



Gender mainstreaming in REDD+ and PES

Lessons learned from Vietnam

 Gender mainstreaming in REDD+ and PES requires not only a policy on gender equity, but also political will and sufficient capacity in government agencies at various levels of governance.

Key messages

- Many policies emphasize the need for gender equity and the importance of mainstreaming gender into REDD+ and PES, but limited guidance is given on how gender should be addressed in forestry policies.
- Although several women are represented in the Vietnam National REDD+ Steering Committee, they need to take a more active role in order to influence policy outcomes.
- Many REDD+ projects and PES national programs have proposed benefit-sharing mechanisms, but not enough effort has been made to understand women's preferences for receiving PES and REDD+ payments. This has led to ineffective, inefficient and inequitable implementation of both REDD+ and PES.
- Despite the existence of several information channels related to PES and REDD+, many women lack access to these channels.

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.¹

This brief synthesizes major challenges that are occurring at different government levels in an attempt to translate political commitment on gender equitable REDD+ into reality. It is based on research findings from the Global Comparative Study on REDD+ (see <http://www.cifor.org/gcs/>), the Global Comparative Study on REDD+ Benefit Sharing (www.cifor.org/redd-benefit-sharing) and the ASEAN Social Forestry Network (<http://www.cifor.org/asfcc/>) conducted in Vietnam since 2009.

Evidence and experience

National level

Many policies emphasize the need for gender equity and the importance of mainstreaming gender into REDD+ and PES, but limited guidance is given on how gender should be addressed in forestry policies.

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 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”.

Although several women are represented in the Vietnam National REDD+ Steering Committee, they need to take a more active role in order to influence policy outcomes.

In 2012, only 2 of the 15 members of the national REDD+ steering committee were women; by 2015, this had risen to 50 percent. But there is doubt about whether this will lead to increased participation by – and influence of – women on final outcomes. Most of the women participating in REDD+ discussions reported that they focused on representing their organizational interests and as such do not have a gender mandate. They do not see themselves as gender champions, do not promote gender topics in policy debates, nor do they prioritize gender mainstreaming.

Many organizations are identified as influential actors in shaping REDD+ and PES policy, but only a small number of those organizations are represented by women.

A total of 52 organizations are identified as influential actors in shaping REDD+ and PES policy, 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 5 percent are from government agencies.² This indicates there is limited scope for women to influence policy outcomes, especially since the most influential actor in Vietnam is the government.^{3,4}

Provincial and district level

There are many political commitments to mainstreaming gender in REDD+ and PES, but there is little evidence that these commitments are being translated into policy and concrete actions.

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 a willingness to mainstream gender into the socioeconomic development plan and provincial REDD+ action plan. One provincial government interviewee explained: “The central government requested us to mainstreaming gender into REDD+ but it is unclear how this mainstreaming should be done. . . . Moreover, gender has to come at second place as we have more important issues to take care of such as MRV, improve legal framework on institutional setting.”

Although several leadership positions are open to women, few are eligible to apply for these positions.

In many provinces, the provincial government has set up a target of more than 30 percent representation by female provincial leaders. However, only 5–10 percent of such positions are currently filled by women. This low figure, according to many interviewees, 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 central government such as MARD. By November 2011, women held only 24.4 percent of seats in 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 government, such as in People’s Councils or at the provincial or district level, reaches 20–24 percent, but women comprise only 1–4 percent of leadership positions.

Commune/village level

In our village study site, women have a stronger motivation 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, which in comparison 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 are increased household food security, the opportunity for additional income, and access to social network 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.

Inadequate understanding of women's interests and preferences with respect to REDD+ and PES payments result in ineffective, inefficient and inequitable implementation of REDD+ and PES.

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 differences in preferences within the two gender groups due to the different ethnic backgrounds. For example, in the delta where infrastructure and market access are often already established, women's key interest in PES schemes is access to loans and further market development, while for women in more remote areas the main motivation is to cover basic 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, in turn leading to lower willingness to participate the scheme over time. There have been attempts to tackle those 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.

Market information on PES and REDD+ is available and exchanged at village level through various channels. However, women are often not able to access many of those channels.

Our research findings indicated that there are six major channels through which local people can obtain information and market information on PES and REDD+: from 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, traders and middle men. However, women's mobility in the study area was restricted due to patriarchal traditions and family responsibilities. Women often only speak local languages, while most of the information on REDD+ and PES was available only in Kinh (the language of the dominant ethnic group). Channels available for women to access information on PES and REDD+ were therefore restricted; the only accessible information channel was through mass organizations such as women's unions, farmers' associations and youth unions.

Many social organizations are mandated to represent women's interest and voice in decision making in both social economic development and environmental protection policies at all levels, but they do not perform this role efficiently.

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 to social programs and microcredit programs. However, these unions tend to also have a political mandate to support government policies and less so to identify and tackle shortcomings in existing policies and governance structures with regard to gender. Therefore, most of the women interviewed in our study see the need to improve the representation of women's interests in REDD+ and PES policy design and implementation.

Recommendations

- Detailed guidance on how gender mainstreaming should be carried out at provincial, district and commune level, coupled with clear indicators for monitoring the implementation of government commitments to the increased participation of women in decision-making positions, is essential.⁵
- 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 and measures as well as incentives structures inside the institutions should be in place to encourage the true participation of women.^{3,6} 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.
- At the 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.⁷

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Ricky Martin for Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR)

Rosita, a 3 year old girl, showing a cabbage seed to be planted in the nursery area.

This brief is number 5 in a set of Gender Climate Briefs.
See the full set here: CIFOR.org/gender-climate



This research was carried out by CIFOR as part of the CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (CRP-FTA). This collaborative program aims to enhance the management and use of forests, agroforestry and tree genetic resources across the landscape from forests to farms. CIFOR leads CRP-FTA in partnership with Bioversity International, CATIE, CIRAD, the International Center for Tropical Agriculture and the World Agroforestry Centre.



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