What Strategic Directions are Needed to Strengthen Gender Equality in REDD+ in Asia-Pacific?

This brief highlights the status of gender integration in Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) in Asia-Pacific and focuses on constraints the region faces in addressing gender equality in REDD+. It further describes how country-level efforts to address gender issues in REDD+ can be strategically supported through a regional framework.

Key Messages

- The Asia-Pacific region has made remarkable progress towards addressing gender equality in REDD+ in recent years. Nonetheless, several challenges persist, requiring better synergies, adequate investments and dedicated persistence.
- The region should learn from its stock of lessons learned from women’s inclusion in sustainable land use management and promote those in the context of REDD+.
- It is time to develop a coherent long-term regional vision and strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, which can further inform and support greater integration of gender perspectives and women’s inclusion in forestry and REDD+ programs at national and sub-national levels.
- Addressing gender gaps in REDD+ requires integration of practical and strategic needs of women into REDD+ activities at the operational level of sub-national planning and broader sustainable development strategies.
- Current initiatives to address gender gaps in REDD+ are largely limited to awareness raising and capacity building, but lack inbuilt financial resources and expertise for implementation. Increased institutional responsiveness should be the key focus of gender integration efforts to promote enforcement in the region.
- Evidence shows that a tailored capacity building process that fosters south-south collaboration and exchange can promote mutual learning and replication in the region.
Introduction

While the United Nations Framework on Climate Change recognizes the need to address gender considerations while developing and implementing national strategies and action plans related to climate change and Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, a number of key questions remain, including:

- To what extent do REDD+ policies and programming in the Asia-Pacific region actually address gender gaps and promote women’s inclusion in early REDD+ initiatives?
- What lessons can be learnt from existing programs, projects and good practices from forestry and other land use sectors for better addressing gender issues in forestry and REDD+?

In order to answer these key questions, over 60 foresters, gender and REDD+ experts, representatives from the private sector, women’s organizations, and other civil society groups from 16 countries in the Asia-Pacific region deliberated during the Asia-Pacific Workshop on Women’s Inclusion for Sustainable Forests and Climate: What Works? held from 26-27 March 2014, in Bangkok, Thailand. The two-day workshop provided participants a unique opportunity to share, reflect and learn from diverse initiatives in the region, including the Regional Joint Initiative for Women’s Inclusion in REDD+1. Building upon evidence-based research and innovative examples to address gender equality around the region, countries were asked to identify their existing status and capacity needs to better address gender equality in climate change and REDD+ initiatives.

This policy brief summarizes the key lessons that emerged from the Asia-Pacific workshop within the context of recent progress, the remaining challenges for better addressing gender equality in REDD+ in the region and strategic directions for improvement.

Context

Diverse context, similar gender gaps

Countries in Asia-Pacific region have made commendable progress in terms of women’s representation in political spheres and the labor force (Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam). The region also provides successful cases of women’s inclusion and its resulting performance in sustainable forest management (Nepal’s community forestry program; India’s self-help groups; the Philippines’ civil society’s networks). Yet, the region also harbors a pervasive impression that women do not contribute to the forestry sector, leading to situations where policies and planning not only fail to recognize women’s contribution to sustainable forest management, but also compromise their prospective rights to performance-based benefits of REDD+. Considering that many of the early REDD+ initiatives are applied to the forestry sector, such misconceptions about women’s roles lead to evident gender-gaps, including:

- Lack of recognition of women and their constituencies as legitimate stakeholders for sustainable forest management,
- Lack of decision-making for influencing REDD+ policies and programs, and
- Lack of rights to REDD+ fair benefit-sharing mechanisms.
A Regional Joint Initiative was established by the USAID LEAF program, WOCAN and the UN-REDD programme to identify practical entry points for women's inclusion and gender perspectives in REDD+ in the Asia-Pacific Region. The overall goal of the Initiative is to enhance the overall effectiveness of REDD+ through greater inclusion of women and gender perspectives in all relevant policies and practices.

There is a broad disconnect between gender-specific knowledge and its relevance to REDD+ planning and programming. Most of the forestry practices that may qualify for REDD+, such as improved forest management, forest-based alternative energy technologies, drivers of deforestation, safeguard development, scenario planning, and community-based forest monitoring, have not adequately integrated gender perspectives in their design and analysis. Recent gender integration efforts have been conducted in the form of various activities ranging from awareness raising to policy dialogue/assessments as well as the development of checklist/tools to guide gender-sensitive design and analysis. Such efforts have been helpful to raise awareness, add knowledge and provide practical ways of addressing specific contributions and vulnerabilities of men and women to REDD+. However, these efforts have not been linked with the overall REDD+ readiness processes to provide critical gender-specific inputs to REDD+ policies and programs. Nonetheless, some countries (for example Nepal and Indonesia’s efforts to integrate gender indicators in REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards (SES) ) can provide critical insights to the region through south-south exchange and replication opportunities to address gender issues in REDD+ readiness and implementation.

Several USAID-funded climate change projects, such as USAID Lowering Emissions in Asia’s Forests (USAID LEAF), Supporting Forests and Biodiversity in Cambodia, the Vietnam Forests and Delta program, and Hariyo Ban in Nepal, are beginning to address gender issues within their project-level activities related to REDD+. The lessons from these project experiences include opportunities and tested strategies for implementation, which can provide entry points for integrating gender equality into REDD+ activities. There is a need to document and upscale such project-based lessons to inform gender-integration into REDD+ programming.

There is increased interest in the region amongst development partners and state institutions to address gender issues in REDD+ (See Table 1). This includes the Regional Joint Initiative established by USAID LEAF, Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) and UN-REDD that identifies practical entry points for women’s inclusion and gender perspectives in REDD+ in the Asia-Pacific Region; Nepal and Indonesia’s efforts to integrate gender indicators on REDD+ SES; Cambodia’s Ministry of Women’s Affairs Climate Change Action Plan; and Vietnam’s roadmap to safeguard development. While these developments are encouraging, countries in the region have limited resources to develop necessary capacities to set up demonstration activities on women’s leadership and exchange lessons learned for replication. There is a need to develop a regional framework for cooperation that provides technical backstopping, garners investments and fosters exchange to further support women’s empowerment and gender equality objectives.

1 A Regional Joint Initiative was established by the USAID LEAF program, WOCAN and the UN-REDD programme to identify practical entry points for women’s inclusion and gender perspectives in REDD+ in the Asia-Pacific Region. The overall goal of the Initiative is to enhance the overall effectiveness of REDD+ through greater inclusion of women and gender perspectives in all relevant policies and practices.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizations</th>
<th>Key initiatives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USAID LEAF</td>
<td>Maps existing knowledge gaps through evidence based research and provides key entry points for women’s inclusion in REDD+ and other natural resource management sectors through a Regional Joint Initiative, gender leadership program, gender integrated programming in key policies and plans including Vietnam’s provincial REDD+ action plan.</td>
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<td>WOCAN</td>
<td>Development of the ‘W+ Standard’, which is a unique certification label developed by WOCAN that endorses projects that create increased social and economic benefits for women participating in economic development or environmental projects, including those that provide renewable energy technologies, time and labor saving devices, forest and agriculture activities and employment opportunities.</td>
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<td>RECOFTC</td>
<td>Assessment on integration of gender into national forest policies in six countries in the Asia region in collaboration with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization.</td>
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<td>IUFRO</td>
<td>Use of research to capture gender-disaggregated information in its own work; research on global review and synthesis of gender and reward for environmental services.</td>
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<td>CIFOR</td>
<td>Review of forestry and gender studies to identify gaps; production of toolkits such as Gender Strategy for Pro-poor Climate Change Mitigation.</td>
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<td>CliPAD/GIZ</td>
<td>Scoping study on “Cash for Work initiative” with a specific focus on identifying and rewarding women’s and men’s contributions to activities that help reduce/sequestrate greenhouse gas emissions.</td>
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<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>Integrated women-specific criteria and indicators into its national and provincial level safeguards standards.</td>
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<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>PACT and WOCAN gender analysis of the Oddar Meanchey project that identified key interventions for its implementation phase.</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Gender analysis for the UN-REDD Program in Vietnam prescribed a set of policy recommendations for VNFOREST to better inform gender integration in Phase 2; assessment on Benefit Distribution Sharing Systems uses gender as a factor to consider in calculating carbon emission gains.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>Integrating gender in REDD+ SES, the Forest Carbon Trust Fund’s REDD+ pilot project verified and distributed carbon money to communities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Myanmar</td>
<td>Included women in its initial consultations for the REDD+ roadmap; conducted stakeholder mapping to identify women’s groups and gender and development organizations</td>
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Capacity building approaches to address gender gaps narrowly focus on a few sporadic events, often overlooking the political and institutional context that affects implementation. As such, efforts to address gender gaps are often scattered, random and limited to either the programming, policy or community level, but not interlinked. Most capacity building programs focus on developing knowledge and skills, which are important but still inadequate to promote institutional accountability for effective enforcement and monitoring.

Key implementing agencies working with women, forestry, environment and REDD+ are strategically positioned to incorporate gender integration into REDD+ policies and programs. This requires creating an enabling institutional environment for these agencies, along with a mandate for gender-integrated REDD+ programming.

Comprehensive capacity building approaches

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Creating enabling environments

Considering the diversity of cultures and social norms in the region, additional effort is required to initiate enabling spaces for discussing realistic solutions to address gender gaps. The concept of gender equality still remains vague, particularly in forestry and REDD+, and at times creates fear of recrimination. The forestry sector has long been identified as predominantly masculine, putting women at disadvantage.

Many women forestry professionals hesitate to raise gender issues in forestry and REDD+ policies and planning. It is important to develop safer spaces whereby both women and men can learn and share their experiences without fear of being ridiculed, singled out and looked down upon. Gender equality is a right that should be enjoyed by everyone. There is a need to rethink social business politics so that they match with the evolving and mixing roles of men and women as breadwinners and care givers. Concomitantly, broader mass movements and campaigns should be conducted in tandem with on-going efforts to put gender at the heart of REDD+ activities.

Limits to incentive systems

Current incentive systems that promote gender integration are minimal and poorly enforced. At the regional level, investments and expertise to address gender-gaps in REDD+ are limited and random. At the national level, gender budgeting is common but allocations are very low, often cover specific activities, are poorly enforced and not tied to the REDD+ programs. Reward systems for gender champions is not a common practice. Programs that provide income-generating activities and empower women are scarce, particularly at the community level. At all levels, lack of seed capital to fund demonstration activities that address practical and strategic needs of women and men in REDD+ activities is evident.

Past and ongoing work in the region highlights a series of issues which require immediate attention at the level of design and implementation mechanisms to further address gender gaps in REDD+.

Policy-practice gaps

Many countries in the region have gender-responsive policies and mechanisms, but they lack adequate enforcement and monitoring. Countries such as the Philippines, Nepal, Cambodia and Vietnam have excellent policies but lack a concomitant focus to build robust and responsive institutions at sub-national and local levels that can successfully translate those policies into practice. This means that having gender-friendly policies in the forestry sector and REDD+ would not automatically lead to women’s empowerment until financial resources and skills, as well as the attitude of forestry actors, are supportive to address issues of gender inequality and women’s empowerment.

3Scoping report 2013.
Establish gender as a critical part of REDD+ readiness and implementation

Gender equality should be established as a non-negotiable right in REDD+ readiness and implementation. In practice, this would mean greater gender integration in a range of current plans, policies and demonstration projects across REDD+. Women’s contributions, as well as their vulnerabilities, in sustainable forest management need to be well-established as a fact to inform REDD+ planning and implementation in key areas such as safeguards, benefit-sharing mechanisms, and land tenure. Key actors influencing REDD+ activities in the region should incorporate adequate gender budgeting to recognize gender-specific risks and opportunities into REDD+ activities, including policy and legislative review and harmonization, REDD+ strategy implementation, financial sharing mechanisms and grievance and dispute resolution mechanisms. REDD+ should be understood not just in terms of emissions reductions, but as a means of creating change in the fundamental management of both the forests and the country, which includes other complex issues such as alternative development, fair benefits and poverty alleviation.

Leverage project experience in national REDD+ activities

Given that projects are starting to implement gender-friendly REDD+ interventions in the region, there is a need to tie project-level experience to national level REDD+ activities as part of the larger effort of integrating gender equality into REDD+ policies and programming. There is need to draw upon lessons from on-ground experiences, including the opportunities and challenges of implementation frameworks and benefit sharing, and the impacts of activities promoting gender equality in REDD+. This would require the scaling up of project-level gender integrated programming to gender-sensitive REDD+ piloting. Projects will develop gender standards (gender analysis baselines, monitoring, reporting) which can be used to inform the development of a safeguard information system.

Establish a regional framework to backstop gender equality efforts in REDD+

While many countries in the region have initiated awareness and capacity building activities in REDD+, they are not all fully aware of possible pathways to address the gender gaps. Regional support and backstopping for gender equality in REDD+ is limited and randomly allocated through development partners. There is an immediate need to expand and replicate initiatives such as the Regional Joint Initiative into concrete regional frameworks that provide technical backstopping, promote lessons learned, and harmonize support across development partners. This calls for a regional framework (see Table 2) that supports countries in the region through increased opportunities to access public and private resources, increased capacities to promote women’s leadership in public institutions, communities and companies, enhanced gender technical assistance to meet a country’s specific needs, and enhanced mechanisms to increase institutional accountability and implement demonstrative activities (at the national and sub-national levels).

Promote institutional accountability

Institutional accountability is key to effective implementation of gender equality policies and programs. Targeted programs are required to influence organizational management, gender-integrated programming and enforcement at key institutions that implement forestry, REDD+ and gender related activities in the region. This would require adopting a comprehensive strategy for developing the institutional and human capacities of the sectoral ministries, line agencies, local governments, women-led organizations and community based institutions. These organizations need increased understanding of the issues related to gender and climate change, as well as the expertise to plan and integrate gender equality into their plans and activities. Such a strategy should build the capacity of gender champions, incentivize their efforts, and incorporate wider stakeholder engagement to create enabling spaces and buy-in for dialogue and transformative change.

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4Participants at the Asia-Pacific Workshop deliberated to identify capacity needs and the require regional support for addressing gender equality in REDD+, as presented in Table 2. Additional discussions with the participating countries are needed to prioritize the support.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity Needs</th>
<th>Regional Actions</th>
<th>Activity and Potential Country</th>
<th>Action already planned/in Place</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Increased access to public and private resources to develop necessary capacities and social capital.</td>
<td>1. Develop, prioritize and demonstrate a range of practices/approaches that enhance knowledge for options, and respond to demand for women’s empowerment and gender equality.</td>
<td>- Capacity building (Lao PDR)</td>
<td>- USAID LEAF is supporting 20 gender champions across Asia-Pacific from 2013-2015 (representatives from Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, Malaysia, PNG)</td>
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<td>2. Increased opportunities for women to take leadership roles in public institutions, communities, companies, NGOs, etc.</td>
<td>2. Knowledge sharing by countries to exchange lessons and to replicate best practices.</td>
<td>- Women’s leadership (Mongolia)</td>
<td>- WOCAN provides training for Women’s Leadership.</td>
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<td>3. One-stop shop for expertise and knowledge, including training, technical assistance, knowledge sharing opportunities, tools and guidance notes, for gender equality.</td>
<td>3. Leverage resources and investments across the region through national governments, donors and the private sector.</td>
<td>- Institutional innovation and implementation (Cambodia, Vietnam, Nepal, Philippines)</td>
<td>- UN-REDD programs support countries to meet their plan on gender-responsive needs</td>
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<td>4. Increased institutional accountability and innovation for women’s empowerment and gender equality.</td>
<td>4. Develop a regional framework for cooperation to support women’s empowerment and gender equality objectives.</td>
<td>- Harmonized tools and processes (mainly for safeguard processes in all countries, the Philippines)</td>
<td>- The Joint Initiative regional workshop 2015 (by UN-REDD, WOCAN, USAID LEAF) (TBC)</td>
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<td>5. Demonstration of pilot activities (at national and sub-national levels) that integrate women’s empowerment.</td>
<td>5. Promote and support the application of the W+ Standard to measure benefits to women and fulfill social and environmental safeguard requirements.</td>
<td>- Demonstration/pilot projects (Vietnam: PLUP, safeguards, benefit-sharing)</td>
<td>- USAID LEAF is supporting gender reviews of policies and strategies upon request from government</td>
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For further information:
Kalpana Giri, PhD
REDD+ and Gender Expert,
USAID Lowering Emissions in Asia’s Forest (USAID LEAF)
287 Silom Road, 20th Floor, Liberty Square,
Bangrak, Bangkok, 10500, THAILAND
Office: +66 (0) 2631 1259/1675
Email: Kalpana@winrock.org
Website: www.leafasia.org

Read more:

USAID LEAF and our gender integrated programming www.leafasia.org
Gender and Climate Change Video http://www.leafasia.org/videos/fair-climate
Regional Scoping study http://www.wocan.org/resources/scoping-study-womens-inclusion-REDD
REDD+ gender work in Cambodia http://www.wocan.org/resources/women%E2%80%99s-inclusion-redd-cambodia-good-practices-forest-agriculture-NRM
REDD+ gender work in the Philippines http://wocan.org/resources/women%E2%80%99s-inclusion-redd-philippines-good-practices-forest-NRM