

**EIGHTH SESSION OF THE OPEN WORKING GROUP ON THE SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS (OWG8)
CO-CHAIR MORNING SESSION: FORESTS AND BIODIVERSITY
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**Remarks by ISIS ALVAREZ
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Distinguished Co-Chairs, friends, all protocols observed. I'm Isis Alvarez, representing the Global Forest Coalition and the Women's Major Group.

The Women's Major Group believes that forests and biodiversity and the policies to protect both must be discussed together and not be separated into two different topics as has been done in the TST Issues Briefs.

Mr/Mrs Chair, the importance of diverse forests as well as other ecosystems to achieve global sustainable development cannot be over-emphasized. Healthy forests, for example, are key for the diverse life forms on Earth, including humans. When forests regulate hydrological, carbon, nitrogen and nutrient cycles they help maintain the delicate balance of atmospheric gases vital for a habitable atmosphere. Besides, they are essential for maintaining the quantity and quality of freshwater available on Earth on which not only humans depend for survival, among other benefits many of which are still beyond human understanding.

Thus, their diligent conservation must be central to any sustainable development planning and policy. For rural communities and indigenous peoples, forests and biodiversity are not just services; rural and indigenous women, often heads of households, are particularly dependent on free access to resources including fuelwood, medicinal plants, fodder, fruits, nuts and seeds as they constitute the basis of their culture, spiritual values and livelihoods. Studies have shown that when rural women's access to forest resources is improved, their income increases and they are most likely to spend this income on their children's education, health care and feeding the household. Thus, women's access to forests and associated biodiversity therefore has a direct bearing on poverty alleviation and the well being of families.

Women often cultivate lands that they do not own, and gather resources from forests to which they lack titles. Even where there are land tenure policies in place, some patriarchal cultures will not consider women's land tenure rights, thus leaving women and even families landless. Historically, land reforms have tended to grant tenure rights to men ignoring gender aspects. Thus, poor education and other factors have lead to women seldom having a voice in decision-making in regards to land use or management, including the current projects being proposed in their communities that will ultimately affect their lives. In fact, a study conducted in three countries in the Congo Basin forest region, Cameroon, Central African Republic and

the Democratic Republic of Congo, to ascertain the involvement of women in discussions or decision-making on climate change and REDD+, revealed that women have had limited participation in discussions on issues of climate change in general, and for the most part have not been involved in discussions on REDD+.

Women's role as care-takers and food providers makes them highly dependent on the good state of natural resources and any restriction or depletion of these could particularly severely affect them and contribute to the feminization of poverty. In Tigray, Ethiopia, there is a significant correlation between extreme poverty and households where the head is a woman.

Women are more dependent on biodiversity's non-monetary benefits, while men derive income by engaging in commercial activities. Women have less capital assets, less property ownership and less money; it is recognized that while women will procure water, take care of their children, cook, among other household tasks, they are not likely to get any payment for this work.

Increased pressures on forests and biodiversity will only increase pressures on rural and indigenous women, and other marginalized groups around the world as global demand not just for timber, other wood-based products and Non-Timber Forest Products escalate but also for the carbon that is stored in trees.

Thus, former forests are being rapidly converted into massive monoculture tree and shrub plantations; according to the current Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO), there is no difference between a forest and a plantation. This allows for the conversion of real forests into monoculture tree plantations, including of alien tree species, oriented towards the global market, thus leading to further biodiversity loss, soil erosion, depletion of water sources, and other social and ecological impacts:

Current policies proposed during different intergovernmental processes do not necessarily identify and address the drivers behind the loss of forests and other biodiversity; they, in fact, continue to propose policies that promote inequalities. Most rural women depend on subsistence farming, whereas privatization and market-oriented policies have tended to benefit larger farmers. Communities in Africa and Latin America are increasingly being violently evicted from their ancestral lands, especially where property rights have not been clearly defined, often to make way for extensive agroindustrial plants and plantations, as well as for carbon offsets projects. Land grabbing conflicts have been widely increasing at a fast rate and women are in the fore-front of this struggle. In Chiapas, Mexico, the California-Chiapas-Acre agreement led to the displacement of Lacandon jungle inhabitants who now live in poverty in so-called 'sustainable rural cities' breaking all the spiritual and cultural relationship with forests they have had for centuries.

Continued **unsustainable consumption, trade and production patterns**, mainly in northern countries, increases environmental pressures as more and more biomass is required to supply their demand, while governments subsidize such "alternative" means; this is indeed the case of renewable energies, such as biofuels and wood-

based bioenergy, that has already impacted valuable forests and biodiversity around the world. Sustainable development within planetary boundaries requires that some reduce while others increase access to resources.

Forest and land policies that are gender blind and do not take a rights-based approach will continue to marginalize women, both legally and socially, excluding them from decision-making and from benefitting from forest and land resources. Biodiversity should be valued because it lets us breathe and not valued on monetary terms. The implementation of rights-based and people-centered projects that strengthen gender justice are critical to developing environmental and social benefits for all women and men...

The **Women's Major Group** believes the protection of biodiversity, including forests and other ecosystems, must be central to Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, at this stage Mr/Mrs Chair, we can share with you the following recommendations for Goals & Targets:

Goal 1: Conservation of Ecosystems and Sustainable Governance of Land and other Natural Resources

Targets include:

- ☐ Zero loss of forest cover by 2030 (based on a definition of forests that excludes industrial tree and shrub plantations);
- ☐ Zero depletion of clean freshwater resources, full protection and ambitious restoration of healthy freshwater ecosystems by 2030. This requires both the protection and restoration of healthy ecosystems and ending over-extraction of water, especially for irrigation and water-intensive industries;
- ☐ Zero loss of other ecosystems, including grasslands, peatlands, savannah, tundra and alpine ecosystems by 2030;
- ☐ 50 million hectares of degraded or destroyed ecosystems restored or allowed to naturally regenerate by 2030;
- ☐ Phasing out all agricultural practices that cause soil erosion, depletion and compaction by 2030;
- ☐ All potentially perverse incentives promoting unsustainable consumption and production patterns that might trigger biodiversity loss have been redirected or eliminated by 2030;
- ☐ The territorial rights and customary conservation practices of Indigenous Peoples, women and local communities have been fully documented and recognized by 2030;
- ☐ Women and men participating equally in forests and other natural resource governance;
- ☐ Free, Prior and Informed Consent of all communities, including Indigenous Peoples, required for any projects and developments that may affect lands which they own, occupy or otherwise use.

Indicators for these targets should be gender sensitive and include **an indicator based on the implementation of the Aichi Targets**. The target on perverse incentives should include an **indicator on mainstreaming biodiversity in all Overseas**

Development Aid and other public financial flows, as well as an **indicator on eliminating subsidies that are potentially harmful for biodiversity**. Last but not least, it should include a **gender-disaggregated indicator** of the amount of public support and other positive incentives provided for sustainable use of biodiversity by Indigenous Peoples and local communities.