



# INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN REDD+ MAKING THEIR VOICE HEARD



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## INDIGENOUS WOMEN IN REDD+: MAKING THEIR VOICE HEARD

Women – both indigenous and non-indigenous – have actively engaged in international and national REDD+ processes to raise their concerns regarding the potential negative impact of REDD+ on women, and to assert their right to equally participate in negotiations, planning and implementation of REDD+. Indigenous women share many of the basic concerns and needs with their non-indigenous sisters but their situation as women in indigenous societies sets them apart from those who are part of the mainstream society, and their needs and concerns are often different. Their concerns may thus not be fully addressed, either by indigenous rights advocacy or by women's rights and gender advocacy. In advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples and for the rights of women, the specific situation and needs of indigenous women therefore need to be taken into account.

### Indigenous Women – Acknowledging their Roles, Recognizing their Needs

Being part of indigenous communities, indigenous women share the same conditions as those of the men: they suffer from loss of land and resources due to dispossession and encroachment, from racial discrimination, cultural alienation and pressure to assimilate, and from violations of their human rights, often exacerbated by the violent conflicts engulfing their communities.

Indigenous women also share the same struggles as their men. Indigenous women have always taken an active part in their peoples' struggles to maintain or regain the rights to their lands, resources, to their culture and identity and to self-determination.

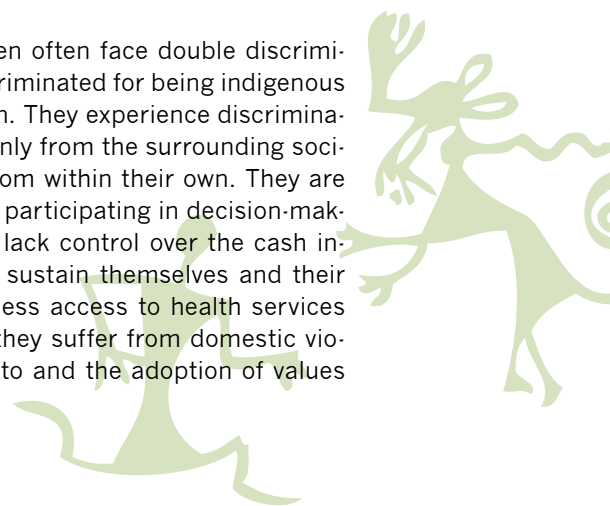
It is, however, important to bear in mind that these conditions affect indigenous women and men differently. For example, women are more severely affected by the loss of land and resources since, in accordance with culturally-defined gender roles, they are in most cases the ones responsible for collecting firewood, fetching water, tending the fields and feeding the family. Among many forest-dependent indigenous peoples, indigenous women play a central role in forest conservation and management, they are a repository of traditional knowledge on non-timber forest products and herbal medicine and are often the keepers of seeds and thus in charge of preserving domesticated plant varieties. These invaluable roles and contributions of women for the wellbeing of their families, and communities are not properly acknowledged and recognised.

Indigenous women are also therefore often more directly affected by the impact of climate change, in the form of irregular rainfall, droughts,



floods and storms. Indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to, and suffer from, gender-based violence in situations of armed conflict and militarization.

Indigenous women often face double discrimination: they are discriminated for being indigenous and for being women. They experience discrimination as women not only from the surrounding society but often also from within their own. They are often excluded from participating in decision-making processes, they lack control over the cash income with which to sustain themselves and their families, they have less access to health services and education and they suffer from domestic violence. Integration into and the adoption of values





of the mainstream society often leads to a further weakening of the status of women in indigenous societies and increases their vulnerability to domestic and external violence.

## Indigenous Peoples' Rights and REDD+

Indigenous peoples have been quite successful in making their voice heard in discussions and negotiations surrounding REDD+. They have actively participated in climate change negotiations in general, and in negotiations on REDD+ at international and national level in particular. The success of indigenous peoples' advocacy work related to REDD+ is perhaps most clearly reflected in the agreements reached at the UNFCCC's 16th Conference of the Parties (COP 16) in Cancún, Mexico, in 2010.

Key concerns raised by indigenous peoples, together with other civil society groups, are addressed in the Cancún Agreements, such as land tenure and forest governance in Article 72, and the social and environmental safeguards in paragraph 2 of Annex I. Indigenous peoples' rights and concerns are mentioned three times in the text. The outcome document of the COP 17 held a year later in Durban, South Africa, recognizes multiple benefits of REDD+ in terms of poverty alleviation, biodiversity benefits, and the need for policies should promote and support safeguards. It furthermore reaffirms that any REDD+ finance will have to be consistent with the safeguards contained in the Cancún Agreements.

The key achievements of indigenous peoples' advocacy and lobbying work on the UNFCCC with respect to REDD are thus:

1. The inclusion of respect for the traditional knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples;
2. The 'request' that states should ensure full and effective participation of indigenous peoples in activities relating to REDD+;
3. The obligation of states to report on the implementation of safeguards, and for UNFCCC's Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) to develop guidelines for that.

While the agreements on REDD+ do address indigenous peoples' rights, the language agreed on is not very strong. For example, the Cancún Agreements use rather vague phrases such as "requests developing country Parties...to address". Much

more advocacy work is therefore needed to ensure that these international agreements are properly translated into action at the national level.

## Indigenous Peoples' Rights in REDD+ What is needed

- *Legal recognition, protection and implementation of the collective rights of indigenous peoples over their lands, territories and resources*
- *Recognition, protection and promotion of the traditional sustainable livelihoods including shifting cultivation and customary forest management systems of indigenous peoples*
- *Recognition and respect of indigenous peoples' customary laws, traditional knowledge and forest governance systems including their own system of collective decision making*
- *Appropriate and equitable representation of indigenous people, including indigenous women, in the decision-making bodies and processes of REDD+*
- *Equitable benefit sharing mechanism and agreements with explicit collective consent of indigenous communities*
- *Accessible and effective grievance mechanisms at the local and national levels*

Source: AIPP 2014



Photo by: Christian Erni

## Women's Rights and REDD+

It was also at the COP 16 in Cancún that women's concerns and demands with respect to climate change and REDD+ were most successfully voiced. There are seven references to women and gender in the Cancún Agreements. Article 7, for example, states that "gender equality and the effective participation of women and indigenous peoples are important for effective action on all aspects of climate change".

Article 72, already referred to above, also 'requests' governments of developing countries to address, among other things, gender considerations in the development and implementation of national REDD+ strategies or action plans. Indeed, there is an urgent need for this. A recent regional analysis of barriers and opportunities for women's participation in REDD+ in Asia found that: "REDD+ has the potential to positively affect women's roles and status in relation to land ownership and management." (USAID 2011: 12) However, the regional analysis also concludes that: "The REDD+ programs currently being implemented reinforce gender inequality by failing to ensure that women are equal partners in decision-making, consultations, design, and benefit-sharing mechanisms"(ibid.: 11).

are still only marginally addressed at national level, by government agencies and indigenous organizations alike.

Indigenous women are generally less informed about REDD+ and have been much less involved than men in REDD+ related activities, including advocacy work. The participation of women in REDD+ project activities is usually better at the local than at the national level. This also means that women are usually less represented in national bodies such as, for example, the Indigenous Peoples Working Group on REDD+ in Cambodia, where only 6 of 29 members were women in 2013.

Working with indigenous women in REDD+ to ensure their active participation and that their concerns, needs and rights are properly addressed requires awareness of the specific situation and circumstances of indigenous women, and sincerity and flexibility to take these into account. This may mean departing from assumptions or certainties that may be appropriate when working with women in other societies.

### The challenge of levels of engagement in REDD+

Negotiations on the implementation of REDD+ are taking place at the international level, within the UNFCCC. REDD+ will be executed nationally, based on national-level reference scenarios, guided and regulated by national-level plans, policies and laws. Actual forest conservation will happen on the ground, at local level. Indigenous peoples, and thus indigenous women's engagement, is necessary at all levels. However, for indigenous women's participation at different levels involves different challenges. It is more difficult for them than for the men to participate at all levels. Women are more tied down to their house and community by their responsibility for taking care of children, animals or their fields. It is easier for them to join meetings organized in their own or maybe a neighbouring village, but travelling to distant places like the provincial or national capital, which implies staying overnight, sometimes even for several days, is difficult. In some indigenous societies, men are very reluctant or not willing at all to let their wives, sisters or daughters travel without the company of their husbands or close male kin.

The situation is different for those indigenous women who are more educated and who have moved to the cities, where some of them work as professionals. It is these women who are better able to engage in REDD+ processes at national or international levels. However, it has been shown that women in general are under-represented in

### Gender Perspectives in REDD+ – Policy recommendations

- *Collect and analyze sex-disaggregated information to inform gender sensitive REDD+ policies*
- *Acknowledge and confirm women's rights over forest resources and carbon rights*
- *Assure equal access to benefit sharing*
- *Provide equal access to decision making structures and processes*
- *Strengthen capacities of women and men*
- *Men should support women's participation and leadership*

Source: WOCAN n.d.

### Indigenous Women and REDD+ – Facing the Challenges

While indigenous women have played a leading role in advocacy, lobbying and negotiations in UNFCCC processes at the global level, contributing significantly to the safeguards that are now part of the global REDD+ agenda, gender issues in REDD+





forestry agencies (Setyowati 2012: 58) and, even though disaggregated data to confirm this is not available, it is expected that even fewer of them are indigenous women.

As more indigenous women complete higher education, ensuring their active participation in REDD+ related processes and institutions at national and international levels will be more possible but will require a conscious effort and active lobbying with the relevant agencies. Indigenous peoples and their organizations themselves need to push for the inclusion of indigenous women, not least by appointing more women to lead their own organizations and represent them in relevant bodies and processes. Equally important is the fact that if indigenous women from the grassroots are



to be kept informed and involved, extra efforts are necessary to reach out to women at the community level. There is no other way but to carry information to the villages and bring local indigenous women's views and voices back to the meeting rooms in the cities.

### The challenge of diversity and change

While there are variations in mainstream societies between regions and social classes with respect to the status and role of women, the differences encountered are never as pronounced as the differences that exist between mainstream society and indigenous societies. Furthermore, there is a tremendous diversity among indigenous peoples. In a single country such as Thailand, for example, we find indigenous societies that are considered fairly gender egalitarian and others with pronounced male dominance. Thailand has a relatively small indigenous population of just under 1 million but there are around 25 ethnic groups that are considered indigenous. Naturally, there is even greater diversity in countries with larger indigenous populations such as India or Indonesia.

Taking into account cultural variations in dealing with women's issues in REDD+ becomes particularly relevant with respect to key demands such as equal rights to land, forest and other natural resources. In indigenous societies, rules that are





regulating access to land and resources are often complex and multi-layered, comprising a combination of individual and collective ownership and use rights. There is also a wide variation of inheritance rules between indigenous societies, which is partly related to ecological and economic conditions, and they are often tied to rules about clan or lineage identity and residence after marriage. Land rights issues can thus not be addressed without taking these aspects of customary law also into consideration, along with the needs and perspectives of indigenous women.

Currently, integration into the nation state and the market is leading to rapid transformations in indigenous societies. The shift toward market oriented production usually results in individualization of land rights. At the same time, more men than women are leaving the villages in search of work, which has led to a ‘feminization of agriculture’ (de Schutter 2013), since it is now mostly women who are looking after the land. This applies very much to the management of forests, too. In such a situation it is even more important that women are given equal rights over land and forests.

In order to do justice to the specific customary laws and traditions related to ownership of land and forest rights among indigenous peoples, while at the same time ensuring equal rights of women,

it is first of all indispensable to recognize the collective rights of indigenous peoples to their land, territories and resources. This will allow indigenous communities to regulate individual ownership and use rights to land within their territories. Since existing customary law often does not recognize equal rights over land and forest for women, it is necessary that certain aspects of customary law are revised accordingly.

Aside from individual rights over certain types of land, most indigenous communities still continue to use and manage parts of their territories, such as forests, pastures or shifting cultivation land, communally. Therefore, it is important that women are part of the decision-making institutions and processes related to the use and management of common properties, such as village councils, which are often still an exclusive domain of the men.

All over Asia, indigenous women are increasingly raising their demand for a revision of customary land rights and other aspects of customary law in their societies. It is important to support these demands as well as constructive discussions and decision-making processes which allow communities to address conflicts and differences in perspectives and views by themselves.

## Indigenous Women in REDD+ – Recommendations

*In order for indigenous women to fully and effectively participate in REDD+ at all levels, efforts need to be stepped up to*

- *Train and employ more indigenous women professionals in governmental and non-governmental agencies responsible for or linked to REDD+ preparation and implementation at national and sub-national levels*
- *Provide equal access for indigenous women to information and decision-making structures and processes related to REDD+ at all levels*
- *To do this, culturally-appropriate and gender-sensitive information materials and information dissemination methods at community level have to be developed*
- *Provide targeted, separate training for indigenous women to enhance capacities and encourage their active participation in REDD+ related processes and bodies*
- *Provide technical and logistical support to grassroots women such as interpretation and translation services, travel and logistics etc. for them to effectively participate in national, regional and global REDD+ processes that are important to make the voices from the grassroots heard*
- *Link the demands for equal individual rights for men and women over land and forest with advocacy for the recognition of collective (territorial or communal) land and forest rights of indigenous peoples*
- *Promote more gender equality within indigenous peoples' customary law and institutions and, in particular, promote the full participation of indigenous women in customary decision-making processes and institutions*





## ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION: OUR EXPERIENCES

Over the past five years, AIPP, IWGIA and indigenous partner organizations in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, Vietnam and, in a first phase, Laos and Kenya have jointly implemented the project “Climate Change Partnership with Indigenous Peoples: Promoting Rights-based, Equitable and Pro-Poor REDD+ in South- and Southeast Asia”. The project’s purpose is to increase awareness among indigenous peoples of climate change and REDD+ and of national forest conservation policies and laws, and to build their capacity for effective policy advocacy and negotiations and for active participation in the development of national REDD+ strategies. The following results were achieved:

- The project helped increase the visibility of indigenous peoples at all levels through participation in local, national, regional and global meetings on climate change and REDD+
- It contributed to the recognition, participation and representation of indigenous peoples in different REDD+ bodies and mechanisms established by governments and key global REDD+ programs (UN-REDD, Forest Carbon Partnership Facility – FCPF, Forest Investment Program - FIP) at local, national, regional, international levels.
- It made substantial contributions to awareness raising and capacity building of indigenous peoples on their rights relating to climate change and REDD+ through:
  - ◊ A total of 95 publications (over 160,000 copies printed) and 17 audio-visuals in English and national languages and some indigenous languages, radio and TV programs in five countries six web-sites.
  - ◊ 253 workshops, trainings, seminars and dialogues with a total of 15,774 participants (10,175 men and 5,599 women).
- Community maps were produced in Indonesia (5), Laos (5), Nepal (3) Thailand (10), Vietnam (18).

### The Partners

**Coordination:** International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA)

**Co-coordination and regional activities:** Asia Indigenous Peoples’ Pact (AIPP)

#### Local partners:

Cambodia Cambodia Indigenous Youth Association (CIYA)

Indonesia Aliansi Masyarakat Adat Nusantara (AMAN)

Myanmar Promotion of Indigenous and Nature Together (POINT)

Nepal Nepal Federation of Indigenous Nationalities (NEFIN)

Thailand Indigenous Peoples Foundation for Education and Environment (IPF)

Vietnam Center for Sustainable Development in Mountainous Areas (CSDM)





## Challenges for the Participation of Indigenous Women

The results assessment of the first project phase revealed that one of the biggest challenges was to ensure the equal participation of women. While there was progress with respect to representation and engagement of women in all activities – overall around 35% of participants in meetings and training sessions were women – it remained a challenge through to the end of the project. Reasons identified by partner were cultural factors, i.e. social values defining gender roles, the related general male dominance, women's domestic responsibilities and heavy work load, restrictions to women's travelling and the lack of confidence on the part of women, partly a result of gender stereotypes, partly a result of low literacy rates and educational levels among women in some communities, were identified as the main reasons. It will take time and consistent efforts to overcome this. Given the important role indigenous women play in resource use and management, climate change adaptation and REDD+, it was decided that women's participation should be given priority in the current project phase.

Participation of men and women in training and workshops 2010-2013		
	Men	Women
International/regional	270	176
Indonesia	2,102	929
Kenya	1,488	760
Lao PDR	787	518
Nepal	2,049	1,062
Thailand	612	296
Vietnam	2,867	1,857
<i>Total</i>	<b>10,175</b>	<b>5,599</b>



## Stepping up Efforts

After realizing that women's participation in activities of the previous project phase was not as high as desired, it was decided to step up efforts in the ongoing second phase. One of the project's objectives is thus to ensure that there is a better understanding of gender issues in REDD+ and that women play a more active role in advocating for indigenous peoples' rights within this process. In addition to the general policy of trying to ensure the equal participation of women in all activities, there are specific targeted activities aimed at raising gender awareness and women's participation. These include:

- Capacity building, advocacy and engagement through training for women leaders and training on REDD+ and gender issues;
- Documentation and dissemination of information materials on the role of women in forest management and conservation, and the importance of forests for indigenous women;
- Targeted support to indigenous women's groups and organizations in relation to CB REDD activities.

Women's active participation in meetings is often stymied by male dominance and a lack of confidence among the women in the presence of men. In order not only to increase the presence of indigenous women numerically but also to encourage their more active participation, it is therefore sometimes important to have separate meetings and training sessions for women. This allows them to educate themselves and to gain more confidence, which they can then carry over into meetings where both men and women are present. Realizing the importance of such targeted empowering action, separate training sessions, meetings and platforms were initiated in all partner countries. Some, such as the training in Nepal, were exclusively for women while in other countries, like Myanmar or Thailand, a few men were also invited. In Cambodia, exposure visits for indigenous women to areas where successful struggles had been led by women was found very empowering but they need to be coupled with concrete follow-up activities to consolidate what has been learned.

In Cambodia, women's representation in the national Indigenous Peoples Working Group on REDD+ has increased from 6 out of 29 members in 2013 to 10 of 31 at present. A separate indigenous women's group on REDD+ is currently being formed and will be officially launched in 2015.





To reach women at the grassroots more effectively, information materials such as posters and videos on women's rights were produced in indigenous languages, for example Karen in Myanmar. There, special support is being given to those women who are not yet familiar with either the form of meeting or training session or the issues being discussed, and close translation into Karen language and more explanations are given to them.

Partner organizations differ with respect to the target they set for themselves. Some aim for 30%, others 40% or 50% women's participation in their workshops, training and dialogues. Overall, their efforts already seem to be bearing fruit: while women's participation in all activities during the past project phase was 35%, it has increased to 41% in the activities thus far conducted in 2014.

## Stories of Empowerment

The extra efforts taken during the current project phase are already showing results. Not only has the numerical presence of women increased, targeted support and capacity building have helped empower indigenous women. In Cambodia, for example, some were encouraged to take initiatives and leadership in their communities to defend their rights to land, forest and resources, particularly to defend their resin trees, burial forests, conservation forests and sacred forests from the threats posed by land concessions and illegal logging. Also in Cambodia, indigenous women have become more visible and actively contributed in consultations and dialogues with NGOs and networks on REDD+ and other matters concerning them.

In Nepal, NEFIN found that around 10 % of the indigenous women participating in training have the capacity, and are showing interest and willingness to act as resource persons on climate change, REDD+ and indigenous peoples' issues, passing on what they have learned to their brothers and sisters in the communities, but also to governments and NGOs.

*Basanti Chaudari is 30 years old and lives in Dhangadi-8, Kailali, in the Terai region of Nepal. She belongs to the Tharu indigenous people. Her parents were bonded laborers (Kamaiya or Kamlari). She grew up as a bonded laborer along with her family until 2000, when the Kamaiya system was abolished. Former bonded laborer families were resettled near forest land.*

*Since her childhood, Basanti has been attached to the forest in many ways. It was in 2012, however, when she attended her first training session on climate change and REDD+ organized by NEFIN and, during subsequent training provided by NEFIN, she realized how indigenous peoples elsewhere also have multiple and close relationships with and are dependent on forest and natural resources. She started thinking about the collective property of indigenous peoples, forests in particular, and the government policies and practices that affect the livelihood of her community. She says, "I learned a lot from the training. The training benefited not only me as an individual but also my community". Having participated in the training, Basanti has been able to understand the connection between the situation and the rights of indigenous peoples and the policies, laws and regulations of her country. Basanti began to work as a resource person on climate change, REDD+ and indigenous peoples' issues at local level and now regularly facilitates training courses. Basanti is very happy to disseminate information to communities about the government's activities in preparation of REDD+ and other strategies and plans related to forest and natural resources.*

*Local-level government bodies, particularly the district forest office, and NGOs often invite Basanti to take part in the discussion and dialogue on climate change and REDD+ that is taking place in their area. She explains, "There was a consultation program organized by the REDD Forestry and Climate Change Cell in our village. I urged the organizer (government) to ensure meaningful participation of indigenous peoples in the development of strategies, plans and in implementation and monitoring of activities". Basanti adds, "This kind of awareness and capacity building program has to reach many more indigenous peoples and women. We have much more to share and say. I hope this program will help us to echo our voices in a more effective manner".*



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