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REDD+ ACADEMY

Learning Journal

Social Inclusion and Gender



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Welcome & introduction

Welcome to the Learning Journal on Social Inclusion and Gender.

This Learning Journal was developed for the revitalized REDD+ Academy. It highlights the importance of integrating social inclusion and gender considerations into REDD+ policies and actions, demonstrating how equitable participation and social inclusiveness and gender-responsive approaches strengthen outcomes for forests, communities, and climate goals.

Who is it for?

This Learning Journal is primarily designed for government practitioners engaged in REDD+ planning and implementation. It may also be useful for project developers, public and private funders, and technical assistance partners working on forest conservation, climate action, and community engagement. This Learning Journal is primarily designed for government practitioners engaged

in REDD+ planning and implementation. It may also be useful for project developers, public and private funders, and technical assistance partners working on forest conservation, climate action, and community engagement.

At a glance

The Journal provides practical insights into:

- Understanding social and gender dimensions in REDD+ contexts
- Designing and implementing socially inclusive and gender-responsive REDD+ actions
- Engaging stakeholders effectively and equitably, including women, Indigenous Peoples, youth, and marginalized groups
- Monitoring, reporting, and assessing impacts through a social inclusion and gender lens

How to make the best use of this Learning Journal



Read the key chapters of relevance to you.



Download this publication at [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) and use the online version to access all hyperlinks in the text.



Use the QR CODES to access the additional online tools to reinforce your knowledge.



Utilize it as a supplement for any learning opportunities.



Check your knowledge before starting. What do you already know about Social Inclusion and Gender? Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) to share your level of prior knowledge.



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Acronyms

ART-TREES / TREES	Architecture for REDD+ Transactions / The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CIE	Communication, Information and Education
COCOBOD	Ghana Cocoa Board
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO / CSOs	Civil Society Organization(s)
ERPA	Emission Reduction Purchase Agreement
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
FPIC 360	FPIC 360° Verification/Assessment Tool
FCPF	Forest Carbon Partnership Facility
FREL	Forest Reference Emission Level
FUNAI	Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas (National Foundation of Indigenous Peoples – Brazil)
GBV/SEAH	Gender-Based Violence / Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
GCF	Green Climate Fund
GEF	Global Environment Facility
GRM / GRMs	Grievance Redress Mechanism(s)
ICCA	Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas Consortium
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
ILO	International Labour Organization
JNR	Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
MAATE	Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition (Ecuador)
MAG	Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (Ecuador)
MPF	Ministério Público Federal (Brazilian Public Prosecutor's Office)
NCB / NCBs	Non-Carbon Benefit(s)-Carbon Benefit(s)
NFMS	National Forest Monitoring System
NGO / NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization(s)
NS/AP	National Strategy / Action Plan

OSAGI	Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues
PAFT / PAFTs	Environmental, Forest and Territorial Plan(s)
PAMs	Policies and Measures
PGTA / PGTAs	Territorial and Environmental Management Plan(s)
PES	Payments for Ecosystem Services
PNRP	National Program of Reforestation (Ecuador)
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RBP	Results Based Payment-Based Payment
REDD+	Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (plus conservation, sustainable forest management, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks)
SAGE	Social Assessment for Gender Equality
SAPA	Social Assessment of Protected Areas
SECU	Social and Environmental Compliance Unit (UNDP)
SEP	Stakeholder Engagement Plan
SIS	Safeguards Information System
SOI	Summary of Information
SRM	Stakeholder Response Mechanism (UNDP)
STRANAS	National REDD+ Strategy of Indonesia
TREES	The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard (also listed under ART-TREES)
UN-REDD	United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Module 1



Foundational concepts: What is social inclusion and gender and why are they important in REDD+?



This module

This module introduces the foundational concepts of social inclusion and gender in the context of REDD+. It explains why integrating these considerations is essential for effective, equitable, and sustainable forest and climate action. The module highlights structural inequalities, power dynamics, and barriers that women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other marginalized groups face in accessing resources, participating in decision-making, and benefiting from REDD+ interventions. Through real-world examples from countries like Brazil and Costa Rica, the module demonstrates how social inclusion and gender considerations can strengthen REDD+ outcomes, safeguard rights, and improve governance.



You will be able to...

- Define social inclusion and gender in the context of REDD+ and understand their importance for forest and climate action.
- Recognize structural inequalities and power imbalances affecting women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other marginalized groups.
- Explain how integrating social inclusion and gender considerations can enhance the sustainability, equity, and the legitimacy of REDD+ initiatives.
- Identify practical approaches and examples for embedding social inclusion and gender into REDD+ design, implementation, and monitoring.

1.1 Setting the scene

In many countries where REDD+¹ is implemented, deep-rooted inequalities influence access to land, forests and their resources, as well as decision-making, and economic opportunities, often along lines of gender, ethnicity, class, and age. Women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other marginalized groups², frequently have weaker or less secure (i.e. customary or informal) land and resource rights, limited voices or ability to influence decision-making in governance structures, and fewer economic opportunities. At the same time, these marginalized groups are often those who most directly depend on forest resources, which, in addition to serving as an essential carbon reserve, provide livelihoods, subsistence and income for more than 1.6 billion of the global poor. These groups, therefore, disproportionately suffer the repercussions of disappearing forests and climate change.³

Even though Indigenous Peoples and local communities hold a wealth of knowledge of forest systems and are often forest guardians working to sustainably manage and preserve the forests that are central to their traditions, cultures and livelihoods,⁴ they remain widely under-recognized and under-valued agents in addressing forest loss.⁵ They have also experienced historical and ongoing violations of collective rights, including dispossession of lands, territories and resources, denial of self-determination, and the marginalization of customary governance systems. Indigenous Peoples' vulnerability in the context of REDD+ should also, therefore, be understood as the result of structural rights violations rather than inherent socio-economic disadvantage. Indigenous leaders and environmental defenders also often face heightened risks of threats and reprisals.

Additionally, although women play a vital role in environmental stewardship and natural resource management, their contributions are frequently under-recognized and undervalued. Women often face structural barriers that limit their ability to participate in, influence, and benefit from REDD+ initiatives. Indigenous women, in particular, experience intersecting and compounded forms of discrimination and barriers based on not just their gender, but also ethnicity and Indigenous identity, resulting in their heightened exposure to land-related conflict and gender-based violence.

The barriers that women face may include⁶:

- Limited recognition as forest rights holders or decision-makers;
- Unequal access to land, resources, and services;
- Restricted participation in governance processes;
- Disproportionate unpaid care responsibilities; and
- Exposure to gender-based violence and discrimination

These structural and power imbalances mean unless deliberate measures are taken to address this, the benefits of REDD+ interventions risk being distributed unequally while the costs fall disproportionately on marginalized groups.

Accordingly, a social inclusion and gender approach must be prioritized in the context of REDD+. As a first step, it is, thus, critical to understand the meaning of these key terms and concepts, and their importance.

1.2 Definitions

1.2.1 Social inclusion

In its 2016 *Report on the World Social Situation*, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs defines social inclusion as “the process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights.”⁷

It involves making the 'rules of the game' fairer through “the process of removing institutional barriers and improving incentives to increase access to development opportunities for a range of individuals and groups”.⁸ Social inclusion includes ensuring the “full and equal engagement of the diverse stakeholders and rightsholders to forge public policies and field actions.”⁹ It can therefore be seen as both a process and an end goal.¹⁰

It is a crucial component in realizing one of the overarching principles of the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, namely that of “Leaving No One Behind”, which represents the unequivocal commitment of all UN Member States to eradicate poverty, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind.¹¹

In other words, social inclusion seeks to ensure that all people can participate fully in society and are empowered to exercise their rights. Achieving social inclusion typically requires a combination of actions that address issues of equality, equity, and justice.¹²

To unpack these concepts in more detail, the definitions below are used:

- **Equality:** The principle that all individuals are equal before the law and entitled to the same rights and protections, without discrimination. It is a foundational concept in international human rights law, including the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is often associated with equal treatment and equal access to opportunities.
- **Equity:** The principle of fairness, which recognizes that people have different needs, circumstances, and starting points. Equity involves distributing resources and opportunities in ways that address these differences in order to achieve more balanced and inclusive outcomes, including through targeted or special measures to address historical disadvantage and structural inequalities.
- **Justice:** A broader concept that focuses on addressing the underlying systemic, legal, and policy factors that produce and sustain inequality. Justice seeks long-term, sustainable fairness by ensuring that institutions, laws, and decision-making processes uphold rights and accountability.

This means that treating everyone identically, even if done in the name of equality, is often insufficient to achieve social inclusion. In many cases, additional measures grounded in equity and justice are required to ensure that all people can effectively exercise their rights and participate in fair terms within society.

Figure 1 depicts how equality, equity, and justice are related, while remaining distinct concepts.

Figure 1. Differences between 'equality', 'equity' and 'justice'

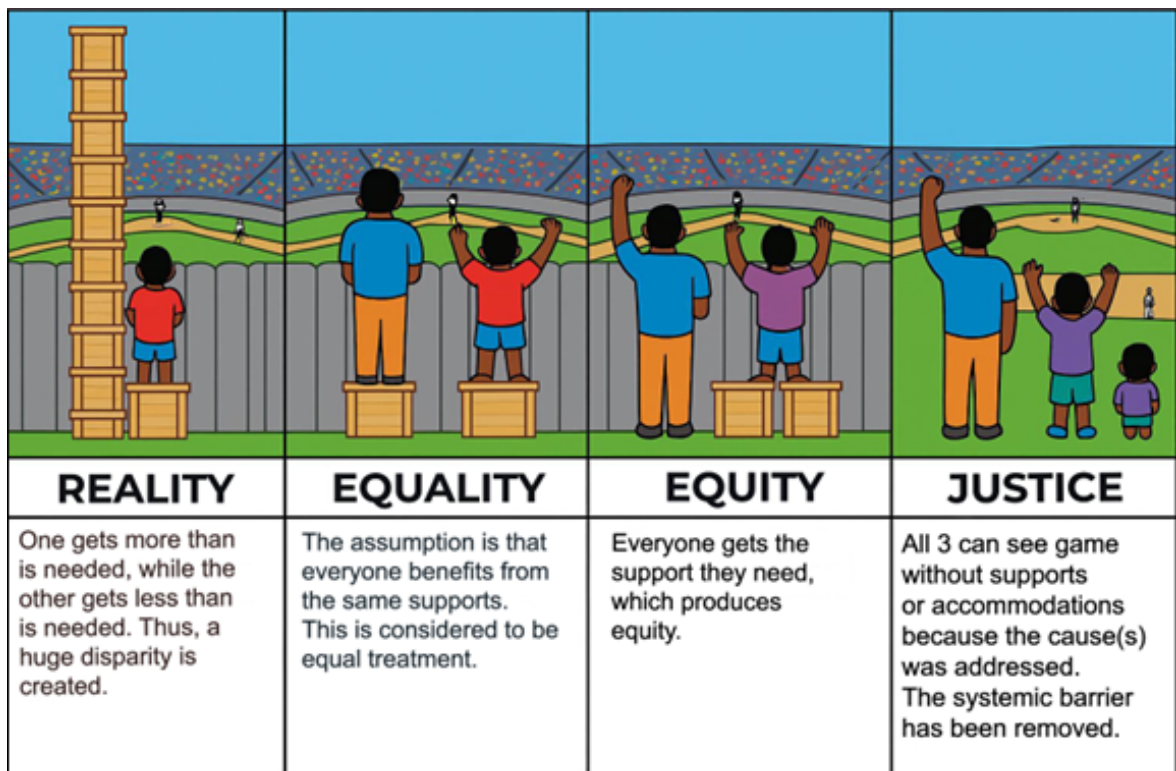


Photo credit: Boston University, available at: <https://www.bu.edu/diversity/resource-toolkit/inequity-equality-equity-and-justice/> (original source, @restoringracialjustice).

1.2.2 Gender equality and women's empowerment

Social inclusion and gender are complementary concepts. In this context, gender equality and women's empowerment form a crucial element of social inclusion because it oftentimes intersects with power dynamics, rights, identity, and access to resources and opportunities. Box 1 provides a more detailed breakdown on what these gender terms mean.

Gender and social inequalities frequently go hand in hand, as gender is one of the most pervasive factors shaping who is included or excluded from access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making in society. As a result, efforts to promote social inclusion must explicitly address gender norms and power relations to ensure that both women, men and youth from all social groups can participate equitably and benefit fairly from REDD+ interventions. This is even more important considering that women are "on the frontline of climate change mitigation and adaptation, bringing unique perspectives, expertise, and problem-solving skills".¹³



Box 1.

Key gender terms

Gender: According to the UN Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), ‘gender’ refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities, and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable.¹⁴

Gender equality: This refers to “the concept that women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefitting from) economic, social, cultural and political development.”¹⁵ It is the concept that all people, regardless of sex, enjoy the same rights, opportunities, and fair treatment to reach their full potential and participate equally in all aspects of society.

Women’s empowerment: This can be defined as “the ability and agency of every woman to shape her own destiny, exercise her rights and make her own choices.”¹⁶ Women’s empowerment, which is essential to achieving gender equality, has five components:¹⁷

- women’s sense of self-worth;
- their right to have and to determine choices;
- their right to have access to opportunities and resources;
- their right to have power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and
- their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally.

In other words, women’s empowerment is the process of enabling women to assert their rights, make their own decisions, access opportunities and resources, control their lives, and actively shape a more just society and future.

1.3 Social inclusion, gender and REDD+ safeguards

While environmental and social safeguards frameworks provide an important foundation for addressing potential negative impacts of REDD+, experience has shown that the existence of safeguards alone does not guarantee socially inclusive outcomes. In practice, the extent to which social inclusion and gender considerations are clearly defined, meaningfully integrated into REDD+ design, and effectively implemented and monitored varies widely across countries and jurisdictions. This variation is particularly

evident with respect to groups that are often marginalized in development and forest governance processes. Overlapping forms of social and gender exclusion and inequality demand tailored approaches that reflect differing tenure arrangements, power dynamics, cultural norms, and institutional capacities.

Recognizing this, the UN-REDD Programme has developed two complementary learning journals within its REDD+ Academy Learning Journal series, each responding to distinct but interrelated needs:

- The [REDD+ Safeguards Learning Journal](#) focuses on building a common understanding

of environmental and social safeguards frameworks, requirements, and systems, including how safeguards are interpreted, operationalized, and reported at national and sub-national levels.¹⁸

- The Social Inclusion and Gender Learning Journal responds to a more specific and persistent gap: the need for deeper, practical guidance on how social inclusion and gender considerations can be systematically embedded within social safeguards approaches and REDD+ action more broadly. It goes beyond explaining *what* social safeguards are, to focus on *how* social and gender barriers can be identified, effectively addressed, and monitored in diverse contexts.

This background and rationale provide the foundation for the subsequent sections and modules of this Learning Journal.

1.4 Objectives of a social inclusion and gender approach

Given the persistent social inequalities present in many REDD+ countries, as well as States' human rights obligations under international law, attention to human rights should be

central to the design and implementation of REDD+ action. Embedding human rights considerations strengthens both the legitimacy and long-term sustainability of REDD+ outcomes.

A key objective of a social inclusion and gender approach is to operationalize a rights-based approach within REDD+ by designing and implementing policies and activities that:

- Recognize and address structural inequalities;
- Fulfil applicable human rights obligations; and
- Ensure the meaningful, effective, and equitable participation of women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other marginalized or vulnerable groups as rights holders, rather than merely stakeholders.

At the same time, this approach seeks to ensure that benefits, rights, decision-making authority, and safeguard protections are distributed and applied equitably, without reinforcing existing social or gender disparities.

While there are no universally accepted definitions of "Indigenous Peoples," "local communities," or "vulnerable groups," international bodies and human rights instruments rely on commonly referenced criteria. These are summarized in Box 2 below.



Box 2.

Commonly referenced definitions of key groups

Indigenous Peoples

States and Indigenous groups may differ regarding formal recognition of "Indigenous Peoples." However, internationally accepted criteria generally include consideration of whether a collective:

1. Self-identifies as Indigenous Peoples;
2. Has pursued its own concept and pathway of human development within a given socio-economic, political, and historical context;
3. Has sought to maintain distinct identities, languages, traditional beliefs, customs, laws, institutions, worldviews, and ways of life;

4. Has historically exercised control or stewardship over lands, territories, and natural resources to which it maintains a special connection and upon which its cultural and physical survival depends; and
5. Predates colonization or dispossession in the territories it traditionally occupied.

Importantly, the application of Indigenous Peoples' rights under international law does not depend on formal State recognition. Self-identification is a fundamental criterion.

Local Communities

Under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), "local communities" refers to communities with a long-standing association with lands and waters traditionally lived on or used, whose collective rights warrant recognition regardless of the absence of a universally agreed definition.

A working definition used by the ICCA Consortium describes local communities as: "A self-identified human group that acts collectively in ways that contribute to defining a territory and culture through time."

The meaning of "local communities" varies by national context. Within REDD+, the term should be used carefully to avoid conflating local communities with Indigenous Peoples, whose collective rights are distinct under international law.

In addition to Indigenous Peoples, REDD+ activities may affect forest-dependent local communities that do not meet the criteria for recognition as Indigenous under international law but maintain long-standing social, cultural, and economic ties to forest lands and waters. These may include non-Indigenous smallholder farmers, extractive communities dependent on non-timber forest products, agro-pastoral groups using forest commons, or resident community forest concession holders. While their collective rights frameworks may differ from those of Indigenous Peoples, their legitimate tenure interests, livelihood dependence, and governance systems require appropriate recognition, meaningful participation, and equitable benefit-sharing under national law and applicable safeguard standards.

Vulnerable Groups

Social vulnerability may arise from multiple and overlapping characteristics, including socioeconomic status, gender, race and ethnicity, age, disability, employment status, tenure insecurity, occupation, family structure, and level of education. In many REDD+ contexts, vulnerability is shaped by structural inequalities related to land access, natural resource dependence, and social marginalization. Vulnerability is context-specific, dynamic, and may shift over time depending on political, economic, and environmental conditions.

Another core objective of a social inclusion and gender approach is to promote women's empowerment and gender equality through systematic gender mainstreaming. To support effective integration of gender considerations in REDD+ action, it is recommended that programmes strive to achieve at least a gender-

responsive approach. This Learning Journal focuses on supporting the transition toward gender-responsive and, where feasible, gender-transformative approaches.

See Box 3 for definitions of key gender integration terms.



Box 3.

Gender mainstreaming and integration terminology

Gender Mainstreaming¹⁹

The process of assessing and integrating the implications for women and men of any planned action, as well as the inclusion of specific provisions for gender equality, including in legislation, policies and programs. It is a systematic approach for ensuring that the concerns and experiences of women and men are an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes, wherein the ultimate goal is aimed at achieving gender equality. The degree of gender mainstreaming within an programme/project can vary (see corresponding terms below).

Gender-Sensitive²⁰

An approach that acknowledges sociocultural factors underlying gender-based discrimination and seeks to avoid exacerbating existing inequalities (“do no harm”). It involves:

- Differentiating between the needs and capacities of women and men;
- Considering how decisions may affect women and men differently;
- Taking action to prevent reinforcing inequalities.

Gender-Responsive²¹

An approach that proactively addresses identified gender gaps and biases. It seeks not only to avoid harm, but to improve outcomes (“do better”) by:

- Redefining gender roles and relations where appropriate;
- Intentionally advancing gender equality;
- Integrating gender considerations into policies and implementation.

Gender-Transformative²²

An approach that seeks to transform unequal gender relations and address root causes of discrimination. It promotes shared power, control over resources, and equitable decision-making, requiring shifts in institutional practices, norms, and social attitudes.

A social inclusion and gender approach should also be intersectional. Individuals and groups often experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination. In REDD+ contexts, factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, geography, disability, and economic status may interact with compound vulnerability. Integrating intersectionality concepts into a

gender and social approach helps to identify how these overlapping identities shape access to resources, participation in decision-making, exposure to risk, and ability to benefit from REDD+ initiatives. Incorporating intersectionality helps to strengthen the effectiveness and fairness of a social inclusion and gender approach.

1.5 Importance of a social inclusion and gender approach

1.5.1 Maximizing the benefits and minimizing the risks of REDD+

The types and magnitude of benefits and risks associated with REDD+ vary depending on the nature of the interventions, the drivers of deforestation being addressed, and the local context.²³ While REDD+ promises climate, biodiversity, social and economic gains, especially for forest-dependent communities, these benefits are not guaranteed if the applicable environmental and social (including gender) safeguards are not properly “addressed” and “respected”.²⁴ If limited or no efforts are taken to integrate a social inclusion and gender approach into REDD+, existing inequalities between and within different stakeholder groups may be exacerbated, including through elite capture²⁵, and local communities, Indigenous Peoples or other vulnerable populations (such as women and youth), risk losing land or resource rights, having their customary land tenure ignored or overwritten, or being displaced.²⁶

In the absence of robust rights protections, REDD+ risks contributing to forms of “carbon colonialism,” whereby forest carbon objectives may lead to the recentralization of control over Indigenous lands and resources, exacerbate existing land and resource conflicts,

restrict customary land use, or result in the criminalization, threats, or reprisals against Indigenous land defenders, including women leaders. These risks underscore the necessity of a defender-sensitive risk management approach and the legal recognition and protection of Indigenous Peoples’ land, territory, and resource rights as foundational conditions for REDD+ implementation.

The loss of forest ecosystems, or even small changes in their species composition, also have gender-differentiated impacts that could jeopardize the livelihoods of women and men around the world. As such, deforestation and forest degradation tend to reinforce and exacerbate existing gender inequalities, such as gender-based violence and unequal access to resources and tenure of land. As a result, the impacts of forest loss tend to be greater on women, placing them, along with girls, in a position of greater vulnerability in which their livelihoods, assets and economic opportunities are threatened.²⁷

When designed and implemented with a social inclusion and gender approach, REDD+ action has greater potential to mitigate these risks and improve forest governance, strengthen land tenure security, conserve biodiversity, and promote fair and transparent benefit-sharing—particularly for Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women and youth.

Country case study in Box 4 illustrates the importance and power of a social inclusion and gender approach in REDD+.



Box 4.

Case study on operationalizing a social inclusion and gender approach in REDD+: Evidence from the Floresta+ Communities Modality in Brazil²⁸

Context

Brazil has historically maintained a comparatively progressive legal framework recognizing the rights of Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Communities. The 1988 Federal Constitution formally recognized Indigenous Peoples' rights to their traditionally occupied lands, cultures, and social organization. Institutional protection has been supported by the National Indigenous Peoples Foundation (Fundação Nacional dos Povos Indígenas – FUNAI), established in 1973. Within this legal context, women from Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Communities play a central role in sustainable natural resource management and territorial stewardship. However, structural gender inequalities persist, limiting women's economic participation, influence decision-making spaces, and access to financial resources.

The Floresta+ Amazônia Project (Floresta+) was launched in 2020 and financed by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) based on REDD+ results achieved in 2014–2015. It is implemented by Brazil's Ministry of the Environment with support from UNDP. The project operates through payments for environmental services (PES), providing financial incentives to eligible participants who conserve or restore native forests. Floresta+ is structured around five modalities, each targeting different stakeholders. The Communities Modality provides support for local initiatives aimed at strengthening environmental and territorial management within the territories of Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Communities.

Although Brazil's Indigenous rights framework was weakened during the 2016–2019 and 2019–2022 administrations, the Floresta+ project maintained participatory processes and consultation mechanisms. This continuity was supported by sustained engagement from civil society, oversight by the Brazilian Public Prosecutor's Office (Ministério Público Federal – MPF), and the continued participation of FUNAI in the Floresta+ Advisory Committee. These institutional safeguards contributed to preserving rights-based implementation during a politically constrained period.

Key Social Inclusion and Gender Achievements of the Communities Modality

As illustrated below, social and gender integrity were embedded across all stages of the Communities Modality, and included the following:

- 1. Operationalization of FPIC:** The Floresta+ Operational Manual required adherence to the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) at the local project level. Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Communities submitted their own proposals, and all approved projects followed FPIC principles. Where communities had developed their own Consultation or FPIC Protocols, these were applied. Traditional governance and decision-making structures were respected in project design and implementation.
- 2. Alignment with Territorial and Life Plans:** Floresta+ sought to complement existing Indigenous and Traditional Communities' management instruments, including Territorial and Environmental Management Plans (PGTAs), or to create opportunities for their development where absent. Where such plans existed, they provided a strategic framework for prioritizing investments. This enabled communities to focus on deliberations on implementation rather than redefining long-term objectives. In total, 40 projects were approved under the Communities Modality.

3. Gender-Responsive Design and Targets: Gender equality was incorporated through explicit criteria, targets, and capacity-building measures. Within the Communities Modality, at least 40 percent of selected projects were required to:

- Include a majority of women on the technical team;
- Prioritize women as direct beneficiaries; or
- Identify gender equality as a primary focus.

Of the 40 approved projects:

- 70 percent (28 projects) directly addressed gender issues;
- 60 percent of local project selection committee members were women.

Women from Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Communities assumed leadership roles in project design, oversight, and implementation. These measures contributed to a shift from gender-sensitive to gender-responsive practice within the modality.

4. Community Autonomy and Flexibility: The Communities Modality allowed significant flexibility in project scope, provided core safeguards and thematic criteria were met. Projects could operate at the community or territorial level, span multiple Indigenous territories, or involve partnerships chosen by communities themselves. This flexibility enabled communities to leverage existing institutional relationships and align investments with locally defined priorities. Many Indigenous Peoples had already developed PGTAs, enabling them to propose projects linked to territorial governance, sustainable production systems, biodiversity conservation, and socio-economic strengthening.

Outcomes

The Communities Modality portfolio demonstrates that embedding social inclusion and gender considerations from the outset can enhance both fairness and effectiveness in REDD+-linked results-based finance contexts. Projects implemented under the modality span environmental conservation, restoration of degraded areas, agroecological production, strengthening of socio-biodiversity value chains, and territorial surveillance and protection. These thematic areas were pursued while maintaining rights-based participation, institutional safeguards, and structured gender integration. The Floresta+ experience illustrates that even in politically challenging contexts, institutionalized safeguard mechanisms, gender criteria, and community-led design can sustain inclusive and rights-aligned implementation.

1.5.2 Promoting sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency and justice

A social inclusion and gender approach strengthens REDD+ implementation by improving decision quality, legitimacy, and risk management. By incorporating the knowledge, priorities, and governance systems of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and other affected groups, REDD+ processes are more likely to secure durable support, reduce conflict, and align interventions with local realities.

Such an approach also contributes to non-carbon benefits (NCBs)²⁹, including strengthened tenure security, improved resource governance, enhanced livelihoods, and the protection of human rights. These outcomes reinforce environmental objectives by supporting permanence and reducing the risk of reversals.

When effectively operationalized, integration of a social inclusion and gender approach contribute to REDD+ interventions that are:

- More effective, by aligning incentives and practices with local land-use dynamics;

- More efficient, by reducing delays, disputes, and implementation risks;
- More equitable and just, by respecting rights and addressing structural inequalities; and
- More sustainable, by fostering ownership and long-term stewardship.

A social inclusion and gender approach addresses social and gender inequalities and power imbalances and informs effective and

efficient REDD+ processes by more accurately considering the specific knowledge, distinct needs, perspectives and contributions of all affected stakeholders, across genders and identities from various groups.

To illustrate the power of a social inclusion and gender approach in achieving a more sustainable, effective, just and efficient REDD+, see the example from Costa Rica's REDD+ process detailed in Box 5 below.



Box 5.

Case study on social inclusion and gender as key success factors in Costa Rica's REDD+ process³⁰

This case illustrates how social inclusion and gender equality were embedded from the initial design of Costa Rica's REDD+ process through implementation, strengthening legitimacy, participation, and long-term effectiveness.

Context

Costa Rica's REDD+ process builds on decades of forest policy experience, including the 1997 Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) program, which provided incentives for forest conservation, reforestation, and sustainable land use, including in legally demarcated Indigenous Territories. Building on the success of the PES program, Costa Rica embraced the REDD+ mechanism to further its environmental objectives.

Social inclusion and gender as integral design features of the REDD+ development process

Central to the development and implementation of the REDD+ strategy has been the focus on social inclusion, ensuring the active participation of Indigenous Peoples. Recognizing their unique relationship with forests and traditional knowledge, Costa Rica initiated a comprehensive consultation process starting in 2008, including stages of information dissemination, pre-consultation, and formal consultation. The methodology for the formal consultations was developed and proposed by Indigenous leaders from the 24 Indigenous Territories, ensuring cultural appropriateness and community ownership.

In addition, in collaboration with gender experts, State institutions, civil society organizations, and various indigenous and small rural producer women's groups, a Gender Action Plan (GAP) for the National REDD+ Strategy was developed in 2019. It establishes a framework to promote financing, technical assistance, and ongoing monitoring that strengthens women's capacities and supports their leadership in implementing high-impact actions within priority forest landscapes.

Use of cultural mediators to reinforce social inclusion

To ensure communities were adequately informed about REDD+ in a culturally appropriate manner, in 2013, the National REDD+ Secretariat established a national program of cultural mediators. The program, which consisted of 150 indigenous mediators, was incorporated into the Indigenous REDD+ consultation plan to enhance information sharing and communication, particularly around understanding the implications of REDD+ at the territory level.

Territorial planning as a vehicle for promoting social inclusion and gender equality

The Environmental, Forest and Territorial Plan (PAFT) is a participatory planning instrument in which Indigenous communities and groups in a territory identify their needs and propose forest conservation projects. PAFTs are developed through an inclusive, local, and participatory process taken by Indigenous Territories through their own internal participatory decision-making processes, in accordance with the guidelines outlined in the 2018 Consultation Mechanism.³¹ PAFTs represent one of the main instruments to involve Indigenous territories in the implementation of the National REDD+ Strategy and ensure the vision of the communities that live in the territories are taken in account. Territories that have a PAFT can also access results-based funding based on their achievements. The decision of almost all Indigenous Territories to engage in the REDD+ Strategy development process was seen as evidence of the cultural mediator role having successfully counteracted initial skepticism towards REDD+ through transparent dialogue with communities.

A gender-responsive approach was also used in the design of the PAFTs. Through this approach, both women and men had their capacities built as cultural mediators. In addition, Indigenous women were equitably and actively involved in PAFT decision-making processes regarding their forests and territories, with their priorities included within the selected local projects and associated benefit sharing arrangements. As of the end of 2024, key outcomes of these efforts include:

- 44% of cultural mediators trained leading the development of the PAFTs were Indigenous women, with improved capacities in facilitation, methodology development, consultations, and mediation skills;
- A total of 9,512 people participated in the 209 community dialogues, of which 51% were women;
- Completed PAFTs establish a fair and equitable distribution of climate finance to a range of marginalized groups, including women, the elderly and youth;
- 52% of the members of the monitoring committees and follow-up committees are Indigenous women.



Key takeaways

- **Structural Barriers Must Be Addressed:** Inequalities in land and resource rights, decision-making power, and economic opportunities require deliberate, rights-based approaches to avoid reinforcing existing disparities.
- **A Social Inclusion and Gender Approach Supports a Rights-Based Approach:** Operationalizing a rights-based approach in REDD+ must involve designing and implementing policies and activities that address structural inequalities, fulfil human rights obligations; and ensure the meaningful, effective, and equitable participation of women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other marginalized or vulnerable groups as rights holders, rather than merely stakeholders.
- **Social Inclusion and Gender Integration Improves Sustainability and Legitimacy:** Embedding social inclusion and gender considerations from the outset increases REDD+ effectiveness, reduces conflict, and fosters long-term sustainability while supporting human rights and broader development objectives.

Module 2



What is the basis for social inclusion and gender in REDD+?



This module

This module provides an overview of the international and normative frameworks for integrating social inclusion and gender considerations in REDD+. It explains how key UNFCCC decisions, international human rights instruments, and REDD+ safeguards standards establish requirements and guidance to ensure the equitable and meaningful participation of women, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and other marginalized groups. The module highlights the procedural, institutional, and legal frameworks that countries can use to embed social inclusion and gender into REDD+ design, implementation, and monitoring.



You will be able to...

- Identify key UNFCCC decisions that establish social inclusion and gender requirements in REDD+.
- Explain how international human rights instruments, such as CEDAW and UNDRIP, provide a normative basis for rights-based, socially inclusive and gender-responsive REDD+ approaches.
- Recognize how REDD+ safeguards standards and climate finance frameworks operationalize social inclusion and gender considerations.
- Apply these international and normative foundations within the design, implementation, and monitoring of socially inclusive and gender-responsive REDD+ action.

2.1 Key UNFCCC decisions on REDD+ related to social inclusion and gender

Within its work to promote environmental and social safeguards, several decisions under

the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) refer to, or require steps to be taken, to ensure a social inclusion and gender approach in REDD+. These decisions occurred over a range of years at various UNFCCC conferences of the parties (COP), the most relevant of which are briefly summarized in the table below.



LEARNING TOOL

Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) to define the basis for social inclusion and gender.



Table 1. Key UNFCCC COP decisions related to social inclusion and gender

UNFCCC Decision	UNFCCC text	How it establishes the basis for social inclusion and gender in REDD+
Decision 1/CP.16 (Cancun Agreements), Appendix I (c)	"Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities, by taking into account relevant international obligations, national circumstances and laws, and noting that the United Nations General Assembly has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." (redd.unfccc.int)	Establishes explicit recognition of Indigenous Peoples' and local community rights within REDD+ safeguards.
Decision 1/CP.16 (Cancun Agreements), Appendix I (d)	"The full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities, in the actions referred to in paragraphs 70 and 72 of this decision." (redd.unfccc.int)	Creates the formal participation requirement that underpins inclusive REDD+ design and implementation.
Decision 1/CP.16 (Cancun Agreements), Appendix I (e)	"Enhance other social and environmental benefits, taking into account the need for sustainable livelihoods of indigenous peoples and local communities and their interdependence on forests in most countries." (redd.unfccc.int)	Links REDD+ implementation to protect livelihoods and social benefits for forest-dependent groups.
Decision 1/CP.16, Paragraph 72	Parties should address "drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, land tenure issues, forest governance issues, gender considerations, ... ensuring the full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, inter alia indigenous peoples and local communities." (redd.unfccc.int)	Explicitly integrates gender, tenure, governance, and participation into national REDD+ strategies.

UNFCCC Decision	UNFCCC text	How it establishes the basis for social inclusion and gender in REDD+
Decision 12/CP.17, Paragraph 2	Safeguards information systems should recognize international obligations and agreements and be implemented while “respecting gender considerations.” (redd.unfccc.int)	Embeds gender considerations into safeguards of monitoring and reporting architecture (SIS).
Decision 12/CP.17, Paragraph 3	Parties must provide “a summary of information on how the safeguards ... are being addressed and respected throughout the implementation of the activities.” (redd.unfccc.int)	Creates an accountability mechanism ensuring inclusion and rights protections are tracked and disclosed.
Draft Decision -/ CP.30, Belém Gender Action Plan (GAP) for 2025–2034	Preamble 1) recognizes that “gender-responsive implementation [...] of climate policy and action can enable Parties to [...] enhance gender equality” ; 2) acknowledges the “differentiated impacts of climate change and opportunities for all women and girls, including Indigenous women, and women from local communities, migrant women, women with disabilities, women smallholder farmers and women from rural and remote communities”; and 3) recognizes “the contribution of women and girls of African descent to climate action”	Designed to guide long-term gender-responsive climate policy and action under the UNFCCC, including on REDD+, it aims to drive concrete action on gender at every level, calling on governments, UN entities, civil society, and other organizations to work collectively on its implementation. ³²

(Please see the [UN-REDD Safeguards Learning Journal](#) for more information on UNFCCC decisions as they relate to safeguards.)

2.2 Selected relevant international frameworks on social inclusion and gender

In addition to the UNFCCC decisions and guidance related to REDD+, a number of international human rights instruments provide important normative foundations for integrating social inclusion and gender equality into REDD+ design and implementation. While

a wide range of agreements are relevant, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on Biological Diversity, and ILO Convention No. 169, this Learning Journal does not attempt a comprehensive review. Instead, Table 2 below highlights two key illustrative frameworks that are particularly influential in shaping rights-based, socially inclusive, and gender-responsive approaches in forest and climate policy contexts.

Table 2. Key illustrative international frameworks on social inclusion and gender

International Framework	Key Provisions (Relevant Extracts)	Relevance for Social Inclusion and Gender in REDD+
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)	Establishes binding obligations for States to eliminate discrimination against women in law, policy, and practice. Through its General Recommendations, calls for women’s equal participation in decision-making and policy processes; equal rights of rural women regarding land and natural resources; access to information, justice, and services; and protection from gender-based violence.	Provides the primary international legal basis for gender equality. Directly supports gender-responsive REDD+ design, including equitable participation, access to benefits, land and resource rights, and safeguards against exclusion or harm.
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)	Affirms Indigenous Peoples’ rights to equality, participation, lands, territories and resources, cultural integrity, and free, prior and informed consent. Specifies that these rights are to be enjoyed equally by Indigenous women and men. Calls on States to pay particular attention to vulnerable groups, including women, and to ensure protection from violence and discrimination.	Establishes the normative basis for rights-based REDD+ approaches, including FPIC, recognition of customary governance, protection of land and resource rights, and gender-equitable inclusion of Indigenous women in decision-making and benefit-sharing.

2.3 Additional international REDD+ safeguard standards

Table 3 provides a high-level overview of selected international safeguards standards that are commonly applied to REDD+ activities and that include explicit provisions related to social inclusion and gender. These standards originate from both climate finance institutions and carbon market crediting frameworks, and therefore differ in mandate, level of prescriptiveness, and operational focus. Despite these differences, all include requirements related to stakeholder participation, recognition of the rights and interests of Indigenous Peoples and local communities, grievance redress, and equitable benefit-sharing.

To illustrate, the Green Climate Fund places particularly strong emphasis on the systematic integration of gender equality through mandatory gender assessments and action plans across the project cycle. Jurisdictional carbon standards, such as the Verra JNR Framework and ART-TREES, operationalize the Cancun Safeguards by requiring evidence of inclusive consultation, full and effective participation, and mechanisms to address social risks and distribute benefits equitably. While the depth and specificity of gender guidance vary across these mechanisms, each establishes procedural and institutional measures intended to reduce exclusion, strengthen accountability, and support a social inclusion and gender approach REDD+ implementation at national and jurisdictional levels.

Table 3. Social inclusion and gender requirements of selected REDD+ safeguards and standards

Safeguards Standard	Core Safeguards Framework	Key Social Inclusion Requirements	Key Gender-Related Requirements
Green Climate Fund (GCF)	Environmental and Social Policy (2021); Gender Policy (2019)	Requires stakeholder engagement across the project cycle; inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and local communities; social risk assessment; grievance redress mechanisms; monitoring of social outcomes.	Mandatory gender assessment and gender action plans; integration of gender considerations into project design, implementation, and monitoring; reporting on gender results.
Verra Jurisdictional and Nested REDD+ (JNR) Framework	Builds on Cancun Safeguards and applicable national safeguards systems	Requires inclusive stakeholder consultation processes; participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities; grievance mechanisms; transparent and equitable benefit-sharing arrangements; documentation of how safeguards are addressed and respected.	Requires consideration of women and vulnerable groups in stakeholder engagement and benefit-sharing processes; encourages gender-responsive consultation and participation.
ART-TREES (Architecture for REDD+ Transactions)	Cancun Safeguards operationalized into thematic safeguard requirements with indicators	Requires demonstration of full and effective participation of stakeholders; FPIC processes; benefit-sharing mechanisms; grievance redress systems; identification and mitigation of social risks.	Basic gender considerations referenced within broader safeguards themes such as participation and equitable benefit-sharing,

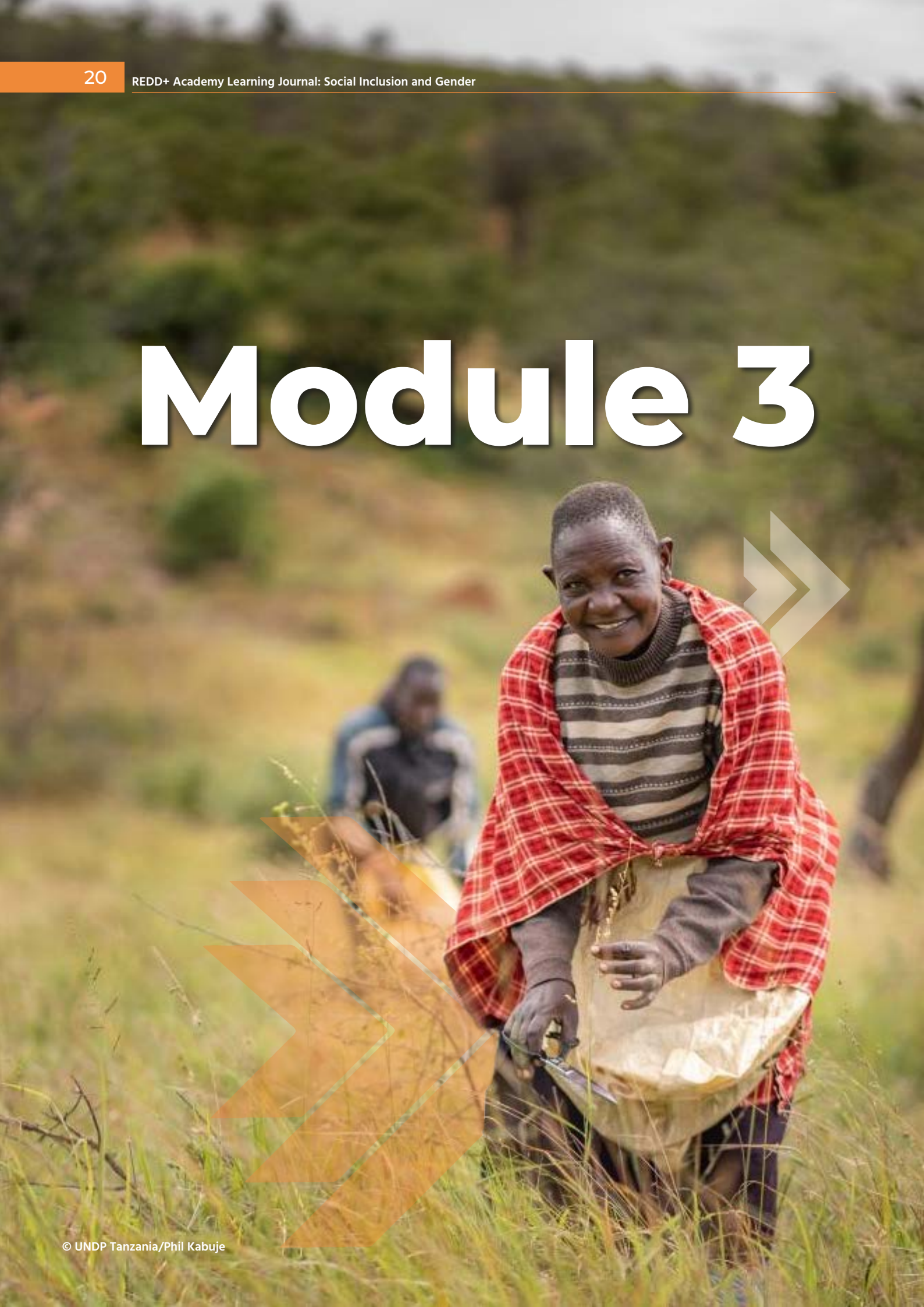
Please see the UN-REDD [Safeguards Learning Journal](#) and [Carbon Markets Learning Journal](#) for more information for a more detailed comparative analysis of these REDD+ safeguards standards and frameworks



Key takeaways

- **UNFCCC Decisions Provide a Core Framework for a Social Inclusion and Gender Approach in REDD+:** Cancun Agreements (Decision 1/CP.16), subsequent COP decisions, and the Belém Gender Action Plan establish explicit requirements for social inclusion and gender considerations, and protection of Indigenous Peoples' and local communities' rights in REDD+.
- **International Human Rights Instruments Support Social Inclusion and Gender:** CEDAW, UNDRIP, and other conventions provide legal and normative foundations for embedding equality, equity, and human rights into REDD+ design and implementation.
- **REDD+-related Safeguards and Standards also Operationalize a Social Inclusion and Gender Approach:** Mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund, Verra JNR Framework, and ART-TREES provide practical guidance and mandatory requirements for stakeholder participation, grievance redress, benefit-sharing, and gender-responsive action, amongst others.
- **Integration Strengthens REDD+ Legitimacy and Effectiveness:** Aligning REDD+ actions with these decisions and standards ensures that social inclusion and gender considerations are not only recognized but meaningfully implemented, enhancing equity, accountability, and sustainability of interventions.

Module 3



Building blocks for designing an effective social inclusion and gender approach in REDD+



This module

This module introduces the key building blocks required to design and implement a socially inclusive and gender-responsive REDD+ approach. It highlights the contextual factors that shape REDD+ design, implementation, and results-based finance. It also explains how understanding these factors is critical to 1) addressing structural inequalities, 2) ensuring a rights-based approach is used, and 3) achieving equitable outcomes. Practical guidance and key questions are provided to help guide analysis of the possible REDD+ contextual factors that can inform and shape a social inclusion and gender approach.



You will be able to...

- Identify and analyze from a social inclusion and gender perspective REDD+ contextual factors which influence the design and implementation of REDD+ interventions.
- Understand the social inclusion and gender implications of key REDD+ contextual factors.
- Identify entry points to integrate social inclusion and gender considerations across a range of REDD+ contextual factors, such as drivers of deforestation, land tenure, governance, safeguards, modalities of REDD+ implementation, amongst others.

3.1 REDD+ contextual factors

Most countries have followed a phased approach to REDD+, starting with readiness (i.e. design) and gradually moving into implementation and results-based payment phases. Readiness refers to the phase during which capacities are built and the elements for REDD+ implementation are put in place, such policies and measures (PAMs), governance and stakeholder engagement processes, a National Strategy/Action Plan, a Safeguard Information System (SIS), a Forest Reference Emissions

Level (FREL) and a National Forest Monitoring System (NFMS).

An essential part of developing these different REDD+ building blocks in a socially inclusive and gender-responsive manner – ideally during the readiness phase – requires first an understanding of the different contextual factors that shape how REDD+ is designed and implemented. These contextual factors should be considered and taken into account within all three phases of REDD+, from readiness to implementation and results-based payments.



**LEARNING
TOOL**

Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) to identify the basics for designing an effective for social inclusion and gender approach.



While not exhaustive, presented below are some of the key REDD+ **contextual factors**. For each one, a rationale of its relevance – and the value of a social inclusion and gender approach within it – is provided. Key sample questions, to help guide identification of the different social and gender dimensions at play within it, are also provided.

Factor 1. Drivers of Deforestation and Forest Degradation

Why this is a contextual factor to consider

Drivers of deforestation are often rooted in underlying social, economic, gender, and power dynamics that affect groups differently and in unequal ways.

Key questions to ask

- Who is responsible for land-use change and forest loss?
- Who depends on forests for livelihoods and subsistence?
- Who controls land, resources, and decision-making processes?
- Which groups bear the greatest risks from both deforestation and REDD+ interventions?

Implication for a social inclusion and gender approach

A social inclusion and gender approach helps to understand these dynamics and identify how REDD+ action can be designed and implemented to not reinforce existing inequalities and instead address structural drivers affecting women, Indigenous Peoples, and other marginalized groups. It will also promote ownership of REDD+ action among national and local stakeholders (e.g. Indigenous People, local communities, women, youth, etc.), which in turn can promote the sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency of REDD+ action.

Factor 2. Land, Resource Rights, and Tenure Systems

Why this is a contextual factor to consider

Land and resource tenure determine who holds rights, who receives benefits, and who is exposed to risk. In many of the contexts and countries in which REDD+ is implemented, land tenure is contested, informal, or governed by customary law. Similarly, power structures, laws, customs, and cultural norms also often exist which can deny marginalized groups, such as Indigenous People and women, equal rights to land.

Key questions to ask

- Is there recognition of collective and customary tenure systems?
- Do women and other marginalized groups have equal land and resource rights?
- Is there alignment between statutory and customary claims?
- Is there risk of exclusion where tenure is informal or contested?

Implication for a social inclusion and gender approach

Secure and recognized tenure is both a human rights consideration and a core enabling condition for equitable benefit-sharing, safeguard compliance, and socially inclusive and gender-responsive REDD+ outcomes. Such rights must be respected and formally recognized, in which women and men equitably and actively participate in corresponding decision-making processes.³³

Did you know?

- Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including women, men and youth among them, steward at least 17% of the forest carbon – much of it on lands lacking full legal recognition.
- Empirical research shows that secure Indigenous Peoples and local community tenure is associated with significantly lower deforestation rates.²
- Globally, Indigenous Peoples and local communities customarily manage far more land than States formally recognize, revealing an implementation gap that is central to REDD+ risk management, safeguard compliance and equitable benefit-sharing.³

Sources: (1) RRI, 2018. A Global Baseline of Carbon Storage in Collective Lands. Available at https://rightsandresources.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/A-Global-Baseline_RRI_Sept-2018.pdf; (2) Camino et al., 2023. Indigenous Lands with Secure Land Tenure Can Reduce Forest Loss in Deforestation Hotspots; and (3) RRI, 2020. The Opportunity Framework.

Factor 3. Governance and Policy Frameworks

Why this is a contextual factor to consider

Governance and policies determine whose voices are included, whose rights are enforced and how benefits are shared.

Key questions to ask

- Is there evidence of transparency and accountability of forest governance to protect Indigenous, community, and women's rights?
- Is there equitable representation of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, and women in decision-making bodies?
- Are there functioning grievance redress and conflict-resolution mechanisms?
- Are policies aligned across sectors affecting forests and land use?

Implication for a social inclusion and gender approach

Strong, socially inclusive and gender-responsive governance reduces risks of elite capture, social exclusion, and inequitable distribution of REDD+ benefits.

Factor 4. Cultural, Social, and Gender Dynamics

Why this is a contextual factor to consider

Forest use, access and management are shaped by gender roles, cultural norms, and livelihood strategies. These dynamics can determine who participates in decision-making, who bears the costs of forest restrictions, and who benefits from REDD+.

Key questions to ask

- What is the gendered division of labour in forest and land use?
- Is there differential access to resources, finance, and information among women and other marginalized groups?
- What are the cultural institutions and customary governance systems in place?
- Are there any groups that may be unintentionally excluded from consultations?

Implication for a social inclusion and gender approach

Understanding these dynamics and taking them into account in REDD+ action helps to ensure that REDD+ policies and interventions do not undermine traditional practices or reinforce existing social and gender disparities.

Factor 5. REDD+ Safeguards Compliance and Implementation

Why this is a contextual factor to consider

Safeguards provide a framework to ensure REDD+ does no harm to local communities by establishing standards to protect rights, ensure meaningful participation, address social and gender inequalities, and design REDD+ actions that benefit all groups fairly.

Key questions to ask

- Are Indigenous Peoples, local communities and women equitably and actively engaged in the design and implementation of the SIS, safeguards Summary of Information (SOI), risk assessments, management measures, monitoring and reporting?
- Are grievance and redress mechanisms functioning?
- Is there evidence that participation, FPIC, and benefit-sharing commitments are implemented in practice?

Implication for a social inclusion and gender approach

Effective safeguards systems ensure that social inclusion, gender equality, rights protections, and risk mitigation measures are addressed and respected throughout REDD+ design, implementation, and results-based finance.

(Please see the UN-REDD [Safeguards Learning Journal](#) for more information)

Factor 6. Scope and Scale of REDD+ Action

Why this is a contextual factor to consider

The scope and scale of REDD+ (national, jurisdictional, or project level) determine how safeguards and a social inclusion and gender approach must be integrated in order to avoid adversely affecting communities and ecosystems.

Key questions to ask

- Is there alignment between national strategies, subnational programs, and projects?
- Are social inclusion and gender aspects integrated across all REDD+ policies and activities, not only in selected interventions?
- Is there integration of safeguards and equitable benefit-sharing and across REDD+ financing mechanisms?

Implication for a social inclusion and gender approach

A coherent social inclusion and gender approach across the entire scope and scale of REDD+ action helps prevent fragmentation and ensures consistent protection of rights and equitable outcomes for marginalized groups (e.g. Indigenous People, local communities, women, youth, etc.).

Factor 7. Modes of Implementation and Institutional Arrangements

Why this is a contextual factor to consider

Different implementation models (national programs, jurisdictional systems, project-scale initiatives) create different risks and opportunities for social inclusion and gender.

Key questions to ask

- What are the different implementation models (e.g. government-led jurisdictional programs, project-based initiatives, etc.)?
- Are there nesting arrangements in place between national and subnational systems?
- Is there consistency of safeguards, participation processes, and grievance mechanisms?

Implication for a social inclusion and gender approach

Embedding social inclusion and gender considerations within jurisdictional systems can strengthen consistency, reduce fragmentation, and improve overall environmental and social integrity of REDD+ action.

(Please see the UN-REDD [Safeguards](#) and [Nesting](#) Learning Journals for more information on REDD+ approach and scales.)

A socially inclusive and gender-responsive REDD+ approach is most catalytic and effective when incorporated from the earliest stages of REDD+ policy design through implementation, monitoring, and results-based finance, and applied consistently across scales and institutional arrangements. Doing so can help ensure REDD+ action supports good governance, upholds the rights and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples and local

communities, including both women and men among them, while also strengthening livelihoods and promoting equitable benefit-sharing.

The case study within Box 6 provides an illustrative example of the importance of considering and integrating social inclusion and gender aspects within these different REDD+ contextual factors.



Box 6.

Case study on promoting effective REDD+ implementation in Indonesia through strengthened customary forest governance³⁴

This case demonstrates how recognizing and reinforcing customary forest governance institutions can serve as a practical entry point for effective and locally grounded REDD+ implementation.

Indonesia's REDD+ Results-Based Payment (RBP) program has supported efforts to strengthen customary forest governance as a pathway to effective forest conservation. From 2014 to 2016, the country achieved significant reductions in emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, which were then rewarded by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) through a REDD+ results-based payments (RBP) project in 2020. Implemented from 2020-2025, this project supported implementation of Indonesia's national REDD+ strategy (STRANAS) and strengthened ongoing forest governance efforts.

One of the sites supported by Indonesia's REDD+ RBP project was the Kasepuhan Cibedug village. The village, which is only accessible on foot or motorbike, is led by the Kasepuhan Cibedug Indigenous Peoples, a subgroup of the larger Sundanese Indigenous community. The area is rich in biodiversity and home to the Kasepuhan Cibedug's customary forest.

Customary forests (known as *Adat* forests, a term denoting a complex system of traditional customs, norms, and customary laws governing Indigenous Peoples in Indonesia and Malaysia) are formally recognized under the Indonesian Constitution. The Kasepuhan Cibedug Indigenous Peoples depend on the forest for their livelihoods and the preservation of their unique socio-cultural traditions.

Recognizing the Kasepuhan Cibedug's strong customary institutions and traditional decision-making processes has been an important part of successfully engaging the community in REDD+ under the GCF REDD+ RBP project. For example, the custom of "peaceful talking" (or *mushawara*), where both women and men community come together to deliberate and find collective consensus on issues of dispute or discord, is an essential component of the community's local governance. Moreover, the vital role of women in sustainable forest management in the community is well-documented, as is the fluid nature of women's roles therein.

For communities like the Kasepuhan Cibedug Indigenous Peoples, preserving forests and supporting customary forest governance through REDD+ not only protects forests but helps them to preserve their unique traditions and practices, livelihoods, customary institutions, and socio-cultural heritage for future generations. This, in turn leads, to more effective REDD+ outcomes, especially considering that Indigenous Peoples and local communities hold a wealth of knowledge of forest systems and are often forest guardians working to sustainably manage and preserve the forests that are central to their traditions, cultures and livelihoods.

The results achieved in the Kasepuhan Cibedug village underscore the importance of a strong social inclusion and gender approach within customary forest governance arrangements, which seeks to ensure the meaningful and equitable participation of Indigenous Peoples as rights holders in REDD+, for achieving successful outcomes under REDD+.



Key takeaways

- **Gender and Social Inclusion Dimensions of REDD+ Contextual Factors Matter for Effective and Sustainable REDD+ Action:** Understanding the gender and social inclusion aspects within the various REDD+ contextual factors (e.g. drivers of deforestation, land tenure systems, governance frameworks, cultural and gender dynamics, safeguards, implementation modalities, etc.) is essential for designing and implementing effective socially inclusive and gender-responsive REDD+ interventions.
- **Early Integration is Critical:** Identifying gender and social inclusion aspects within the various REDD+ contextual factors and integrating them during the readiness phase—when policies, strategies, and institutional arrangements are developed—maximizes sustainability, ownership, and effectiveness of REDD+ action.

Module 4



Key elements to support an effective social inclusion and gender approach



This module

This module presents the essential elements required to operationalize an effective social inclusion and gender approach within REDD+. Building on the contextual factors identified in Module 3, it outlines practical tools, strategies, and interventions to ensure that REDD+ action ensures the meaningful, effective, and equitable involvement of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, and other marginalized or vulnerable groups as rights holders, rather than merely stakeholders. The module emphasizes stakeholder engagement, Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), gender mainstreaming, grievance redress mechanisms, equitable benefit sharing and monitoring and reporting as core components of socially inclusive and gender-responsive REDD+ action.



You will be able to...

- Apply stakeholder engagement tools, including mapping, analysis, and the development of Stakeholder Engagement Plans (SEP), to ensure meaningful and equitable participation of all relevant REDD+ actors.
- Understand, design and implement FPIC processes, including how to respect Indigenous Peoples' rights, governance structures, and cultural practices in this process.
- Conduct gender analyses and integrate gender considerations into REDD+ design, risk assessments, interventions, and monitoring frameworks.
- Design, assess and strengthen effective REDD+ grievance redress mechanisms that protect rights and provide a fair, transparent, and accessible process for stakeholders to raise concerns and ensure those concerns are addressed and resolved effectively.
- Understand the importance of recognizing rights, addressing power imbalances, and ensuring that REDD+ benefits – and associated decision-making spaces – are equitably shared among those who contribute most to REDD+ outcomes, such as Indigenous Peoples, forest-dependent communities, women and other marginalized groups.
- Design and apply socially inclusive and gender-responsive REDD+ monitoring frameworks that track progress through clear indicators, systematic data collection, and mechanisms for validation and adaptive management.

Guided by the contextual factors outlined in Module 3 – which help determine how, where, and at what scope and scale a social inclusion and gender approach should be applied – the

key elements for effectively operationalizing and integrating this approach into REDD+ action are listed below.



LEARNING TOOL

Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) to explore the key elements to support an effective social inclusion and gender approach.



4.1 Stakeholder engagement

4.1.1 What is stakeholder engagement?

Stakeholder engagement is an overarching term that encompasses “a range of activities and interactions with stakeholders throughout the project cycle”.³⁵ Stakeholder engagement is key to developing “strong, constructive, and responsive relationships that are critical for sound project design and implementation” and also “enhances project acceptance and ownership and strengthens the social and environmental sustainability and benefits of supported interventions.”³⁶ Stakeholder engagement is

important not only as a fundamental right, ensuring that people can participate in decisions that affect their lives, but also as a practical tool for achieving strong project outcomes.³⁷

Effective and meaningful stakeholder engagement supports participatory governance, environmental protection, gender equality, social inclusion, respect for human rights, and helps to prevent or resolve conflict.³⁸ Stakeholder participation in decision-making ranges from simply informing to full empowerment, generally categorized into five, often sequential, levels: Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate, and Empower (see Figure 2). These levels determine how much influence stakeholders have on project outcomes, ranging from low (one-way communication) to high (direct partnership or control).

Figure 2. Levels of stakeholder participation in decision making processes

<i>Increasing impact of stakeholders on project decisions</i>				
Inform	Consult	Collaborate	Consent	Empower
Provide stakeholders with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	Obtain stakeholder feedback on project analysis and design, alternatives and/or decisions and consider stakeholder concerns and aspirations	Partner with stakeholders in reaching all key project decisions and ensure stakeholder input incorporated to maximum extent possible	Respect freely given decisions of rights-holders to proceed or not proceed with project or certain project activities	Transfer control over decision-making, resources and activities to stakeholders

Source: UNDP (2017). “Guidance Note on UNDP Social and Environmental Standards (SES) Stakeholder Engagement”, and adapted from International Association for Public Participation, Public Participation Spectrum; UN-REDD Guidelines on Free, Prior and Informed Consent, Types of Participation

4.1.2 Identifying REDD+ stakeholders

The first step in stakeholder engagement is to accurately identify the relevant stakeholders. This should be done as early as possible.³⁹

In the context of REDD+, stakeholders are individuals or groups with a stake, interest or right in the forest land that will be affected negatively or positively by REDD+ activities.⁴⁰ The following (non-exhaustive) list sets out the main REDD+ stakeholders:⁴¹

Table 4. REDD+ stakeholders

Government agencies	REDD+ activities often require collaboration across and between ministries including finance, planning, rural development, agriculture, land, natural resources/forestry and between national and subnational levels.
Private sector entities	Relevant as landowners or managers, because of their role in the exploitation of natural resources, or as financiers of REDD+ action. Private sector actors in the following sectors can be relevant to REDD+: agriculture, energy, forestry and timber, mining, infrastructure, investment banking and forest carbon.
Civil society organizations (CSOs)⁴²	CSOs have vital roles to play as participants, legitimizers and endorsers of government policy and action, as watchdogs of the behavior of other public and private REDD+ stakeholders, and as collaborators in REDD+ efforts.
Indigenous Peoples⁴³	Indigenous Peoples have historical and intricate relationships with their lands, territories and resources. Many live in and around forests and have formal or customary rights to forested land. REDD+ efforts need to recognize that forests have multi-functional values and roles for indigenous peoples.
Forest-dependent and local communities	Forest-dependent and local communities are those: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that do not satisfy the criteria for Indigenous Peoples but have economic and non-economic relationship with forests, and rely on the ecosystem services they provide, such as clean water⁴⁴ and • that are explicitly acknowledged by the State, and which may be protected using legal means or de jure rights (formal users)⁴⁵ as opposed to forest users that lack official recognition and protection (informal users)
Smallholders⁴⁶	Those who own, manage or use forest lands or have resource endowments considered small compared to others in their region.

These last three groups and individuals, particularly marginalized groups within them, such as women, youth and persons with disabilities, are those with potentially the most to gain or lose through REDD+ and special attention should be paid to them.

4.1.3 Stakeholder engagement in REDD+

Stakeholder engagement should start early in REDD+ design (e.g. in identification of drivers of deforestation and forest degradation and environmental and social risks as well as

development of NS/APs and PAMs) and then carried out within REDD+ implementation and payment for results. Stakeholders, across all groups and genders, must be provided with opportunities and be empowered to express their views at all points in the program and/or project decision-making process, as well as have their perspectives considered and taken into account.

While there are a number of tools that are useful when carrying out a stakeholder engagement process, for the purposes of this discussion, this section specifically looks at the following two main tools for integrating a social inclusion and a

gender approach into stakeholder engagement within REDD+:

- Stakeholder mapping and analysis
- Stakeholder Engagement Plan

This said, there are also additional tools not discussed here, which can also be helpful in designing, implementing and monitoring stakeholder engagement processes. To learn more about these tools, please see the UN-REDD Stakeholder Engagement Learning Journal located [here](#).

4.1.3.1 Stakeholder mapping and analysis

An important component of effective stakeholder engagement is understanding how different stakeholders are likely to be affected by the project and therefore how to engage them. This is referred to as “stakeholder mapping and analysis”, which can be understood as “the process of identifying a project’s key stakeholders and assessing their interests in the project and the ways in which these stakeholders may influence the project’s outcomes.”⁴⁷ It is therefore used “to identify who should be engaged in relation to REDD+, and to what extent.”⁴⁸

Stakeholder analysis accordingly provides a crucial “understanding of power relations and potential alliances and conflicts among stakeholders [and] provides the foundation for planning stakeholder engagement throughout the project cycle.”⁴⁹ It helps to ensure that those who are often excluded, particularly Indigenous People, local communities, women and other vulnerable groups (e.g. youth and persons with disabilities) are meaningfully represented in consultation and consent processes, and associated governance structures, which are central to both the effectiveness and legitimacy of REDD+.

Stakeholder mapping and analysis can help:

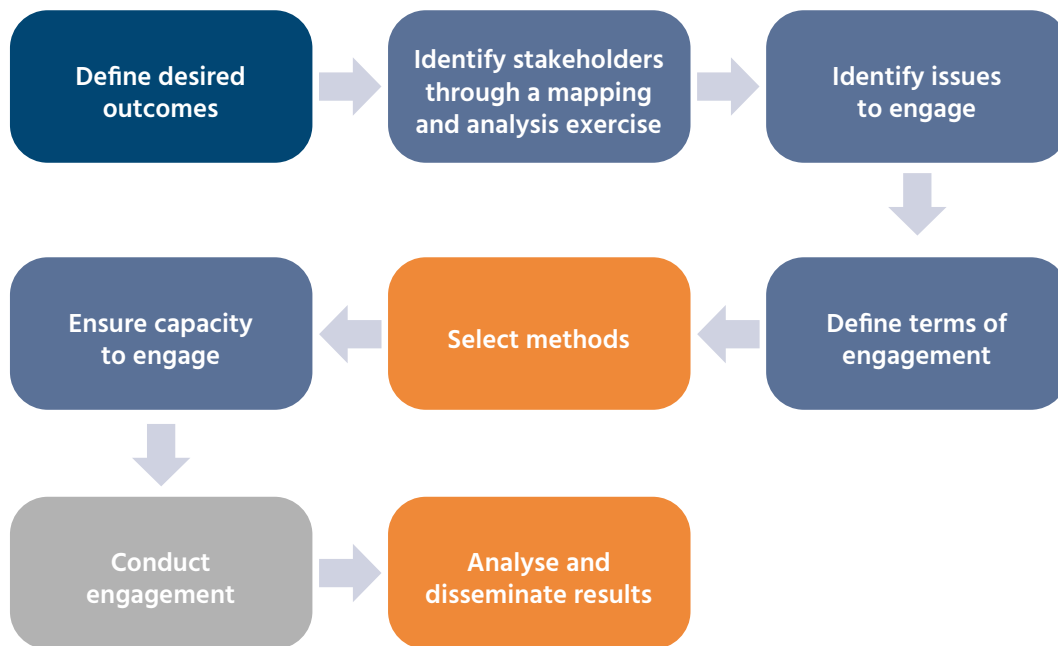
- Identify key government ministries that will need to be engaged as well as their views on stakeholder engagement and REDD+;

- Identify other key stakeholder groups and their representative institutions and their views on stakeholder engagement and REDD+;
- Develop plans to address the issue of legitimate representation within bodies or platforms;
- Assess where the rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities need to be strengthened⁵⁰.

4.1.3.2 Stakeholder engagement plan

In order to put the stakeholders and rightsholders mapping and analysis into action, a Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) can be used. The SEP draws on the results of stakeholder mapping, stakeholder analysis and other related analyses (e.g. capacity building needs assessment, gender analysis, etc.) to define how engagement will be carried out. It sets out the intended objectives and outcomes of engagement; distinguishes appropriate types of engagement for different stakeholder groups (which is based on capacities, literacy levels, access to information, location, etc.); identifies target audiences, communication channels, and tailored key messages; and selects suitable tools and activities, such as printed materials or audio-visual media. It also clarifies how engagement links to broader communication efforts and outlines steps to strengthen legitimate representation and inclusive decision-making where needed.⁵¹

In other words, the SEP provides a “roadmap” as to “when, how and with whom consultations and exchanges should be undertaken” with stakeholders throughout the life of the project.⁵² The SEP also defines in detail how the steps for consultation and participation process, as shown in Figure 3, should be designed and implemented. (To note, the steps noted below may be repeated and reordered, depending on the country context.)

Figure 3. Steps for a consultation and participation process⁵³

Key to note, is that for Indigenous Peoples, engagement must recognize them as rights-holders, not only stakeholders, consistent with UNDRIP and relevant human rights standards. Engagement processes, as defined in the SEP, should also therefore respect customary institutions, traditional decision-making systems and governance, ensuring equitable inclusion

of Indigenous women, youth and elders, and upholding Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). (For more information on FPIC, please see Section 4.2 below.)

For additional detailed guidance on which elements should be addressed in a comprehensive SEP, please see Annex 1.



Box 7.

Helpful tool to promote gender-responsive REDD+ workshops and consultations

UN-REDD's [Checklist for Gender-Responsive Workshops](#) can act as an helpful tool to guide REDD+ countries and development practitioners in meaningfully integrating a gender perspective into their REDD+ efforts to build capacity and organize inclusive consultation and engagement processes.

This two-page checklist – available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#) – suggests a range of practical steps to make workshops gender responsive, with guidance on design, implementation, monitoring and reporting. The checklist provides tips on how to promote women's meaningful and equitable participation as well as reminds organizers to discuss the importance of gender with workshop facilitators and to set clear targets for women's participation. The concise and easy-to-use checklist also includes helpful links to additional documentation. With this checklist in hand, organizers will be able to promote that all women and men REDD+ stakeholders equitably and meaningfully participate in national and subnational REDD+ processes and actions.

4.2 Free prior and informed consent (FPIC)

FPIC is a fundamental social inclusion tool because it ensures that all people—especially those who are typically excluded—have the right, opportunity, and power to influence decisions that affect their lands, resources, and lives.

4.2.1 What is FPIC?

FPIC is a principle and a legal norm that was developed to protect Indigenous Peoples' collective rights, and specifically their right to self-determination, their right to be consulted, their right to participate in decisions that may affect them, and most importantly, their rights to their lands and resources. In practice, FPIC may be understood as a process where Indigenous Peoples who may be affected by a programme are meaningfully engaged in programme design, implementation and decision-making, are fully informed and are able to grant or deny consent prior to implementation of any activities that may affect them.

4.2.2 Why is FPIC needed?

Historically, Indigenous Peoples around the world have commonly experienced discrimination, land dispossession, and marginalization from decisions that affect them. In response to this, Indigenous representatives, and their advocates, have campaigned for decades to have their rights recognized, particularly their rights to their lands and resources, and their right to determine their own developmental priorities. FPIC is derived from these rights and is a safeguard to ensure that Indigenous Peoples' rights are respected in practice, and not just in theory.

4.2.3 Who seeks FPIC?

Under international law, States have a duty to ensure FPIC is applied and sought in the context of applicable activities. States have a duty to make effective and protect the rights of

Indigenous Peoples, including through FPIC in the context of applicable activities.

4.2.4 From whom should FPIC be sought?

An FPIC process should begin with engagement and consultation with the self-determined representatives of the Indigenous Peoples who may be affected by a programme or its activities. These might initially be regional organizations, and then as the programme details become more granular, engagement could take place with more local representatives, and ultimately with the communities themselves. It is important to respect the governance structures, norms, values and customs of the peoples and communities in question and the consultation and decision-making methods they utilize. However, programme developers/teams will also need to ensure that all customary and formal rights-holders are represented in the decision-making process, especially women, and that no affected community is excluded or over-looked.

Both the process and the outcomes of FPIC will always be context specific (even within a programme this context varies). Therefore, it is key that the FPIC processes are designed in partnership with the affected Indigenous Peoples in question – including by identifying exactly from whom FPIC would be sought and understanding how decision-making is done in those communities and on the issues in question. Some Indigenous communities might have established leadership structures where only a few are designated by the peoples to make the decision on behalf of the community. Other Indigenous communities might have practices and customary laws that require consensual decision-making at the community level. The aim of the early consultation phase is to gain an understanding of these norms and practices, in order to design and implement the FPIC process and outcomes in compliance with these norms. If a programme will affect multiple Indigenous communities, a one-size-fits-all approach to FPIC will not work. In such cases, tailored FPIC processes will need to be agreed with the

affected Indigenous communities and in relation to the particular activities that may affect them.

It should be noted that Indigenous representative organizations, both at the regional and local level, are increasingly developing Consultation/FPIC Protocols, in which they outline how they expect a programme developer to engage with them and seek their consent. Where these protocols have been developed, they should be followed by the programme developers/teams, in consultation with the affected Indigenous Peoples. Where such protocols have not been developed yet, the programme should support communities to clarify how they would like to be consulted.

Programme developers/teams must engage early in the programme cycle with affected peoples and their designated representatives and advisors, to clarify these issues so that they can be built into the FPIC process throughout programme development and implementation.

4.2.5 When during the programme cycle should FPIC take place?

FPIC is an ongoing and iterative process and will involve various decision-making points during the programme cycle. It should therefore be planned early and implemented throughout the programme cycle.

If the programme could take place in Indigenous territories and/or affect Indigenous Peoples' rights, lands, territories, resources and traditional livelihoods, consultations on programme design, potential impacts, and whether and how FPIC will be applied should be initiated as soon as is feasible in the programme design phase. If it is clear that FPIC is required, the consultation process should begin before the programme is approved, through early engagement with Indigenous Peoples through their designated representatives. If insufficient information is available regarding programme sites and activities at this stage, engagement with a broader national or regional umbrella organization or

selected Indigenous leaders that are trusted and representative could be an effective means of gauging initial interest, support, needs, requests and concerns over the proposed programme, and mapping out an initial plan for how FPIC could be implemented during programme implementation. This first stage of engagement should then be ground-truthed and checked with the affected Indigenous Peoples' communities once programme sites and activities are more clearly defined. Ultimately, consent should be sought from the affected Indigenous Peoples before implementing any specified programme activity that might impact Indigenous Peoples' rights, lands, territories, resources, traditional livelihoods, and Cultural Heritage.

4.2.6 What is the appropriate scope/scale of FPIC?

The FPIC requirement(s) for a given programme should be determined based on the potential impacts of the programme's activities, individually and collectively. When one programme activity requires FPIC that does not mean that FPIC is required for the entire programme or all activities. However, if all programme activities are located in Indigenous Peoples' lands, then FPIC would likely be required for the entire programme.

4.2.7 How to ensure gender equity in an FPIC process while also respecting traditional governance and decision-making processes?

While an FPIC process should be implemented according to the traditional decision-making processes of a particular Indigenous Peoples, the process must also strike a balance between these traditional decision-making processes and international standards of inclusiveness, particularly ensuring that women are also included in FPIC processes. As there is no one-size-fits-all solution, the programme developers/teams will need to consult with Indigenous

Peoples' representatives, as well as with experts in implementing consultation processes with Indigenous Peoples, to ensure that all groups in a community are involved in FPIC processes. Support on this matter can be sought through other parties that have a trusted relationship with the communities or the Indigenous Peoples' representative organizations in question. This could be a government or non-government organization or independent facilitator or expert consultants. These organizations and individuals can support the programme in initially determining the best approach to balancing cultural sensitivity and the rights of women.

4.2.8 What if the FPIC process does not result in consent?

In these cases, programme developers/teams should first engage further to understand

the basis for the rejection of the programme or specific activities, and ascertain whether there are aspects that can be changed to address any potential concerns. If the lack of consent remains, then programme developers/teams should carefully consider whether the programme can continue while respecting Indigenous Peoples' rights and not impacting their territories as part of the programme's area of influence. If so, the programme should be revised to ensure that the activities for which FPIC was not achieved are no longer included in the programme. The programme developers/teams should also provide clear justification and evidence that the remaining activities of the programme will not negatively impact Indigenous Peoples' rights. Finally, if the programme is occurring entirely on lands where communities have withheld consent, the programme will need to be reconsidered, redesigned or cancelled.



Box 8.

Additional resources on implementing FPIC

There are a number of publicly available resources on FPIC. Key resources that can be of particular use are as follows:

- **FPIC 360:** Since 2017, Equitable Origin and the Roundtable for Sustainable Biomaterials (RSB) have been working jointly on a programme funded through the ISEAL Innovations Fund to research and develop a means of helping assurance providers verify whether FPIC has been achieved. The key output from this programme is a draft framework for a tool that can be used to aid the verification process. The tool is multi-sided, facilitating a "co-audit" process that is jointly implemented by the assurance provider and by the affected Indigenous Peoples' community.
- **UN-REDD Guidelines on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (2013):** This resource provides detailed information on how to implement FPIC in the context of UN-REDD programmes.
- **FAO guide on Respecting free, prior and informed consent: Practical guidance for governments, companies, NGOs, Indigenous Peoples and local communities in relation to land acquisition (2014):** This guide breaks down an FPIC implementation process into suggested steps, including addressing various potential challenges.
- **Accountability Framework Operational Guidance on Free, Prior and Informed Consent (2019):** This Guidance describes 13 key elements of an effective FPIC process, as well as an Annex addressing common implementation challenges.
- **The Indigenous Navigator:** The Indigenous Navigator is a framework and set of tools for and by Indigenous Peoples to systematically monitor the level of recognition and implementation of their rights. While this website is not specifically focused on FPIC, it can provide useful data for NCE programme developers/teams seeking to develop and implement FPIC processes, as well as indicators to monitoring.

- **Global ICCA Registry hosted by the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre:** The ICCA Registry website is an online information platform for Indigenous and Community Conserved Areas, where communities themselves provide data, case studies, maps, photos and stories which result in useful statistics and analysis on featured ICCAs around the world.
- **LandMark:** LandMark is an online, interactive global platform that provides maps and other information on lands that are collectively held and used by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. This platform can provide useful data for programme developers/teams seeking to develop and implement FPIC processes.



Box 9.

Examples of an FPIC protocol developed by Indigenous communities

Indigenous Peoples have increasingly been developing their own consultation and consent protocols, also known as “FPIC protocols”, defining how they are to be consulted and their FPIC sought. There are a number of webpages and databases where examples of these protocols can be found:

- The [Observatory of Community Protocols for Consultation and Free Prior and Informed Consent](#) provides a database of FPIC protocols largely from Indigenous communities in Central and South America
- [Example of an FPIC Protocol](#) developed by communities in Nepal
- [Biocultural Community Protocols](#)



Box 10.

Case study on designing and implementing FPIC in REDD+ in Ecuador⁵⁴

This case study shows how FPIC can be formalized within national legal frameworks and adequately resourced to support meaningful Indigenous participation in REDD+ implementation.

Context

Ecuador began engaging with REDD+ in 2008 and by 2019, it had completed all three phases of REDD+ under the UNFCCC process. In 2017, Ecuador received funding from the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Global Environment Facility (GEF) to support the implementation of PROAmazonía (the Amazonian Integrated Forest Conservation and Sustainable Production Program), a national initiative led by the Ministry of Environment, Water and Ecological Transition (MAATE) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MAG), with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

A key aspect of the REDD+ process in Ecuador is the commitment to ensuring the full and effective participation of Indigenous Peoples in the design and implementation of REDD+, and that ultimately REDD+ was executed in Indigenous Peoples' territories with FPIC.

Constitutional recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights

The 2008 Ecuadorian Constitution enshrines Indigenous Peoples' ownership rights over their ancestral and community lands and territories, including the right to participate in the use, administration, and conservation of natural renewable resources located on these lands. The aim of consultation rights under Article 57 is to guarantee a FPIC process in relation to plans, programmes, and projects related to natural resource exploitation.⁵⁵

Evolution of political will to support FPIC

Despite the constitutional protections in place for Indigenous Peoples' rights, in practice, their decisions to withhold consent are often not fully respected, particularly in large-scale development projects. However, in the context of REDD+, MAATE demonstrated a commitment to adapt its way of working with Indigenous Peoples, and to implement effective consultation and participation processes. FPIC is now mandatory in the National Program of Reforestation (PNRP) and legally binding for implementing restoration initiatives on Indigenous Peoples' collective lands.

Participatory design and implementation

As part of the REDD+ Readiness Phase, between 2012 and 2016, National REDD+ Guidelines on Consultation for the Implementation of REDD+ Actions in Collective Lands and Territories (referred to as FPIC Guidelines) were developed and recognized by formal decree. The Guidelines' legal status was formalized by Ministerial Decree No. 116 of November 7, 2016, thereby creating a specific legal framework around consultation and FPIC that is adapted to REDD+.

The REDD+ FPIC Guidelines clarify that internal decisions must be taken in accordance with the community's own processes and governance structures, and be inclusive of all sectors of the community, including women, youth, elders, and persons with disabilities. External actors (the State or its implementing agencies) must respect the principle of non-interference. To record FPIC processes and their outcomes, projects must maintain a range of documentation including meeting recordings, agreements, photos, informational materials, community characterizations, FPIC methodologies, community statutes, land titles, leadership appointments, official communications, and project details and results. By providing an archive of all aspects of the processes, communities are provided with a road map to implementation that provides a vast array of evidence demonstrating that respect for FPIC is possible and leads to successful outcomes.

Resourcing of the FPIC process: Time and budget

For participatory rights to be guaranteed, it is imperative that sufficient funding is budgeted, and adequate time is allocated to the consultation processes. Between 2018 and 2024, over USD 13 million was strategically invested to advance the rights, priorities, and participation of Indigenous Peoples in forest conservation and sustainable development in the Ecuadorian Amazon. The budget for these activities was secured and the projects implemented in a way that enabled consultation processes to run in parallel with participatory design. Ecuador's REDD+ consultation experiences demonstrate that for participatory rights to be guaranteed, realistic estimates of these costs and timeframes need to be budgeted into programs.

Outcome of the FPIC process: Life plans

As a result of the FPIC processes, Life Plans were developed as frameworks for communities to enshrine their decisions on forest restoration, conservation and management projects. The Life Plans helped to:

- ensure respect for documented community governance structures;
- pre-establish strategic direction, including plans for forest restoration (thereby allowing consultations to focus on implementation); and
- communicate the community's self-determined development priorities externally to a range of state and non-state actors.

The implementation of FPIC processes in forest initiatives helped ensure that they were culturally appropriate and guaranteed the communities' role in determining forest restoration methodologies and implementing project activities.

4.3 Gender mainstreaming

As set out in Module 1, gender mainstreaming refers to the process of assessing and integrating the implications for women and men within any planned action, including in legislation, policies and programs, wherein the ultimate goal is aimed at achieving gender equality.⁵⁶ It is a central component of a social inclusion and gender approach as it helps to guide where and how a gender approach should be incorporated into all REDD+ project and policy stages to ensure that all genders, across relevant stakeholder groups, are informed, actively and equitably involved in and benefit from REDD+.

Practically, this involves several key components and activities within REDD+ design, implementation, monitoring and reporting. While not exhaustive, a range of key steps are highlighted below to help provide guidance on how gender can be effectively mainstreamed within REDD+ action.

(To highlight, for more specific discussion on how to integrate gender into monitoring and reporting processes, please see [Section 4.6 below on "Monitoring and Reporting"](#).)

4.3.1 Undertake a gender analysis

As with the stakeholder analysis process, a gender analysis is essential to a social inclusion and gender approach because it can help reveal gendered patterns of resource use, decision-making power, benefit access, and exposure to risks. It enables REDD+ programs to design their actions in a socially inclusive and gender-responsive manner and ensure that women are meaningfully represented in consultation, consent processes, and governance structures. Ideally it should be undertaken during the REDD+ readiness process.

Figure 4 below provides a depiction of some of the political, socio-economic and cultural barriers faced by women in the forestry sector, of which a gender analysis can help to identify and shed light on. In the illustration, there are a range of barriers which are limiting women's involvement in REDD+ processes and access to corresponding information, technology sources (e.g. community meetings, pamphlets, cell phones, radios, etc.) and financing.

Figure 4. Women's barriers in REDD+



Source: UN-REDD Programme (2024). Available at: <https://reddacademy.in.howspace.com/gender-publications>

A gender analysis, in other words, helps to explore the roles, needs, priorities, and opportunities of different stakeholders, including women, men, and youth, within their specific context, and provides sex-disaggregated baseline data for monitoring. Its findings and recommendations should then inform a range

of REDD+ work areas, including but not limited to 1) the design and implementation of REDD+ policies and NSs/APs; 2) REDD+ safeguards; 3) stakeholder engagement; 4) benefit sharing arrangements; and 5) monitoring and reporting frameworks.⁵⁷ Please see Box 11 for a listing of key steps of a gender analysis.



Box 11.

Key steps of a gender analysis

1. Define clearly the context and issue(s) to be analyzed through a gender lens.
2. Clarify the objectives and guiding questions to inform programme or policy design.
3. Engage gender specialists to guide the process—from design to data analysis to strategic recommendations and action planning.
4. Gather gender data from primary and secondary sources, disaggregated by gender and other identity markers (e.g. age, etc.). Note where data gaps exist.
5. Map the socio-cultural, economic and institutional context, including actions taken by governments, civil society, women's groups and UN agencies.
6. Engage diverse stakeholders—women, men, and non-binary individuals—in identifying needs and inequalities.
7. Analyze data through an intersectional lens, examining gender roles, the sexual division of labor, access and control over resources, time poverty, power relations, legal rights and systemic barriers.
8. Identify constraints and opportunities faced by different gender groups in relation to the issue or policy being addressed and frame strategic recommendations.

Source: UNDP (2025). Investing in Gender Equality: UNDP Gender Marker, Tracking gender related investments and expenditures in Quantum. Available at <https://www.undp.org/publications/investing-gender-equality-undp-gender-marker-tracking-gender-related-investments-and-expenditures-quantum>.



Box 12.

Additional resources on gender analyses and related frameworks

- UNDP. (2016). [Guidance Note on How to Conduct a Gender Analysis](#).
- International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). (2021). [Gender analysis guide](#).
- European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). (2019). [Gender analysis methods and tools](#).
- International Labour Organization (ILO). (2023). [Guidance note on intersectionality, racial discrimination and protection of minorities](#).
- UN Women. (2021). [Intersectionality resource guide and toolkit](#).

4.3.2 Integrate gender into REDD+ risk analyses

Integrating gender into risk analyses into REDD+, and more specifically, within environmental and social risks management frameworks for REDD+ safeguards, is essential for two main reasons.

1. It allows for the identification of whether REDD+ action and related interventions could create or exacerbate gender-related risks for marginalized groups—such as women, youth, or others—and determine whether existing gender inequalities could be worsened. (A gender analysis can serve as a key information source for identifying such risks.)
2. It helps in the development to prevent and/or mitigate such potential negative impacts of REDD+ action on women and other marginalized groups, which in turn creates more effective, equitable and sustainable REDD+ outcomes.

Gender risks should be identified during REDD+ readiness/design so that appropriate mitigation and gender intervention strategies can be built into the project before implementation begins. Examples of gender-related risks in REDD+ can include:

- Inaccurately identifying primary forest stakeholders;
- Creating inequitable benefit-sharing systems;
- Reinforcing unequal land and resource rights;
- Increasing women's workload;
- Further marginalizing women in decision-making processes.

Possible mitigation measures to address such risks can include but are not limited to 1) conducting targeted training for women on forest management and climate-smart agricultural practices; 2) sensitizing male stakeholders on gender issues; and 3) working to formalize women's land and use rights and associated decision-making spaces to promote equitable sharing of REDD+ benefits. (Please see Table 5 below for a detailed list of additional gender actions and activities that be undertaken in REDD+ interventions to avoid and/or minimize potential gender-related risks.)

Integrating a gender-responsive approach within environmental and social risks management frameworks helps to ensure that all genders, from affected stakeholder groups, have equal opportunities to inform, participate in, and benefit from REDD+ action.

4.3.3 Define gender intervention strategies

Defining gender intervention strategies is also a key step in transforming the gender analysis into actionable, structural, or behavioral changes within REDD+ action. Such strategies can be defined through a Theory of Change and project priorities, in which strategies are selected that will drive the desired change and target the root causes of gender inequalities and any risks, gaps and barriers identified.

In this process, it is also important to assess partners' and institutions' capacities from a gender perspective and identify how different actors can contribute to and/or hinder the identified gender priorities. In practice, this could include involving advocates for gender equality and women's rights, identifying actions to strengthen relations between women and men, and addressing potential conflicts between actors when shifting power dynamics. Also, while this process is ideally undertaken during the design phase, it is equally important to hold regular check-ins—such as monthly meetings—to assess progress, monitor persistent barriers, and identify emerging gaps.

Through this process, gender-responsive goals, actions and indicators can be identified and then directly integrated into the project's design and implementation as well as monitoring and reporting processes.

4.3.4 Mainstream gender into REDD+ objectives and activities

Mainstreaming gender into project objectives and activities helps to move from the 'theory'

of the gender intervention strategy to the practical application of 'how' the strategy is then implemented and monitored.

Mainstreaming gender fully into REDD+-related objectives and activities is an essential part in ensuring that gender equality and women's empowerment concepts are meaningfully addressed throughout the REDD+ project and policy cycle. It requires gender perspectives to be incorporated throughout REDD+ interventions and activities rather than confined to a limited set of interventions. Gender considerations should be embedded during both project design and implementation and subsequently assessed during monitoring and reporting. In this process, specific gender-related results should also be included to promote that REDD+ action is not just "adding women and stirring" but rather reducing gender inequality and empowering women.

As depicted in Figure 5, mainstreaming gender can have a catalytic impact not just on women's lives but also in helping to combat climate change, preserve forests and improve the livelihoods for themselves and their families.

Figure 5. Catalytic impact of integrating a gender perspective within land tenure



Source: UN-REDD Programme (2024). Available at: <https://reddacademy.in.howspace.com/gender-publications>

There are a range of effective gender measures that can be undertaken to mainstream gender into REDD+ action and associated work streams. While not exhaustive, Table 5 provides a sample

list of gender actions and related activities that can and should be undertaken to mainstream gender within REDD+ interventions.

Table 5. Sample gender actions and corresponding examples of gender activities⁵⁸

Gender action	Examples of gender-related activities (not exhaustive)
Collection of gender-disaggregated data and development of a gender baseline	Develop a methodology, procedure, etc., to collect gender-disaggregated and other gender-related data
	Carry out a gender analysis
	Collect information and developed gender baselines to monitor impacts
Integration of gender expertise	Hire gender specialist to support REDD+ actions
	Consult with women's and gender-focused groups/networks to help guide implementation and engage with Indigenous Peoples and local communities effectively Include National Women's Mechanism as a key partner in project design and/or country REDD+ action and implementation
Allocation of budget to support gender activities	Dedicate/earmark adequate project funds for gender through a specific budget line in budget for gender specific activities and/or 2) budget allocated to support the hiring of a gender specialist
Integration of gender-responsive monitoring and reporting	Disaggregate data by gender and age for activities involving or impacting people
	Integrate gender indicators, targets and/or criteria within monitoring frameworks
	Report on impacts related to gender equality or women's empowerment
Promotion of equitable and effective participation of women	Carry out activities to guarantee participation of women's and youth groups, CSOs, etc., in REDD+ design, implementation, monitoring and reporting) (e.g. through consultations, dialogue spaces, focus groups, etc.)
	Project stakeholder engagement strategy includes gender-related stakeholder groups, such as women's and youth groups/CSOs, women's ministries, forums and/or departments, etc.
	Address barriers that prevent women from fully and effectively participating (e.g. location, timing, childcare, funding format, undertaking any necessary capacity-building, etc.) Women's mobility, workload, schedules and cultural restrictions taken into account, especially when planning meetings, interviews, consultations and workshops
Promotion of women's equitable involvement and leadership in decision-making	Increase women's participation in leadership and decision-making spaces through proactive steps (e.g. quotas, mentorship programmes, capacity-building, sensitization, including with men and community leaders, etc.)
	Train women in leadership skills and decision-making processes
	Promote the associativity of women through forums, exchange sessions, etc. Create a secure and democratic voting process for project decisions to ensure that women's perspectives and voices have the same value as those of men. (The process should be adapted from traditional structures.)

Gender action	Examples of gender-related activities (not exhaustive)
Inclusion of comprehensive gender capacity-building efforts with project stakeholders and staff	<p>Carry out activities to strengthen institutional/internal capacities on gender equality and forests</p> <hr/> <p>Develop capacity-building methodology and manuals that use various techniques and which can be tailored to the needs of different actors, including women (even those with informal education)</p>
Promotion of women's equitable and active inclusion in the project's training and capacity-building efforts	<p>Recognize women's knowledge and skills with respect to project activities to identify gaps, strengths and needs, and address any gaps identified</p> <hr/> <p>Organize targeted sessions for women only in situations where gender inequalities or discrimination prevent women from fully and effectively engaging in meetings and workshops; ensure the information covered is the same</p>
Improvement in women's access to finance opportunities	<p>Design finance schemes/incentives that include gender criteria to address prevalent gender inequalities that limit women's access to finance opportunities</p> <hr/> <p>Set a prioritization criterion to target women entrepreneurs/groups, etc., in finance opportunities</p>
Promotion of gender equitable project benefit-sharing arrangements	<p>Address inequalities that affect women's access to, and control of the resources or benefits associated with the project.</p> <hr/> <p>Offer different types of benefits (for example, cash, non-monetary, services) that women will be able to access and which they will be able to control.</p> <hr/> <p>In cases of joint ownership, deposit any monetary benefits into women's account.</p> <hr/> <p>Establish an external mediation plan for situations where women's needs and preferences are excluded.</p>
Use of gender-responsive communication	<p>Develop communication products that use gender-sensitive language and images</p> <hr/> <p>Use communication uses messages that represent both men and women as important actors in conservation and ensure that they do not reaffirm gender inequalities (roles, stereotypes, cultural practices) in any communication strategy or product</p>
Integration of measures to address risks of gender-based violence / sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment (GBV/SEAH)	<p>Raise awareness of risks of GBV/SEAH</p> <hr/> <p>Create mechanisms for victims of GBV/SEAH to safely and anonymously report cases and seek help</p> <hr/> <p>Developing mechanisms developed to punish perpetrators of GBV/SEAH</p>



Box 13.

Gender action plan

A gender action plan (GAP) is a constructive tool that forms the basis for operationalizing the results and recommendations of the gender analysis and can help implement and guide the monitoring of the gender intervention strategy.

A GAP contains specific gender activities, such as those listed above in Table 5, which need to be considered in project design and during the implementation of project activities. It helps a project advance on gender equality and women's empowerment and helps to minimize social and gender-related project risks in its actions. GAPS also include clear targets, gender design features and measurable performance indicators, with baseline data for comparability, to ensure women's participation and benefits as well as gender equality are promoted.⁵⁹

For more information, the following resources can be helpful tools when developing GAPS:

1. Green Climate Fund. (2019). [Gender assessment and action plan template](#).
2. Asian Development Bank. (2013). [Preparing a project gender action plan](#).

4.4 Functioning grievance redress mechanisms (GRM)

4.4.1 Designing effective GRMs

Given that the introduction of REDD+ in participating countries and jurisdictions "is likely to have a significant impact on the dynamics of conflicts over forest resources, and on land, oil, gas, minerals and other valuable resources in forested areas", it is crucial that countries "strengthen their capacity for grievance resolution in order to respond to contentious issues, complaints and disputes."⁶⁰ Fundamental to grievance resolution is establishing a Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM). GRMs, for the purposes of REDD+, are "organizational systems and resources established by national government agencies (or, as appropriate, by regional or municipal agencies) to receive and address concerns about the impact of their policies, programs and operations on external stakeholders."⁶¹ They are specifically for complaints relating to REDD+, to provide "recourse for situations in which, despite proactive stakeholder engagement, some stakeholders have a concern about a project or program's potential impacts on them".⁶²

Having a functional, effective GRM is crucial for a social inclusion and gender approach to REDD+, because it provides a safe, accessible and culturally appropriate way for affected people to raise concerns and seek remedy without fear of retaliation. It helps ensure accountability, prevent harm, and promote equitable participation and benefits throughout REDD+ implementation.

In order to be effective and functional, GRMs must be designed appropriately. Several fundamental principles should guide their design. These include:⁶³

- **Legitimacy:** building trust among the stakeholders, the mechanism is designed to serve and ensure accountability for conducting grievance processes in a fair and transparent manner.
- **Accessibility:** being known to all stakeholder groups for those use they are intended, they are designed to serve and providing adequate assistance (consider barriers to access such as language, literacy, costs, physical location and fears of reprisal).
- **Predictability:** providing a clear and well-communicated procedure, setting out the

timeframe for each stage, and clarity on the types of process and outcome available and means of monitoring.

- **Equity:** aiming to guarantee that aggrieved parties have reasonable access to sources of information, advice and expertise necessary to engage in a grievance process on fair, informed and respectful terms.
- **Transparency:** keeping the parties to a grievance informed about progress and providing adequate information about the GRM's performance.
- **Rights compatibility:** outcomes are consistent with applicable national and internationally recognized rights.
- **Enabling continuous learning:** identifying lessons for improving the GRM and preventing future grievances and harms.
- **Engagement and dialogue:** consulting the relevant stakeholder groups on the design and performance of the GRM and focusing on dialogue as the means to address and resolve grievances.

Where consistent with international human rights standards, GRMs should recognize and interface with Indigenous Peoples' customary justice and dispute-resolution systems. In contexts where Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth and environmental defenders may face intimidation or retaliation, GRMs must incorporate explicit anti-reprisal safeguards. This includes adopting a clear anti-reprisal policy, establishing confidential and anonymous intake channels, and ensuring that complaints can be submitted in Indigenous and local languages and through culturally appropriate formats. GRMs should include survivor-centered protocols for handling gender-based violence. Where risks or allegations involve threats, coercion or violence, the mechanism should provide independent escalation pathways such as referral to national human rights institutions.

4.4.2 Operationalizing the GRM

Dealing with grievances effectively depends on having a well-designed GRM and managing complaints according to the following steps:⁶⁴

- **Registering and receiving** the complaint through a variety of channels and logging and recording those grievances in a centralised database.
- **Acknowledging receipt** of the complaint in a timely manner including a description of the process and timeline to be followed in dealing with the complaint.
- **Assessing eligibility** of the complaint according to the predetermined eligibility criteria.
- **Developing a proposed response.** This would typically be one of three types of response, depending on the circumstances, namely:
 - Direct action to resolve the complaint;
 - Further assessment and engagement with the complainant and other stakeholders to determine jointly the best way to resolve the complaint; or
 - Determination that the complaint is not eligible for the GRM, either because it does not meet the basic eligibility criteria, or because another mechanism (within the organization or outside it) is the appropriate place for the complaint to go.
- **Communicating the proposed response to the complainant** in a timely manner, in writing and in a language accessible to the complainant (this can be further discussed in person or telephonically). If the complainant agrees with the proposed response, then the organization can proceed to implement it. If not, the complainant must be made aware of any other recourse that may be available, whether through the judicial system or other administrative channels. The outcome of discussions must be documented.

- **Implementing the response or reviewing the response** if it has been unsuccessful.
- **Closing out or referring the complaint**, depending on whether there has been agreement with the proposed response.
- **Communicating the results** of the GRM process with the affected community

Throughout the process, accurate documentation of steps taken, agreements reached and communication between parties must be carried out.

4.4.3 Assessing, strengthening or establishing national and sectoral GRMs

In many REDD+ contexts, grievance redress does not begin from a blank slate. National human rights institutions, ombuds offices, environmental complaint mechanisms, Indigenous affairs bodies, sectoral dispute-resolution systems, or customary justice structures may already exist. REDD+ Programmes should first assess whether existing national or sectoral grievance mechanisms can effectively address REDD+-related complaints before establishing new, parallel systems.

An initial institutional assessment should examine:

- **Mandate and jurisdiction:** Whether the existing mechanism has legal authority to receive and resolve complaints related to land, tenure, environmental impacts, Indigenous rights, gender discrimination, or benefit-sharing.
- **Independence and legitimacy:** Whether the mechanism operates independently from implementing agencies and is trusted by affected stakeholders.
- **Accessibility:** Whether marginalized groups—including Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, persons with disabilities, and remote forest communities—can safely access the mechanism.
- **Procedural clarity and timeliness:** Whether clear steps, timelines, and appeal processes are in place.
- **Rights compatibility:** Whether outcomes are consistent with national and internationally recognized human rights standards.
- **Capacity and resources:** Whether the mechanism has adequate staffing, technical expertise, and financial resources to handle REDD+-related grievances.
- **Protection from reprisals:** Whether safeguards exist to prevent intimidation or retaliation against complainants.

Where existing mechanisms meet these criteria, REDD+ programmes should formally link to and strengthen them rather than duplicate them. Strengthening may include:

- Clarifying jurisdiction over REDD+-related grievances;
- Providing training on safeguards, FPIC, gender-based violence, and defender-sensitive risk management;
- Supporting translation services and culturally appropriate outreach;
- Enhancing data management systems to track social and environmental complaints;
- Establishing coordination protocols between national, subnational, and project-level mechanisms.

Where gaps are identified—particularly in relation to accessibility, independence, anti-reprisal protections, survivor-centered handling of gender-based violence, or technical capacity—targeted institutional strengthening measures should be implemented. If no suitable mechanism exists, a REDD+-specific GRM may need to be established. In such cases, the design

should align with internationally recognized effectiveness criteria (legitimacy, accessibility, predictability, equity, transparency, rights compatibility, continuous learning, and dialogue) and ensure coordination with judicial and administrative systems.

Importantly, project-level grievance mechanisms should not replace national accountability systems. Rather, they should function as complementary entry points, with clear referral pathways to higher-level institutions where complaints involve systemic rights violations, criminal conduct, or serious environmental harm.

Regular review of GRM performance—including stakeholder satisfaction, resolution rates, and analysis of grievance patterns—should inform institutional strengthening and safeguards improvements over time. Integrating GRM data into national safeguards information systems enhances transparency and supports adaptive management.

4.5 Equitable benefit-sharing

Benefit-sharing arrangements is a central entry point for operationalizing a social inclusion and gender approach in REDD+. They directly determine who receives REDD+-related benefits, under what conditions, and with what degree of control, thereby shaping equity, incentives, and long-term legitimacy.

When designed through inclusive and gender-responsive processes—grounded in stakeholder and gender analysis and aligned with rights-based principles—benefit-sharing mechanisms can help address power imbalances and recognize the contributions and rights of Indigenous Peoples, women, and forest-dependent communities. Such mechanisms

should ensure that benefits reach those who bear opportunity costs, assume stewardship responsibilities, and face potential risks associated with REDD+ implementation. Gender-responsive design elements may include transparent allocation criteria, targeted measures to enhance women's access to financial and non-financial benefits, safeguards against elite capture, and monitoring systems that track differential impacts across genders and groups.

However, benefit-sharing arrangements cannot substitute for unresolved structural issues. If underlying rights and tenure concerns are not addressed, benefit-sharing mechanisms risk reinforcing existing inequalities or entrenching informal power hierarchies. Secure land and resource tenure—particularly for women and marginalized groups—is often a precondition for equitable access to REDD+ benefits. Without clarity on rights and decision-making authority, financial flows alone are unlikely to produce fair or durable outcomes.

When women hold secure rights to land and forest resources, they are better positioned to access finance, participate in governance, and invest in sustainable forest-based enterprises. This, in turn, strengthens household livelihoods, enhances forest stewardship, and supports climate mitigation objectives.

Benefit-sharing with Indigenous Peoples must be grounded in their status as rights-holders and in recognition of the value of their territories, governance systems, and stewardship contributions to emission reductions. Accordingly, mechanisms may include options such as co-ownership or shared governance of carbon assets (where consistent with national law), minimum revenue floors to provide predictable community benefits, and community-governed funds with transparent oversight and accountability processes.



Box 14.

Case study on designing equitable benefit sharing: Ghana's experience with the TREES Program⁶⁵

This case highlights how a participatory Benefit Sharing Plan (BSP) can operationalize principles of equity, inclusion, and gender responsiveness within jurisdictional REDD+ finance.

Context

Ghana has advanced its climate action efforts by signing an Emission Reduction Purchase Agreement (ERPA) in 2023 with the Lowering Emissions by Accelerating Forest Finance (LEAF) Coalition to deliver high-integrity REDD+ carbon credits under ART/TREES.⁶⁶

The TREES Program supports emissions reductions from avoided deforestation, forest degradation, and restoration while promoting strong environmental and social safeguards, forest protection policies, and economic incentives for conservation. Central to its implementation in Ghana is the TREES Benefit BSP. Aligned with international safeguards, including the Cancun Safeguards, the BSP places inclusion, gender and equity as three of its four guiding principles and legal frameworks.

Participatory BSP design

The BSP was designed in a participatory manner, led by the Climate Change Directorate of Ghana's Forestry Commission. The process combined desk reviews and national-level consultations with a series of two-day regional workshops, engaging government institutions, traditional authorities, private sector actors, civil society organizations, and local communities.

A stakeholder mapping, focus group discussions and influence-interest analysis, were used to identify beneficiaries, assess contributions to emissions reductions, and gather perspectives on risks, expectations, and benefit-sharing arrangements. Particular attention was given to gender inclusion by creating spaces that prioritized women's participation. Inputs from the regional consultations were validated through a national workshop, ensuring consensus on benefit distribution, governance arrangements, and safeguards.

Defining benefits

Benefits under the BSP include a wide range of both monetary (financial) and non-monetary (other than cash) benefits. Both play a key role in incentivising participation as well as ensuring equitable distribution of project benefits amongst all stakeholders, including local communities and women. To illustrate, 30% female representation is required in both corresponding farmer groups where benefits are distributed and in leadership roles of newly established landscape management groups and farmer cooperatives.

Monetary benefits will be paid directly to the following stakeholders who contribute to emissions reduction efforts:

- Traditional authorities for supporting emission reduction activities
- Forestry Commission for forest monitoring and law enforcement activities
- Ghana Cocoa Board (COCOBOD) for activities including cocoa rehabilitation and promoting the adoptions of climate-smart practices by smallholders

- District Assemblies for support in the development and approval of by-laws aimed at promoting sustainable land use and forest conservation

Non-monetary benefits will be rewarded to address broader community needs, helping to strengthen stakeholder participation in the Program, enhance livelihoods, and build resilience within the Program area and include:

- Provision of resources and tools for community-led reforestation activities
- Support to farmers for obtaining better seeds, fertilizers, and equipment to enhance productivity
- Training and resources for local CSOs and NGOs to support local conservation and reforestation projects
- Provision of training to private sector actors to facilitate compliance with safeguards associated with REDD+ activities

Benefit-sharing as a vehicle for a social inclusion and gender-responsive approach to REDD+

The BSP is a participatory, equity-focused framework for distributing financial and non-financial benefits from carbon credits among all stakeholders, including the broader community. Building on lessons from previous REDD+ initiatives and extensive consultations, it establishes transparent governance and safeguards to ensure socially inclusive and gender-responsive benefit allocation. Beyond revenue distribution, it serves as a tool to promote sustainable forest management, community empowerment, and long-term socio-economic, gender and environmental benefits, all of which are key to achieving longer-term, sustainable change.

Further information on equitable benefit sharing in REDD+ can be found in the upcoming UN-REDD Benefits Sharing Learning Journal to be released later in 2026. (Please visit the [UN-REDD Academy](#) to obtain the latest resources published.)

4.6 Monitoring and reporting

Gender and broader social inclusion considerations should be explicitly integrated into REDD+ monitoring and reporting frameworks and serve as the operational backbone of socially inclusive and gender-responsive Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). They provide structured, systematic, and timely evidence of progress within REDD+ projects, jurisdictional programmes, or national Safeguards Information Systems (SIS). Key features of such frameworks should include and specify the following:

- Gender and social inclusion outcomes, outputs, and associated indicators and targets

- Roles and responsibilities for data collection and oversight
- Frequency and modalities of monitoring
- Mechanisms for validation and adaptive management

These frameworks should include information on who, when, why and how for monitoring social inclusion and gender outcomes, outputs, activities and targets.

A list of sample social inclusion and gender indicators from REDD+ projects and programmes are listed below. These indicators help to demonstrate the breadth of the social inclusion and gender aspects that can and should be covered in monitoring and reporting frameworks. As illustrated, to ensure a comprehensive approach, monitoring frameworks should include indicators related to rights, participation, tenure security, and equity across affected groups.

Sample gender indicators

- Percentage and number of women and female youth participating in consultations, trainings, and validation processes (disaggregated by Indigenous status where applicable).
- Percentage of women stakeholders/beneficiaries reporting meaningful participation and influence in decision-making processes (survey-based).
- Percentage of women in REDD+ governance bodies, negotiating delegations, and benefit-sharing committees.
- Number of REDD+ initiatives initiated, co-led, or reviewed by Indigenous women's or other women's organizations.
- Proportion of REDD+ staff in managerial and field positions who are women.
- Evidence of legal or regulatory reforms strengthening women's land and resource tenure rights.
- Proportion of benefit-sharing recipients identified by gender, age group, and other relevant characteristics.

Sample rights and tenure indicators

- Number and percentage of participating communities with formalized land or resource tenure agreements.
- Evidence of strengthened recognition of customary tenure systems.
- Changes in tenure security perceptions among Indigenous Peoples and forest-dependent communities (survey-based).

Sample FPIC and participation indicators

- Number of FPIC processes completed, including duration and number of consultation iterations.
- Documentation of adherence to community-developed consultation protocols.
- Proportion of project documents disclosed in relevant Indigenous languages.
- Participation rates of Indigenous Peoples, local communities, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups in decision-making processes.

Sample FPIC monitoring indicators

Monitoring frameworks should assess whether the core tenets of FPIC—Free, Prior, Informed, and Consent—were substantively upheld, not only procedurally documented.

Free – Ensure engagement is voluntary and free of coercion.

Indicators

- Evidence that consultations occurred before discussion of compensation or benefits.
- Percentage of community representatives confirming no inducements or intimidation occurred.
- Absence of security or law enforcement presence unless requested by the community.
- Functioning grievance mechanism for complaints regarding the FPIC process and resolution rate of FPIC-related complaints.

Prior – Ensure FPIC occurred sufficiently in advance of decisions.

Indicators

- Documentation that FPIC began before project approval, impact assessments, or financing decisions.
- Evidence that community-defined timelines and customary decision-making processes were respected.
- Percentage of surveyed participants confirming adequate time for deliberation.
- Number of consultation iterations conducted prior to final decision.

Informed – Ensure communities received accessible and understandable information.

Indicators

- Documented communication strategy covering both leadership and wider community.
- Materials provided in relevant Indigenous languages and culturally appropriate formats.
- Percentage of participants reporting understanding of project risks, benefits, and grievance procedures.
- Evidence of accessible records of FPIC documentation within the community.

Consent – Ensure decisions reflect legitimate and inclusive community processes.

Indicators

- Signed meeting minutes documenting agreed procedures, representatives, timelines, and decision outcomes.
- Attendance records disaggregated by gender and relevant social groups.
- Evidence that women and marginalized members participated meaningfully.
- Documentation of whether consent was granted, withheld, or conditional, including any attached conditions.

Sample grievance and risk management indicators

- Number and type of grievances received, disaggregated by complainant category and gender.
- Rate and timeliness of grievance resolution.
- Documentation of actions taken in response to allegations of reprisals or threats against defenders.
- Number of defender-related incidents identified and mitigation measures implemented.

Sample equitable benefit-sharing indicators

- Distribution of REDD+ benefits across stakeholder groups (by gender, Indigenous status, geography, livelihood group).
- Evidence of community-governed benefit-sharing funds with transparent oversight mechanisms.
- Evidence of monitoring of elite capture risks (e.g., concentration of payments among a small subset of beneficiaries).

Sample accessibility and inclusion indicators

- Availability of consultation materials in culturally appropriate formats and languages.
- Percentage of meetings held at times and locations accessible to women and marginalized groups.
- Evidence of whether Indigenous women, youth, and other marginalized participants felt able to influence decisions (survey-based).

Integrating these indicators into national SIS frameworks enhances transparency and supports reporting under the Cancun Safeguards and related REDD+ requirements.

To help define the success of such indicators, targets should also be used and informed by baseline data wherever possible. They should meet SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable,

Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound).

Where baseline data are not available, Year 1 of implementation may serve as a baseline for subsequent comparison. Targets should be periodically reviewed and adjusted based on monitoring results to ensure continued relevance and realism. See Box 14 for an illustration of sample targets on gender.



Box 15.

Sample gender targets

1. Women represent at least 40% of participants in consultations, trainings, governance bodies, and management teams.
2. The REDD+ Strategy integrates gender considerations across objectives, implementation arrangements, safeguards, benefit-sharing, and monitoring frameworks.
3. At least 80% of women participants report that 1) they understood consultation topics, 2) were able to participate actively, and 3) felt their perspectives were considered.
4. At least 30% of REDD+-linked finance, grants, or investment flows are directed toward women-led enterprises, cooperatives, or producer groups.

Where baseline data are unavailable, yearly targets against baseline can be established. To illustrate:

- Year 1: Establish baseline participation and access metrics
- Year 2: 10–15% increase in women’s participation in defined activities over baseline
- Year 3: 20–25% increase in women’s participation in defined activities over baseline

Monitoring gender and social inclusion is also not limited to reporting compliance; it should inform adaptive management. Data collected should be used to:

- Adjust participation strategies
- Identify any unaddressed gaps on gender and social inclusion
- Revise benefit-sharing mechanisms
- Strengthen safeguards implementation
- Address emerging inequalities or exclusion risks

Effective adaptive management shifts from a model of following a plan to accountability for managing risks and achieving outcomes through a step wise and learning process.

Participatory validation sessions with relevant state and non-state stakeholders—including Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women’s organizations, and marginalized groups—can also enhance credibility and contextual appropriateness of monitoring and reporting frameworks.



Key takeaways

- **Stakeholder Engagement is Foundational:** Effective engagement ensures that all stakeholders, including Indigenous Peoples, local communities, women, youth, and marginalized groups, are identified, consulted, and empowered throughout the REDD+ cycle. Tools, such as stakeholder mapping, analysis, and SEPs provide structured approaches for effective, equitable and inclusive participation.
- **FPIC Protects Rights and Strengthens Legitimacy:** FPIC is a fundamental safeguard that ensures Indigenous Peoples can meaningfully influence decisions affecting their lands, territories, and livelihoods. FPIC processes must respect traditional governance while ensuring equitable inclusion of women, youth, and other community members.
- **Gender Mainstreaming Ensures Practical Impact:** Moving beyond analysis, gender mainstreaming integrates gender considerations into REDD+ objectives, activities and monitoring. It ensures that interventions are not just nominally inclusive, but actively reduce gender inequalities, empower women, and enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of REDD+ outcomes.
- **Strong GRMs Protect People and Rights:** Well-designed GRMs enable safe, accessible, and fair pathways to address concerns and prevent conflict.
- **Equitable Benefit-Sharing is Foundational:** REDD+ must recognize rights, address power imbalances, and ensure that those who contribute most —Indigenous Peoples, women, and forest dependent communities – share fairly in benefits and decision-making.
- **Monitoring Must be Socially Inclusive and Gender Responsive:** Clear indicators, systematic data collection, and adaptive management help track progress and ensure accountability of a social inclusion and gender approach in REDD+.



LEARNING TOOL

Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) to review the key conclusions around social inclusion and gender.



Conclusion

Adopting a social inclusion and gender approach in REDD+ is a foundational condition for achieving outcomes that are legitimate, durable, and aligned with human rights obligations. Structural social and gender inequalities shape control over land and forest resources, participation in decision-making, and the distribution of costs and benefits associated with REDD+ interventions. Where these dynamics are not addressed, REDD+ may reinforce existing power imbalances, exacerbate tenure insecurity, and generate conflict, undermining both its credibility and long-term effectiveness.

A social inclusion and gender approach therefore requires moving beyond a narrow focus on technical carbon objectives toward a rights-based, participatory framework grounded in equity, accountability, and risk management. This includes recognizing Indigenous Peoples and local communities as rights-holders; ensuring women's meaningful and equitable participation and leadership; respecting Free, Prior and Informed Consent; and establishing accessible and culturally appropriate grievance redress mechanisms. It also requires embedding gender-responsive—and, where feasible, gender-transformative—measures within governance

arrangements, safeguards systems, benefit-sharing frameworks, and monitoring processes across the full REDD+ cycle, from readiness and strategy development through implementation and results-based finance.

The international REDD+ architecture, including under the UNFCCC, together with applicable human rights instruments, provides a clear normative foundation for this approach.

Operational tools such as stakeholder mapping, gender analysis, safeguards information systems, and gender-responsive and social inclusion indicators translate these commitments into practice. When social inclusion and gender considerations are systematically integrated, REDD+ initiatives are better positioned to reduce implementation risks, strengthen tenure security, support equitable benefit-sharing, and sustain stakeholder engagement over time.

Placing social inclusion and gender at the center of REDD+ design and implementation helps ensure that forest-based climate action delivers verified emission reductions alongside strengthened rights protections, expanded agency for women and marginalized groups, and durable local ownership—conditions that underpin long-term integrity and permanence.



Your learning journey is concluded. What do you know now about Social Inclusion and Gender? Go to the [REDD+ Academy Platform](#) and answer the questions to assess your actual knowledge.



**LEARNING
TOOL**

Annex: Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Plan

Below is an example of elements that should be addressed in a comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Plan. This guidance has been adapted from UNDP's *"Social and Environmental Standards (SES) Guidance Note on Stakeholder Engagement"*, available [here](#).

It is key to note that the scope and level of detail of the Stakeholder Engagement Plan should be scaled to fit the needs of the project.

Outline of a Comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Plan⁶⁷

1. Introduction

- Briefly describe the project including design elements and potential social and environmental issues. Where relevant, include maps of the project site and surrounding area.

2. Regulations and Requirements

- Summarize any legal, regulatory, donor/lender requirements pertaining to stakeholder engagement applicable to the project. This may involve public consultation and disclosure requirements related to the social and environmental assessment process as well as relevant international obligations.

3. Summary of any previous stakeholder engagement activities

- If any stakeholder engagement activities had been undertaken to date, including information disclosure and/or consultation, provide the following details:
 - Type of information disclosed, in what forms and languages (e.g., oral, brochure,

reports, posters, radio, etc.), and how it was disseminated

- Locations and dates of any meetings undertaken to date
- Individuals, groups, and/or organizations that have been consulted
- Key issues discussed and key concerns raised
- Responses to issues raised, including any commitments or follow-up actions
- Process undertaken for documenting these activities and reporting back to stakeholders

4. Project Stakeholders

- List the key stakeholder groups who will be informed about and engaged in the project (based on stakeholder analysis). These should include persons or groups who:
 - Are directly and/or indirectly affected by the project
 - Have "interests" in the project that determine them as stakeholders
 - Have the potential to influence project outcomes or operations
 - [Examples of potential stakeholders are beneficiaries and project-affected communities, local organizations, NGOs, and government authorities, indigenous peoples; stakeholders can also include politicians, private sector companies, labor unions, academics, religious groups, national environmental and social public sector agencies, and the media.]

- Consider capacities of various stakeholder groups to effectively participate in the stakeholder engagement activities, and include measures to support them where capacity is limited
- Identify project-affected marginalized and disadvantaged stakeholders (e.g. women, youth, Indigenous Peoples, etc.), including persons with disabilities and:
 - Identify limitations for understanding project information and participating in consultation process (e.g. language differences, lack of transportation, accessibility of venues, disability)
 - Develop measures to support and accommodate engagement (e.g. provide information in accessible formats, choose convenient locations for consultations, ensure venues are accessible, provide transportation to meetings, change time of meetings to accommodate needs, provide facilitation and explain complex issues and terminology, provide support workers for assisting participants with disabilities, provide simultaneous interpretation (language, signing))
- Briefly describe the methods that will be used to engage and/or consult with each of the stakeholder groups identified in section 4. Methods used may vary according to target audience, for example:
 - Interviews with stakeholder representatives and key informants
 - Surveys, polls, and questionnaires
 - Public meetings, workshops, and/or focus groups with specific groups
 - Participatory methods
 - Other traditional mechanisms for consultation and decision-making
- Describe how the views of women and other relevant groups (e.g. minorities, elderly, youth, other marginalized groups) will be taken into account and their participation facilitated
- Where relevant, define activities that require prior consultation and FPIC from indigenous peoples (and refer to Indigenous Peoples Plan and FPIC protocols)

5. Stakeholder Engagement Program

- Summarize the purpose and goals of the stakeholder engagement program
- Briefly describe what information will be disclosed, in what formats and languages, and the types of methods that will be used to communicate this information to each of the stakeholder groups identified in section 4 above. Methods used may vary according to target audience, for example:
 - Newspapers, posters, radio, television
 - Information centers and exhibitions or other visual displays
 - Brochures, leaflets, posters, non-technical summary documents and reports
- Outline methods to receive feedback and to ensure ongoing communications with stakeholders (outside of a formal consultation meeting)
- Describe any other engagement activities that will be undertaken, including participatory processes, joint decision-making, and/or partnerships undertaken with local communities, NGOs, or other project stakeholders. Examples include benefit-sharing programs, stakeholder-led initiatives, and training and capacity building/support programs.
- Where the risk assessment indicates that there is a likelihood of reprisals and retaliation against stakeholders, clarify to all relevant parties there will be zero tolerance for such actions and develop

possible preventative and response measures specific to the circumstances together with relevant stakeholders. Measures may include respect for confidentiality; adjustments to means and timing of communications, meetings, transportation; use of trusted intermediaries, interpreters, facilitators and other consultants; clear response protocols for notification, reporting, and support for protection strategies.

6. Timetable

- Provide a schedule outlining dates/ periodicity and locations where various stakeholder engagement activities, including consultation, disclosure, and partnerships will take place and the date by which such activities will be undertaken.

7. Resources and Responsibilities

- Indicate who will be responsible for carrying out the specified stakeholder engagement activities.
- Specify the budget and other resources allocated toward these activities.
- For projects with significant potential impacts and multiple stakeholder groups, it is advisable to hire a qualified stakeholder engagement facilitator to undertake all or portions of the stakeholder engagement activities. This may include, where necessary, community facilitators/assistants who are able to work in local languages (where relevant, ideally from the same ethnic group/ culture). A gender expert may also need to be engaged to assist with gender-responsive planning aspects.

8. Grievance Mechanism

- Describe the process by which people concerned with or potentially affected by the project can express their grievances for consideration and redress. Who will receive grievances, how and by whom will they be resolved, and how will the response be communicated back to the complainant? (see [Supplemental Guidance on Grievance Redress Mechanisms](#)).
- Ensure reference is made to and stakeholders are informed of the availability of UNDP's Accountability Mechanism (Stakeholder Response Mechanism, SRM, and Social and Environmental Compliance Unit, SECU) as additional avenues of grievance redress.

9. Monitoring and Reporting

- Describe any plans to involve project stakeholders (including target beneficiaries and project-affected groups) or third-party monitors in the monitoring of project implementation, potential impacts and management/mitigation measures.
- Describe how and when the results of stakeholder engagement activities will be reported back to project-affected and broader stakeholder groups. Examples include newsletters/bulletins, social and environmental assessment reports; monitoring reports.

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24 In the context of the UNFCCC REDD+ Cancun Safeguards, “addressed” means has been taken to mean institutions, policies, regulations, strategies, agreements, etc. in place that are relevant to a safeguard and “respected” has been taken to mean the safeguard is being implemented effectively. For more information see UNFCCC (2012), SBSTA Miscellaneous Document 09 (Cancun Safeguards), <https://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2012/sbsta/eng/misc09.pdf>

25 “Elite capture” refers to “situations where elites shape development processes according to their own priorities and/or appropriate development resources for private gain.” For more information see Post, D. (2008), CDD and Elite Capture: Reframing the Conversation, World Bank; <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/397181468137726436>

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31 In 2018, the Presidential Ministry issued a decree establishing a General Consultation Mechanism for Indigenous Peoples regulating all decisions that may affect their rights. This Mechanism, which was developed with the consent of 22 of the country’s 24 Indigenous Territories. It aims to guarantee protection of their collective rights and compliance with it

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42 The United Nations (UN) defines CSOs as non-state actors whose aims are neither to generate profits nor to seek governing power. CSOs unite people to advance shared goals and interests and can include NGOs, charities, labor unions, women’s, youth or faith-based groups, foundations, community associations, human rights or environmental activists, etc.

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