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Engendering social and environmental safeguards in REDD+: Lessons from feminist and development research

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Abstract

Drawing on feminist and development literature, this paper suggests several important lessons and considerations for building equitable approaches to REDD+. Specifically, we illustrate the conceptual and practical significance of women's participation for achieving the goals of REDD+ as well as the limits and opportunities for gendering participation in REDD+. We argue that the standing debates over how and in what context gender becomes instrumentalised, technicalised, or institutionalised in development provide important cautionary tales for the implementation and reporting of REDD+ safeguards. By doing so, this paper contributes to the growing literature on gender, development, natural resource management, and REDD+.

Key words: gender and feminism; environmental policy; REDD+; forest governance; climate change

Introduction

Reducing Emissions, Deforestation, and Forest Degradation (REDD+) has emerged as a key international policy to reduce carbon emissions and promote "pro poor" development throughout the global south. However, as REDD+ was conceived as an economically efficient means to promote sustainable resource management and mitigate global carbon, scholars question the ability of REDD+ to reconcile the tenuous relationship between efficiency, effectiveness and equity (3 Es).[1] Amidst growing concern that the infusion of financial capital would exacerbate inequalities among already vulnerable groups, the 16th Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in December 2010, more commonly known as the "Cancun Agreement", adopted a set of broadly worded safeguards to prevent any adverse consequences.[2] The Cancun Agreement requests countries to address "the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, land tenure issues, forest governance, and gender in developing and

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implementing national strategies and action plans".[3] Furthermore, the safeguards are intended to support the "full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders" and enhance the "social and environmental benefits" of REDD+ activities.[4]

The following year, language was added to emphasise the need to respect "gender considerations", and guidance for a national-level Safeguards Information System (SIS) was adopted, requiring parties to collect and provide information as to how safeguards are "addressed and respected".[5] Although each country is required to establish their own information system in order to receive payments, there is a considerable lack of details regarding performance indicators, such as the types of evidence that countries might use to demonstrate how they "address and respect" safeguards or the ways that such evidence might be collected or reported.[6] Although the United Nations REDD Programme (UN-REDD) has published a Guidance Note on Gender Sensitive REDD+, it does not specifically focus on the safeguards.[7] Instead, it has a very brief paragraph on safeguards (among other things) and suggests, "Guidance approaches to support countries on this work are being developed"[8]. It then refers to a publication that does provide guidance on Safeguards, put together by the REDD+ Social and Environmental (REDD+ SES) initiative and their collaboration with the Women's Environmental and Development Organization (WEDO).[9] To date, this publication is the only initiative specifically developed to support countries in the monitoring and reporting of REDD+ safeguards and to attend to issues such as women's rights, livelihoods and participation in REDD+.[10] The lack of guidance as to how gender might be addressed and respected in the design and implementation therefore has resulted in a wide range of ways and degrees to which gender is incorporated in current pilot programmes.

For example, a comparative analysis of the safeguards of six pilot REDD+ initiatives revealed that only the Asian Development Bank and the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility effectively address gender in their safeguards.[11] Surprisingly, the UN-REDD Programme does not specify how the programme contributes to addressing gender discrimination, even though they published recommendations to encourage gender mainstreaming in REDD+ strategies and programmes.[12] Furthermore, although the World Bank, the Forest Investment Program, and the Inter-American Development Bank have specific safeguards, and the latter has a policy that addresses women in development, none of them have any particular safeguard for ensuring gender equality in their operations.[13] Consequently, the extent to which gender *can* or *will* be fully addressed, in the context of REDD+ safeguards, remains to be seen. On the one hand, having monitoring and reporting systems in place could provide a process whereby countries/parties are made accountable to address gender concerns, like women's participation. On the other hand, it could result in the institutionalisation of gender, whereby 'gender' becomes a technical issue that needs to be 'monitored' and 'verified' and therefore, risks being de-politicised.

This paper examines the complex, gendered terrain of designing, implementing, and reporting REDD+ safeguards. Given the growing emphasis yet simultaneous lack of clarity on safeguarding effective participation in REDD+, we argue that a thorough examination of the feminist debates around participation in forest governance and participatory development provide important lessons for addressing gender in REDD+ safeguards, both in terms of, (a) defining and operationalizing 'gender considerations' in safeguards, and also (b) reflecting critically on the boundaries and underlying

assumptions behind 'women's participation'. In particular, we argue that this literature offers important insights into understanding the nature and significance of socially differentiated participation (and the lack thereof), decision-making, gendered labour, and achieving a critical mass for achieving the goals of REDD+. This is particularly important given that gender equality and women's inclusion in REDD+ thus far has been framed as a means to improve efficiency and efficacy in terms of forest conservation and social development.[14] As such, we suggest that long-standing debates over how and in what context gender becomes instrumentalised, technicalised, or institutionalised in development provide important cautionary tales for the implementation and reporting of REDD+ safeguards. Such lessons are important to consider if REDD+ is to achieve its stated social and environmental goals.

We begin with a brief review of the emerging scholarship on gender in REDD+. This work highlights the currently minimal ways in which gender is addressed in country-specific REDD+ pilot initiatives. We then turn to reflect on the ways in which feminist scholars have theorised the limits and opportunities for participation in the context of forest governance and development. This leads us to an exploration of the broader critiques of 'participation' in development, which highlight the ways in which development (and forestry) has become a techno-scientific endeavor whereby 'participation' is the means to legitimise such endeavors. Lastly, we reflect on these issues in the context of REDD+ and the implications this has for en-gendering REDD+.

Emerging gender analyses of REDD+

While very little is known about how gender will be fully addressed within the context of REDD+ safeguards, a small, but growing body of empirical research has emerged to analyze the state of 'gender considerations' in the REDD+ preparation process. This literature has emerged in response to the numerous, and at times conflicting ways, in which 'gender considerations' are being interpreted and applied within attempts to integrate gender into the REDD+ process. Nevertheless, a common denominator, both in the implementation and the analysis of that process, appears to be 'women's participation'.

For instance, a recent study in the Congo Basin has shown that despite the rhetoric of gender equity and women's empowerment in REDD+, women's actual participation was very limited.[15] Specifically, this study found that government ministries charged with addressing gender issues were not involved in the REDD+ preparation plan, gender concerns were not explicit in the process, and only a handful of women-centred community organizations participated.[16] Additionally, a large-scale, comparative study of REDD+ in five countries (Peru, Brazil, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cameroon) found that women's participation in and basic understanding of REDD+ was limited when compared to their male counterparts. In particular, male-dominated forest user groups participated in decision-making, monitoring and rule enforcement activities while women-only group participation was limited to attending meetings and trainings.[17] Similar findings, with regards to women's lack of knowledge about REDD+ activities have been found elsewhere.[18]

More recently, a study of a REDD+ pilot initiative in Nepal, utilising a gender transformative approach to understand how sociocultural power dynamics and

institutional structures shape participation and decision-making, found that the quality of participation and access to decision-making varied greatly by gender and caste/ethnicity.[19] In particular, the lack of attention to skewed power relations among actors simply reinforced existing elite and male-centred forestry practices in REDD+ initiatives.[20] For example, men often prepared the agenda and provided more input during meetings, which discouraged women from raising concerns.[21] So although women were included in the REDD+ readiness activities, their participation was limited by gender, caste and ethnic dynamics.[22] A recent analysis of the Forest Investment Program (FIP) in Burkina Faso also highlights how both the framing and implementation of the program simply perpetuates existing inequalities, a point which we will discuss in detail towards the end of the paper. [23]

The concern over the lack of women's participation in and exclusion from forest governance is not new, however. Indeed, as Mai, Mwangi and Wan have pointed out through an extensive review of feminist literature on forestry over the past 20 years, the issue of 'women's participation' in forest governance has remained the most prominent focus during this timeframe.[24] Notwithstanding, as the above examples showcase, 'gender considerations' in the text of REDD+ safeguards has led to a variety of ways and degrees to which gender, and its attendant power dynamics, is considered and addressed within various early REDD+ programmes. If the current trend for narrowly interpreting 'gender considerations' as a bureaucratic obligation continues, REDD+ will not only fail to meet its environmental goals, it will also exacerbate uneven power dynamics within communities thereby failing to meet its social goals. As we attempt to demonstrate throughout the remainder of the paper, the rich body of feminist scholarship on forest governance and participatory development, as well as the broader critical development literature provide important lessons from which REDD+ can draw.

Learning from feminist research and forest governance

En-gendering participation

Participatory development has been viewed as an efficient means to involve community members in a collaborative process of governing common resources. In forest communities, community forestry user groups (CFUGs) in particular, are among the most widely spread and rapidly expanding attempts to incorporate participatory development in forestry communities. In general, studies that examine women´s participation within CFUGs have confirmed that women participate far less than men.[25] Yet, the nuances of different types of participation are actually more ambiguous in practice. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that the nature and level of women's participation can have significant impacts on both equity (benefits) and efficiency (forest conservation) and therefore have significant implications for REDD+ implementation.

In one of the most influential papers on the subject of women`s participation in forest governance, Bina Agarwal developed a *typology of participation* to both understand and analyze the equity, efficiency and sustainability implications of the range of participation that exists among community forestry groups.[26] This model categorised six different levels of participation and their objectives, which ranged from efficiency (nominal participation) at the most basic level, to equity and empowerment at the highest

level (interactive participation). Although Agarwal is hopeful about the *potential* benefits of achieving effective participation for women, she is explicit about the numerous barriers to effective participation, which include membership criteria, gender-segregated public space, gender division of labour, implicit and/or overt opposition to women's participation, and women's subordinate social positions within the household or community.[27] Building upon this work, Andrea Cornwall developed a broader typology based on only four types of participatory approaches to development.[28] Cornwall takes her typology one step further to address not only the objectives of each type, but also, how each type constructs the participants themselves, ranging from objects (nominal participation) to agents (transformative participation).[29] In many ways, most of the current safeguards and gender sensitive actions in REDD+ unfortunately fall into nominal/instrumental modes of participation, where participants are constructed as passive objects and a means to an end. In contrast, transformative participation facilitates meaningful participation and provides opportunities for people to realise their rights, exercise voice, and influence decisions. In this mode, participants are viewed as agents and subjects, rather than passive 'beneficiaries' of development (figure 1). As the existing literatures show, there are several considerations and challenges in moving from nominal to more transformative types of participation.

Figure 1. Typology of Participation. Adapted from Agarwal 2001 and Cornwall 2001.

These different types of participation have been shown to have very different results when they are applied in the context of community forestry. For example, women's participation in the decision making body of CFUGs, which might be regarded as a form of transformative or interactive participation, have very different social and environmental outcomes depending upon the specific gender composition of the group and the degree to which use and access restrictions are enforced. In a comparative study of east Africa and Latin America, female-dominated CFUGs had lower environmental outcomes than more equally mixed or male-dominated groups.[30] Yet while female-dominated groups participated less, they were less likely to sanction, exclude, and to have greater property rights to trees and bushes than mixed-sex or male-dominated groups.[31] On the other hand, increased women's participation in mix-sex forest user groups has been positively associated with regenerating degraded forests, regulating illicit grazing and felling, and an increased capacity to reduce conflicts.[32] However, in India and Nepal, Agarwal found that women-only and women-majority CFUGs with more women participating in the decision making had positive environmental outcomes, although the social equity trade offs were significant.[33] Specifically, these groups had better conservation results because they enacted and enforced strict rules, which limited access by landless individuals.[34] Agarwal found that this strictness was attributable to the resources constraints faced by women as the all-women executive committees often had smaller and more degraded forests than male groups, a point which has been established in other literature.[35] On the other hand, one group with a high percentage of landless women on the committee enacted more lenient rules than all the other groups with a high percentage of women, while groups with a disproportionate presence of landless males still enacted strict forest rules.[36] Consequently, women-only CFUGs are an inefficient means of promoting gender equity in forest management contexts.[37] Given the potential

social and environmental benefits, several scholars have argued in favour of focusing on enhancing women's participation in mix-gender groups and settings rather than privileging women-only groups. These results also point to the need to consider how differently positioned groups within communities interact with gender to produce different results regarding forest governance. Therefore, while striving for more transformative or interactive types of participation is a desirable goal, without adequate attention to local power dynamics, programmes like REDD+ have the potential to result in the empowerment of some, at the expense of others. Understanding and promoting equity and environmental sustainability in REDD+ require an in-depth knowledge of specific local social norms and socially-differentiated power dynamics. We return to explore this point in the next section.

Looking toward legal frameworks and policies that could support more equitable and transformative participation between men and women, several studies have shown that despite the existence of such formal rules, prominent inequalities still exist in forest use and/or management.[38] Indeed, feminist political theorists have demonstrated that formal or legal rules surrounding women's participation in the public sphere (a largely masculine space) does not suffice to ensure inclusion in practice.[39] Institutional factors and asset endowments like wealth and education have been shown to be significant predictors of women's participation in forest governance.[40] Ranjita Mohanty, on the other hand, demonstrates how although there is a formal emphasis of women being on executive committees in CFUGs, the level of participation of these women depends a great deal on the benevolence of the male committee members and the forest bureaucrats.[41] At the same time, she demonstrates that unfortunately, women's voice and more active participation in these committees do not translate into influence.[42]

Based on ideas developed by global north feminist political theorists, scholars have debated whether or not a 'critical mass' might shift women's participation in community forestry from nominal to interactive.[43] Analysing data from India and Nepal, Agarwal found that women were more likely to promote gender inclusive rules and improve collective action if they constituted 25 – 30% of the committee members.[44] Consistent with other studies, she found that a critical mass helped bolster the confidence of other women in the group and increased the likelihood that women would voice their concerns as well as volunteer and be elected to office positions.[45] She also found that women from disadvantage households would be more outspoken than women with higher social status as they have less to risk in terms of social status, but much to gain if decisions are made in their favour.[46]

However, it should be noted that increasing the number of women in the decision-making committees without capacity building is not enough.[47] Furthermore, while women may enjoy greater participation in forest management at the community scale, they are largely shut out of decision-making at other scales.[48] Hence, local initiatives must be scaled up or teleconnected to broader scales of decision-making.[49] In Nepal, for example, the Ministry of Forest and Soil conservation recommends that the executive committees of CFUGs are at least 33 percent women, however they do not specify what positions of authority they might hold or how they might participate in decision-making, which has resulted in mixed benefits for women.[50] Moreover, Sijapati's study on gender dynamics of community forestry in Nepal suggests that even women from communities with fairly egalitarian norms and high interactive participation of women in forest-related

decision making structures rely on men to act as intermediaries between themselves and forest officials.[51] Women's spaces are often confined to the local scale and women do not have the experience of reaching out to extra-local actors such as forest officials nor are they able to relate to the highly technical discursive space they occupy.[52] Adding to this paradox, the task of both facilitating and verifying that community forestry user groups are gender inclusive rests on the lowest ranking forest officials who work directly with local users of community forests. The extent to which these officials can play such a role depends crucially upon whether they are both embedded and autonomous from local power relations so as to be able to decipher local dynamics and strategically promote the interests of women. However, these officials often have little incentives, personal and institutionalised, to promote gender inclusive change. This is partly because the Nepalese Ministry of Forestry and Soil Conservation is itself one of the most gender exclusive institutions in the country.[53]

On the other hand, as Seema Arora-Jonsson argues, the power that men and women exercise *in* the formal spaces for forest governance has just as much to do with what happens *outside* these spaces.[54] Drawing on her work in Sweden and India, she demonstrates how the formation of women-specific groups enabled alternative, public spaces for their interests to be addressed, thereby challenging how politics and forest management were done. In each context, women grew dissatisfied with rules and regulations in formal village associations that ignored their needs and voice.[55] However, their ability to reach out beyond the villages was in some instances restricted by men in the village, or in the case of India, enabled by men.[56] Additionally, development practitioners in both places served merely to reinforce gender hierarchies by ignoring women's critique and their organizing.[57] NGOs working to promote gender equity in both cases were only interested in supporting the participation of women in the formal association, thus ignoring the concerns of the newly formed women's collectives and trivializing village politics, which inadvertently strengthened male interests.[58]

Other studies have shown that simply increasing women's participation in environmentally-oriented development projects do little to either empower them or solve environmental problems. Drawing on research in Jharkhand, India, Sarah Jewitt found that many women possessed very limited knowledge about forests and forest products relative to their male counterparts, as acquiring such knowledge was contingent upon marriage practices, distribution of labour and authority at the intra-household level.[59] In a recent study that used 'role playing games' to simulate the role of men and women in land use change in Indonesia, it was found that women were more likely to opt for converting land for large-scale agricultural production whereas men were more conservation-oriented.[60] Scholars exploring the linkages between property rights and gender suggest that women can equally be perpetrators of the environmental degradation as their male counterparts if women do not have secure property rights and the associated incentives to invest in land and natural resources.[61] Such findings further reinforce the importance of acknowledging that women's livelihoods, life-cycle processes, and the contexts in which environmental relationships are nested mediate their relationship with the forest.

Taken together, these studies suggest that while having specific provisions and/or safeguards for women's participation is important, simply increasing their presence does not necessarily lend itself to their full participation. Simply increasing the number of

women in forest governance merely serves the instrumental goals of participatory development, and thus constructs participants as objects. Neither does it signal automatic conservation or environmental sustainability. Likewise, when women exercise emancipatory forms of power by forming their own groups to contest and redefine the terms of forest governance, attention to their relationships to outside actors reveals the multi-dimensional aspects of power across scales that can act to either constrain or enable their collective agency.[62] On the other hand, increasing their participation by promoting women-only groups or a critical mass does little for social equity or environmental sustainability if it is not accompanied by simultaneous attention to capacity building and underlying power dynamics, which serve to reinforce elite interests. Consequently, such efforts run the risk of exacerbating elite interests as well as women's labour responsibilities, as we will show.

Attending to issues of representation, power dynamics, and labour

As several feminist scholars have demonstrated, any effort to represent totalizing notions of "women's interests" actually reinforce the exclusionary effects of other dimensions of difference such as age, ethnicity, or caste and thus discursively colonise the lives of women in the global south.[63] In forestry contexts, "women's interests" and thus their identity and representation are embedded in their environment, families, and communities, as well as social, economic, and political institutions, which can lead to complex and sometimes contradictory positions.[64] For example, Banana et al. found that educated women are often not particularly good at representing all women's needs.[65] Another study in the mid-western region of Nepal notes that women representing land rich and high caste households mostly capture decision-making positions and influence decisions according to their own interests.[66] Thus, the ways in which relations of power shape identities and differences between women and between men needs to be taken into account when designing policies intended to improve access or rights for particular groups.

Studies that highlight the significance of different social positions, like caste, marriage, and age among women provide important lessons for understanding and addressing these power dynamics in practice. Andrea Nightingale, for example, illustrates how differing perspectives, based on labour responsibilities between high-caste and lower-caste women, lead to either contestations or acceptance of "women's work," or leaf-litter collection, in community forestry.[67] This draws attention to the important ways in which focusing on particular resources (leaf litter instead of multi-use forests) and ignoring the needs and interests of forest users reinforces particular axes of difference, making it difficult for marginalised groups to contest their position.[68] Therefore, designing appropriate policies and interventions requires paying careful attention to the social processes that determine who is responsible for creating forest use rules, who actually does the work, and what contestations result.[69]

The debate within feminist scholarship around the role of marriage in providing women with access to material resources also showcases the need to understand the multiple roles and identities that shape resource access and management between women and between men.[70] Within migrant communities in Indonesia's forests, for example, marriage and heteronormative ideologies of the family are an important means to access

forest and state resources, not just for women, but also for men.[71] Several case studies also point to the significant role that being married plays not only in providing access to resources for men and women, but in differentiating between women.[72] Such findings point to the need to unpack the multiple modes of social cooperation, within households and within communities, through which sustainable livelihoods and resource access is achieved.[73] Moreover, the design of appropriate policies and interventions, and avoiding unwanted outcomes, requires research on 'people in nested and overlapping constituencies that reflect the multiple roles, identities and interests of men and women across class, location, occupation and other points of difference and affinity'.[74]

Part of addressing the multiple roles and interests of men and women also include an awareness of how enhancing women's political participation can potentially exacerbate the unequal gender division of labour. Feminist scholarship on economic development and resource management has long established that ignoring the division of labour between men and women only serves to perpetuate its unevenness and can lead to project failure.[75] It is well known that women's labour hours, frequently tied to subsistence and family care, are greater than men's. As Agarwal and others have indicated, this translates into less free time to attend and participate in forest governance and can lead to policies and programmes which are incomplete in their design and unsustainable in their outcomes.[76] In outlining how unsustainable development patterns and gender inequality reinforce each other, a recent UN report states, "such development patterns rely on and reproduce gender inequalities, exploiting women's labour and unpaid care work. The same development trajectories also produce environmental problems, as market actors seek to secure profit in ways that rely on the overexploitation of natural resources and the pollution of climates, land and oceans".[77]

In the context of REDD+, concerns are emerging over how participation might result in exploiting women's reproductive labour in favor of their productive labour in national and international markets for natural resources. Westholm and Arora-Jonsson make evident that while decision-making on the environment is moving toward the global scale, the responsibility for carrying out these decisions is being shifted toward women and marginalised individuals.[78] As a result, the environmental labour of REDD+ becomes the responsibility of women and poor communities in the global south. As we detail below, such efforts are part of a technicalised approach to development that views mobilizing women's productive labour as the solution to women's vulnerability. Such approaches ignore women's reproductive responsibilities and as a consequence risk burdening their labour demands and perpetuating the already uneven division of labour between men and women. Moreover, it erroneously assumes that all men and all women are homogenous groups with similar interests, needs, and available time.

Lessons from development: Rendering gender technical

As we have previously mentioned, promoting gender equality and including women in REDD+ is most often presented as a way of improving outcomes and efficiency both in terms of forest protection and development.[79] Reducing gender to a means to improve program efficiency might be seen as a result of the anti-political, expert-driven and technical nature of development projects that is often the subject of critical development studies. Tania Li, for example, asserts that development projects come to fruition through

a process of "rendering technical".[80] Rendering technical involves three elements: 1) Expertise: established by identifying a 'problem' that is in need of a 'solution', which then requires development expertise; 2) Nonpolitical solutions: excludes the structure of political-economic relations from the diagnosis and solutions (i.e.: focus more on the capacities of the poor than on the practices through which one social group marginalises the other); and 3) Anti-political design: solutions contain and deflect any challenge to the status quo.[81] Utilizing the example of an integrated conservation and participatory development project in Sulawesi, Indonesia, Li demonstrates how the project only nominally supported the participation and interests of diverse stakeholders, which reinforced the interests of landowning elites.[82] An important step in the project was the development of community conservation agreements (CCAs), which served to regulate the conservation activities of local communities. Although the agency responsible for designing and managing the "participatory" process of developing these agreements recognised the heterogeneity of the communities participating, they demonstrated little interest in guaranteeing the quality of participation and in the end, sought only to diminish dissent. As a consequence, the final CCAs supported the interests of the landowning elite.

The consequences of such a technicalised, reductionist approach to gender in any development effort is that it risks exacerbating already existing inequalities, as other examples specific to REDD+ are demonstrating.[83] Analysing the implementation of Burkina Faso's REDD+ pilot program, for example, Westholm and Arora-Jonsson argue that gender merely serves to legitimise the program and the reductionist way in which women are incorporated risks exacerbating the uneven gender division of labour[84] Specifically, the authors highlight how gender is reduced to a problem of "poverty," which could be solved through participatory forest governance and the expansion of markets.[85] For example, women became ideal candidates for REDD+ because of their role in the collection, production and trade of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) and of the income-generating potential of these activities.[86] Indeed, and as has been in the case elsewhere, the authors found little evidence that gender was incorporated into all stages of the programme.[87] Instead, gender was reduced to a bureaucratic obligation that served to legitimise the process and women were viewed in terms of their ability to contribute their productive labour to the conservation work of the programme, thereby increasing incomes for the community. Such a narrow focus, as argued by the authors, shifts responsibility for the anti-poverty work of the project onto the backs of poor women and risks perpetuating already existing gendered inequalities if women's reproductive work is not taken into account.[88] As has been argued for over thirty years, reducing women's contributions to forest governance, or to development more broadly, to their productive roles reinforces the misplaced idea that women's only value is in their productive labour and their ability to generate incomes.[89]

Such a reductionist view of women's roles, and gender in general, can be seen as part of the process of rendering gender technical within REDD+. First, by reducing women's involvement in the REDD+ pilot programme to their productive labour in NTFPs is a clear exclusion of any broader political-economic relations from the programme. For example, promoting gender equity through income-generating activities neglects to address the structural causes of gendered inequalities, which result in reproducing and in some cases, exacerbating the uneven gender division of labour.

Furthermore, this also lends to maintaining the status quo both with regards to Burkina Faso's relationships with donors and in gender relations at home.[90] Low-income forest resources users, and especially women, remain excluded from decision-making spaces while at the same time, disproportionately shouldering the burden of forest conservation labour, which can then be connected to global markets.[91] Nevertheless, it is widely acknowledged that increasing responsibility for saving the environment or for reducing poverty without equal attention to their capacity to do so simply deflects attention from the broader relations of power and inequality and falls short of promoting gender equity in any way.[92]

The emphasis on monitoring, reporting and verifying in REDD+, in many ways, lends itself to the process of rendering technical. As part of this process, each country involved is now required to collect and provide information as to how safeguards are being "addressed and respected," including gender. However, lacking clear guidance on how to go about doing this has seemingly meant that gender is addressed in very reductionist ways. As a consequence, and as the Burkina Faso case study shows, gender runs the risk of being rendered technical, or otherwise a-political, and thus becomes a 'solution' in need of a problem.[93] Therefore, it is imperative to critically reflect upon the rich body of literature that draws our attention to the unintended consequences of nominal or instrumental considerations of gender, as more REDD+ pilot programs come to fruition.

Conservation and development interventions, like REDD+ often rely upon "mobilizing metaphors", like participation, in order to justify support and resources.[94] As Mosse writes, "as soon as 'participation' with its implication of local control or autonomous action becomes institutionalised as policy, part of the 'language of entitlement' rather than the 'tactics of consumption', it too is colonised and eroded from within."[95] REDD+ programmes, therefore, have already begun to reflect many aspects of the depoliticizing practices that make up rendering issues technical. Yet, as Li is quick to highlight, rendering contentious issues, like gender, technical is a practice, not a secure accomplishment.[96] The key then, is to identify possible points of reversal or switches, whereby potential openings for struggle and contestation occur.[97] In the case of REDD+, this signifies the importance of tracing the contour lines of the practice of incorporating gender into the fold, such that moments to challenge the depoliticisation of gender become evident.

Implications for REDD+

As we hope the above examples demonstrate, the extensive work on gender, forest governance, and development provide several key lessons that are imperative to note as early REDD+ projects work towards addressing gender inequities in social safeguards. In the first instance, as "participation" becomes a key word and strategy for incorporating women into REDD+ projects, it is important to consider the type of participation that is promoted. As the work of Cornwall, Agarwal and others highlight, anything less than transformative or interactive participation will fall short in its ability to realise equity goals.[98] In other words, participation should move beyond nominal membership and provide women access to decision-making space and processes alongside men. Simply "adding and stirring" women into the REDD+ pot is inadequate.

At the same time, programmes and policy makers need to be cognizant of the local limits to participation, which if left unaddressed or unacknowledged, will simply work to bolster already existing power dynamics that maintain unequal access and benefits. Examples from Li's work in Indonesia and Arora-Jonsson's in both Sweden and India reveal how development interventions that trivialized local politics merely served to reinforce existing social hierarchies, despite the intended goals of increasing democratic space and participation for marginalized groups.[99] The scholarship on women's contributions to natural resource management has also shown that ignoring the division of labour between men and women, which also limits participation, only serves to perpetuate its unevenness and can lead to project failure.[100] Yet, as the Westholm and Arora-Jonsson case illustrates, newly emerging strategies to increase women's participation by harnessing their productive labour for income-generating activities without equal attention to their reproductive labour potentially burdens an already heavy workload.[101] Furthermore, it excludes women's participation in decision-making and the actual governance of the program.

Consideration to the limits to participation also includes an awareness of how differently positioned groups (for example, older women, younger men, higher castes, etc.) within communities produce different results regarding forest governance. As scholarship has shown, programmes and policies that treat women and men as homogenous groups, with similar interests and access to resources exacerbates differences *between* women and *between* men that only serves to perpetuate social hierarchies within communities that maintain strained access to resources and governance spaces for particular groups.[102] Programmes therefore need to attend to the multiple roles, identities and interests of men and women across a range of differences including age, class, caste, and religion, among others. Underestimating or even ignoring local power dynamics leads to a distortion of the local reality and thus, inequitable and unsustainable outcomes.

Last but not least, as gender becomes institutionalised in the REDD+ safeguard process, the work of critical development studies highlights the potential to render gender technical in all its facets and phases. On the one hand, the lack of clear guidance for monitoring, reporting and verifying 'gender considerations' in the REDD+ implementation process raises important questions about the potential for gender to be treated as a bureaucratic obligation, or a check-box, that serves to legitimise the safeguard monitoring and reporting process. On the other hand, the lack of clear guidance signifies an immense opportunity for early action initiatives to consider the complexity of gender and design and adapt each initiative to specific contexts, needs and circumstances. It is therefore crucial to reflect on the wealth of evidence that provide examples and cautionary tales of narrow interpretations of 'women's participation', the representation of women's interests and needs, or the technicalisation of gender as a bureaucratic obligation.

Notes

1. See for example Sandbrook et al., "Carbon, forests," 330; Visseren-Hamakers et al., "Trade-offs, co-benefits and safeguards," 646-653.

2. UNFCCC, "*The Cancun agreements,"* 1-31.

3. Ibid, 13.

4. Ibid, 26.

5. UNFCCC, *"Decision on guidance on systems,"*, 16-19.

6. Menton et al., "*Further guidance for REDD+,"* 1-12.

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