

Gender-justice and climate action

A feminist analysis of climate and forest policy-making, in eight countries



This report is the 65th edition of **Forest Cover**, a series of publications by the **Global Forest Coalition** on international forest policy.

About the Global Forest Coalition (GFC): We are an international coalition of 117 NGOs and Indigenous Peoples' Organizations from 70 countries, defending social justice and the rights of forest peoples in forest policies. GFC carries out joint advocacy campaigns on the need to respect the rights, roles and needs of Indigenous Peoples, women and local communities in forest conservation and the need to address the underlying causes of forest loss.

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Front cover image: Indigenous Dhanwar forest defenders in Bakhai, India. Navrachna

Back page photo: Women-led forest restoration in the Bryansk region in Russia. Viola

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Introduction: We can't achieve climate justice without gender justice

By **Coraina de la Plaza**, Global Forest Coalition, Spain, and **Jeanette Sequeira**, Global Forest Coalition, Netherlands



Annabelle Avril/WEFC

Climate change is the largest, most complex and least just challenge that we face as a society. The failure of a policy agenda that refuses to address the root causes of the crisis or remove the structural barriers that stand in the way of effective action is rapidly driving us to the point of no return.

The global climate change narrative continues to be dominated and shaped by governments and corporations rather than by frontline communities and civil society. Climate mitigation strategies are devised primarily to avoid urgent action, and do not respond to the needs and wellbeing of the most affected and underrepresented groups, even though they are the least responsible for the crisis.

Net Zero pledges by governments and polluting industries, market-based schemes that commodify life, afforestation and reforestation with monoculture plantations, nature-based solutions and large-scale bioenergy are all examples of this failed approach. Led by a **casually**

misogynist and until recently **climate-denying** presidency, COP26 is a vivid example of how this narrative is being pushed onto the global climate agenda, disguised as truly transformative climate action.

Market-based approaches inherently favor those with economic power and tend to **further entrench inequalities** faced by women, Indigenous Peoples and other groups that are economically, socially and politically underrepresented. For example, in schemes like payment for ecosystem services (PES), payments have been found to be **often controlled by relatively wealthy men**. **Research in the Congo Basin** points to the fact that ten years of REDD+¹ projects have not led to

improvements in the rights of forest peoples, forest governance or reduction in deforestation rates. It is no surprise therefore that women's perception of wellbeing is reported to have worsened in **some REDD+ programs**.

This report consists of three in-depth case studies and five articles contributed by GFC member groups. Between them, they analyze a broad range of forest-related climate change mitigation policies, from country-level schemes to global World Bank and UN programs. The analysis has been carried out according to a feminist methodology developed by GFC member groups. It helps to assess climate policies through a gender justice lens, emphasizing the needs

¹ REDD+ is a UN program aiming to "Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and foster conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks".

and roles of women in all of their diversity, as rights-holders and agents of change.

Put together, the case studies in this report show how climate and forest-related policies that are born of existing colonial and patriarchal mindsets only perpetuate the root causes of the crisis they are supposed to tackle. In doing so, they fail to deal with the uneven distribution of access to and control over resources experienced by frontline communities on the basis of gender, class, race, caste, age and ability, amongst others. As a result, they maintain an unjust, unequal system with intersecting forms of oppression that reproduces and strengthens structural barriers instead of breaking them down. This is the situation described in case studies on the Solomon Islands, Nepal and DRC, where climate mitigation schemes are undermining the rights of women and other underrepresented groups.

It is widely acknowledged through a **growing body of evidence** that women, specially Indigenous and rural women, are more vulnerable to climate change and land use change such as deforestation, and that addressing gender inequality is central to effective climate mitigation and adaptation. Despite this, gender-blindness is still alarmingly common, even in supposedly flagship climate policies such as UNFCCC Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). NDCs are at the heart of the Paris Agreement and set out country-level roadmaps for climate change mitigation and adaptation. However, in the first round, **only 64 of 190 NDCs included a reference to women or gender**. The Paraguay case study on the country's updated NDCs is an example of this prevailing gender-blindness in some areas of climate policy-making, where false solutions are promoted rather than proposals that genuinely consider small-scale

farmers, Indigenous Peoples and women.

One impact that is felt disproportionately by women is where policies threaten and undermine the land tenure rights of communities, given that women shoulder the greatest responsibility for providing food, water and energy for families, but often have the least say in how land is used. For example, case studies examine how DRC's REDD+ strategy and afforestation programs in India linked to UN climate convention commitments exploit conditions of insecure land tenure and rights of access to forest resources.

The case studies in this report also point to the significant economic contribution made by rural women through their unpaid care and domestic work, as well as how this burden is exacerbated by climate policies that promote the strict protection of forests and private

Annabelle Avril/WECF





Annabelle Avril/WECF

plantations. Restricting access to forests forces women and girls to travel further and spend more time collecting water, food, medicine and fuelwood for their households, at greater personal risk.

In Rwanda, the lack of inclusive and gender-just energy policies solidifies a reliance on bioenergy for domestic energy needs, which hinders the education prospects of women and girls and their participation in community development activities. Forest-dependent livelihoods are similarly impacted, as is demonstrated in the case study on Russia, where monoculture pine plantations have disrupted small businesses that women depended on, that relied on collecting forest berries, mushrooms, herbs and drinking water.

While progress has been made, there is still a long way to go in terms of recognizing women as the powerful agents of change that they

are, and mainstreaming gender justice into climate, forest, land, water and energy policies and decision-making processes. This is best exemplified by the Indigenous Dhanwar women in India, and how their traditional knowledge and practices play a key role in conserving forests, yet their way of life is threatened by climate and forest policies that are trying to replace their diverse forests with monoculture plantations.

Mainstreaming gender justice into policy-making has to go further than simply being responsive to the needs of women and girls. It must be transformative, and this means ensuring women's rights to information, training, representation, governance and access to resources, on top of respecting their basic human rights.

As a beacon of hope in what can otherwise read as quite a bleak assessment of climate mitigation efforts, a strong theme in case

studies from Chile, Russia, India and Nepal is that women-led struggles are happening everywhere. Their collective action to care for and feed their communities, and to conserve the forests they depend on, is an act of resistance that is indispensable to solving the climate crisis and safeguarding human and territorial rights. On top of this, their bottom-up organizing to manage forests for the benefit of all and to stop further deforestation and forest degradation is actually achieving the emissions reductions that so many top-down climate policies are failing to.

Their collective action reaffirms how important it is to put gender-justice, Indigenous rights and community governance at the heart of forest and climate policy-making, and how through feminism we can achieve the radical changes that will lead us to a just and equitable future.

Gendered power imbalances in so-called nature-based solutions¹

Most of the world's remaining forests are found in areas that are **remote, steep and otherwise economically unattractive**, as fertile lands were historically the first to be converted to agricultural and other uses. Politically and economically marginalized communities such as Indigenous Peoples have often ended up in these forests after being pushed out of more attractive areas. These communities tend to be disproportionately dependent on free access to the non-monetary resources that forests can provide, such as fuelwood, and a huge range of non-timber forest products such as bushmeat and medicinal plants. However, due to their marginalization they have often been denied legal tenure and governance rights over their forests.

These remaining forests are also now high on the climate agenda, given that the **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change** and other institutions have recognized that reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and removing carbon from the atmosphere through reforestation can play an important role in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Increasingly, these policies are being presented as “nature-based solutions” (NBS).

The question that must be asked is: which problems are these solutions actually addressing, and whose needs are being considered the most? There is an inherent tension between the interests of the often urban economically-powerful elites that promote NBS, and the rights, needs and interests of the Indigenous Peoples, rural communities, women and other underrepresented

groups that inhabit the forests that these “solutions” are being implemented in.

As a result of deep-rooted patriarchy, women suffer from multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization. This includes a lack of formal land tenure and access rights, despite the fact that **women account for 83% of the 850 million people that depend on forests for their basic needs**. Women play a central role in forest conservation and restoration, but they tend to have very little say in forest governance, and their access and tenure rights are easily overlooked. In fact, whenever forests become more commercially attractive, for example through forest carbon offsets markets, there has been a **tendency for forest tenure and access rights to shift from women to men**, thereby dispossessing and excluding the very women that make the greatest contribution to caring for and protecting forests.

The current climate regime is nowadays **dominated by powerful global corporate and political elites** that primarily respond to the interests of wealthy urban consumers, creating inherent tensions and power imbalances in climate policy-making. This means that corporate-driven NBS is being prioritised over more rights-based approaches, despite the clear evidence that gender just recognition of the forest governance rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities **can help to protect those** who actually live in, depend on and care for forests.

¹ This is a summary of the main findings in **Lovera-Bilderbeek and Lahiri, 2021**, *Addressing Power Imbalances in Biosequestration Governance*.



Susana Balbuena

Progress towards gender justice and community forest governance eroded by afforestation and carbon offsets in Bakhai village, India

By **Kanta Marathe**, Navrachna Samaj Sevi Sanstha, and **Souparna Lahiri**, Global Forest Coalition, India



Bakhai lies nestled at the foothills of Narsimhnath in the coal-rich Korba district of the central Indian province of Chhattisgarh. This village of 320 people is inhabited by the Indigenous Dhanwar community.

Bakhai perennially faces the twin threats of coal mining expansion and compensatory afforestation, which contributes towards India's emissions reductions targets. In its **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the UNFCCC**, India has committed to increase tree cover by 10 million hectares and enhance carbon sequestration by 100 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent annually. These commitments were made on the basis of India's flagship climate project, the Green India Mission (GIM).

The Compensatory Afforestation Planning and Management Authority (CAMPA) collects a levy on industrial projects that cause deforestation, and the Compensatory Afforestation Fund and is a major financier of GIM projects, amounting to some US\$15 billion in 2019. CAMPA is essentially an internal offset program, where corporations involved in mining and other industries pay a net value for deforestation to finance payments for ecosystem services elsewhere, which mostly involves tree plantation expansion.

In contrast to this top-down approach to emissions reductions and compensation for deforestation is India's landmark Scheduled Tribe and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act of 2006, also known as the **Forest Rights Act (FRA)**. It enabled Bakhai's Dhanwar women to resist deforestation and monoculture plantations and embark on a pathway of sustainable livelihoods and resource governance.

Women who had traditionally been excluded from decision-making processes and struggled to contribute to family incomes through the illegal and small-scale collection of forest produce found a voice through the FRA. It gave authority to the *Gram Sabha* (village council), a constitutionally mandated assembly of all adult members of a village that requires a quorum of no less than one third of participants to be women whenever the *Gram Sabha* is convened. The FRA also ensures women's full and unrestricted participation in all village-level forest-related decision-making, and upholds the property rights of forest-dwelling women where land titles are registered jointly in the name of both spouses, or in a woman's name if she is a single head of household.



A CAMPA tree plantation. Navrachna



Women of Bakhai. Navrachna

Following years of delay due to poor implementation of the FRA and hurdles created by the Forest Department, Bakhai's *Gram Sabha* was convened in August 2016. The spirit and the basic tenets of the Act ensured that the women of Bakhai could share their perspectives and understanding of conservation practices and resource governance in the *Gram Sabha* and the implementation of the village forest management plan. It also gave Bakhai women the power to stop logging operations.

At the very first opportunity, Bakhai women confronted Forest Department officials and stopped the GIM-linked tree felling that had been taking place in their forests. The colonial 1927 Indian Forest Act empowers the Forest Department

to practice **coupe cutting**, where old growth trees are clear-felled in blocks and replaced by commercial plantations. In December 2016, as well as stopping another 60,000 trees from being felled,¹ Bakhai women seized the logs that had already been felled and wrote to the District Forest Officer, senior Government officials and even the Governor of the Province.

The Forest Department responded by trying to forcibly plant trees in Bakhai, and in the process destroying the traditional crops cultivated by the villagers. The women convened a *Gram Sabha* meeting and issued a summons to Forest Department officials. Planting trees on village lands and grazing pastures is a common Forest Department practice as it

implements afforestation and compensatory afforestation projects on behalf of GIM and CAMPA.

The women in Bakhai had seen such forcible plantation projects being undertaken by the Forest Department in several villages in the **neighboring district of Bilaspur**, so they mobilized *Gram Sabha* members to ensure that no such tree planting could take place without seeking their permission first. Male members of the *Gram Sabha* stood in solidarity with the women, and thereby forced the Forest Department to respect local governance legislation set out in the FRA.

Having successfully halted logging and plantation expansion, Bakhai

¹ Information collected by Navrachna from interviews with villagers and a Right to Information application

women were able to refocus their efforts on their traditional farming and conservation practices, which have protected forests for generations.

With the support of Navrachna, the women of Bakhai led a community resource mapping of their forests, which identified, counted and mapped local and endangered species of trees, herbs and roots. They also formed a community forest management committee (CFMC) that meets regularly and shares responsibility for guarding community forests between the families involved. Women protect community forests during the day, whilst men take over at night.

The villagers have established seed banks of forest species as women have found that sprinkling seed balls in the forest for germination during the monsoon is a better way to restore forests compared to establishing plantations. Women have also created nurseries for fruit bearing trees such as jamun, guava, amla, mango, jackfruit, mulberry and custard apple, and contribute their labor voluntarily by digging pits, planting and fencing the planted area with thorny bushes. Bamboo is also grown in nurseries, since Bakhai residents are traditionally bamboo weavers and sell woven baskets at local markets.

Being a forest-dependent community, the Indigenous Dhanwar of Bakhai village have not traditionally cultivated annual vegetables, but rather collected and consumed uncultivated foods found in the forests. With increasing deforestation and a ban on entry to forest reserves, forest foods vanished from their plates, resulting in malnutrition in lactating

women and children. As recently as 2018, Bakhai women started cultivating annual crops such as beans, potatoes, rice, tomatoes and leafy vegetables using no-till and organic techniques, which has increased levels of nutrition and locks carbon in soils. Even turmeric, mustard, linseed and pulses are now grown in small patches as a part of three-tier cultivation practices.

Agro-ecological farming has also been revived in Bakhai with the return of millet farming, which was traditionally grown through swidden cultivation, but disappeared when the practice was banned after the enactment of the 1980 Forest Conservation Act. Millet is a suitable crop for the village's mostly steep, undulating and stony land and is compatible with forest restoration as sowing it does not require tilling.

Other women-led innovations include drip irrigation systems based on earthen pots with a small hole at the bottom to water the tender plants in the summer. This is

the perfect solution for Bakhai's hilly land, which does not retain water easily, and it builds resilience in the community to changing rainfall patterns as a result of climate change.

To preserve their traditional practices and knowledge, the women of Bakhai have established a resource centre that showcases traditional rice varieties and tree seeds. Their display in the resource centre enables them to pass on their traditional knowledge of forests and biodiversity to the children in the village.

While this powerful group of women in Bakhai have managed to transform their village, securing community rights over their forest resources still eludes them. The government has yet to officially record their rights, in violation of the FRA, thereby wasting a great opportunity to strengthen forest conservation and the livelihoods and food security of the forest dwelling communities. The struggle of the Bakhai women continues.



A forest rights committee meeting in Bakhai. **Souparna Lahiri**



REDD+ in Nepal: What are the impacts on Indigenous and rural women and girls?

by **Anila Onta**, with the participation of Federation of Community Forestry Users Nepal (FECOFUN) members and Community Forest Groups in Nepal

More than 8 million people in Nepal are living below the poverty line (16% of the population). Women and girls are more likely to be poor despite their significant contributions to the economy, especially through unpaid care and household work and community services.

Indigenous and rural women and girls are highly dependent on forest resources for their daily subsistence and livelihoods, and because of this, they are **key actors in forest conservation in Nepal**. They have conserved their community forests since time immemorial through their traditional knowledge and customary practices, which has been recognized in law for the last four decades.¹

Women are also key to Nepal's unique community forestry model,

where more than 2.2 million hectares of Nepal's forests are controlled by over 22,000 Community Forest User Groups (CFGs). Established following the 1993 Forest Act, this bottom-up, ecosystem-based approach to forests is a real solution to conserving biodiversity and mitigating climate change.

Gender equality is built into the model; the Forest Act stipulates that CFGs must be formed by households and not individuals, and

it requires the involvement of at least one female and one male member of each household. Across the country, more than 1,000 CFGs are solely managed by women, with women comprising the entire executive committee. In other CFGs, as stipulated in the Community Forestry Guidelines developed in 2015, at least half of executive committee members are women, including either the chairperson or secretary.

¹ MOFE. 2013. *Persistence and Change, Review of 30 years of community forestry in Nepal*, Ministry of Forest and Environment (MoFE), published by Multi-Stakeholder Forestry Program (MSFP), Kathmandu, Nepal

Young women members of the Janakalyan Community Forest Group in Kailali district. **FECOFUN**



REDD+ and other emissions reductions policies

However, the progress made by Nepal's CFGs is now being eroded by top-down climate mitigation policies. In partnership with the government and in the name of reducing emissions in the forestry sector, the livelihoods and traditional practices of Indigenous and rural women and girls across the country are under threat. Underpinning these projects is the false belief that, as **set out in the National REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and Enhancing Forest Carbon Stocks) Strategy 2018**, poverty and dependency on forest resources for livelihoods are underlying drivers of deforestation and forest degradation in Nepal.

Supporting this discourse and implementation of the REDD+ Strategy are a number of World Bank-funded projects. Firstly, the 2017 Forest Investment Plan (FIP) for Nepal aims to develop commercial forestry industries on community and private forest land, including plantations of fast-

growing species. Implementation is now taking place in two provinces in Southern Nepal through the **Forestry for Prosperity project**, which focuses on "moving from a conservation and subsistence-oriented approach to sustainable forest management and to establish smallholder forest plantations on public and private lands." Secondly, the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF)-supported **Emission Reduction Program** is a results-based payment system supporting REDD+ implementation on over 2.4 million hectares in the lowland Terai region.

In addition, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) projects Building a Climate Resilient Churia Region and Climate Resilience in the Gandaki River Basin were approved in 2019 and 2020, respectively, and link to Nepal's REDD+ strategy, as does **Nepal's Second Nationally Determined Commitment to the UNFCCC**, which commits to managing 50% of lowland and 25%

of middle hills and mountain forests through REDD+ initiatives by 2030.

The most contentious elements of the REDD+ Strategy are its commitments to:

1.3 Update and improve management plans of all forest management regimes with provisions of carbon stock measurement, monitoring methods and measures to control drivers of deforestation and forest degradation.

1.7 Rehabilitate degraded land by adopting appropriate measures, such as natural regeneration, plantation, and bio-engineering.

1.8 Increase supply of sustainably harvested timber and timber products with improved distribution mechanisms.

As this case study shows, there is wide-spread evidence that, in the name of increasing forest carbon stocks, these policy commitments have resulted in government-

imposed commercial logging activities in community forests (referred to as "scientific forest management"), followed by the establishment of monoculture plantations of sal trees² (*Shorea robusta*). CFGs say that this practice is **violating their forest resource and tenure rights**, in part due to lack of legal recognition of the carbon rights³ of Indigenous and local communities in their community forests.



Collecting fodder for livestock and other forest resources in Banke district, Nepal. **FECOFUN**

² *Shorea robusta* is a hardwood tree that is widely used in the construction industry.

³ Generally carbon rights are 'detached' from land and resource rights, as carbon has become a commodity through the carbon trade. According to Schedule 5 of the Constitution of Nepal (2015), carbon is included under the jurisdiction of the federal government. Section 44 of the Forest Act 2019 also centralizes carbon rights, and only the Government of Nepal has the right to develop plans for sharing benefits generated by the forest carbon trade.



Commercial logging operation in a community forest in the name of carbon stock enhancement. Communities do not have the right to use the harvested timber. **FECOFUN**

Methodology

This case study aims to identify the impacts of REDD+-related forest and climate change policies and projects on the livelihoods of Indigenous and rural women, girls and marginalized groups in two districts in Nepal: Kalilali in the west and Sindhul in the east, both lowland areas that have been highly affected by REDD+ related commercial logging.

To achieve this, FECOFUN visited Kalilali and Sindhul and interviewed eight women representatives of CFGs and held four focus group discussions with Indigenous and rural women and girls nominated by the CFGs. FECOFUN also organized a virtual discussion with women representatives of CFGs and members of local FECOFUN groups to share their experiences.

Interviewees and focus group participants were selected after consultation with the executive committees of the different CFGs. The experiences and opinions shared by the participants, in addition to desk-top research, form the basis of this case study.

Impacts of REDD+ on community rights

Although Gender Action Plans and social safeguards are an integral part of the emissions reduction projects considered here, they have not been able to mitigate gender-differentiated impacts. Firstly, it is clear from interviews with Indigenous and rural women and girls that there is little awareness at the community level about what these projects involve, and their participation is hampered by language barriers and a lack of capacity building.

Secondly, during the focus group discussions, women CFG executive committee members described how forest policies governing participatory, community-based and bottom-up planning processes in community forests are being

violated due to the top-down imposition of commercial logging of community forests, as a result of REDD+ policies and projects aimed at reducing emissions. These projects intentionally limit the access that women and poor forest dependent households have to the forest products that they depend on for their daily subsistence and livelihoods, and there is clear evidence that these projects are also affecting the collective legal rights of CFGs in Nepal more broadly.

Impacts on livelihoods and forest tenure rights

Collecting firewood and fodder, grazing small numbers of livestock (goats, cows and buffalo), collecting

wild fruits, plants and vegetables and operating micro-enterprises are some of the major sources of livelihoods for Indigenous and rural women, girls and marginalized groups in Nepal.⁴ At the same time, these traditional practices ensure food security, and are therefore reflected in CFG management plans.

However, because of actions undertaken as a result of the National REDD+ Strategy and emissions reduction projects to update the management plans of all forest management regimes, including community forests, Divisional Forest Offices now require management plans to include provisions for commercial logging and carbon stock

⁴ FECOFUN, 2019. SDG book.

enhancement through the establishment of tree plantations in community forests.

So far, in lowland areas, 768 Community Forest Groups (CFGs) have been forced to do this, which has prevented rural women-led CFGs in particular from carrying out their community conservation and forest management systems, as is their legal right.⁵ Clear-felling and plantation activities prevent women and girls from accessing forest resources for their livelihoods, and the replacement of community forests with monocultures harms biodiversity and the associated traditional knowledge of Indigenous and rural women. On top of this, the private contractors carrying out the work employ men from outside the area.

Following protests by CFGs in the Terai and Churia regions against government-imposed commercial clear-felling operations in community forests, the Parliamentary Committee on Public Finance investigated the misuse of public funds in different forest areas.⁶ It found that funds made available through the FCPF-funded Emission Reduction Program had been used for clear-felling and the deforestation of community forests and establishment of monoculture sal plantations, in the name of carbon stock enhancement.⁷

As well as forcing CFGs to include commercial forestry practices in their

management plans, according to interviewees, Divisional Forest Offices are also now refusing to allow CFGs to include the collection of forest products from community forests in them. They claim that, in line with the National REDD+ Strategy, forest-dependent livelihoods are a driver of deforestation. In addition to jeopardizing livelihoods, this also denies Indigenous and rural women their cultural rights and traditional knowledge. **Biodiversity is key to maintaining the cultural practices of Indigenous and rural women** who collect and use leaves of different tree species and wild fruits, flowers, bark, roots and shoots, seeds, latex, resin, vegetables and grasses for numerous purposes. Indigenous and rural women in Nepal also have

rich traditional knowledge regarding the use of forest products for medicine, food, fuel, fodder, soil enhancement and natural pesticides.

Most CFGs - more than 60% - have not yet revised their management plans, which they are obliged to do every ten years,⁸ due to the conflict that this policy has created in terms of imposing emissions reduction activities in community forests. This has also impacted the forest-based livelihood activities of Indigenous and rural women and girls, since CFG members are not allowed to collect wood and non-timber forest products (NTFPs) in community forests unless their updated management plans have been approved by the Divisional Forest Offices.

⁵ House of Representative, 2020. *Investigation Report on Scientific Forest Management in Nepal* (Nepali language), Parliamentary Committee on Public Fiscal, House of Representative, Kathmandu, Nepal.

⁶ The Rising Nepal. 2021. Ministry Plans To Change Forest Mgmt Method, <https://risingnepaldaily.com/main-news/ministry-plans-to-change-forest-mgmt-method>; User's opinion in scientific forest management implementation in Nepal – a case study from Nawalparasi district, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23311843.2020.1778987>.

⁷ Supra 6.

⁸ Section 18 of Forest Act 2019 (Previous Forest Act 1993) .



“ We have conserved our community forest for many years and collected different forest products for our livelihoods, though the government agency is now refusing to approve our forest management plan with provisions to promote livelihood activities. The government agency is forcing us to manage forests for commercial timber production and enhancing carbon stocks, which is not beneficial to us. Woman member of the Sonaha Indigenous community in Kailali district ”

Increased violence against women

As well as the impacts on livelihoods, women-led CFGs have been leading protests against commercial felling and plantation establishment in community forests due to the increased threat of violence against rural women and girls that these operations bring. Women are already at risk during conservation work when patrolling forests, participating in meetings and speaking out about local leaders, and commercial forestry operations increase the threats that they endure. Interviewees and focus group participants described how loggers have attacked women that have challenged the felling, and how some employees of the government and emission reduction projects have threatened women members of CFGs when they have raised concerns over transparency and social safeguard mechanisms in emissions reductions projects.

Community forest land grabbing in the name of Nature-Based Tourism

Nepal's Forest Investment Plan aims to enhance the role of the private sector through nature-based tourism activities in forest areas. The tourism industry has been putting pressure on the central and local governments to obtain concessions on community forest land to build tourism infrastructure such as hotels, resorts and cable cars, funded by the FIP grant. Community members say that the Government of Nepal has also given permits to private companies to use community forests for nature-based tourism projects without the free, prior and informed consent of impacted CFGs and their members. The affected CFGs, led by rural women's rights groups, have been organizing protests against community forest land grabbing which the government has responded to by calling in the security and police forces to suppress the women-led protest groups.

Interviewees also described how women members of CFGs have been forced to volunteer to plant trees in plantation establishment projects in community forests under the Forestry for Prosperity project even though there is sufficient public funding to pay them. Women members of CFGs in these areas have been demanding

transparency in how projects are financed and an end to corruption in commercial logging and plantation activities. However, a lack of representation of Indigenous and rural women in decision-making means that their voices and demands have not been addressed.



“The Divisional Forest Officer, contractors and members of the elite tried to restrict us from participating in the meetings and general assembly of CFGs because we had organized a protest against commercial logging in our community forest. Many times, they also threatened us to stop our protests and community campaigns. However, after our protest, the commercial logging stopped. Women members of a CFG in Kanchanpur district.”

Conclusions and recommendations

Essentially, the different emissions reductions related projects in Nepal are encouraging a shift from small-scale, women-led forest resource use for a diverse range of local livelihoods, to centralized, male-dominated, commercially-driven forest management for timber production.

This has resulted in community land rights being curtailed and increasing conflicts between CFGs and government agencies. The livelihoods and socio-cultural practices of Indigenous and rural

women and girls in the areas studied have suffered, as has biodiversity, and gender-based violence is also likely to increase due to these projects.

The following urgent actions must be taken to protect the legal and customary rights to forest resources of Indigenous and rural women, girls and marginalized groups, and the livelihoods that directly depend on these rights being upheld:

- CFGs should not be forced to participate in carbon emissions

reduction projects, and free, prior and informed consent should be upheld and respected.

- Priority should be given to forest-based livelihood activities instead of commercial forestry activities in community forests and management plans.
- The rights of Indigenous and rural women and girls to forest resources should be ensured and safeguarded through independent monitoring and effective and accessible grievance redressal mechanisms.

Conservation area in Janakalyan community forest, Kailali district. FECOFUN



Impacts of afforestation and reforestation projects on Indigenous and rural women and girls in South Kivu, DR Congo

The DRC has had a REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and Enhancing Forest Carbon Stocks) framework in place since 2012. Through landscape restoration, reforestation, agroforestry projects and other initiatives, it aims to stabilize forest cover at 63.5% of the national territory by 2030, tackle the direct and underlying drivers of deforestation and increase forest carbon stocks.¹ It also aims to support parallel efforts to facilitate political reform and improve national governance, as well as raise the standard of living and reduce poverty.

However, several afforestation and reforestation projects in South Kivu, such as in the highlands of Kalehe, have resulted in the acquisition of large areas of community land and the **eviction of local communities** to establish commercial tree and tea plantations. This has further marginalized Indigenous and rural women and girls and small-scale farmers by violating their rights to land and forest resources. According to an officer at the Provincial Environmental Coordination in South Kivu, this has resulted in flagrant human rights abuses and environmental degradation.²

Indigenous and rural women and girls are further marginalized by discriminatory management practices in the plantations. According to a women's rights activist and head of a peasant development organization, working conditions in the plantations are difficult for rural women and girls. They earn around 1000FC (Franc Congolais) per

day, or 0.44 Euros, whereas men working for the same company are paid double or even triple that amount on the pretext that their work requires greater physical strength or specialized skills. According to the activist, women and girls are still considered to be a cheaper and more compliant labor force, and thus they face constant rights violations.³

Leaders of women's rights and feminist organizations in the region highlight the lack of a legislative and political framework regarding Indigenous land and collective rights, and the absence of appropriate gender impact assessments in the projects that are carried out. These factors lead to a loss of access to forests and savannas for rural communities, undermining livelihoods, food security and conservation efforts.⁴ These impacts are also disproportionately felt by women, given their particular roles, responsibilities, opportunities and needs, and lower involvement in decision-making and access to land and resources.⁵

Although a lack of accountability and transparency in some institutions means it is difficult to know the true amount of funding that has been devoted to REDD+ in the DRC,⁶ a **recent report** looking at Green Climate Fund finance for tropical forests in the Congo Basin is critical of the scheme. It concludes that over ten years of REDD+ interventions in the region have failed to bring about expected improvements in forest governance, support for the rights of forest dwellers or a reduction in deforestation.



Local reforestation efforts in contrast to afforestation projects. **FCPEEP**



Discussing women's rights. **FCPEEP**

¹ Ministère de l'environnement conservation de la nature et tourisme, *Évaluation environnementale et sociale stratégique du processus REDD+*. Cadre de planification en faveur des populations autochtones, Kinshasa, janvier 2014, p.15.

² Information provided by an officer at the Provincial Environment Agency in South Kivu, interview held in Bukavu, July 25, 2021. All names of interviewees have been removed to protect their identities.

³ Information provided by a women's rights activist, interview held in Combo, July 24, 2021.

⁴ Information provided by the leaders of a village association for the development and defense of the rights of women and girls, interview held in Kamakombe, July 27, 2021.

⁵ Osman-Elasha, 2008. *Gender and Climate Change in the Arab Region*, Organisation des femmes arabes p. 44.

⁶ Information provided by the Director in charge of study and planning to the Directorate General of the Environment in Kinshasa, August 18, 2021.



New forest policy aims to halt forest destruction in the Solomon Islands, but what can it do for the people impacted the most?

By **James Meimana** and **Aydah Gwaena Akao**, Network for the Indigenous Peoples Solomons (NIPS), Solomon Islands

The Solomon Islands currently has one of the highest logging rates in the world, **estimated to be up to 19 times the sustainable harvest rate**.

Almost 87% of the Solomon Islands' 2.8 million hectares of land is **held under customary ownership**, and the national constitution ensures that customary owners control forests on this land. However, around 22% of forest areas have been classified as appropriate for commercial logging, and it is estimated that 18% have now been logged. As a consequence, around 85% of felling licenses are now operating in logged-over forests. Harvesting rates also reflect a serious over-exploitation of forest resources: the annual "sustainable" harvest rate is estimated as 250,000 m³ per year¹ but, according to government sources, **2.73 million m³ was harvested in 2018**. Another estimate suggests a much higher rate, and predicts that **natural forests will be exhausted there by 2036**.

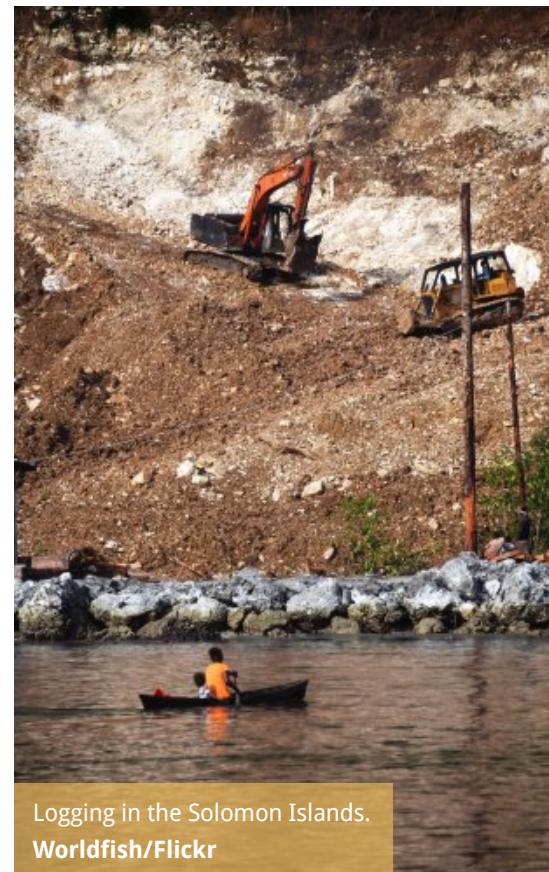
Logging has become very important economically to the Solomon Islands and currently accounts for around **20% of government income** and around 65% of exports. Land title holders are entitled to 10%, government 30% and loggers 60% of what is earned through logging operations. At the same time though, it is estimated that **77% of**

the Solomon Islands' greenhouse gas emissions now come from forestry and land use change.

The disproportionate and differentiated impacts of logging on women in the Solomon Islands are **well-established**, particularly where food and water insecurity and violence against women are concerned. Women are responsible for subsistence agriculture and growing staple foods as well as collecting fresh water, and impacts of logging such as sedimentation, oil spills and damage to water pipes by logging machinery often make it harder for women to provide for their families, and they have to work longer hours in more dangerous conditions.

Three main policy areas aim to reduce forest degradation and its associated carbon emissions in the Solomon Islands, whilst keeping its forestry industries economically profitable. **REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation, and Enhancing Forest Carbon Stocks) activities began in the Solomon Islands in 2017**, and the country is currently developing a **national REDD+ Programme** and carrying out a **pilot**

project in Buala and Kia in Isabel province. Alongside this, the **National Forest Policy (NFP)** was finalised in 2018 and aims to support the government to manage and sustain the country's forest resources for the benefit and resilience of all Solomon Islanders. It is seen as being key to reducing shocking deforestation rates. The Solomon Islands is also undertaking a national forest inventory as part of its **Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)** to the UNFCCC, which doesn't currently factor in emissions from land use change.



Logging in the Solomon Islands.
Worldfish/Flickr

¹ Ministry of Finance and Treasury of Solomon Islands, 2018. Solomon Islands Logging Sustainability Committee Report.

Methodology

This case study analyses the NFP from a feminist perspective, to assess its implications for the recognition of forest governance by Indigenous Peoples and local communities. It focuses on logging in Kosisi Village, Hograno District, Isabel Province, where research was carried out by NIPS in July 2021. After seeking the free, prior and informed consent of the Kosisi community through communication by phone and letters, NIPS carried

out eight face-to-face interviews, where interviewees were selected to encompass a broad cross-section of society and its least represented members, including logging representatives, elders, women, girls, widows, orphans and those lacking formal education. A meeting was also held with the community and logging representatives in the logging camp near Kosisi, which was attended by 26 people, most of whom were male land owners. The

forests around Kosisi Village are one of four logging areas that operate within a few meters of each other in the Thousand Ships Bay in Isabel Province. The purpose of the research was to identify the extent to which the NFP impacts or recognizes forest governance by Indigenous Peoples and local communities, including in particular the impacts on Indigenous and rural women and girls.

Results: Is the National Forest Policy achieving its aims?

We identified four NFP goals and objectives that have implications for Indigenous Peoples and local communities as resource owners. These are: Goal 6, on capacity building for gender equity and community empowerment; Goal 12, the community governance strategy; Goal 13, on community forest management; and Goal 16, on transparency to combat corruption. Within these goals we assessed each objective according to the results of interviews and the community meeting.

Goal 6: Capacity building for gender equity and community empowerment

Goals 6.1 and 6.3 focus on capacity-building within communities and aim to build both technical capacity and legal understanding through training, in order to enable local people to make informed decisions about and contribute to gender inclusive forest management, reforestation and sustainable development in the forestry sector. However, in practice, no such activities have yet taken place

around many logging sites in the country, and most Indigenous Peoples and local communities have never taken part in training sessions linked to NFP implementation. In Kosisi, mother of two Clara Magi stated in an interview that no such training had taken place in the community or nearby communities.² According to Agaster Gasepea, women and girls in Kosisi Village also do not have sound knowledge of forest and environment legislation and land

use rights. This is highlighted by the fact that in 2020 a log pond was built on one of the pristine mangrove forests that the Kosisi community had conserved for generations through traditional tabu, that only allowed forest resources to be harvested on special occasion such as church ceremonies, marriages and funerals.³ Had the wider community been aware of its rights, it would not have allowed the log pond to be constructed.



Kosisi log pond area. James Meimana

² Magi, C. Personal interview, 23 July 2021, 8:30 pm.

³ Gasepea, G. Personal interview, 24 July 2021, 7:30 am.



Kosisi log pond area. James Meimana

Goal 12: Community governance strategy

Goal 12.2 in the NFP recognizes traditional governance and decision-making systems in the timber rights acquisition and free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) processes, such as the Traditional Local Council of Chiefs. Yet, in almost every traditional governance and decision-making system in the Solomon Islands, women, girls and other underrepresented groups are usually left out. It is common practice at most logging sites that only the men from the land-owning tribe will attend meetings and participate in decision making processes over logging activities.

Goal 12.3 clearly spells out the need for an efficient methodology and evaluation system for awareness raising on logging and forest governance in communities, that is

adapted for rural educational levels, is gender inclusive and educative on legislation and rights. However, according to a woman elder from Kosisi, Georgina Vehe, this is not being implemented and there is little awareness of the threats of logging, legislation and community rights, despite the fact that logging has been ongoing for a number of years. She has also witnessed the impacts of deforestation and logging operations first hand, such as oil spills that have washed out along the mangroves and killed mud crabs and mud shells that Indigenous Peoples and local communities, particularly women and girls, depend on for food and their daily livelihoods.⁴

Goal 12.5 of the NFP ensures support for communities in the establishment of formal, fair and transparent benefit sharing systems. However, on the ground,

many communities still have issues with the distribution of royalties from logging operations, and most of the promised benefits that logging companies have agreed to have not been fulfilled. In Kosisi, Joycelyn Authegna described how formal benefit sharing systems need accountability and transparency, otherwise only the land-owning tribe will benefit, and those without legal title will not.⁵ Betsy Thosa, a female land-owning trustee of a benefit sharing agreement, added that even when benefit sharing systems are formally-agreed, benefits are still not shared equally as male trustees receive a greater share of the royalties.⁶ Likewise, a male elder in the community, Mathias Hoamana, said that this is an ongoing issue that normally happens in every logging operation, where women and girls are discriminated against. He also described social issues

⁴ Vehe, G. Mothers Union, Personal interview, 24 July 2021, 7:30 am.

⁵ Authegna, J. Single Mother, Personal interview, 24 July 2021, 9:30 am.

⁶ Thosa, B. Logging trustee, Personal interview, 25 July 2021, 10:30 am.

arising from logging operations that affect women in Kosisi, one of which is unwanted pregnancy. Currently two women in the community have had children fathered by Asian loggers who refused to marry them. They have been stigmatized in the community and are now single mothers.⁷

Goal 12.7 of the NFP supports the establishment of community-based forest organizations like Community Tribal Forest Associations, in order to increase community governance over the management and utilization of forest resources. In Kosisi village, there are no such community-based organizations, which was confirmed by Nelson Bodrick, the chairperson of Kosisi's trustees to the benefit sharing agreement. He stated that these kinds of organizations need to be established to engage youth, women and girls in his community as a watchdog to ensure the sustainable use of their forests.⁸

Goal 12.9 deals with community grievance redressal mechanisms for land and natural resources use, in order to support forest resource owners to challenge illegal and unauthorized forest use, and to facilitate due diligence from timber buyers. The fact that the responsible authorities cannot effectively support the implementation of grievance redressal mechanisms for land and natural resources in the Solomon Islands is a big issue, as women and girls are consistently discriminated against, and have no means of addressing this. The concession held by the logging company currently operating in Kosisi overlaps with the boundary of another land-owning tribe, which has caused a conflict between the two land-owning tribes as they both claim that they are the true owners of the land. Tribal boundaries should therefore be legally documented by the relevant authorities, so that they are legally recognized and future conflict can be avoided.

Goal 13: Community forest management

Goal 13.1 encourages tribal, clan and community based sustainable forest management projects to improve government revenue, community livelihoods and long-term forest sustainability. However, throughout the Solomon Islands few effective forest management projects have been established. This was confirmed by Jessye I'te from Kosisi who reported that there is lack of support from the responsible authorities to facilitate the establishment of forest management projects, and that such information had not yet reached Kosisi village.⁹

Goal 16: Transparency to combat corruption

Goal 16.3 aims to design and implement a communication framework to share information between government agencies in the national and provincial governments. This is one of the challenges faced by many land-owning tribes and communities involved in logging operations in the country. There is no communication framework and community leaders usually have to approach the provincial agencies and go directly to the Ministry of Forestry in the capital Honiara to get information regarding legislation and developments. This was expressed by Joycelyn Authegna, who stated that this is one of the obstacles that communities faced, particularly women and girls, who are more tied to their villages due to their care and food production responsibilities.¹⁰



Logging in the Solomon Islands. Scott Zona/Flickr

⁷ Hoamana, M. Elder, Personal interview, 24 July 2021, 1:30 pm.

⁸ Bodrick, N. Logging Chairman, Personal interview, 25 July 2021, 7:50 am.

⁹ I'te, J. Personal interview, 25 July 2021, 9:36 am.

¹⁰ Authegna, J. Single Mother, Personal interview, 24 July 2021, 9:30 am.

Conclusion

The NFP is the main tool that the Solomon Islands has to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and it has numerous important goals related to Indigenous Peoples and local communities and forest governance and conservation. However, the problems identified by this case study are twofold: in many ways the NFP has not yet been implemented, but more importantly, it has ignored the specific rights, roles and needs of women and girls in forest conservation.

Authorities need to be more proactive in upholding the rights of land owning tribes and community members, and most especially

women, girls and other underrepresented groups. Numerous issues have resulted from the logging operation in Kosisi which have still not been addressed by the NFP, have deprived the local community of their rights and have only given land-owning tribes a say in issues impacting the whole community. Central to these is a lack of representation of women and girls in logging-related decision making and consultations, which the NFP does not explicitly try to address.

Other key issues that require attention also include the specific gender-based discrimination experienced for example by women

facing unwanted pregnancies, the lack of equitable benefit sharing for women trustees, as well as lack of accessible information available to women and girls about logging activities, their rights, and forest policies.

The fact that deforestation is by far and away the biggest contribution to greenhouse gas emissions in the Solomon Islands underlines how important it is that the NFP achieves its aim of “**sustaining the country's forest resources**”.

However, if it is to genuinely be “for the benefit and resilience of all Solomon Islanders”, much more emphasis must be placed on gender justice.



Kosisi log pond area. James Meimana

Carbon offsets, pulp mills and Indigenous resistance in Chile (Wallmapu)

By **Camila Romero**, Colectivo VientoSur, Chile



"If we don't have water, if we don't have a plot of land, a mawizantu, a mountain where we can gather good, healthy remedies, that haven't been contaminated...that is a problem for us." Woman leader of the *Asociación Indígena Trem Trem Mapu*.

The conflict between the largest pulp company present in Wallmapu and Mapuche communities in San José de la Mariquina has been going on for over 25 years, since the construction of the Valdivia pulp mill was first proposed. Since 2009, the mill has been selling carbon credits through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) for **generating electricity by burning biomass**. This has directly subsidised the mill's operations, and is dependent on pulp production at the mill and the vast industrial tree plantations that wood is sourced from.

This article describes some of the main problems faced by Mapuche women in the *Asociación Indígena Trem Trem Mapu* (Trem Trem Mapu Indigenous Association) in the commune of San José de la Mariquina, Wallmapu. Based on the testimony of a woman leader of the organization and the history of the socio-environmental conflict with CELCO (Celulosa Arauco y Constitución S.A.), it explains how the production of pulp for paper and textiles and biomass energy generation at Arauco's Valdivia pulp mill has affected Mapuche

territories. All of this is in the context of the **constitutional process** that is currently underway in Wallmapu, the COVID-19 pandemic, and also increasing **militarization** and **repression**, which put even more pressure on various aspects of life in Indigenous territories and on Indigenous bodies.

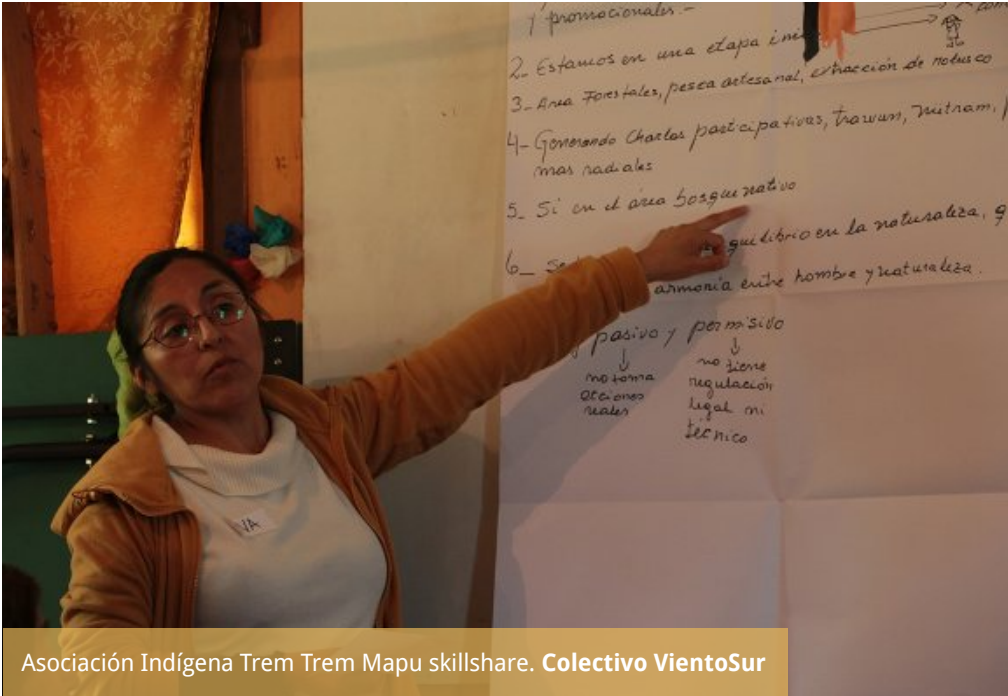
In the Los Ríos region, there are at least **ten active socio-environmental conflicts**, five of which are linked to the energy sector, and two to the forestry sector. Notably, seven of the conflicts are located in the territories of the Mapuche Indigenous Peoples, who make up about one quarter of the total population in the region.



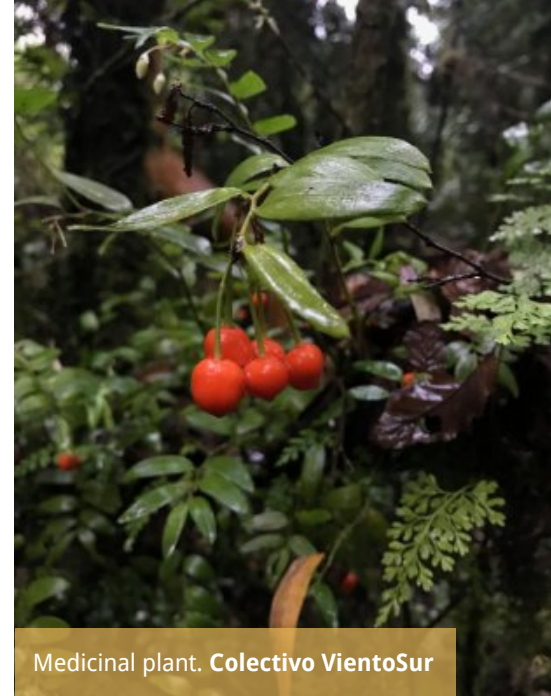
Eucalyptus plantation. **Colectivo VientoSur**



Valdivia pulp mill. **Orin Langelle**



Asociación Indígena Trem Trem Mapu skillshare. Colectivo VientoSur



Medicinal plant. Colectivo VientoSur

In the commune of Mariquina, the Mapuche communities of Lafkenche (meaning “People of the Sea”) and Williche (“People of the South”) have historically had to defend their rights and territories because of a neoliberal, extractivist model of forest development promoted by the Chilean state in alliance with private forestry companies. The forestry industry, based on industrial pine and eucalyptus plantations for pulp production, has since its inception caused conflicts in the commune due to intense environmental degradation and human rights violations, and has in effect **turned the area into a sacrifice zone**. Residents and communities have organized to denounce the impacts of this model, which has had repercussions for human health due to air pollution, water contamination and water scarcity as a result of extensive monoculture plantations, and the proximity of the mill to homes and schools. All of this has had major impacts on the economic, cultural and spiritual practices of communities.

Alongside the devastation in the multiple territories where the forestry industry operates, the

Mapuche people continue to resist the state violence that goes hand-in-hand with the extractivist model imposed in Wallmapu. Women have historically played a key role in this struggle, defending Indigenous territories, reproducing culture, sustaining family economies, and through spiritual practices as acts of resistance, confronting the multiple inequalities of the extractivist economy.

The *Asociación Indígena Trem Trem Mapu* has a long history of **territorial, cultural and environmental defense**, emphasizing traditional healthcare and the participation of women leaders and health workers such as *machi* (healers) and *lawentuchefe* (herbalists). This highlights the importance of *Itrofill Mongen* and *Az Mapu*, the basis of Mapuche traditional knowledge, which recognizes the importance of respecting and caring for all forms of life in a holistic manner.

Womens’ roles in maintaining community health and the family economy are deeply affected by the environmental problems caused by forest extractivism. For example, the destruction of native forests and

their replacement with pine and eucalyptus plantations has wiped out the medicinal plants that they collect to make remedies, and water scarcity and soil contamination affect peasant agriculture, causing instability in the social and community fabric and illnesses.

This prolonged situation has led traditional Mapuche health authorities to seek out alternatives to counteract the degradation that is experienced in the territories, which makes women’s lives more complicated, as they are in charge of multiple tasks in family and domestic arenas. Added to this are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on family economies, particularly in the activities that women carry out, such as the sale of agricultural products, food and crafts.

Despite these difficulties, women continue to resist and lead demands for care for the environment, healthy agrifood systems, local economies, and community initiatives that promote equal access to education, health and an environment that is free from contamination.



Russian women versus logging and tree plantations: one NGO's quest to regenerate traditional mixed forests and restore local livelihoods

By Lyudmila Zhirina, Viola, Russia

Viola's women-led efforts to restore forests in a radiation-impacted region of Russia are an example of gender-transformative climate action that mitigates greenhouse gas emissions, restores biodiversity and strengthens the livelihoods of rural women.

Their hands-on and self-directed approach to forest restoration is undoing the harm caused by illegal logging and state-sponsored plantation establishment, and sets a powerful example of what effective climate mitigation can look like.

Viola is an NGO that was founded by a group of concerned teachers, professors, doctors and students in response to the 1986 Chernobyl disaster in the Bryansk region of Russia, on the border with Ukraine and Belarus, which had the **highest level of radioactive fallout**. The western part of this region is located 170 km northeast of Chernobyl and received soil contamination levels significantly greater than 40 Curies per square kilometer.

In Russia, rural women typically prefer to discuss and solve issues that affect them with other women. For this purpose, Viola created a second NGO called Provincial Women in 1995, and since then, it has operated with a permanent staff of six and 30 volunteers, all of them women between the ages of 18 and 80.



The affected region is located at the intersection of various types of landscapes: the southern taiga, broadleaf forests and Polesia. Traditionally, these forests consisted of old-age spruce, oak, linden, and hornbeam, trees that have deep root systems. The forests performed important functions: they helped maintain the balance of small forest rivers and swamps and water levels in the wells of local villagers, they resisted fires, and fostered a comfortable mild climate. They also provided berries, mushrooms and medicinal herbs that families could consume and sell. Gathering forest products was a small business for local women.

After Chernobyl, in 1986-93, scientists informed the local population that trees are

accumulators of radionuclides. High levels of forest pollution were **detected in 35% of the forests**, an area 415,400 hectares in size. This period coincided with the collapse of the USSR, a time of legal and economic upheaval. There was no local forest fire service, and safety regulations prohibited forestry workers from spending more than two hours a day in forests with high radiation levels.

Illegal loggers took advantage of the situation, cutting down more than 80% of the old spruce, oak, linden and hornbeam trees. This was documented by annual monitoring observations by local ecologists and scientists from local NGOs (in unpublished materials). The illegal loggers smuggled roundwood with high levels of radionuclides to

Belarus and sold it to furniture makers and then left our region, and local residents and NGOs were powerless to stop this process. Companies and the government administration planted pine monocultures on these lands. Russian laws require timber producers to plant new trees in deforested areas, and **pine saplings are cheap and low maintenance** (compared to oak, for example).

Pine plantations do not perform the functions of a traditional forest that in comparison contain enormous biodiversity and provide food for local communities. Small rivers and swamps are drying up and water levels in wells are sinking due to the hydrological stress plantations cause. This has increased vulnerability to forest fires, which have broken out in every hot summer since 2009. Pine trees have superficial root systems, and high winds easily break fragile trunks and uproot them. This spurs a process of desertification. Local women say that they have lost their small businesses collecting berries, mushrooms and herbs from the forests, and are having trouble finding drinking water for their families.

The NGOs carry out educational, human rights and practical actions. Our main target population consists of vulnerable groups such as youth, women in local communities, women with large families, and women of the old Orthodox religious traditions who use old trees for rituals and construction (known as “old believers”). We lend radiometers to residents and train them to make maps of villages, fields and forests, identifying localized pollution. But our main task is to restore forests.

The work has been particularly successful among young women between the ages of 16 and 35. Elizaveta T., age 18, a student from the district city of Unecha, credits Provincial Women with creating educational and practical projects that have helped prevent desertification of the local territory after the destruction of traditional mixed forests. Vasilisa S., age 19, a student from a small village in the district of Klintsovsky, is very concerned that pine monocultures cannot withstand the windstorms that have increasingly affected this area over the last 10 years due to climate change. Evgenia K., age 27, a mother of three children residing in a village in the district of Zlynkovsky, attests that she has suffered due to the loss of forest biodiversity since she is no longer able to collect and store berries, mushrooms and medicinal herbs for her family.

Viola has created a local women’s public forestry group and a scientific laboratory of biomonitoring which operates out of Bryansk State University. We train local women to conduct soil biomonitoring and dendroclimatological analyses. We also train local women of all ages to collect high-quality seeds from the rare surviving spruce, oak, linden and hornbeam trees, cultivate seedlings in small forest nurseries, and obtain official permission to plant certain tree species to foster the regeneration of traditional mixed forests.

Every year, members of the Provincial Women help to cultivate and plant 5-7,000 seedlings. This helps to partially replace plantations with natural broadleaf and taiga forests. Provincial



Women-led conservation and reforestation initiatives. **Viola**



Women's long-term and effective work is unique in the region, and has succeeded in uniting women around the task of forest restoration.



Paraguay: Where lies become international climate policy

By **Inés Franceschelli**, Heñói, Paraguay



"The countryside needs water, it doesn't need eucalyptus. COVID-19 isn't going to kill us, the corporations will. We, the people, have a right to decide."

This case study provides a gendered analysis of public policies concerning land use, production practices, climate change and forests in Paraguay. It describes women's perspectives on the differentiated impacts that Paraguay's extractivist economic model has on their territories and lives, and their struggles to transform the political reality in their country.

Despite Paraguay's low historic contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions, the country is extremely vulnerable to climate change. According to [State of the Climate: Paraguay 2019](#), a report

published by the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development, that year was the hottest in the nation's history. Annual average precipitation has also increased by 200 mm in the last 70 years, although it has been concentrated into just a few areas that have experienced extreme weather events. Meanwhile, the rest of the country is rapidly drying out and experiencing desertification.

This worrying situation is acknowledged in the [National Climate Change Policy](#) and the [National Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies](#). Various responses are proposed in Paraguay's Nationally

Determined Contribution to the UN climate convention, which was recently updated. Although on paper these national policies appear to take the climate-related problems affecting the population of the country seriously, evidence points to the fact that the national executive's implementation of these policies is responding to other interests, and moving in the opposite direction.

Paraguay continues to follow an extractivist economic model based on the production of agricultural commodities such as genetically modified soy and corn, irrigated rice and beef, and increasingly eucalyptus wood, that is grown for the pulp industry or turned into charcoal to dry grain or produce steel. Recent transnational investments have amplified this model, such as the construction of a large-scale biofuel refinery and the expansion of exotic tree plantations by hundreds of thousands of hectares.

These forms of land use have serious implications for the country's vulnerability to climate change, and impact the least represented members of society the most, such as Indigenous Peoples, peasant communities and especially women.



Indigenous women are disproportionately impacted by climate change. **Susana Balbuena**



The vulnerability of the country and women to climate change

According to the [Climate Change Vulnerability Index](#) published by the Corporación Andina de Fomento, Paraguay is the eighth most vulnerable to climate change out of the 33 Latin American countries. This is due to high rates of poverty and inequality, as well as its extreme economic reliance on the agricultural sector, which [contributes 16% of GDP](#) and more than in any other Mercosur country. Climate change has and will continue to have extensive impacts on crop yields, as well as access to potable water and sanitation for poor communities, a situation worsened by high levels of contamination due to the widespread and indiscriminate use of agrochemicals.

Paraguay's ability to adapt to climate change is rated as extremely low, the seventh lowest in the region. This is again due to the country's dependence on agricultural exports, as well as institutional weaknesses that are characterized by corporate influence over public policy, extreme corruption in successive government administrations and the same party having been in power for decades.

Women's vulnerability to climate change is particularly pronounced, and is linked to how economically disadvantaged they are. According to the [National Institute of Statistics \(INE\)](#), 26.9% of the population is poor. While there are no gender-disaggregated statistics on poverty, their unequal access to resources can be deduced from various indicators, including the fact that, of the total number of bank accounts in the country, 45% belong to men, 29% are held jointly and [just 26% belong to women](#). Women also access fewer loans: 55% go to men, versus 40% to women.

Women are heads of household in [36.4% of homes](#) and they earn approximately 70.6% of what men earn, regardless of educational level or hours worked. According to the INE, women have fewer educational opportunities, lower rates of employment and were much more likely to lose their jobs in 2020 during the pandemic. In 2016, women did an average of [28.7 hours of unpaid work](#), more than twice as much as men (12.9 hours). In rural areas, the gap is even larger, with women doing 33.3 hours of unpaid work per week.

Peasant and Indigenous women are also victims of exclusion and

discrimination. They continue to be exclusively responsible for family care tasks, but also increasingly take on productive tasks (both on their farms and in paid work outside the home). Women in peri-urban and urban areas also face the challenge of supporting their families without the academic or vocational training necessary to obtain salaried work. Many are in low-skilled and poorly-paid jobs such as in maquiladoras (duty-free factories), while others are street vendors or other informal workers.

Whilst access to land, credit and other resources are needed for the economic wellbeing of rural women in peasant and Indigenous communities, recent land distribution processes in Paraguay have failed to transform unjust land ownership structures, and have excluded women. [According to Oxfam](#), only 23% of farms are owned by women, equivalent to a total of 16% of land nationally, and women have received just 13.6% of lands allocated to peasant families. They have also been marginalized in terms of access to agricultural support, receiving just 14% of technical assistance and less than 23% of credit.

The roots of the problem: The economic model

Paraguay's commodity-driven extractivist economic model poses serious threats to the environment and the country's residents, and is the main driver of greenhouse gas emissions. Genetically modified soy and corn have caused high levels of agrotoxic contamination, and livestock production has converted native forests into pastures. Eucalyptus plantations dry out soils and increase the risk of forest fires, and the unsustainable use of water to irrigate rice crops is drying up wetlands in the southern part of the country, and poisoning rivers.

Over the past few decades the production of these commodities has resulted in:

- The destruction of nearly all of the Atlantic Forest that once covered most of the eastern region of the country, growing destruction of the wetland ecosystem in the south, and growing destruction of the ecosystems of the Cerrado and Gran Chaco in the west;
- The forced and often violent displacement of Indigenous and peasant communities, resulting in migration to urban and peri-urban areas, where they survive in conditions of extreme poverty;

- The loss of food sovereignty, given the high rate of conversion of land from food production to agricultural export commodities, with the consequent need for food that was once produced domestically to be imported;

- The loss of traditional knowledge, production techniques and cultures, as displaced Indigenous and peasant communities cannot maintain their ancestral ways of life.

Policy proposals to address climate change

In April 2021, the Paraguayan state published its updated **Nationally Determined Contribution** (NDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which were **initially set out in 2015** as part of the Paris Agreement.

The update, based on the 2030 National Development Plan, the National Climate Change Policy and other public policies theoretically being implemented, included measures that aimed to make the country more economically and financially competitive, and described good intentions that were far from the reality of what is being experienced on the ground. Likewise, it failed to reflect the gravity of the situation or establish measures geared toward respecting the territories and rights of women, Indigenous Peoples and peasant communities, and their proposals for strategies that genuinely

address the specific problems they face.

To increase community resilience, the NDC includes vague proposals such as: more green areas; increasing citizens' participation in tackling climate change; promoting tourism with an emphasis on the conservation of natural and cultural heritage; improvements in health services; and "initiatives that help to increase the climate resilience of ecosystems through socioeconomic and cultural activities".

Regarding biodiversity and ecosystems, the plan includes general aims such as "conservation actions and restoration that takes into account ecosystem services and vulnerable communities", but ignores increasing deforestation and criminal productive practices. It is no surprise therefore that the UN's Green Climate Fund and Food and Agriculture Organization have

fuelled the expansion of monoculture tree plantations in Indigenous territories by financing the PROEZA program.

With regard to the agriculture, livestock and forestry sectors, goals and objectives are included in Paraguay's NDC that aim to improve yields and intensify production. However, there are no measures designed to increase food security and sovereignty.

Linked to the NDC is Paraguay's "REDD++ Policies, Actions and Measures" package. While Paraguay has **reported progress on paper** and was **controversially awarded a 50 million USD results-based REDD+ payment** by the Green Climate Fund, deforestation and forest fires continue at an alarming rate, and the destruction of forests and other ecosystems has not been met with any serious response by national authorities.

Indigenous resistance to eucalyptus plantations

There are many examples of courageous women and Indigenous-led resistance and struggle in Paraguay. Particularly worth mentioning is how Qom Indigenous women are resisting false solutions to climate change.

Bernarda Pesoa is a Qom Indigenous leader in the district of Benjamín Aceval, Department of Presidente Hayes, in the Paraguayan Chaco. She is also a member of **CONAMURI**, an organization that supports rural and Indigenous women in Paraguay. Bernarda has led the Qom's fight against large-scale eucalyptus plantations in the Chaco. For four years, Fundación Paraguaya, a development NGO associated with conservative politics in the country, has insisted on planting eucalyptus on Qom land, promising that it will help them escape from poverty when they will eventually *"be able to sell the wood to silos for drying soy."*

This is one of many efforts to convince rural communities to cultivate this exotic species that dries out and deteriorates the soil. This threat is even greater for the Qom, since local livelihoods are dependent on income from the production and sale of crafts made from totora reeds (*Schoenoplectus californicus*). Desertification and water scarcity are causing the reeds to disappear, leaving Qom women without the raw materials for their work.

In an interview, Bernarda described how: *"They came to break our organization, to create disturbances among the leaders of our people, to co-opt some with the promise of earnings, but we know that it is not*

the case; those sectors are only interested in profits."

"We have lived on this land for more than 38 years, we have 2,227 hectares on which three clans live, a total of 620 families. We have schools, a health center, all that we need to live. Four years ago, they came with a supposed study that

consisted of making a 'traffic light' system to categorize different 'poverty reduction' proposals. It turns out that our people gave a green light to the idea of planting eucalyptus, and they said that that was enough to grant free, prior and informed consent."



Bernarda and her Qom community. **Susana Balbuena**



Qom livelihoods are dependent on marshland areas. **Susana Balbuena**



A Qom community meeting. **Susana Balbuena**

"Only two of our eight leaders signed the contract with the company. And since then, all we have had is violence. They ambushed and beat me when we tried to stop the tractors. We filed a complaint with the attorney general's office, and nothing happened. They gave me death threats, they told me that they were working with the Paraguayan Indigenous Institute [INDI], with the municipality and the government, that they were going to annul the recognition of my leadership, that

my community is going to disappear. I know they can't do that."

"The project is going to affect our artisanal well, our cemetery, and we are worried about the totora, which is the raw material we use for crafts. The project is going to benefit just 40 families, not all 620 of us. The foundation pays 200,000 Guaraní (less than \$30) to every family each week. What can you do with that? That's less than half of the minimum wage... And they told the leaders

that it's a three-year project, but growing it takes at least seven years and up to 10. This is the first time that brothers have fought; if it weren't for the presence of this private company, we wouldn't be fighting."

"The countryside needs water, it doesn't need eucalyptus. COVID-19 isn't going to kill us, the corporations will. We, the people, have a right to decide."

Conclusion

Paraguay is an emblematic case of a land that is subjected to the plundering of resources, where the destruction comes at a high cost, and where ecosystems and life in all of its forms, including human life, are assigned little importance.

Multinational corporations do their multi-million-dollar business here, allied with local capitalists and

recruiting managers from politicians in the three branches of government. Public policies are either designed to covertly subsidize agribusiness or recite good intentions that are not fulfilled.

This is clearly also the case with climate mitigation policies in Paraguay. Whether at the national

or international levels, they incentivise rather than tackle the root causes of deforestation and greenhouse gas emissions. This increases the impacts of the production of commodities such as soy and eucalyptus on poor, peasant and Indigenous communities, which fall disproportionately on women.



Why forest protection policies in Rwanda must adapt to the needs of poor, rural women

By **Aphrodice Nshimiyimana**, Global Initiative for Environment and Reconciliation (GER), Rwanda

Rwanda suffers increasing deforestation due to a number of factors, one of which is the fact that wood-based bioenergy is still the most reliable source of energy used domestically.

Although dependence on wood has dropped in recent years, about **85% of Rwanda's overall primary energy consumption** still comes from biomass and almost every household uses it for cooking. From 2001 to 2020, Rwanda lost 37,700 ha of tree cover, equivalent to a 7.6% decrease.

Different **forest, biodiversity, environmental and land use and management** policies have been put in place to fight deforestation in Rwanda and the greenhouse gas emissions that result from it.

However, they have often failed to bring needed solutions. In some instances they have instead increased pressure on women from poor and historically marginalized families, especially in rural areas where access to forests is severely restricted despite high levels of dependency on wood for domestic use.

For example, Rwanda's 2011 "**Green Growth and Climate Resilience: National Strategy for Climate Change and Low Carbon Development**" was developed to

mainstream climate action into all sectors of the economy. Program 12 deals with forestry and biomass and, amongst other goals, it aims to 1) "Promote afforestation/ reforestation", which involves establishing tree plantations to supply fuel wood and charcoal; 2) "Employ Improved Forest Management", which often implies protecting forest areas by restricting access to them, and 3) "Promote improved cook stoves for efficient and clean wood and charcoal consumption", in order to reduce demand for biomass.

All three of these aims can result in **disproportionate impacts on women and girls**. Restricting access to forests and establishing tree plantations threatens livelihoods that are dependent on forest resources, and small-scale food production, which women tend to bear more responsibility for. However, using biomass for cooking has perhaps the greatest direct and differentiated impact, due to the time women and girls spend collecting wood, and the health impacts they are subjected to due to exposure to smoke.

Using corn cobs as cooking fuel. GER





Eucalyptus and tea plantations in Rwanda. [travelmag.com/flickr](https://www.travelmag.com/flickr)

The emphasis on improved cookstoves as a forest protection and climate mitigation policy has come about in large part due to the high financial cost of alternatives. Biogas was initially seen as a promising solution for household energy needs, but the infrastructure required and materials needed to operate biogas digesters and stoves, and the amount of organic material that needed to be sourced, has meant that **only a small number of communities have been able to build and maintain them.**

The Rwandan government has frequently stated that LPG and renewable electricity are more cost-effective compared to wood and charcoal, and rural electrification has progressed considerably in Rwanda in recent years too. However, in general, communities have found the costs of gas and electricity and the stoves required to be unaffordable.

For many poor rural communities, collecting their own biomass remains the only affordable option to them, in the absence of more effective support. Jacqueline Ayinkamiye, a resident of rural Nduba in Gasabo District, near Kigali, said that *“collecting wood and other biomass to cook with is the only priority we have; we even struggle to get enough to eat, we do not have money to buy charcoal or gas. All we can do is buy food and the children go to collect firewood.”* Given that collecting firewood in public and private forests is illegal, Jacqueline said that *“...the forests are highly protected, we move around and collect whatever we find that can be used instead of wood.”*

Improved cook stoves are therefore a popular tool for reducing the demand for firewood or charcoal. Compared to other options, they require less infrastructure and lower operating costs given that users were already collecting their own biomass. In a group discussion

on the subject, residents of Nduba said that *“Although wood and charcoal are still needed, it is at least the most affordable option for us living in rural areas with tiny incomes...for food that needed 10 pieces of wood to cook, with that cookstove we use only 3, for food that needed 5kg of charcoal to cook, it uses 1.5-2kg.”*

However, there is **very little published evidence** suggesting that improved cookstoves are an effective means of reducing wood use. On top of this, there is also very little evidence that they reduce the significant health impacts that predominantly women and girls experience through cooking with biomass. They also do not address underlying cultural and societal injustices.

Jacqueline Ayinkamiye said that it is still in the mindsets of Rwandans that unpaid domestic work such as cooking and cleaning should be carried out by women and young



An improved cookstove. GER

girls. *"We are not going to change this mindset overnight"* she said. *"It is still a woman's responsibility to cook for the family, and when we don't bring something to the table...we feel ashamed and irresponsible, it causes conflicts within our families. That is why we try our best to find firewood, as well as using agricultural waste like maize cobs."*

The burden on women and girls, particularly in poor families, affects other aspects of their lives. *"Young girls are late to school and have less time to revise compared to their male counterparts, others drop out, and women hardly participate in community development initiatives. Cooking occupies most of our time."*

Basing energy and forest policy on an approach that by definition accepts the gender-differentiated impacts of domestic biomass use is therefore fundamentally unjust. In light of this, forest policies in Rwanda must adapt to the needs of rural women. At GER, we believe that the only way this can be achieved in an equitable way is if women are prioritized and involved in forest governance processes. Women's involvement in decision- and policy-making at all levels will ensure that their rights are recognized and respected throughout efforts to protect forests and halt deforestation.

GER works with and advocates for women from rural communities and historically marginalized groups to fight deforestation and conserve

natural forests in a just way. Our national campaigns aim to reduce women's vulnerability to the social impacts of deforestation, overcome the burden of providing energy for domestic use and avoid the health problems that result from their daily exposure to smoke.

According to Innocent Musore, GER's Executive Director, *"We need more participation of women in forestry resource management, and all forest related policies should consider how rural women are unable to adapt renewable energy for domestic use. The transition from biomass to renewable energy is a process that must be taken step by step depending on communities' capacity and the support available to them, so that renewable energy can be affordable."*

