

Can Safeguards Guarantee Gender Equity? Lessons from research on women in early REDD+ implementation

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“Participation” is an insufficient measure to safeguard women’s interests. Rather, gender-responsive analyses are needed to understand real and perceived gender differences in interests and needs, and to anticipate threats or risks to women’s livelihoods.

Key messages

- Research suggests that women are not as informed about REDD+ or initiative activities as their male counterparts in the same village.
- When women are involved in REDD+ implementation, their participation is more superficial than men’s.
- Important gender gaps in information, knowledge and decision making are likely to affect the distribution of future benefits and burdens from REDD+ projects.
- Interventions that do not seek to address imbalances at the outset may be doomed to perpetuate them.

The problem

Researchers and practitioners have amply discussed the potential effects of REDD+ on forest-based communities (e.g. Gomes *et al.* 2010, Griffiths 2008, Larson *et al.* 2013, Sikor *et al.* 2010), but less attention has been paid to its gender dimensions. Given the tendency to see “communities” as undifferentiated, even REDD+ policy makers and proponents sensitive to the needs of forest-based peoples may fail to understand or address the specific needs of women related to forest and REDD+ policies. As a result, women struggle on two fronts: even if “communities” are taken into account and have opportunities to benefit from REDD+, women are likely to be left out.

Ensuring that REDD+ helps rather than harms

women requires understanding gendered processes and variation on the ground. The research results presented in this brief were generated by CIFOR’s Global Comparative Study on REDD+ in early project implementation (2011–2012) at 77 villages in 20 REDD+ sites across six countries (Brazil, Cameroon, Indonesia, Peru, Tanzania and Vietnam). The findings suggest that promoting “women’s participation” alone is an insufficient solution.

Context

While women are still largely peripheral to REDD+ debates, several organizations have called for greater attention to gender issues (Gurung and Quesada 2009, Peach Brown 2011, UN-REDD 2011). The World Bank’s Forest Investment Program (FIP), which provides funding to support REDD+ in developing countries (such as REDD-readiness and pilot activities), refers to women in a footnote in the 2009 FIP Design Document: “For the purpose of the FIP ‘indigenous peoples and local communities’ includes tribal communities and implies equal emphasis on the rights of men and women” (Climate Investment Funds 2009: 4). A more recent FIP document on the grant mechanism for indigenous people and local communities refers to an overarching principle that includes gender equality and twice mentions ensuring the participation of women (Climate Investment Fund 2011).

The second version of the UN REDD+ Social and Environmental Safeguards (SES) features

gender issues much more prominently than its previous version and more than other safeguard standards (Mackenzie 2012, REDD+ SES 2012). The UN-REDD+ Programme’s *Guidance Note on Gender Sensitive REDD+* (UN- REDD 2013) takes its gender recommendations beyond the discussion of safeguards.

Findings

The findings presented here are based on results from two sources: focus group interviews with mixed (66% male) groups of villagers (on their knowledge of and involvement in REDD+ or the local initiative) and focus group interviews with women (on their knowledge and involvement in REDD+, perceptions of participation in village decisions and decisions on forest use, and sex-differentiated forest use).

Knowledge of REDD+

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the women’s focus groups appear less informed about REDD+ than the mixed groups: 41% demonstrated a basic understanding of REDD+ compared to 67%, respectively (Table 1). Given that people were interviewed in the

early phase of the initiatives when proponents had only started introducing their REDD+ activities, it is important to compare groups within the same villages. For example, in all villages sampled in Brazil, both the women’s and the mixed groups demonstrated a basic understanding of REDD+, whereas in Cameroon, Peru, Tanzania, and Indonesia, the women’s group demonstrated a basic understanding in fewer villages compared to the mixed group (neither group demonstrated an understanding in the Vietnam site).

For those groups that demonstrated a basic understanding of REDD+, the proportion of mixed groups that participated in the the approval (or consent) process of the local REDD+ initiative (55%), or were involved in its design or implementation (35%), was still higher than in the women’s groups (43% and 30%, respectively), although the gap is much smaller than for “basic understanding”. Furthermore, the type of involvement among mixed groups included not only attending meetings and training events, as in the case for the women’s groups, but also clarifying tenure arrangements, monitoring forests and improving rule enforcement, although overall these were not mentioned frequently.

Table 1. Knowledge of and involvement in REDD+ in women’s and mixed groups.

	Demonstrated basic understanding (n=73*) (# and %)	Involved in decision to implement (# and %)	Involved in design or implementation (# and %)	Type of involvement
Women’s focus group	30 (41)	13 of 30 (43)	9 of 30 (30)	Attending meetings or training events
Mixed (male-dominated) focus group	49 (67)	27 of 49 (55)	17 of 49 (35)	Attending meetings, training events, clarifying tenure arrangements, monitoring and rule enforcement

* no data available for four villages in one site. Source: Larson et al, 2015

Understanding women's participation

The hypothesis was that, relative to the mixed groups, women would demonstrate similar knowledge of REDD+ initiatives if one or more of the following held true:

(1) If women have a strong voice in village decision making

We found that 64% of the women's focus group participants agreed that women were sufficiently represented in important village decision-making bodies, 65% agreed that they were usually able to influence village decisions and 79% agreed that women participated actively in meetings. Yet, there was no correlation between these perceptions and actual women's knowledge on REDD+.

(2) If women have a strong role in forest rule making

Less than half (47%) of the women's focus group participants agreed that women actively participated in making village rules for forest resource use. However, overall, the share of women that agreed that women are actively participating in making village rules for forest resource use was 30% higher in villages where both women's and mixed focus group demonstrated the same basic understanding of REDD+ (though the correlation still does not hold in all villages).

(3) If women use forest resources as much or more than men

According to the women's focus group, in 56% of all villages in our sample men went to the forest more often than women, 33% of villages demonstrated no difference between women and men, and for the remaining 11%

Summary of findings

- Relative to mixed (male-dominated)

women went into the forest more often. There was no correlation between the relative use of forest and women's knowledge of REDD+.

4) If REDD+ initiatives take an explicit gendered approach

Interview answers with REDD+ proponents were examined to see whether their projects explicitly considered women as a differentiated group. At this early interview stage, five proponents listed fair benefits to women as an equity goal. By the time of the field research, however, women and mixed groups exhibited a similar basic understanding of the initiative in only one site.

Discussion and recommendations

Overall, interview results demonstrate that fewer women's groups have basic understanding of REDD+ relative to the mixed groups, even for many women who have a vested interest in forests and when initiatives are concerned with gender equity. These results have potentially significant implications. Important gender gaps in information, knowledge and decision making are likely to affect the distribution of future benefits and burdens from REDD+. The findings suggest that "participation," while a central demand of indigenous and other local communities more generally, is only a partial solution to addressing women's strategic needs in ways that could strengthen their position in REDD+. Rather, gender-responsive analyses are required to understand real and perceived gender differences in interests and needs, and to anticipate threats or risks. Interventions that do not seek to address gender imbalances at the outset may be doomed to perpetuate them.

village groups, fewer women's groups demonstrate a basic understanding of REDD+ in early REDD+ activities.

- Where they are involved in REDD+ implementation, mixed groups attend meetings and trainings, and in some cases also clarify tenure arrangements, monitor and enforce rules, whereas women's groups only attend meetings and trainings.

Differences in understanding between mixed and women's groups emerged in the villages studied in Cameroon, Tanzania, Peru and Indonesia; groups demonstrate similar understanding in study villages in Brazil (basic understanding).

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