



## GENDER AND CLIMATE CHANGE

# Gender and REDD+

Forests support the livelihoods of 1.6 billion people and 80 percent of all terrestrial biodiversity,<sup>1</sup> and they help absorb up to 30 percent of carbon emissions from the atmosphere through photosynthesis.<sup>2</sup> There is thus a strong ecological and socio-economic rationale for forest conservation. REDD+ aims to address the forest-climate mitigation interface by promoting sustainable forest management, which reduces carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation while allowing developing countries, including local communities within them, to receive benefits from the carbon sequestration capacity of their forests. However, there are many hurdles that marginalized groups, especially women, still face, including a lack of rights around forest use and land tenure, which can prevent them from equitably accessing and receiving such benefits. For the global REDD+ effort to succeed in reducing carbon emissions, it has to deliver REDD+ co-benefits in the form of sustainable development, poverty reduction and gender equality—nothing less will make REDD+ effective, equitable and sustainable, and therefore successful.

## *The role of REDD+ in protecting forests and promoting sustainable development*

Forests are indispensable—they play a pivotal role in biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation, ecosystem services provisioning and livelihoods.<sup>3</sup> It is estimated that 300 to 350 million people live within or adjacent to dense forests on which they depend for their subsistence and income, while 1.6 billion rely on forests for their livelihoods to some extent. Forests absorb carbon; they provide critical habitat for terrestrial species of animals, plants and insects; they purify the air we breathe, conserve our soil and water and prevent flooding; and they have tremendous cultural and aesthetic value.<sup>4</sup>

Yet, the Earth's forests continue to decline as forested areas are converted for agricultural and other land uses.<sup>5</sup> To illustrate, some 129 million hectares of forest—an area equivalent in size to South Africa—have been cleared in the last 25 years.<sup>6</sup> According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Agriculture, Forestry, and Other Land Use (AFOLU) sector represents 20 to 24 percent of total emissions globally, making it the largest emitting sector after energy.<sup>7</sup> And the situation could worsen: according to one recent estimate, some 289 million hectares of tropical forest—an area the size of India—could be cleared during 2016 to 2050, dumping a significant amount of carbon (169 gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub>) into the atmosphere.<sup>8</sup>

In response, numerous global processes have commenced to help combat this forest loss, to reduce emissions that result from such activities, and to mitigate the effects of climate change. The main international mitigation mechanism designed to encourage developing countries to reduce carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation was introduced by Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) during the Eleventh Conference of the Parties (COP) in 2005. Known as REDD+, this approach is defined as 'reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks'.<sup>9</sup> REDD+ creates incentives for governments, companies or owners of forests in developing countries to undertake measurable, reportable and verifiable reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from activities in the forest sector.

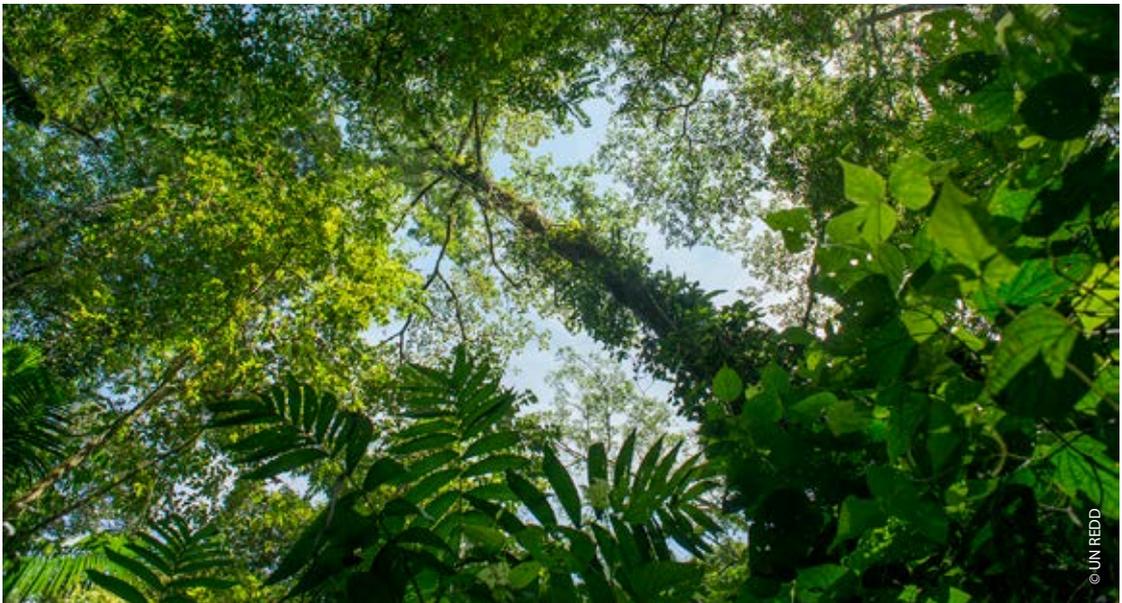
Further underscoring the relevance and importance of addressing forest loss to help mitigate climate change and promote sustainable development, the IPCC devoted a separate chapter on AFOLU (chapter 11).<sup>10</sup> Then, building on the UNFCCC Warsaw Framework for REDD+ (COP 19) and previous COPs,<sup>11</sup> the UNFCCC 2015 Paris Agreement formally recognized the role of forests in combating climate change.<sup>12</sup> The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,<sup>13</sup> which includes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has also set an ambitious goal to conserve forests, with universal targets that include an end to deforestation by 2020 (SDG 15). And while REDD+ is specific to the forest sector, it can be viewed as a thread that runs through many SDGs, for example SDG 13 (climate change mitigation), SDG 15 (sustainability of terrestrial ecosystems) and SDG 7 (access to energy). To the extent that REDD+ has non-carbon benefits that come in the form of conserved biodiversity (from avoided deforestation) and socio-economic benefits to forest communities (from carbon credits/purchased offsets), its objectives and possible outcomes can also promote the achievement of other SDGs, such as SDG 1

(poverty eradication) and SDG 2 (sustainable food security).<sup>14</sup> Additionally, if REDD+ is designed and implemented in a manner that is gender-responsive and meaningfully incorporates the rights, concerns and aspirations of forest-dependent communities, with the inclusion of women and men on an equitable basis, it can catalyse progress in achieving gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5).

## *Scope of REDD+ action and support*

The scope of REDD+ action has evolved over the years, and has ranged from project-based to subnational- and national-level approaches. More recently, there has been a growing recognition of the need to create more REDD+ action that is scaled up at the subnational and national levels.<sup>15</sup> While often much more complex and lengthy in process, subnational and/or national approaches can provide opportunities to engage with governments to align policy strategies on a larger scale, develop consistent approaches for measuring emissions, and involve multiple types of land use.<sup>16</sup>

Currently, support for REDD+ action can come from a wide range of private and public sources. Such support can range from international funding mechanisms, such as the Carbon Fund of the Forest Carbon Partnership (FCPF), the Forest Investment Program of the Climate Investment Funds (CIFs), and the Green Climate Fund. It can also come through multilateral arrangements (e.g., UN-REDD Programme, EU REDD Facility, etc.) or bilateral agreements between donor countries looking to offset their emissions by financing REDD+ within developing countries. Additionally, funding and support can come from various international and national organizations, including NGOs and conservation networks as well as from countries themselves, which seek to support REDD+ action within their own borders through national funding vehicles.





## Gender dynamics around REDD+

Women's and men's specific roles, rights and responsibilities, as well as their particular use and knowledge of forests, shape their experiences differently. They also often respond differently to corresponding incentive measures and public policy interventions, have different relationships with institutions, and use the forests differently. For example, while men tend to focus on timber and profitable non-timber forest products, women likely focus on firewood and fodder.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, women tend to rely more on natural resources for their livelihoods<sup>18</sup> and are often the primary users of forests—their practices can include traditional agroforestry systems, gathering wild plants for food and medicinal purposes, collecting non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and forest patrolling and monitoring.<sup>19</sup>

However, as a result of social, economic, and cultural inequalities and legal impediments within the forest sector, women (and other marginalized groups such as youth, indigenous, poor and/or disabled people, etc.) continue to experience societal exclusion that limits their ability to fully participate in, contribute to, and benefit from REDD+ action. As result, while women in forest-dependent communities contribute considerably to the management of forests, they do not often benefit from forest-related investments and/or are excluded in relevant decision-making.<sup>20</sup> They also face inequalities regarding forest and land tenure and possess fewer assets to overcome such hurdles.<sup>21</sup>

In many cases, the gender disparities are sanctioned by law: a recent study by the World Bank indicates that 9 in 10 countries in the world currently have at least one law impeding women's economic opportunities.<sup>22</sup> Increasing commercial demands on and for land (in the form of 'land grabs') are also creating challenges for poor women to gain or retain secure and equitable land access.<sup>23</sup> This asymmetry in power has a negative cumulative effect on sustainable development in general and the sustainable management of forests in particular.

## Box 1 Gender statistics around REDD+ thematic areas

- 129 million hectares of forest - equivalent in size to South Africa - have been cleared in the last 25 years. Deforestation deprives of poor communities of their livelihood resources.
- Almost 75 per cent of the world's poor are affected directly by land degradation.
- Study in 20 REDD+ sites in 6 countries found that women have been less informed and less involved in the design and decision-making related to REDD+.
- With limited land ownership and control over productive resources, women, relative to men, may not have strong incentive to engage in tree planting. Studies (e.g. Ethiopia) show that land certification significantly increases productivity on plots farmed by women.
- 90 percent of Africa's rural land is currently undocumented, leaving rural communities vulnerable to land-grabbing. Land grabs have been shown to adversely affect rural livelihoods, especially women.
- Since 1980, Brazil has approved more than 300 territories where indigenous peoples have the right to use their forests for their own needs, wherein it is safe from external outside pressures (e.g. soy farmers, ranchers, gold miners, etc.).
- Study in India shows that women's participation in forest projects is associated with a 28 percent greater probability of forest regeneration.
- Countries with higher female representation in parliament are more likely to safeguard protected land areas.

Sources: Larson et al. (2015); Forest Trends (2015); Bernier et al. (2013); Bezabih et al. (2012); Agrawal et al. (2006); UNDP (2011); UNEP (2016); Oxfam, ILC, RRI (2016); UN (2016)<sup>24</sup>



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## *The role of social inclusion and gender equality in REDD+*

It is widely acknowledged that gender equality and women's empowerment are catalysts for reaching sustainable development, including in REDD+.<sup>25</sup> Both women and men are key agents of change whose unique but often differentiated knowledge, skills, and experience are central to economic development as well as environmental sustainability. For example, recent research from the McKinsey Global Institute finds that if women were to participate in the economy “identically to men”, they could add as much as \$28 trillion or 26 percent to annual global GDP in 2025 (roughly the combined size of the current US and Chinese economies).<sup>26</sup> Studies also show that countries with a higher representation of women in congress/parliament are more likely to set aside protected land areas and to ratify multilateral environmental agreements.<sup>27</sup>

### *Box 2 Gender-sensitive REDD+ action supported under the UNFCCC*

*REDD+, as it evolved under the UNFCCC over the years, has become a complex and technical climate financial mechanism, largely due to efforts to ensure that it is fair, transparent, inclusive and effective.<sup>28</sup> In this process, a few key UNFCCC REDD+ decisions have ultimately impacted and encouraged the uptake of gender-sensitive REDD+ policy and action as well. For example, in Decision 1/CP.16, which resulted from the UNFCCC COP 16 in Cancun in 2010, developing country Parties were guided to address gender considerations, among other issues, when developing and implementing their REDD+ national strategies or action plans.<sup>29</sup> Building on this guidance, at COP 17, the Durban Outcomes (Decision 12/CP.17) further guided countries that when providing information on how safeguards are addressed within their efforts on REDD+ (what is now commonly referred to as safeguard information systems (SIS)), gender considerations should also be respected in this process.<sup>30</sup>*

As primary users and managers of forest products in many communities, women play a crucial role in the sustainable management of forests as well as in other productive and reproductive activities at the household and community levels. This puts them in a position to contribute to livelihood strategies adapted to changing environmental conditions. Such knowledge and capabilities can and should be deployed to benefit climate change mitigation, disaster reduction and adaptation strategies.

### Box 3 *The symbiotic relation between forests and women —examples from India and Nepal*

*A review of 17 studies in natural resources management demonstrates that increased participation by women leads to improvements in local natural resource governance and forest (and fisheries) conservation efforts in India and Nepal.<sup>31</sup> For example, one study found that women's participation is associated with a 28 percent greater probability of forest regeneration.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, when women and poor communities are included in forest management initiatives (e.g., reforestation, forest surveillance), their livelihoods can be measurably improved.<sup>33</sup> For example, research from West Bengal (India) shows that gender-sensitive participatory forest management decreases the labour and time that women put into collecting non-timber forest products and increases their input to family income.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, research from Nepal shows that inclusive forest governance led to increased income for poor communities, especially poor women.<sup>35</sup>*

There is strong evidence (e.g., India and Nepal) that shows conservation outcomes were improved in forest projects by providing women with more powers in decision-making.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, a study of 61 countries cited in UNDP's *Human Development Report 2011* showed that a greater per capita number of women's and environmental NGOs correlates with decreased levels of deforestation. Women's participation in decision-making, therefore, has both intrinsic value and instrumental importance in addressing equity and environmental degradation.

Therefore, gender-differentiated needs, roles, experiences and knowledge of the forest need to be valued equitably in the design and implementation of REDD+ action. They all serve as critical inputs to REDD+ policy and programmatic interventions, which can help promote that REDD+ is gender-responsive, and thus efficient, effective and sustainable, both in policy and in practice.<sup>37</sup>

## Looking forward: Achieving gender-responsive REDD+

Initiatives involving forest conservation and the sustainable management of forests benefit women and benefit from women (see the box on ‘The symbiotic relation between forests and women—examples from India and Nepal’). There is increased acknowledgement of the critical role that gender equality and women’s empowerment play in the long-term success of REDD+ and in the entities and stakeholders supporting REDD+ action, which include government agencies, private sector entities, civil society organizations, women, men and youth from forest-dependent communities and indigenous peoples. This is leading to gender-sensitive REDD+ policy and action, and the implementation of associated safeguards to ensure the social inclusion of more marginalized groups (e.g., women, youth, indigenous peoples, etc.).<sup>38</sup> Such efforts have helped support the integration of women’s participation and gender equality principles across various REDD+ thematic areas (e.g., REDD+ governance, policies, stakeholder engagement, safeguards, allocation of incentives, national forest monitoring systems [NFMS], etc.), including national REDD+ strategies. For example, the National REDD+ Strategy of Indonesia underscores, as a key principle, the need for ensuring the participation in decision-making and building the capacities of local communities, especially women and other vulnerable groups.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, there remains the continued and pressing need to better integrate gender-responsive activities in a more cohesive and systematic way throughout the REDD+ policy cycle; that is, in its design, implementation and monitoring. This challenge does not involve just one problem, but rather a multitude of issues happening simultaneously within REDD+ policy and action. Varying across countries, the scope of this challenge includes the limited integration of women’s roles and needs as primary users of forests in REDD+ conservation policies, the underrepresentation of women in meaningful engagement and in influencing REDD+ decision-making, the continued insecurity of rights to forests for women and other marginalized groups, and a lack of understanding and knowledge by those designing and implementing REDD+ on how to develop, implement and measure gender-responsive REDD+ policies.<sup>40</sup> For example, a recent study of 77 villages in 20 REDD+ sites found that women have been less informed and less involved in REDD+-related design and decision-making.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, when efforts are made to undertake gender mainstreaming, there can be a tendency by REDD+ designers and implementers to misinterpret what is needed to integrate a gender perspective into REDD+ (for example, there is the assumption that gender mainstreaming entails primarily increasing the number of women in REDD+-related committees, meetings, etc.). Increasing the numerical participation of women, while helpful, is far from sufficient to advance women’s effective and meaningful participation in REDD+.<sup>42</sup>

Thus, increased efforts in the form of context-specific and locally appropriate guidelines for gender-responsive REDD+ are crucial.<sup>43</sup> Key work streams to support such gender mainstreaming efforts across the REDD+ policy cycle—that is, in the design, implementation and monitoring—are mentioned in the box below (see Box 2). These streams can and should also be integrated across REDD+ thematic areas, such as in NFMS, governance arrangements, stakeholder engagement, safeguards, incentive structures, etc.

- 1. Undertake gender-responsive policy assessments:** Conducting gender-responsive assessments around REDD+ policies can help establish a gender baseline and identify areas for improvement in REDD+ policy and whether policies exclude or restrict the rights of certain groups (i.e., women, youth, indigenous groups), account for gendered roles in REDD+, and are consistent with any existing country policies on gender equality.
- 2. Raise awareness and build capacity on gender:** Gender mainstreaming relies on stakeholders having proper knowledge of gender equality and women's empowerment concepts. To achieve this, there remains a need among local and national state and non-state stakeholders (e.g., governments, civil society, the private sector, local communities and indigenous peoples) to increase the depth of understanding of such concepts, build capacity on how to integrate them, and address the misperceptions concerning gender issues.
- 3. Ensure gender-responsive participation:** Ensuring that REDD+ consultations, committees, platforms, task forces, decision-making bodies, etc., equitably involve women and women's groups and take their perspectives into account is part of a socially inclusive policy process. In this work, deliberate action should be taken to account for the contributions and constraints of women, youth and men, and adapt REDD+ concepts to the reality, culture and context of local and indigenous women. This can help ensure that women, in addition to men, are equitably involved and can meaningfully participate.
- 4. Undertake gender-responsive planning and monitoring:** Developing gender-responsive planning and monitoring measures, including within budgets and targets and indicators in reporting frameworks, can help assess whether women and men (and youth, girls and boys when applicable) are benefiting from REDD+ and assist in ensuring there are adequate financial resources to implement gender-related activities.
- 5. Exchange knowledge on gender:** Systematizing good practices and lessons learned for gender-responsive REDD+ action is critical for demonstrating how to move from policy to action in integrating gender equality and women's empowerment concepts into REDD+. Sharing such experiences can also serve as an effective vehicle to drive change, illustrate what is possible and empower others to undertake similar action.

Sources: UN-REDD Programme (2017)<sup>44</sup>

## Key Messages

- **REDD+ readiness and implementation benefits from equitable inclusion of both women and men and integration of gender-differentiated use and knowledge of forests.** Both women's and men's skills and knowledge on forest use, conservation and management contribute to the long-term success of REDD+. A gender-responsive and participatory approach throughout the REDD+ policy cycle can enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of such work and increase ownership, as well as help to maximize the ecological dividends of forest conservation, including carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection and ecosystem services provisioning.
- **To help catalyse key SDGs, including gender equality and women's empowerment (SDG 5), the benefits of REDD+ need to be equitably shared among women and men.** Because of its unique place at the intersection of livelihoods and climate change mitigation, REDD+ can help reduce poverty by improving the resource base and rights of historically disadvantaged groups, especially women, while also delivering mitigation benefits. However, women and other marginalized groups, given various political and socio-economic barriers, tend to be disadvantaged and have weak rights to land and trees. Thus, they run the risk of not being involved in and benefiting from REDD+. To remedy the systemic discrimination related to land access, ownership, control and decision-making, REDD+ action should strive to address structural inequities around land and forest tenure. In this process, gender considerations also need to be fully mainstreamed with REDD+ incentive allocation systems, so that benefits from REDD+ are equitably shared among those undertaking action to reduce deforestation and forest degradation.
- **REDD+ action should go beyond a gender-sensitive approach (e.g., 'do no harm'), to instead achieve a gender-responsive approach of 'doing better'.** Undertaking a gender-responsive approach focuses on catalysing broader socio-economic development throughout the REDD+ policy cycle, by changing national and local laws, attitudes and customs that impoverish marginalized groups, including women, in order to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, and, thereby, more sustainable REDD+ processes and outcomes. With this enhanced conceptual and practical focus, emphasis is placed on ensuring the equitable, full and effective participation of women in REDD+ decision-making and policy design and implementation.
- **Developing gender-responsive accountability tools and frameworks can help ensure REDD+ action advances gender equality and women's empowerment.** Such efforts would include developing succinct gender indicators for monitoring goals and targets set in relevant national processes, including national REDD+ strategies and country approaches to safeguards. Doing so can help hold project designers and implementers accountable for undertaking gender-responsive work. In this process, it is critical to equitably involve local women and men (across stakeholder groups) in both development and implementation, to ensure such tools and frameworks link to and reflect on-the-ground realities.

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