

## **African women are vulnerable**

by **Cécile Ndjébet**

African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests

At the last conference on forest tenure in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in 2009, we created the Women's Network for Community Forestry (REFACOF) spanning 13 countries in Africa. In 2010 we convened a general assembly that produced a five-year strategic plan.

In Africa, women have no decision-making power or control over forest resources and their forest rights are limited to usage rights over non-timber forest products. Customary systems in Africa prevent women from owning land. African land grabs are reinforcing this precarious situation and the overall vulnerability of African women. If we don't address land rights and challenge the customary systems, the situation will not improve. REDD could worsen the situation for women. Promote REDD, by all means, but we need to specify the conditions, and in particular we need to address women's needs. We have to tackle the problems of women specifically because they are different, and there are also many differences between women.

The three major challenges are:

- Getting women to act collectively—Africa is huge, and it is difficult to communicate, even between villages.
- Securing property rights to land and forests for women—this requires reforms to land- and forest-tenure systems.
- Ensuring women's direct participation in reform processes and in REDD and climate-change discussions and processes.

## **Women-led reform amid conflict**

by **Joan Jamisolamin**

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Despite its rich resources and cultural diversity, Mindanao has long suffered armed conflict in forests because of clashes in political-religious views and over territories and access to natural resources. Indigenous women in particular face big issues, some of which we share with our other Asian sisters. Women's rights are not well-recognized—women are doubly burdened because they are expected to carry on with domestic activities as they struggle to participate in the public sphere. Recently the mining sector has been pushing aggressively into forests and ancestral domains, which are usually key biodiversity ecosystems. This is exacerbating the marginal position of women in terms of ownership of and access to resources.

The start-up of a big development project in an area in which communities are not ready or lack the system to engage with the project often leads to the moral disintegration of families and community values. Mining brings militarization because of resistance by communities, which results in human rights' violations, especially against women. Also, the expansion of oil-palm plantations and other commercial-scale monocultures has increased landlessness among small farmers, especially women. In one case study in the country, even though an oil-palm plantation was owned and managed by a community cooperative there was little participation by women, and few benefits accrued to them.

Women suffer most from armed conflict. Women tell us that their husbands joined the struggle in the hope that it would lead to change, leaving behind the women and their families. Those families have become even poorer, so there is a feminization of poverty.



**Good listeners:** Participants tune into a debate during the conference.

Photo: Hwan Ok Ma

Indigenous and rural poor women have risen to these challenges by creating spaces for participation and asserting their rights to resources. They have had their share of successes in defending their rights to natural resources and in resolving conflicts over them. Success lies in organizing small nodes of women leaders in communities to empower them to defend their rights and speak for their needs. Seed funds provided through accessible and manageable small grants enable women to embark on initiatives for economic sustainability and political representation.

Women comprise a very important sector in managing and defending the country's natural resources. Continuing efforts are needed to further reinforce the recognition of women's rights and perspectives, especially in natural resource management and conflict resolution.

## **Women's tenure rights in China**

by **Li Ping**

Landesa

No matter what type of land reform you have, it will affect men and women differently. Tenure security for women depends on three factors—whether it is legally recognizable; whether it is socially acceptable; and whether women's rights are enforceable externally.

China has made huge progress in forest land reform, in which land is allocated to individual households. Those land rights are legally defined as property rights. The reform stimulates forest farmers to invest in land, to take care of it and to manage it well to increase income.

However, when looked at from a gender perspective we find there are a number of issues and concerns. Chinese women tend to move to their husband's village when they marry. Under China's land reform, the allocation is based on the number of people in the household. But when a daughter grows up and moves to another village, how can she take the land with her? So this is the kind of issue that Chinese women face. If a woman divorces she will be treated as an outsider in her ex-husband's village.

All the allocations come with a certificate. However, in most cases the household name on the certificate belongs to a man. This can create problems—when the man wants to sell the land he can use the certificate, and the potential transferee will see the man's name and the transaction can go through without any reference to the women in that household.

All women face the problem of partitioning the land when they get married or divorced. The law is unclear. Whether a household property is partitionable is one question, but even if it is, will the woman be brave enough to stand against her brothers? And if she does stand up and is met with resistance it is uncertain whether she will be able to file a law suit. So whether the woman's rights are legally recognizable is far from clear.

To increase the social acceptability of women claiming their rights, there needs to be a campaign to make women aware of their land rights and the challenges they are facing. They need to be given the legal tools to claim those rights.

Recently we were able to secure the land rights for three sisters who all married out of their village and when their parents died the village took the land back. The sisters came to us for help, and we helped them. Women do not know that land rights are inheritable—they know something is wrong with the situation but they don't know the rules.

Normally, men tend to spend the income earned from the household property on themselves, but women are more likely to use the money for their whole household and for their kids. If you give tenure security to women, therefore, it means you secure the livelihoods of the whole family.

## **The REDD gender agenda**

**by Abidah Setyowati**

WOCAN

My colleagues and I recently completed a study<sup>1</sup> on gender and REDD in eight countries in Asia. The study came about because of growing concern that something is missing in REDD negotiations—the involvement of women. We explored the extent to which REDD has included gender considerations. According to our initial findings, there is:

- Little evidence that institutions implementing REDD or payments for ecosystem services projects have incorporated gender in systematic and significant ways.
- No specific recognition of women as a stakeholder group that will be affected by REDD differently than men.
- An assumption that women will benefit automatically from community-focused activities.

On the other hand, if REDD brings about compliance with international conventions on women's rights it could have a positive effect on women through payments and co-benefits, including secured access to forest. We recommend that REDD-related processes:

- Incorporate a gender perspective in project design and implementation.
- Provide capacity building for women and space for their voices.
- Strengthen women's organizations/self-help groups to provide them with skills and knowledge.
- Develop benefit distribution systems that recognize and reward women's contributions to forest management.
- Ensure secure access to forests for women.
- Promote technologies that reduce women's workloads while promoting conservation and increasing men's support for women's participation and leadership in REDD.

## **Women's rights in Indonesia**

**by Avi Mahaningtyas**

Chief of Cluster, Environment and Economic Governance  
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Activists and academics in Indonesia use the term 'gender justice'. Gender justice requires relevant processes to eliminate inequalities between women and men that are produced and reproduced in the family, the community, the state and the market. It also requires that mainstream institutions are accountable for tackling gender-based injustices and discrimination that keep too many women excluded.

In Indonesia, the application of the *Ibuism* ideology (the idea that women are subordinate to men) in policies and programs, along with male-dominated socio-cultural practices in forest tenure and forest governance at all levels (state, community and household), have maintained various forms of gender injustices.

There is a strong need:

- To ensure gender justice in the reform of the regulatory framework.
- For a systematic approach to capacity-building on gender justice in forest tenure and forest governance.
- To increase the voices of women and vulnerable groups in decision-making at all levels (e.g. household, clan, community, state and market).
- To empower marginalized and forest-dependent groups.

Even if policies are affirmative, implementing them is a challenge. Access to information is related to social class and also to education level. It is likely that many poor rural women will not be reached by government programs or forest-based development. We need a specific approach.

**Question from the floor:** Can anyone suggest a strategy to increase attention to women's issues in tenure reform and also in REDD?

**Ndjébet:** When we were creating REFACOF we thought it was a big opportunity for women to be together, and that's important because we have to act collectively. I encourage Asian women to get together and organize themselves. We can then act cooperatively and make a difference at the global level.

**Setyowati:** In a paper available on the WOCAN website there is a complete list of recommendations on how to empower women in REDD. I agree that if REDD complies with all international conventions on women's rights it will open opportunities for women to be involved and to obtain benefits including access and tenure. Women are diverse and have different perspectives on how forests should be managed. Those perspectives need to be included in the design of REDD.

**Mahaningtyas:** Engaging with women is not just about inviting them to a meeting, it is about continuous engagement, being there as a friend to explain and listen. We can use technology to transfer information in both directions.

**Li Ping:** Of the three parameters I mentioned in my presentation, social acceptance is the most difficult. Men should be educated, yes, but the women also should be educated so they can say "I'm no different in terms of these rights". Women should be empowered to stand up and claim what is rightfully theirs.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.wocan.org/files/all/gender\\_differentiated\\_impacts\\_of\\_redd\\_final\\_report1.pdf](http://www.wocan.org/files/all/gender_differentiated_impacts_of_redd_final_report1.pdf).