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.

READ THIS BRIEF IF...

• You want to ensure that REDD+ does not perpetuate gender inequities.
• You are designing safeguard policies.
• You want to understand why improving women’s participation alone is insufficient to protect women’s interests and needs.
• You want REDD+ to benefit women.

KEY MESSAGES

• Research suggests that women are not as informed about REDD+ or initiative activities as their male counterparts from 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.
• 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, 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 must struggle on two fronts: even if “communities” are taken into account and have opportunities to benefit from REDD+, women may still be left out.

Ensuring that REDD+ helps rather than harms women requires understanding the 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 6 countries (Brazil, Cameroon, Indonesia, Peru, Tanzania and Vietnam). The findings suggest that promoting “women’s participation” alone is an insufficient solution.
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.

The findings presented here are based on results from two sources: focus group interviews with mixed (66% male) groups of villagers (on knowledge of and involvement in REDD+ or the local initiative) and focus group interviews with women (on knowledge of 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 data 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 we interviewed people in the early phase of the initiatives when proponents were just 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 than the mixed group (neither group demonstrated an understanding in the Vietnam site).

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

*no data available for 4 villages in one site. Source: Larson et al. [in press]

Understanding women's participation

We hypothesized 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 this perception and women's knowledge of REDD+. Interventions that do not seek to address gender imbalances at the outset may be doomed to perpetuate them.
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even REDD+ policymakers and proponents sensitive to the needs of forest-based peoples may fail to understand women’s specific needs related to forest and REDD+ policies.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- Relative to mixed (male-dominated) village groups, fewer women’s groups demonstrate a basic understanding of REDD+ in early REDD+ activities, even when:
  - Women believe they have a strong voice in village decision making
  - Women perceive that they use forests as much as or more than men
  - Initiatives have an explicit goal of supporting gender equity.

- 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).

Overall, the data demonstrate that fewer women have a 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. 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.
REFERENCES


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