

# Ensuring that women benefit from REDD+

*A. Setyowati*

*There is a risk that this sustainable development mechanism will ignore half the population.*

**Abidah Setyowati** works with Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN).

This article was adapted from a WOCAN Policy Brief on gender and REDD+.

**W**omen contribute significantly to forest management; for example, they practise traditional agroforestry and gather fuelwood and non-wood forest products (NWFPs) for food, medicine and fodder. In some countries, such as Indonesia and Viet Nam, women engage in nursery activities and patrol and monitor forests.

Given their involvement in forest management, women should be among the beneficiaries of forest-related sustainable development initiatives. One way in which

forest ecosystem services can be monetized is through REDD+, which is a mechanism to encourage developing countries to contribute to climate change mitigation in the forest sector through the following activities: reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation; the conservation of forest carbon stocks; the sustainable management of forests; and the enhancement of

*Women wash clothes and bathe in a forest river in Thailand. Effective REDD+ policies will recognize that women have an intimate engagement with forests and incorporate their perspectives*



forest carbon stocks (CPF, 2012). It has the potential to create a financial value for the carbon stored in forests and therefore an incentive to reduce emissions from forests and to invest in low-carbon sustainable development pathways.

There is considerable debate on how to ensure that forest communities – not only national governments and local elites – benefit from REDD+ payments. Although women represent 70 percent of the poor worldwide (UNDP, 1995), however, it seems that the international community, governments and project implementers have neither seriously considered the gender-differentiated implications of REDD+ nor taken measures to address them.

The REDD+ mechanism poses several potential risks for women, which, if not considered as a matter of urgency, could underline or broaden gender disparity. Women are likely to be affected by REDD+ policies differently to men, possibly to their detriment. For example, they could be subjected to higher workloads without appropriately scaled compensation, displaced from or denied access to forests, denied a fair share of benefits, or left out of consultations and capacity-building activities (Gurung *et al.*, 2011).

As many countries are developing REDD+ policies that will likely transform the way in which forests are governed, this article considers gender disparity in the forest sector and the ways in which women could be excluded from the benefits of REDD+. It explores how women are critical to the success of REDD+ and describes those aspects most likely to affect women differentially. Finally, it recommends that REDD+ policies incorporate a gender perspective, and that women participate in their development.

## WOMEN AND FOREST MANAGEMENT

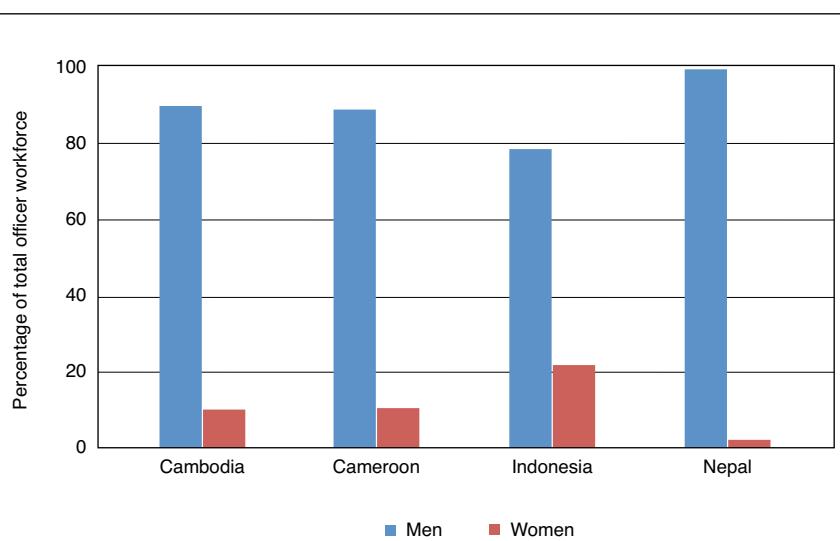
Given their intimate engagement with forests, women have knowledge, skills and experience that can benefit the implementation of REDD+ policies. Under REDD+, for example, women could play critical roles in forest management and monitoring. Moreover, women's groups can be effective structures for community-based forest management.

However, women are often excluded from forest management decisions because of sociocultural norms and legal impediments that limit their access to forests and decision-making processes. For example:

- Women are rarely recognized as primary stakeholders in forests. Although decisions about forest management affect their lives and livelihoods, women are restricted in their ability to voice concerns and be involved in decision-making. Because they often lack employment and decision-making power within their communities, as well as formal education, women are rarely able to influence the allocation of resources and household decisions.
- A failure to recognize that women and men have differentiated roles, rights,

responsibilities and knowledge in forests usually results in inequitable benefit-sharing and a widening of the gap between women and men. Women are often denied access to services, credit, technology and capacity-building activities.

- Women continue to be at a disadvantage because of insecure access and a lack of property rights to forests, trees and other forest resources, under both statutory and customary regimes. Even in countries with laws that provide for women and men to have equal access to land and forests, women might not be aware of their rights. Customs may also exclude women from *de facto* access to and control over forest lands and resources. Women may not have access to other supportive services, such as extension programmes and training, which can influence their long-term commitment to sustainable forest management.
- Women are generally underrepresented in forestry agencies and local forestry institutions (Figure 1), which further limits their opportunities to influence forest-related decisions and to take leadership roles.



Source: Government of Cambodia, 2009; Gurung *et al.*, 2011.

<sup>1</sup> *The gender of officers in forestry agencies in Cambodia, Cameroon, Indonesia and Nepal*



FROM MUGISHA

**A woman carts firewood in Kapchorwa district, Uganda. The recognition of women's rights of access to forest lands, resources and carbon is essential for successful REDD+**

### International agreements on gender equity

**Engaging women in REDD+ programmes is critical for the achievement of equitable and sustainable results in REDD+. It is also necessary under international agreements on gender equality, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; and the United Nations Economic and Social Council's Resolution 2005/31: Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective into All Policies and Programmes in the United Nations System.**

### WOMEN AND REDD+

A gender perspective is needed in REDD+ policies to ensure that entrenched barriers to women are recognized, considered and lifted. Without such a perspective, there is a risk that REDD+ policies will perpetuate women's exclusion from decision-making processes. In addition, REDD+ initiatives could reinforce gender inequality and stereotypes by working within existing sociocultural norms and placing a higher value on the work of men.

If properly designed, however, REDD+ could help provide women with new rights to forest lands and resources and increase their capacity to engage in REDD+ decision-making and to improve their economic and social status. With an estimated US\$30 billion at stake (Gurung *et al.*, 2011), REDD+ could have a significant impact on the empowerment of women and help improve their access to education, health and other public services. But this will require that women are recognized as

stakeholders in REDD+ policy-making and more deliberately engaged in the design and implementation of REDD+ policies. REDD+ financing mechanisms would need to secure the right of women to access forest lands and resources, as well as to obtain carbon rights. These issues, as well as the benefit-sharing mechanism, are explored in the next section.

### Key issues in gender and REDD+ Participation and representation in decision-making

The formal recognition of women's roles creates an enabling environment and provides opportunities for women to assume leadership roles in REDD+ processes, including decision-making. The effective participation of women requires recognition of their substantive rights (e.g. their right to lands and forests) and procedural rights (e.g. the right to be engaged in consultations).

Although attention to the linkage of gender issues and REDD+ is gradually



**Many girls and women spend significant portions of their time in forests gathering fuelwood and non-wood forest products and are key stakeholders in REDD+.**  
These girls are selling *Gnetum* species, collected in the forest, at a market in Abala, Republic of the Congo

#### **Forest tenure and carbon rights**

The implementation of REDD+ policies is likely to affect large forest areas on which forest-dependent communities rely. In most developing countries, however, there are rarely clear arrangements regarding forest tenure. Communities' rights are often ill-defined in statutes, and weakly enforced. Because REDD+ can potentially increase the value of forests, establishing rights may face new challenges.

Also at play is the nature of rights to forest carbon. Carbon is a new commodity and, as such, policies on the rights associated with it are either unclear or undeveloped in many countries (Peskett and Brodnig, 2011). According to some, carbon rights should be attached to land ownership (USAID, 2011). Others counter that, since large areas of forest in Africa and Asia are owned by the state but *de facto* are managed by local communities, including women, using land ownership as the sole basis for granting carbon rights is impractical (USAID, 2011).

Clear and secure tenure over forest lands and clarification as to which groups have rights to carbon or to otherwise benefit from it are necessary preconditions for the successful implementation of REDD+, where success is measured by the equitability of the allocation of benefits. Once an equitable tenure regime has been established, it must not be undermined by REDD+. There is a risk that it will be, however: a study in Paraguay showed that rushing the process of designing and implementing a REDD+ programme to meet validation requirements could cause project developers to simplify complex patterns of forest use and marginalize local people, including women, who have traditional usufruct rights (USAID, 2011).

Individuals with tenure and carbon rights are well-placed to participate in

increasing, the representation of women at various levels of consultations on REDD+ policies is still limited, and the role of women in decision-making is still restricted. In addition, and perhaps as a result, many existing REDD+ projects reinforce gender inequality by failing to acknowledge women as equal partners in design, consultation, decision-making and the benefit-sharing mechanism (Gurung *et al.*, 2011).

At the local level, the heavy burden of work duties and certain sociocultural factors have kept women politically and culturally marginalized from REDD+ decision-making structures. The REDD+ framework has also become complex and the language highly technical, limiting

the effectiveness of efforts aimed at ensuring the participation of women, particularly poor rural women with little, if any, education.

There is an argument that women are part of "communities and indigenous groups" and therefore will be catered for under that umbrella in negotiations on REDD+. This neglects, however, entrenched gender biases, even within such communities and groups. Unless specific provision is made for the participation of women, they simply will not benefit proportionately. REDD+ policies should provide mechanisms that advance women's rights to forest resources and carbon and guarantee equal and appropriate access to revenue from REDD+ initiatives.

decision-making processes and to benefit from REDD+. Clear and just tenure and carbon rights allow project proponents to devise equal and just benefit-sharing mechanisms, identify incentives to encourage appropriate changes of behaviour, and ensure the long-term security of their project. The recognition of women's rights of access to forest lands, resources and carbon is therefore essential for successful REDD+.

#### ***Benefit-sharing mechanisms***

The benefit-sharing mechanisms to be used in REDD+ initiatives are critical because they will determine the ways in which financial benefits are allocated among stakeholders. If designed well and implemented carefully, benefit-sharing can be an avenue for participating communities to be empowered economically and

politically; for government to gain social inclusiveness and ensure social, economic and environmental balance in all aspects of REDD+ initiatives; and for investors to reduce project risks (Peskett, 2011).

Most REDD+ initiatives are in early stages of development, so few countries and projects have clearly defined their benefit-sharing mechanism. Some countries, such as Brazil, Costa Rica, Indonesia and the United Republic of Tanzania, have developed policies to regulate the distribution of REDD+ benefits, but none of those policies specifically addresses gender issues. In all cases, women have been minimally involved in the decision-making processes to develop the benefit-sharing mechanism.

In most cases, tenure and carbon rights will determine who is eligible for REDD+ benefits. Since women often have weak rights, if any, over forest lands and trees, it is unlikely that REDD+ initiatives will bring benefits to them if the status quo is maintained.

To date, debates among policy-makers about benefit-sharing mechanisms at the international and national levels have included little discussion about how benefits are shared within communities, and how benefit-sharing might have a gendered impact in terms of economic opportunities, empowerment and vulnerability (Gurung and Setyowati, 2012). The underlying assumption is that transferring benefits to community institutions guarantees that payments will be meted out, or will trickle down, appropriately to community members. This assumption neglects the dynamics of power relations embedded in cultural and social structures within communities.

Adding another barrier to women's participation in benefit-sharing mechanisms is that most village-level forest institutions are dominated by men. Even if benefit-sharing mechanisms include a gender perspective, therefore, it is critical that women participate meaningfully in decision-making processes. Otherwise, it will be difficult to ensure that women's interests and needs are considered.

#### **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Gender issues are likely to be addressed most effectively if they are put on the negotiation table discretely. As most international and national policies on REDD+ are still being formed, there remains a great opportunity to address gender perspectives in REDD+. The following will help ensure that the opportunity is grasped:

- *Collect and analyse gender-disaggregated information to inform REDD+ policies.* Data should speak to the use of resources, access to resources and participation in REDD+ decision-making. Quantifying the differentiated needs of women and men is the first step towards developing gender-responsive policies and programmes.
- *Acknowledge women's rights to forest resources and carbon.* Land tenure policies that officially recognize women's rights to forest products and forest carbon are crucial for ensuring that women have an equitable share of the revenue from REDD+ initiatives and that women's traditional access to forests is not restricted.
- *Provide for equal access to benefit-sharing.* Mechanisms for distributing benefits should recognize and equitably and proportionately reward women's and men's contributions to REDD+ activities. A simple instance of such a mechanism would be to state explicitly in project contracts that women are targeted beneficiaries. Gaps and opportunities in current benefit-sharing systems should be analysed and gender equity built into their design. Gender audits should be conducted periodically to ensure that REDD+ revenue is being used as intended and that activities designed to empower women are carried out.
- *Guarantee equal access to decision-making structures.* Women's central role in forest management needs to be recognized and measures developed to increase women's participation in the development and implementation of REDD+ policies. One such measure

#### ***When women have not been included in the benefit-sharing mechanism ...***

**In Indonesia, projects involving payments for ecosystem services have shown that, when women are not clearly targeted as beneficiaries through such means as including their names in certificates and contracts, it is unlikely that they will obtain project benefits (Leimona and Amanah, 2010). In community forestry projects in India, cash income distributed to community representatives who are mostly men is often spent on activities from which women cannot benefit (Gurung *et al.*, 2011). In a forest carbon project in the Nile Basin, a requirement that community groups include women has induced men to register their wives' names without providing them with access to decision-making processes (Peskett, 2011). Thus, even where a policy mandating the inclusion of women in projects is in place, gender audits are needed to ensure that women receive REDD+ benefits and could meaningfully participate in decision-making processes.**

## Important questions to be considered in developing gender-sensitive REDD+ initiatives

- Which women's and men's roles affect the use and management of forest resources on a project site? Is there gender differentiation in labour and responsibilities in forest use and related activities?
- What gender-related factors determine access to and control over forest resources and REDD+ benefits?
- Will the project affect the level of women's engagement in forest-related activities? How?
- What constraints – time, financial and social – are there to the participation of women in REDD+ project activities? Do these parameters vary depending on the time of year? What are women's needs to enhance their participation?
- Are there harmful cultural practices that might be supported or exacerbated by the project?
- What are the practical and strategic needs of women and men affected by the project to mitigate harmful practices and leverage social change?

would be to mandate a fixed (minimum) percentage of women who must participate in all phases of REDD+ processes. There should also be official channels through which women can have a voice in REDD+ decision-making and support for increasing women's membership in governing bodies for community forestry in local and national administrations, including those that make decisions related to REDD+. A percentage of seats could be set aside for women representatives (30 percent is a common tipping point for such a measure of affirmative action).

• **Build capacity.** Many women will need new skills to participate meaningfully in REDD+ initiatives and decision-making processes, such as literacy and numeracy and skills in public-speaking, advocacy, community-organizing and negotiation. To enable women to make informed decisions, they should also have full access to knowledge and information on REDD+ risks and opportunities and on the responsibilities they will assume should they participate in a scheme. Women's needs vary, so it is crucial both to assess those needs and to allocate sufficient funds to support training.

To help overcome social and political obstacles that might prevent women's effective participation in REDD+, training in gender awareness should be provided for both women and men to nurture an environment conducive to joint participation and to build support among men for women in leadership. • *Promote renewable energy and agroforestry technologies to meet the needs of women for fuelwood and fodder while building resilience to climate change.* In their roles as farmers and food providers, poor women are likely to be affected profoundly by climate change and population growth. Women in smallholder farming communities who rely on forests and have limited ability to expand or intensify their operations will suffer if those resources dwindle. Agroforestry can play an important role in improving the resilience of farming systems to climate variability. As well, it can improve food security and provide fodder for livestock, thus easing women's workloads and helping to alleviate hunger and poverty. ♦



## References

- CPF.** 2012. SFM and REDD+. SFM fact sheet No. 5. Collaborative Partnership on Forests. Available at: [www.cpfweb.org/76228/en/](http://www.cpfweb.org/76228/en/).
- Government of Cambodia.** 2009. *Gender mainstreaming policy and strategy in forestry sector*. Phnom Penh, Government of Cambodia.
- Gurung, J., Giri, K., Setyowati, A.B. & Lebow, E.** 2011. *Getting REDD+ right for women: an analysis of the barriers and opportunities for women's participation in the REDD+ sector in Asia*. Washington, DC, USA, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (also available at: [www.usaid.gov/our\\_work/cross-cutting\\_programs/wid/pubs/Gender\\_RED%2B\\_Asia\\_Regional\\_Analysis.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/pubs/Gender_RED%2B_Asia_Regional_Analysis.pdf)).
- Gurung, J. & Setyowati, A.B.** 2012. Re-envisioning REDD+: gender, forest governance and REDD+ in Asia. Washington, DC, USA, Rights and Resources Initiative.
- Leimona, B. & Amanah, S.** 2010. *Gender equality in rewards for environmental services scheme*. Bogor, Indonesia, World Agroforestry Centre.
- Peskett, L.** 2011. *Benefit sharing in REDD+: exploring the implications for poor and vulnerable people*. The World Bank and REDD-net. Available at: [redd-net.org/files/BenefitSharingReport.pdf](http://redd-net.org/files/BenefitSharingReport.pdf).
- Peskett, L. & Brodnig, G.** 2011. *Carbon rights in REDD+: exploring the implications for poor and vulnerable people*. The World Bank and REDD-net. Available at: [redd-net.org/files/CarbonRightsReport.pdf](http://redd-net.org/files/CarbonRightsReport.pdf).
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme).** 1995. *Human development report 1995*. New York, USA and Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press.
- USAID.** 2011. *Land tenure and REDD+: risks to property rights and opportunities for economic growth*. Property Rights and Resource Governance Briefing Paper No. 11. Washington, DC, USA, USAID (also available at: [http://usaidlandtenure.net/sites/default/files/USAID\\_Land\\_Tenure\\_Land\\_Tenure\\_and\\_RED%2B\\_Issue\\_Brief\\_0.pdf](http://usaidlandtenure.net/sites/default/files/USAID_Land_Tenure_Land_Tenure_and_RED%2B_Issue_Brief_0.pdf)). ♦