

## Voices Heard: Indigenous Women’s Dialogue on Gender & Forests

During the UNPFII, the UN-REDD Programme organized a “Women’s Dialogue on Gender and Forests” on 22 April 2015, which sought to bring together several indigenous women leaders engaged in and sensitive to the forest and gender interface. To foster genuine dialogue and identify priorities, lessons learned and best practices for the meaningful participation of indigenous women in sustainable management of forests and REDD+, the event was structured around a small group discussion with 20 indigenous women leaders from the African, Asia-Pacific and Latin America and Caribbean regions. It aimed to facilitate a bottom-up approach to learn from indigenous women leaders from the South on how to design and implement meaningful, tangible and relevant on-the-ground solutions for strengthening indigenous women’s involvement in REDD+ action.



*Photo credit: Dearbhla Keegan, UNDP/UN-REDD*

Over the course of the rich, two-hour dialogue, indigenous women leaders made diverse interventions and provided expert guidance that centered on common themes ranging from improving capacity of women and youth and identifying gender champions to link REDD+ to local context and economically empower women. These shared reflections and guidance are summarized briefly below.

- Improve capacity of women and youth: Improving the gender responsiveness of forest management and REDD+ action should involve dual actions of building the capacity of women and male and female youth on the sustainable management of forests and REDD+ as well as addressing more general educational gaps, which prevent their involvement in such processes. Tackling these gaps can include improving levels of literacy, informing them of their national and international rights, as well as using a wide range of

communication tools, such as television, radio, and theater to communicate messaging.

- Identify gender champions among men and leaders: Men can be critical actors to help promote (as well as hinder) women's inclusion in REDD+ and forest management, particularly at the local level. Community leaders and local authorities can also assist in raising gender and women's concerns to a higher political level. Accordingly, more concerted efforts should be made to build capacity of men, community leaders and local authorities on gender equality issues and the effective inclusion of indigenous women in forest management and REDD+ processes.
- Link REDD+ to local contexts: To have REDD+ be more effective and relevant in design and implementation for both women and men at the local level, additional efforts are needed to frame and link REDD+ to issues pertinent to women and men in local communities (e.g. sustainable management of forests, agriculture, mining and water quality issues, etc.), wherein REDD+ approaches are developed from and informed by issues and sustainable practices occurring on-the-ground.
- Economically support and empower women: Indigenous women identified the continued need for additional economical means and funding to support women's attendance and participation in consultations and decision-making processes on REDD+. Additionally, given their roles within communities, indigenous women often have limited means of income, which can then place them at a further disadvantage. Putting more emphasis on economically empowering women and helping them achieve a source of income (e.g. planting fruit trees), can help increase their opportunities to participate in decision making as well as their status and negotiating powers within communities.

Through this fruitful discussion, the experiences shared by these indigenous women leaders will further help to inform the work undertaken by the UN-REDD Programme in mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion in national and local REDD+ processes. Next steps are now being explored to continue and build upon these dialogues at regional levels and create regional and national rosters of experts who could act as advisors on gender equality and indigenous women's empowerment issues within the Programme's work moving forward.