

Brief for GSDR – 2016 Update

Gender mainstreaming in REDD+ and PES - Lessons learned from Vietnam

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The problem

Vietnam was the first country in Asia to initiate the national Payment for Forest Environmental Services (PFES), and is one of the countries under UN-REDD and the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). Gender equity is supported by most national laws and strategies, including the national REDD+ program and Forest Protection and Development Law 2014. The Constitution of Vietnam emphasizes the principle of gender equality and specifically prohibits the violation of women's rights. However, in 2013, women accounted for only 10–12 percent of registrations of agricultural land-use certificates and often have limited awareness of their rights to access land and practice traditional customs. Despite the political vision and commitment, mainstreaming gender into REDD+ and PES in Vietnam has not been successful to date, and continues to pose a challenge for policy makers (Pham et al 2012).

Evidence and experience

National level

Limited guidance on how to address gender in forest policy

Gender equity and the role of women in forest protection and development has been acknowledged in numerous legal frameworks and policies such as the Law on Gender Equality, the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011–2020), the national REDD+ strategy, the Land Law, Law on Forest Protection and Development, the National Strategy and Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women and the Vietnam

MDGs, and the gender strategy of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD). Yet, the country still faces many challenges to actual on-ground implementation. All local authorities and donors interviewed argued that the major barriers to mainstreaming gender in PES and REDD+ are the lack of guidance from the central government on how to translate and implement them. An interviewee from provincial government stated: “As much as we [want] to mainstream gender into PES and REDD+, we do not know how to translate these concepts on the ground. We need more clear guidance”.

Need for gender champions

In 2012, only two of the 15 members of the national REDD+ steering committee were women; by 2015, this had risen to 50 percent. However, there is still doubt whether this will lead to increased participation by – and influence of – women on final policy outcomes on REDD+. Most of the women participating in REDD+ discussions reported that they focused on representing organizational interests and do not have a gender mandate. They stated they do not see themselves as gender champions, do not promote gender topics in policy debates, nor do they prioritize gender mainstreaming.

Lack of female representatives

A total of 52 organizations are identified as influential actors in shaping REDD+ and PES policy outcomes, but only 30 percent of those actors are women. Among these, 95 percent come from local civil society organizations (CSOs) and international NGOs and only five percent are from government

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agencies (Mai et al, forthcoming). This indicates there is limited scope for women to influence policy outcomes, especially since the most influential actor in Vietnam is the government (Pham et al 2014a; Brockhaus et al 2014).

Provincial and district level

From commitment to action

Findings show that the interest, knowledge and willingness to mainstream gender into REDD+ and PES is weaker among local governing bodies compared with national agencies. Of the provincial government actors who were interviewed, only one indicated willingness to mainstream gender into the socioeconomic development plan and provincial REDD+ action plan. The provincial government interviewee explained: “The central government requested us to mainstream gender into REDD+ but it is unclear how this mainstreaming should be done. ... Moreover, gender cannot be prioritized as we have more important issues to take care of such as MRV, and improving legal framework on institutional settings.”

In many provinces, the provincial government has set up a target of more than 30 percent representation by female provincial leaders. However, only five–10 percent of such positions are currently led by women. According to many interviewees, this low figure is mainly due to three key factors: lack of political will to include women in the management group; biased recruitment and promotion protocol which prefers men to women; and the lack of confidence amongst women candidates. According to our interviewees, the poor representation of women also holds for the central government, such as MARD. By November 2011, women held only 24.4 percent of the

seats in the national parliament; thus the target of 30 percent set out in the National Strategy for the Advancement of Vietnamese Women to 2010 was not met. Women’s representation at lower levels of the government, such as in People’s Councils or at the provincial or district level, reaches 20–24 percent, but women comprise only one to four percent of the leadership positions.

Commune/village level

In our village study site in ~~, women have stronger motivations and willingness to participate in PES and REDD+. For example, in Nghe An district, men often migrate to big cities or overseas for higher incomes and hence are not engaged in PES and REDD+ schemes in which offer very limited benefits. Women – on the other hand – remain in the village and show a strong motivation to participate in PES and REDD+. Key factors motivating women to participate in these schemes are increased household food security, the opportunity for additional income, and access to social networks such as women’s unions and farmers’ associations to obtain loans and technical support. However, insufficient efforts have been made by local governments to involve women in PES and REDD+ schemes, thus their engagement still remains limited?

Different preferences

Our research findings highlight that women and men have different perceptions and preferences with respect to benefit sharing mechanisms. For example, while men prefer PES and REDD+ cash payments, women prefer in-kind payments such as rice and tree seedlings, as well as technical support and training on financial management and market access. However, the current proposed benefit-sharing mechanism under both existing REDD+ pilot projects and national PES program adopts a uniform

approach for both men and women, and also ignores the role of other social variables, such as ethnic background, in shaping differing preferences among women and men. For example, in the delta where infrastructure and market access are often established, women's key interest in PES schemes is access to loans and further market development, while for women residing in more remote areas, their main motivation is to cover basic household food security needs. As a result, women are not able to enjoy the benefits derived from PES payments, which are mostly in the form of cash and often managed by men, and this leads to their lower willingness to participate in the scheme over time. There have been attempts to tackle these issues in the first trial of Free Prior and Informed Consent in Lam Dong province, however, under this design, women are still treated as a homogenous group to men when in reality this is not the case.

Access to information

Our research findings indicate that there are six major channels through which local people can obtain market information on PES and REDD+. These include friends outside villages, through government agencies (e.g. extension officers, national parks), mass organizations (e.g. farmers' associations, youth's unions), local NGOs working in the areas, and traders and middle-men. However, women's mobility in the study area was restricted due to patriarchal traditions and family responsibilities. This is because women often only speak local languages, however most of the information on REDD+ and PES was available only in Kinh (the language of the dominant ethnic group). Therefore, channels available for women to access information on PES and REDD+ were restricted; the only accessible information channel was through mass organizations such

as women's unions, farmers' associations and youth unions.

Inefficient representation

Our research findings show that at village and commune level, the Women's Union is formally recognized to act on behalf of women's interest, to bring women's voice to political and social discussions, and support women to access social programs and microcredit programs. However, these unions tend to also have a political mandate to support government policies and less to identify and tackle shortcomings in existing policies and governance structures with regard to gender. Therefore, most of the women interviewed in this study state the need to improve the representation of women's interests in REDD+ and PES policy design and implementation.

Recommendations

1. Detailed guidance on how gender mainstreaming should be carried out at provincial, district and commune level, coupled with clear indication and monitoring of government commitments to the increased participation of women in decision-making positions, is essential (Huyer et al 2015).
2. At national and provincial levels, increasing the target number for women's representation in leadership roles and on management boards is a good start, but policies measures and incentives structures inside the institutions should also be in place to encourage true participation of women (Pham et al 2014 a; Mai et al 2011). Local CSOs and international NGOs that already have women champions and play an active role in influencing REDD+ and PES debates can catalyze these changes.
3. At village and commune levels, REDD+ and

PES programs need to: consider women's preferences and interests in participating in PES and REDD+; tailor benefit-sharing mechanisms, access to information and resources, and governance structure to address those preferences and interests; and strengthen women's willingness to provide environmental services (Pham et al 2014b).

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