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Safeguards at a glance

Are voluntary standards supporting gender equality and women's inclusion in REDD+?

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Summary

- Women from forest-dependent Indigenous Peoples (IPs) and local communities (LCs) play a key role in forest management, yet are frequently marginalized from decision making related to actions in their forests.
- Overall, the design and implementation of REDD+ actions may be repeating the mistakes of prior conservation and development actions that failed to build in responsiveness to women's rights and gender equality; safeguards standards may be a way to change these practices.
- Our analysis shows that despite a commendable turn away from gender-blind requirements in safeguards, there is still much to be done.
- Most of the standards included some gender-related criteria regarding land and resource rights, but only one specifically considered securing IP and LC women's land and resource rights.
- Standards have a range of gender equality requirements regarding REDD+ benefit sharing mechanisms; these range from strategies to assure women receive equal access to benefits, to securing women's participation in the construction of those mechanisms.
- However, only two standards required that grievance mechanisms were gender-responsive or accessible to women; this is an aspect that should receive more attention to bridge the gap between the potential and real impact of these standards.

Introduction

Safeguards standards and guidelines can play an important role in achieving social and environmental goals in response to countries' and corporations' interest in 'Nature-based Solutions' to the climate crisis. Covered more broadly in the first flyer in this series, the rights and justice concerns

regarding the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) framework for reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+) have largely related to Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' (IPs and LCs) access to land and natural resources, respect for their access to information about climate actions and participation in relevant decision making, as well as the fair

distribution of financial and other benefits derived from initiatives (Barbier and Tesfaw 2012; Atmadja et al. 2016; Aguilar-Støen 2017; Duchelle et al. 2018).

While attention to the experiences of IPs and LCs is key to any intervention in forests of the Global South, failure to consider internal differences in these groups may reproduce the structures of inequality within them (Bee and Basnett 2017). One of the most important distinctions within forest-dependent communities is related to the inequalities that structure gender relations (Meizen-Dick et al. 1997; Rocheleau and Edmunds 1997). Women are not a homogenous group either, as gender intersects with other marginalized identities (e.g., indigeneity, caste) to create different experiences of exclusion and discrimination. The result is a need to understand the vulnerabilities, capacities, knowledges and agency of the women of IPs and LCs as a pluralistic group.

The failure to address exclusion and rights transgressions is likely to reinforce or exacerbate them; even when forest-based initiatives have attempted to foster inclusion, they have often done so by addressing the symptoms of injustice rather than its structural causes (Larson et al. 2021). These concerns must be understood within a wider context in which the men and women of IPs and LCs have historically suffered different exclusions and injustices as part of processes of colonization and dispossession – and more recently in conservation, development and climate

change mitigation initiatives in their territories (Chomba et al. 2016; Espinosa and Feather 2018; Human Rights Council 2018) – as well as by the cultural norms that shape gendered roles and behaviours within communities.

The contemporary proliferation of voluntary standards and guidelines for climate investment and associated social safeguards may provide a potential pathway to address inclusion and justice concerns in a transformational manner (see Atmadja et al. 2021 on transformational change). This is the second global flyer in a series exploring a set of characteristics (see Box 1 below) related to the rights of IPs and LCs in eleven voluntary safeguards standards for REDD+ and safeguards guidelines of multilateral funding institutions. Our aim is to provide lessons for the application of such standards in different national and subnational contexts, to enable standard proponents to compare their safeguards provisions with those of others, and for REDD+ implementers to consider the implications and benefits of supporting the rights of IPs and LCs.

The first flyer of the series presents an 'at a glance' comparative analysis of the standards and guidelines (Sarmiento Barletti et al. 2021). This flyer examines the same standards and guidelines, focusing on the extent to which they are supporting gender equality and women's inclusion in IPs and LCs in the context of REDD+.

Background: Gender inequalities and the marginalization of women in the context of REDD+

The marginalization of the women of IPs and LCs is a major barrier to the success of forest-based climate actions, as gender equality is essential for more sustainable forest management and to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. In global climate change policy, there is growing attention to the link between gender equality and effective forest-based climate action (Monterroso et al. 2021), as well as broader goals of ending extreme poverty by transforming the gender relations that limit opportunities, resources and choices (World Bank 2015). For example, UN Sustainable Development Goal 5, gender equality, includes the need to strengthen women's land ownership and rights, and the UNFCCC recognizes women's unique vulnerabilities to climate change and calls for gender-responsive climate policy at multiple levels (UNFCCC 2016, 2017, 2019). Women, then, must be included and recognized in the decision making on design and implementation of climate policies

Box 1. What's in the table?

The table lists safeguards guidelines from multilateral institutions that fund REDD+ as well as voluntary standards set for REDD+. Based on a review of documents published by each standard or institution, we present an analysis of eleven guidelines/standards.

The first line of the table (a) sets out the ratings we assigned each guideline/standard regarding their recognition of gender inequalities/women's exclusion in the first flyer of the series. The rest of the table reveals to what extent these issues are addressed in the following five themes: (b) assessments/baselines; (c) consultations/communication; (d) benefit sharing; (e) land and resource rights; and (f) grievance mechanism. Safeguard guidelines/standards were rated as fully aligning with the criterion ('yes'), aligning in a limited way ('partial' – for those that only met some aspects of the criterion), or not aligning ('no').

and programmes for them to be effective and inclusive. This can build from, and amplify the action and agency of, the women of IPs and LCs across levels and scales.

Table 1. Safeguards at a glance: Support for gender equality and women's inclusion in voluntary standards and multilateral guidelines for REDD+

	Multilateral financial institutions					Independent voluntary standards					
	African Development Bank (AfDB) ¹	Asian Development Bank (ADB) ¹	Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) ¹	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) Carbon Fund	The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard (TREES) ²	Climate, Community and Biodiversity (CCB) Standards	Land Rights Standard	Plan Vivo Standard	Verified Carbon Standard (VCS)	VCS Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+
(a) Recognition of gender inequalities/ women's exclusion	Yes. Gender is a factor of vulnerability in different processes (e.g., participation, compensation)	Yes. Obligations towards women and gender inclusivity	Yes. Must comply with the GCF's Gender Policy	Yes	Yes	No. Consistency with UNFCCC decisions but without implementation guidelines or indicators to monitor progress	Yes	Yes. Supports equal roles and rights for IP and LC women	Yes	Yes	Partial. Only in relation to the benefit sharing mechanism
(b) Assessments / baselines	Yes. Requires assessment on gender issues for every project	Yes. Requires gender-sensitive social and environmental impact assessments	Yes. Gender assessment and a project-level gender action plan required	Yes. Gender analysis required	Yes. Gender- inclusive assessment of land and natural resource use	No	No. Assessment should include stakeholder groups but no specific mention of women	Yes. Must respect and protect the full bundle of IP and LC rights, particularly women	Yes. Gender data required for the socioeconomic baseline	No	No
(c) Consultations / communication	Yes. Participation by women and men in ways sensitive to gender-based constraints and barriers	Yes. Must be gender inclusive and responsive	Yes. Equal opportunity for women and men to participate in consultations and decision making in the project's timeline	Yes. Ensure the inclusion of men and women in consultation processes	Yes. Gender- inclusive consultations and communication with awareness of constraints to participate in or benefit from the project	No	Yes. Gender-sensitive consultations through representatives designated by the groups themselves	Yes. FPIC, planning, implementation and monitoring to be done in collaboration with IP and LC men and women	Yes. Ensure the inclusion of men and women in relevant participatory processes	Yes. Gender-sensitive communication and consultations	Partial. Only in relation to the benefit sharing mechanism
(d) Benefit sharing	Yes. Recognizes gender-based vulnerabilities that must be addressed to avoid adverse impacts in benefits and opportunities	Yes. Benefit sharing for IPs should be gender responsive	Yes. Benefit distribution must consider gender equality as per GCF IP and gender policies	Yes. Provide and distribute benefits and/or resources in a way that narrows existing gender gaps	Yes. Gender inclusive benefit sharing plan	No	Partial. Must generate net positive impacts on the well-being of marginalized and/or vulnerable community groups	Yes. Mutually agreed and equitable, including participation of women	Partial. Mechanism must be equitable and agreed through consultations, but no specific mention of gender or women	No	Yes. Legally binding benefit sharing mechanism developed through a participatory process; emphasizes IPs and LCs and women
(e) Land and resource rights	Partial. Requires gender- disaggregated information for different resource-related issues, but not specifically related to rights	Yes. Gender inclusive consultations, and gendered analysis of resettlement	Yes. Assessment of land and natural resources must be gender inclusive and consider women's resource management roles	Yes. Gender inclusive assessment of land and natural resource use and management roles	Yes. Land and natural resource assessment should be gender inclusive	No	Yes. Gender-sensitive consultations for activities that may affect property rights	Yes. Recognition and protection of IP and LC rights, including women; promotes equal land and resource rights for women and men	No	Yes. Gender-sensitive consultations when property rights are affected	No
(f) Grievance mechanism	No	Yes. Gender-responsive grievance mechanism	No	No	No	No	No	Yes. Accessible to women	No.	No	No

Notas: 1 Safeguards guidelines reviewed were not only for REDD+ but the institutions fund REDD+ activities in their portfolios; 2 The standard is not limited to REDD+

This international attention has not been reflected in the implementation of REDD+ on the ground. For example, community or joint forest management projects (including REDD+ projects) regularly exclude women and fail to recognize gender inequalities and roles; and when gender-specific considerations do occur, most focus on women's vulnerabilities, without addressing the differentiated experiences of the women of IPs and LCs (Löw 2020). Instead, development and implementation of climate mitigation and low emission development actions must first ensure recognition of the women of IPs and LCs and their experiences, but must also go beyond simply "adding and stirring women into the REDD+ pot" (Bee and Basnett 2017).

Meaningful inclusion through gender-transformative approaches would strengthen or create systems that support gender equality by recognizing and addressing the formal and informal roots of marginalization from access to land and resources, as well as to relevant decision-making spaces and in benefit sharing (Pham et al. 2016; RRI 2017; Joshi et al. 2021). Project proponents would transcend 'gender-blind' approaches that conceptualize the 'community' or 'household' as undifferentiated cohesive units, and move beyond 'gender exploitative' activities that reinforce or capitalize on gender norms that structure inequalities by instrumentalizing women's traditional roles to achieve project goals (Arwida et al. 2016). This approach must be built on a recognition of the different knowledges, uses, experiences and values that men and women have in relation to forest resources (Mai et al. 2011). For example, research in six countries found that women and men in villages with REDD+ initiatives held different perspectives on well-being, and men had greater access to decision making and information regarding the distribution of benefits (Larson et al. 2018). Not only do women have different knowledges, but they may also be devalued, along with their forest activities. This can reinforce men's control over forest governance (Stiem and Krause 2016). When women are not just attendees, but recognized and included participants, evidence suggests that outcomes are not only more equitable but also more sustainable (Arora-Jonsson et al. 2019).

Overall, the design and implementation of REDD+ initiatives may repeat the mistakes of prior conservation and development actions that failed to build in responsiveness to women's rights and gender equity (Larson et al. 2018; Pham et al. 2021). Gender-blind initiatives may further marginalize women from participating in and benefitting from forest-based actions, reinforcing or exacerbating gendered inequalities, and devaluing women's work and knowledge (Westholm and Arora-Jonsson 2015; Bee and Basnett 2017; Howson 2017; Ickowitz et al. 2017). In the context of REDD+, voluntary safeguards standards may be a pathway to guide projects to more gender-transformative approaches. We explore that potential below.

Preliminary findings: Attention to gender inequalities and women's inclusion in voluntary standards and multilateral guidelines for REDD+

In what follows, we present our preliminary analysis of the official documents available for each standard or guideline (see the references at the end of this flyer).

Most of the standards/guidelines (10/11) analysed in the table above explicitly consider gender issues; this growing gender awareness is commendable. Together, they present a wide scope of different requirements regarding the integration of gender considerations. These include the collection of gender disaggregated data (especially on tenure/resource rights) as part of project baselines, the inclusion of women in participatory spaces and holding gender-sensitive consultations, the design of equitable benefit sharing mechanisms, ensuring tenure security for both men and women, and the implementation of grievance mechanisms that are gender-responsive and accessible to women.

Disaggregating data by gender or requiring specific consideration of the potential impacts on women in a project's social baseline is common (7/11). Nonetheless, most of the standards fall short on setting guidelines or requirements on how to use this data. Only one specifically requires a plan to address any differentiated impacts identified in the baseline.

A more concrete action related to gender required by most of the standards (10/11) is to assure that project consultations are carried out in a 'gender-inclusive' or 'gender-sensitive' manner, or at least with the participation of women. In the standards reviewed, gender-inclusive or -sensitive usually refers to overcoming the participation barriers that impact women and ensuring women have a voice in decision making. Nonetheless, there are no specific guidelines on how to do so in any of the standards, or specific indicators to measure when this is accomplished. Most of the standards require this for all consultations, and one specifically requires it for consultations regarding benefit sharing.

Standards commonly (7/11) include gender equality requirements regarding the distribution of monetary and non-monetary benefits derived from REDD+. A minority (2/11) did not specifically mention women or gender inequalities, but did require equitable benefit sharing for marginalized groups. Some standards (5/11) require that initiatives recognize and address gender vulnerabilities to assure women are not disadvantaged in benefit sharing agreements. Other standards (2/11) only require that women participate in the development of benefit sharing mechanisms. Despite the evident attention to gender in benefit sharing, only one standard considered that the benefit sharing mechanism should address gender inequality beyond the project itself, such that the benefit sharing agreement should narrow existing gender gaps.

Most of the standards also had gender-related criteria regarding land and resource rights (8/11). These can be classified in three kinds of criteria: data, consultations, and tenure and resource security. The first refers to requirements for having specific data on women's tenure and resources and consideration of their specific roles in land and/or resource management (5/11). The second criterion, regarding the consultation and participation of women in land and resources assessments, is only mentioned by three standards (3/11) and only for cases when property rights are affected by a project's activities. The third criterion, securing land and resource rights, was only considered by one standard (1/11) which requires respect for the full bundle of IP and LC rights, with special attention to women.

Finally, only two standards (2/11) required that grievance mechanisms are gender responsive or accessible to

women. Given the potential of REDD+ actions to impact the rights of IPs and LCs, this is an aspect that should receive more attention. If women are disadvantaged or negatively affected by other measures, there must be appropriate channels for them to raise their concerns without repercussions, as well as pathways for redress when required.

From gender-blind initiatives to a gender-transformative REDD+

Our preliminary analysis shows that despite a commendable turn away from gender-blind requirements (10/11) in the safeguards related to voluntary standards and the guidelines of multilateral financial institutions, there is much more to do. REDD+ initiatives are missing an opportunity to go beyond minimum 'do no harm' standards to engage with IP and LC women as rights-holders, changemakers, leaders, and partners in the effort to address the climate emergency.

A gender-transformative approach to REDD+ would challenge the underlying structures and processes that uphold inequality, for example seeking to address the underlying root causes of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change. This requires actions that go beyond being gender sensitive – or that seek to 'do no harm' – and instead actively and strategically promote gender equality, women's empowerment, inclusion, and equal access to land, resources and benefits for men and women (Kabeer 2010; Elias et al 2021). REDD+ standards and relevant guidelines must be designed to address the differentiated needs and priorities of all members of IPs and LCs, and collaborate towards gender inclusion by harnessing women's strengths and voices. REDD+ initiatives and their proponents can catalyse transformation through collaborations and partnerships with communities that ensure inclusion and equal access to land, resources, and benefits and support self-determination. Standards can provide them with specific implementation guidelines and indicators to monitor progress towards a gender-transformative REDD+.

We will continue to update our analysis as part of GCS REDD+'s engagement with REDD+ safeguards, providing evidence-based recommendations towards a rights-responsive REDD+ that brings benefits to both forests and the men and women that steward them.

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