

Women Organizing for Change in
Agriculture & Natural Resource Management



Photo by Nabin Baral/ICIMOD

CASE STUDY

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An Assessment of Gender and Women's Exclusion in REDD+ in Nepal

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Executive Summary

REDD+ initiatives are well underway in Nepal. The development of the REDD+ strategy, therefore, presents an opportune time to assess the degree to which its strategies and implementation have addressed gender issues and women's representation in the processes. This assessment was undertaken by WOCAN and HIMAWANTI to examine Nepal's Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP), the REDD+ Interim Strategy and REDD+ pilot projects. This assessment found that there is little emphasis on gender in the REDD+ processes, evidenced by the lack of studies on gender issues proposed in the REDD+ interim strategy and the minimal consultation with women's groups. There is also a significant gap in the representation of women at all levels: less than ten percent of the members of the Apex Body and the REDD Working Group are women; only one women expert was consulted in the R-PP development process. The representation of women at the district level was also low, and did not meet the guidelines established for Community Forestry that mandates fifty percent representation of women in the executive committees. Thus the REDD+ initiatives have not only neglected and undermined the international agreements which acknowledge women's rights over resources and for equal representation in governance structures, but also undermine the successes achieved within the country to address gender equality goals.

The assessment also highlighted that benefit sharing of REDD+ initiatives would not be beneficial to women if they are not equal participants in the decision making processes. The assessment also highlights opportunities to capitalize on existing strengths to address women's exclusion in the REDD+ process in Nepal: these include the recognition and validation of women's knowledge and perseverance to maintain forest resources; the implementation of affirmative action policies of Community Forestry, and the support of male champions. Incorporating these elements into the REDD+ initiatives are critical to Nepal's achievement of its goals for REDD+.

Background

Nepal has been undertaking readiness for REDD+ (Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) since June 2010. The REDD+ Strategy will be ready by 2013 to guide the implementation of the future REDD+ program. In this readiness phase, a few pilot projects have been implemented with the support of various organizations and donors. This assessment was conducted by Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) and the Himalayan Grassroots Women's Natural Resource Management Association (HIMAWANTI) in February 2012 to provide a review of the current REDD+ policy, processes and pilots in Nepal from a gender perspective, and to highlight the extent to which these have included women at the national and local levels. It also intends to provide recommendations for how the REDD+ program can mainstream gender more effectively into its projects/initiatives. This assessment employed a mixed methodology that included a desk review and consultations at different levels (national, sub-national and community), using focus group discussions and interviews. It examined Nepal's Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP), the REDD+ Interim Strategy and REDD+ pilot projects.

Nepal is one of the first countries selected to receive support from the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF). The R-PP has already been accepted by the FCPF, and the REDD+ Interim Strategy is guiding the development of the REDD+ strategy. Furthermore, REDD+ is a major component of the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA). Various international NGOs and civil society groups have become closely involved in piloting outreach activities for the REDD+ readiness phase: five major REDD+ related pilot projects have been implemented in various districts. Two of the projects are developing methodologies for forest carbon measurement, benefit sharing, and technical capacity building, and to develop a policy and institutional framework for the implementation of REDD+, while two other projects focus on capacity building and awareness raising. One project focuses on Payments for Ecosystem Services to improve the livelihoods of communities.

Several issues and challenges have arisen during REDD+ piloting. One of these is the exclusion of women in the policy formulation process. This assessment found evidence of the explicit exclusion of women from the policy development process at both national and local levels. Though women were acknowledged as beneficiaries, their roles as contributors and key players during the implementation process were not recognized.

In so doing, and as presented in this paper, the REDD+ initiative and its institutional structure has not only neglected or ignored the international agreements (such as CEDAW¹, MDG3², and The Beijing Platform for Action³) – which acknowledge women's rights over resources as well as call for equal representation in the governance structure of the State – but has also ignored the national level policy instruments which ensure women's participation in decision making processes. Thus, the REDD+ process has pushed back the gender equality achievements made by Nepal.

National Level Policy:

- *The Gender Equality Act (2006) provides greater opportunity for women's representation in government as well as non-government organizations.*
- *The Community Forestry Guideline (2009) sets a 50% quota for women in executive committees.*

¹ Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women.

² Millennium Development Goal (MDG3) on gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

³ The Platform for Action is an agenda for women's empowerment.

Lack of emphasis on gender issues in the R-PP, the REDD+ Interim Strategy and initiatives

There were no gender analyses or studies conducted that could inform the R-PP and REDD+ Interim Strategy; out of the 22 studies proposed in the REDD+ Interim Strategy, none included information on gender issues. Though the REDD+ initiatives have built on the Community Forestry Guidelines that mandate 50% women's representation in Community Forestry Executive Committees, and the pilot projects' guideline for 15% carbon benefit sharing for women, poor and Dalits, there is lack of mechanisms to ensure the implementation of these mandates and to create enabling environments for women's meaningful participation in the REDD+ initiatives. The activities are implemented without acknowledging the different needs, roles and responsibilities of women and men.

The R-PP stays silent on how the new initiatives can ensure women's access to and rights over resources. It also does not offer robust mechanisms to ensure the meaningful participation of women in the decision making bodies of the REDD+ initiative. Although the R-PP prioritizes the special demands of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and ensures their rights, there is no recognition of a differentiation between the roles of men and women within these groups. The analysis of the budget allocation for implementing the readiness activities – detailed in the R-PP – does not show even a trace of gender responsive budgeting.

The R-PP and REDD+ Interim Strategy claim that the decision making process was highly consultative, and a large number of civil society organizations were consulted from national to community levels during the preparation of the R-PP. However, by analyzing the total number of consultations and workshops conducted at the community level (17), it appears that only a negligible number (3) were targeted specifically to women. They consulted three women's groups at the district level, but the outcome of the discussions was not incorporated in the R-PP. A lack of consultations with women is bound to bring about negative results or increase the risk of the REDD+ initiative's success. The risk exists because current consultations on REDD+ at the national and global levels rarely include women who represent the broader concerns and needs of women (Gurung, 2009).

The R-PP states that the REDD Cell was established in April 2009 to fast-track policy development, to submit the national REDD Readiness Plan (R-PP) to the FCPF. Communities were not engaged in the discussions about REDD until January 2010, thus leaving only three or four months to raise awareness and solicit views from local stakeholders. As a result, there was not enough time for incorporating the experience and perspectives of local communities into the policy development process for the validation of the draft R-PP.

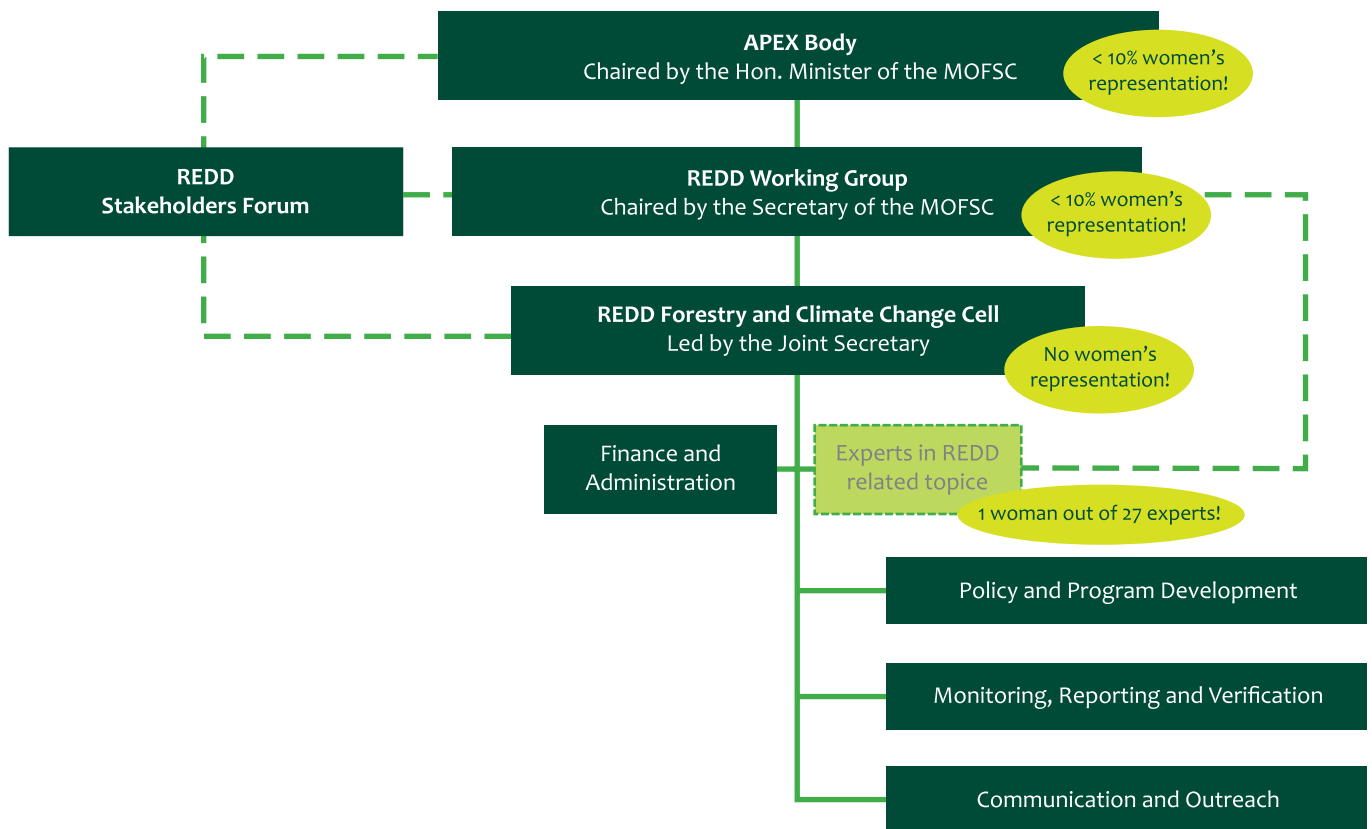
Women underrepresented in the institutional structure of REDD+ governance at national level

The analysis of the data available on the REDD+ Initiative in Nepal shows that a three-tier governance structure has been established as a multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder coordinating entity that includes an Apex Body. It is mainly responsible for policy coordination and is comprised of top-level officials from various government ministries and the National Planning Commission (NPC). The other two tiers are the REDD Working Group (RWG) and the REDD Forestry and Climate Change Cell (REDD Cell). The main responsibility of the RWG is to provide technical and institutional support to the REDD Cell for the preparation of the R-PP and the REDD+ Strategy. The main aim of the REDD Cell is to create awareness and capacity building on the REDD+ process for all stakeholders and right holders and to develop the REDD+ strategies and policies. It also functions as a coordinating entity. Besides these, a Stakeholder Forum has been formed with the aim of including a wide range of stakeholders throughout the REDD+ initiatives and processes. In addition, different teams were formed to draft the R-PP, including the R-PP Development Core Team, made up of other contributors and experts who were frequently consulted during the R-PP preparation. The "Design and setting up of a Governance and Payment System for Nepal's Community Forest Management under REDD+" project has established an informal structure to manage the Carbon Trust Fund effectively.

The assessment shows that women's representation in the Apex Body and in the REDD+ Working Group is less than 10%. The only woman in the Apex Body happens to be a woman representing the Ministry of Industry and one woman in the working group represents Indigenous People (IP). Out of the 27 experts consulted from various organizations during the R-PP development process, only one was a woman. None of these experts who are involved in R-PP development core team or in the list of contributors of the R-PP development team are addressing gender issues. The analysis indicates that the representation of women at the national level is insignificant.

During the consultation for the assessment most of the civil society organization members stated that the scenario of women's representation in REDD Stakeholder Forum is not any different from what could be seen in case of the REDD Working Group or other governance structures. According to them, there is a provision to invite civil society organizations, rather than inviting individuals. But because most of the civil society organizations are headed by men, few or no women participate. This shows the lack of understanding of the steps needed to assure gender equitable participation in the decision making process of REDD+ and points to the need for targets for women's participation.

Fig 1: Institutional Structure of REDD+ governance



Women underrepresented in the institutional structure of REDD+ governance at sub-national level

In Chitwan District, women’s representation at the sub-national level is somewhat similar to the national level scenario. Figure 2 shows that women’s representation is quite low in all the structures except for the Watershed REDD Network. Even in that case, although there are more women, the executive positions – such as those of Watershed REDD Network Coordinator, Deputy Coordinator and secretary – are still held by men.

The interviews and focus group discussions with women revealed that women are responsible for most of the administrative work in the CFUGs but are not getting opportunities to hold positions on executive committees or take part in decisions. One of the members of a women-managed CFUG stated:

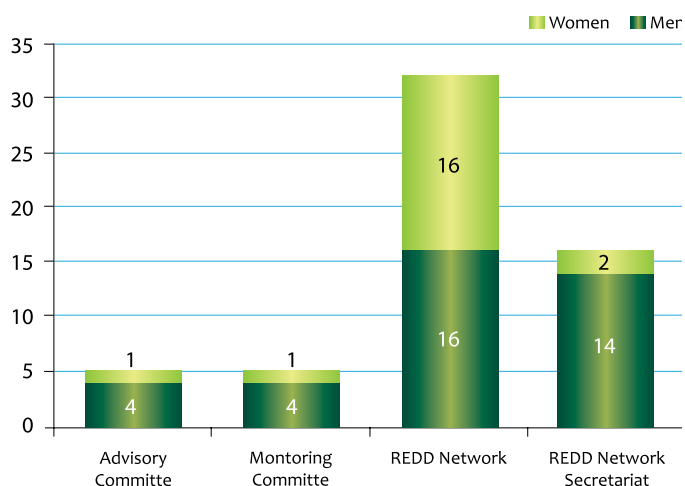
“Women in many CFUG committees are in the posts of vice chair-person, treasurer or secretary, because they do hard labor to produce the minutes and all other official documents. But still the chairperson gets exposure and all the credit goes to him (Secretary of Chelibeti CFUG, 15 Feb 2012).”

Out of the 16 CFUGs affiliated to the Kayarkhola Watershed REDD Network in Chitwan District, only one CFUG has a woman chairperson (in the only-women managed CFUG); 13 CFUGs have women secretaries, six have women vice chairpersons, eight have women treasurers, eight have women joint secretaries and members. The data indicates that the overall women’s representation in the executive committees of CFUGs in Chitwan is 30.35%. Overall, women’s representation in the CFUGs’ executive committees is about 31.5% (DFO, 2012), which does not meet the level prescribed for the mandatory representation of women (50%) as per the Community Forestry Guidelines.

Benefit sharing mechanism in the REDD+ initiative: How will women benefit?

Due to elite capture and male dominance in the decision making process, women have not been able to benefit from the income from community forests (Malla et al., 2003). There is a high chance of the same happening with benefits from the REDD+ initiative. The assessment shows that women, the poor, and other marginalized groups receive fewer benefits from existing benefit sharing mechanisms practiced in community forestry. The study also found that the criteria prescribed in the Operational Guidelines of Forest Carbon Trust Fund (2011) cannot

Fig 2: Women's representation in different institutional structures of REDD + in Chitwan district



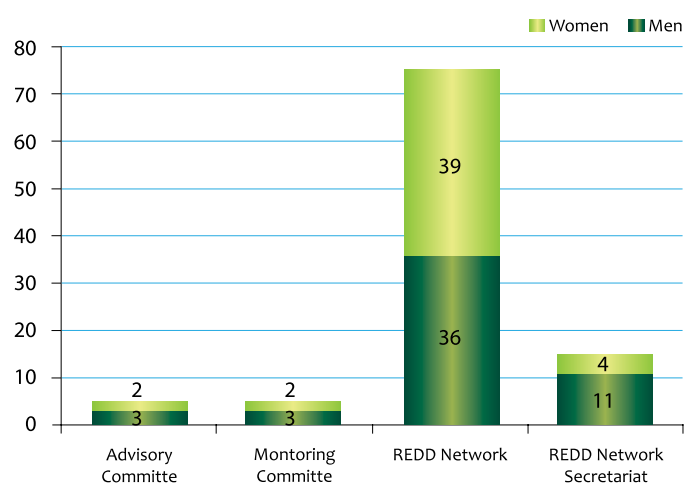
Source: Field Survey, 2012.

assure that women benefit from REDD+ piloting either. If the designing of the principles, policies and REDD+ strategy do not ensure mechanisms that favor women and the poor of the community, there is a looming risk of women benefiting far less than men from these funds.

One of the REDD+ piloting projects, the Forest Carbon Trust Fund (FCTF), has developed operational guidelines in 2011 for regulating its seed grants for community forestry REDD+ projects. It has prescribed several criteria for payments, areas of utilization of the fund and benefit sharing mechanism, which were developed through consultations at national and project area/watershed levels for project implementation purposes. These guidelines pose both technical and socio-economic criteria. Out of its four broad criteria, three focus on demographic and socio-economic aspects. However, an analysis of the performance-based criteria shows that these do not assure women's equitable participation and benefit sharing from carbon offsets.



Fig 3: Women's representation in different institutional structures of REDD+ in Dolakha district



Source: Field Survey, 2012.

Opportunities and barriers for women's participation in REDD+

Opportunities:

Women's engagement, knowledge and experiences in forest management

As primary users, women know a lot about the uses of forests in terms of species qualities for fuel wood, fodder, decomposition and leaf litter; medicinal value of herbs, nutritional value of forest fruits and vegetables, etc., which men do not usually possess. Women make significant contributions through their labor, spending their time engaging in forest cleaning, bush cutting, weeding and thinning activities in community forest management (Agarwal, 2010). It was evident during the field visit in Kayarkhola Watershed (in Pragati CFUG) that out of the 37 members working in the forest cleaning, thinning and bush cutting, 70% were women. Thus, it is important to engage women for their knowledge and experience while acknowledging the possibility of increased workloads. In Dolakha district, the strict regularization of the forest management system with designated days per week to enter the forest for fuel and fodder collection has made all the household members share this work, which previously was mostly done by women. In this context, women feel that their time to collect fuel and fodder has decreased tremendously. Therefore a strategic forest management system can help in decreasing women's workload.

Box 1: Lesson learned from Carbon Trust Fund utilization at community level

Laxmi Karki, 36, is working as a secretary of the Pragati CFUG (Kayarkhola Watershed, Chitwan) and a Local Resource Person (LRP) for the REDD Network. She has participated in every training and interactive program provided by the REDD Network. The Pragati CFUG received NRs. 47000 (USD 520) as a first installment from the Carbon Trust Fund as a seed grant. According to the criteria of the committee for utilizing this fund, some amount was allocated for a pro-poor program, so NRs. 11,000 (USD 122) was allocated to two poor women for cow rearing without their prior consent. Both women refused to accept the fund saying, “we would rather prefer pigs to cows”. As the decision was made without consulting these women (beneficiaries), the fund was not utilized for a long time. This was learned only after the REDD+ monitoring committee raised a question about the unutilized fund for the vulnerable groups. Laxmi Karki, the LRP for this area, discussed it with the women and they were provided with pigs. Laxmi learned from this event that such ad-hoc decision-making and the project’s lack of interest to explore different opportunities for livelihood options meant that it could not be assumed that the poor and women would benefit from this grant. She suggested that the CFUG should set up criteria for allocating funds and make decisions only after consulting with the concerned person and discussing various alternatives.

Affirmative policy reform

In the past, the forest policies did not address women’s tenure rights in community forestry (CF). Three decades of community-based forest management experience made reform necessary in the CF policy and guidelines, and some governance issues emerging at the implementation level were changed. For example, the Community Forestry Guideline (2009) set a 50% quota for women in the executive committees. About 60,000 women are already represented in the executive committee of CFUGs and about 5% of CFUGs are managed only by women. Furthermore, Nepal’s Gender Equality Act (2006) provides an enabling environment for women to participate in all development sectors from national to local levels. Yet these policies have not been fully operationalized.

Perseverance of women leaders

Despite the long history of development interventions in Nepal, there is still a very limited number of women Local Resource Persons (LRP) in the districts and villages. In Chitwan district there are only five women LRPs out of a total of 16.

“Chami Kumari Rana Magar from Chelibeti CFUG in Shaktikhor VDC, Chitwan said that men LRPs and technicians usually do not understand and respect women’s capacities and contributions in forest management. She shared her experience on how she and her women-only CFUG members had to struggle to be part of the REDD+ technical training (practical aspect in the forest) given by the project to the LRPs. She said that their proactive steps and eagerness to learn was disrespected on the pretext that they were unable to grasp the technical aspects of the training due to their low levels of formal education.

However, through much lobbying, the women finally did take the practical training and today they are well versed on technical aspects of REDD+, which is useful for their forest management practices and to brief visitors.”

Thus, even with limited resources, there is evidence of women who are persistent on claiming their rights to participation and benefits of REDD+.

Support from male colleagues and counterparts

Most of the interviewees – both men and women – found that support from men colleagues, technicians, LRPs or men counterparts truly contributed to higher levels of women’s participation. One of the women members of Chysebagawati CFUG stated that they clearly experienced differences between supportive and non-supportive men counterparts. According to her, due to the support of a male counterpart in the executive committee, women were able to speak out in favor of women in a committee meeting on the benefit sharing mechanism of the Forest Carbon Trust Fund seed grant. The story presented below illustrates this:

Barriers:

Lack of timely information provided to the women members

Consultations at the national, sub-national and community level indicate that the lack of timely and unclear information provided to the women members of the community also significantly restricts their meaningful participation. One of the women members of the Chelibeti CFUG stated that they could not manage to participate in many important activities due to a lack of complete and timely information. As they have to organize things within their households

Box 2: Support from male counterparts encourage women's participation

Sita Thapa, aged 37, is an active member of Chysebagwati CFUG of Dolakha District whose voice is a significant contribution to the decision making, but it had not always been so. Her story began nine years ago, and since then she has seen three different chairpersons leading her CFUG. During that time her participation in committee meetings was limited only to her physical presence; even if she and her women colleagues raised their voices, they were not heard. The story took a different turn after a new Chairperson was selected in her CFUG. This new leader, though a man, encouraged her to raise her voice in favor of women. She is now actively participating in every program of the CFUG, and is encouraged by the committee members, who appreciate her courage to institutionalize women's participation in every decision making process. The main reason for this positive change is the support coming from the chairperson of the executive committee.

As a result of a REDD+ pilot program, her CFUG received NRs. 45882 (USD 509) seed grant from the Forest Carbon Trust Fund. She received NRs. 1500 (USD 17) as support for income generating activity and started vegetable farming. By selling vegetables she was able to earn more than NRs 2500 (USD28) per month. As a result of the income from both activities, she is supporting her family with household expenses. She feels proud and honored to support her family along with her husband. "Thanks to the support from my male counterpart in the CFUG, many women like me are gaining respect at home and in the society", said Sita Thapa.

and they need sufficient time to prepare for the meetings. Although they are very interested in participating in meetings and activities, they have been unable to do so.

Illiteracy

The assessment also found that the women's low levels of education and literacy are largely used as a reason to bar them from taking up key positions and participating in important capacity building initiatives. Thus, illiteracy is an important feature that is inhibiting the participation of women in the CFUG's activities and decision making. One of the participants of the FGD stated that they have less confidence to maintain the minutes and put an item on the agenda for the meeting because of their lack of knowledge and poor educational backgrounds. Due to such reasons, they feel hesitant to apply for major posts in the executive committee. According to them, if they were able to read and write, they could maintain the minutes and handle correspondence independently. These issues must be addressed to ensure meaningful participation of women in the REDD+ initiatives.

Conclusion

As Nepal is well underway in implementing REDD+ projects, it is of utmost urgency to understand and highlight the lack of inclusion of gender issues in the R-PP, the REDD+ Interim Strategy and pilot initiatives. Women's representation and participation in the institutional structure of REDD+ governance in both national and sub-national/district levels was found to be insignificant (less than 10%). The assessment emphasizes that REDD+ initiatives have not only neglected and undermined the international agreements which acknowledge women's

rights over resources and equal representation in governance structures, but also undermined the degree of success achieved by Nepal in meeting gender equality goals. The assessment also highlighted that the benefit sharing mechanism of REDD+ initiatives do not have strong mechanisms to ensure that women will benefit, especially from the experiences and lessons learned from the weak implementation of benefit sharing mechanisms in the community forestry.

There are various opportunities and barriers for the significant participation of women in the REDD+ process. Women have knowledge and experience of working in the forest, which are vital to the management of forests, thus an efficient management strategy can be implemented which not only utilizes their knowledge but would also decrease their workload. There are various international and national policies which assure equal and meaningful participation of women in REDD+ processes but a comprehensive mechanism is needed to ensure these policies are upheld in the implementation process. It is also very important to acknowledge the women leaders who are persevering, negotiating and achieving their right to participate and sharing the benefits. There is also a need to emphasize the role of men to support women's leadership and meaningful participation the REDD+ processes. But there are barriers which need to be addressed as well, such as the limited number of women in the decision making positions, politicization of executive committee selection processes, lack of timely information for women, and illiteracy.

Thus it is important to create enabling environments for meaningful participation, decision making and benefit sharing of women in the REDD+ process. There is not only a need for more capacity building for women

leaders, but also for gender awareness to male and other female members. There has to be an emphasis on the equal access of women in all levels of governance and the fostering of more meaningful participation, and the assurance that women will obtain benefits from REDD+ initiatives by setting provisions in favor of women that will reward equitably the contributions of men and women. Two suggestions for how to do so would be to allocate a set aside budget, based on a percentage of all REDD+ payments for activities that enhance women's livelihood, and to develop a monitoring system which includes indicators on women's empowerment.



Recommendations:

The study recommends that in order to successfully implement the REDD+ initiatives by addressing women's issues and having equal and meaningful participation of women, there is a need to:

- Create enabling environments by acknowledging the knowledge and experience of women.
- Develop mechanisms to ensure women's representation in key decision making positions at all levels by adhering to the existing international and national agreements and policies for gender equality and affirmative action.
- Include provision for analysis and assessment for informed inclusion/integration of gender in REDD+ initiatives.
- Build capacity of women's and men's leadership on gender equality in all levels.
- Include literacy education in all capacity building initiatives.
- Develop mechanisms for timely dissemination of information on meetings, giving all participants enough time to make arrangements to attend.
- Develop benefit sharing mechanisms by consulting women, to make sure the REDD+ initiatives meet women's specific needs.
- Consult gender experts in designing, planning, implementing and monitoring phases of the projects.

It is important to understand that the principles and objectives of REDD+ initiatives will not be achieved without women's equal representation, meaningful participation and benefit sharing.

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