in order to safeguard income and employment opportunities and worker rights across the forest sector.
REFERENCES:


FAO. 2017. A project in Honduras assesses the positive effects of land titling on livelihoods in poor households. Rome.


Santamaria, O.J. & Cerna, L.R. 2017. Aportes al fomento del mercado de productos forestales en Honduras: Lineamientos para una propuesta multisectorial de políticas públicas. Tegucigalpa, Fundación VIDA.


WAGE. 2019. Women’s Economic Empowerment in Honduras: Barriers, Opportunities, and a Path Forward. Washington, DC.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview No.</th>
<th>Organization/ cooperative</th>
<th>Forest region</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
<th>Name and role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>FEHCAFOR</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Doña Norma Rodríguez (president) Leonel Ulloa Sara Lagos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CFV / FSC Honduras</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Deborah Sanchez Rafael Meza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>COASUAL</td>
<td>Atlántida</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Focus group: Leticia (vice-president), Mirna, Debora, Irma and Thelma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Rainforest Alliance</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Juan Amaya (technical coordinator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fronteras de Oriente</td>
<td>El Paraíso</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Marcos Rodríguez (president)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Fronteras de Oriente</td>
<td>El Paraíso</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Eliana Talavera (accountant and administrator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Fronteras de Oriente</td>
<td>El Paraíso</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Focus group with gender &amp; youth committee:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Gender: Sonia Vásquez, Marcos Rodríguez, Leonora Bustillo and Argentina Rodríguez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Youth: Jenni Rivas and Terli Quiñone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Guadalupe</td>
<td>El Paraíso</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Mirian Colindres (president)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>COATLAHL</td>
<td>Atlántida</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>COATLAHL: Miryan Sánchez (marketing) and Michelle (administrator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Name de Dios Las Camelas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nombre de Dios: Nelly Escalón and Thelma Santos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>UNICAF-BRP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Las Camellas: Elizabeth de la Roca (treasurer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UNICAF-BRP: Belinda Villafranca (administrator and legal support)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>and Vilma Argueta (accountant)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Cooperative Ebanistas de Guaimaca</td>
<td>Francisco Morazán</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Reina and Elva (employed as carpenters)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>