

THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S NETWORK FOR COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT OF FORESTS (REFACOF): EMPOWERING AFRICAN WOMEN TO INFLUENCE REDD+ A NATIONAL, POLICY-LEVEL INITIATIVE

GENDER & REDD+ CASE STUDY SERIES



REFACOF's MISSION:

To promote women's rights in Africa and advocate to shape policies and practices for gender equity in relation to land and forest tenure.

INTRODUCTION:

Forests, which comprise a total of four billion hectares of land cover worldwide, are one of nature's greatest assets—while, at the same time, effective and sustainable forest managements poses one of the global community's biggest challenges. Forests have the ability to absorb carbon dioxide (CO₂), a potent greenhouse gas and primary component of anthropogenic emissions, and act as carbon sinks. However, when forests are destroyed, they release CO₂ into the atmosphere, contributing to climate change. Forest loss produces 12-15% of total annual greenhouse gas emissions, which is why it is essential that forest management be integrated into effective climate change solutions.

REDD+, which stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation plus conservation, sustainable management of forests, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks, is a framework that seeks to provide financial incentives for developing countries that are making those reductions and conserving forests. The ultimate aim of REDD+ is to foster sustainable forest management, which is not only a smart economic decision, but a smart decision for the environment and the people who depend on it.

Women from forest-dependent communities—communities that are often among the poorest—play an integral role in the management of forests, yet are frequently sidelined in decision-making processes and leadership roles. This exclusion is detrimental, as gender equality is essential for undertaking sustainable forest governance and achieving the goals of REDD+. In order for REDD+ to become a successful mechanism to combat climate change, and in order for it to provide concrete environmental solutions, gender-responsive standards and safeguards that incorporate gender equality and women's rights must be at the core of REDD+ policies and programmes.

Integrating gender considerations into REDD+ policy, planning, and implementation is a key issue for numerous countries. Leveraging learning and knowledge sharing for gender and REDD+ is essential in moving toward harmonized policy reform across relevant sectors, including natural resource management, climate change adaptation and mitigation, land use and tenure reform, and benefit sharing. This case study identifies and consolidates existing tools and best practices for greater access and applicability in mainstreaming gender considerations into REDD+.

WHY GENDER MATTERS IN REDD+ :

Every day in their roles as farmers, foresters, fishers, caretakers, and household providers, women use and manage natural resources. Women have unique experiences and knowledge with respect to their environments and offer important perspectives in natural resource governance. Specifically, women and men from rural communities often have differentiated knowledge of forest resources and diverse roles in its management. Given their responsibility for meeting food, water and energy needs for the household, women's work and time burdens are increased by the depletion of forest resources. Not only does women's equitable participation and representation in REDD+ uphold commitments to women's empowerment and gender equality, it also makes for better development, more effective and efficient climate change solutions, and stronger sustainability and livelihood outcomes.

Thanks to REFACOF's work, 30-40% women are now included in decision-making positions at village, district, regional, and national levels—contributing toward integrating gender in R-PP and other processes.


















REFACOF BACKGROUND:

The African Women's Network for Community Management of Forests (Réseau des Femmes Africaines pour la Gestion Communautaire des Forêts, or "REFACOF") is a network of women involved in sustainable forest resource management in Africa. REFACOF was formed at the May 2009 International Conference on Forest Tenure, Governance and Enterprise: New Opportunities for West and Central Africa held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, where 45 African women delegates first established the network and developed its founding Declaration. Today, REFACOF is composed of 17 countries throughout Africa (see map).

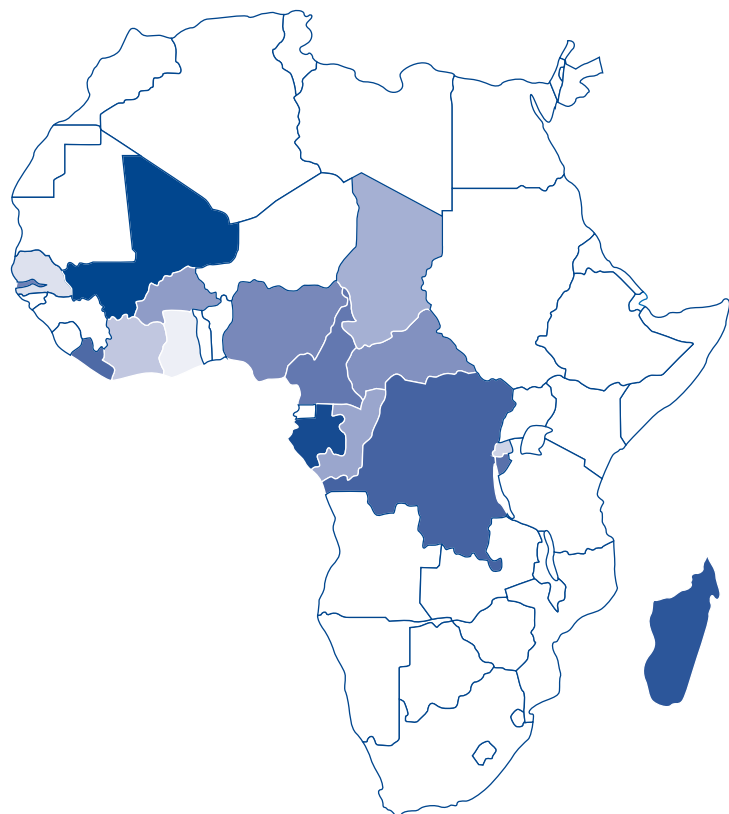
As Cameroon's civil society REDD+ and climate change platform coordinator, REFACOF has successfully engaged women at all levels of the REDD+ decision making process – with women now holding 30-40 percent of decision-making positions at most levels. REFACOF demonstrates that it is possible to have women involved if there is a political will – and if resources are allocated to enhance capacities of women and women's networks.

The goal of the REFACOF initiative is to ensure that the voices of rural and indigenous women are being heard and progressively taken into consideration in REDD+ processes. This case study highlights the strategies for ensuring that these considerations are understood and progressively taken into account—and the extraordinary results that have been achieved, in particular in championing women's participation and perspectives in forest governance spheres and in transforming land tenure norms.

REFACOF MEMBER COUNTRIES

	Senegal
	Gambia
	Mali
	Burkina Faso
	Liberia
	Ivory Coast
	Ghana
	Nigeria
	Chad
	Cameroon
	Gabon
	Congo
	Central Africa Republic
	RDC
	Rwanda
	Burundi
	Madagascar

Edition 2015



CURRENT STATUS OF REDD+ IN CAMEROON :

Since 2005, Cameroon has been engaging in REDD+. At the national level, the government elects for financing options through both funding and market-based approaches. A number of REDD+ pilot initiatives are currently taking place in Cameroon, ranging from payments for ecosystem services to forest communities, to biodiversity conservation at the regional level through landscape management, to a variety of capacity-building and technical activities, such as the development of an MRV action plan at the national level. REDD Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) preparation has involved broad stakeholder consultation with national experts and stakeholder workshops and a crucial step in the REDD+ process was the creation of the national civil society for REDD+ and climate change. After five years of negotiations, the Voluntary Partnership Agreement between the EU and Cameroon was signed in 2010 and ratified into national law.

Cameroon is a member of the Central African Forest Commission (COMIFAC) and the COMIFAC's Working Group on Climate Change. Since 2010, Cameroon has been a Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) country participant, which was when the first grant agreement to develop an R-PP was signed. Since 2011, Cameroon has been a United Nations REDD Programme (UN-REDD) Partner. In 2013, the country's R-PP was approved by the FCPF, which secured \$3.6 Million USD for implementation. This "readiness grant" is expected to be used to develop Cameroon's national REDD+ strategy, which, according to the R-PP, intends to develop legislation on a range of topics, including stakeholder engagement, carbon rights, and distribution of benefits from REDD+ programs.

"It is possible to have women in decision-making positions, but we need to have good leadership to do so—somebody, a woman or man, who knows what can be done with women's involvement, what are the consequences of women not being involved are, what are the chance of success will be if the women are involved. Those good leaders will know how to select women with capacities to influence, to say what they think, and of course, to progress the issues of their colleagues, their counterparts, their communities.

CECILE NDJEBET,
President of REFACOF

OBJECTIVES:

REFACOF aims to make concrete, meaningful, and effective contributions to forest governance in order to influence national policies and international frameworks regarding women's rights and tenure in member countries. Under African customary law, women seldom own or inherit land, and the only way they can access it is by marriage or through their male children. Through advocacy work, REFACOF has been able to propose articles and forest policies to the Government and to the Parliament that include women's interests and ultimately will secure women's rights in forestry and natural resource management, as well as REDD+ in the coming years. The lack of collective action amongst women's organizations was a pressing issue that led to REFACOF forming strategic country and regional level development interventions. By strengthening women's networks and partnering with men so they can advocate for comprehensive gender equality, which benefits broad community wellbeing, REFACOF has made it clear that inequitable situations are not an option.

"If women have the property rights to the forest, she will build in forest enterprises, give added value, develop partnerships, gain money, change her status and the status of her family—we don't need money from REDD+, we don't need carbon from REDD+, we need reforms. Bring REDD+ for reforms—we care about reforms that will secure women's rights."

CECILE NDJEBET,
President of REFACOF

As Cameroon's civil society REDD+ and climate change platform coordinator, REFACOF has successfully engaged women at all levels of REDD+ decision-making. This work began by creating a civil society platform for REDD+. REFACOF then introduced criteria to include gender at the decision-making level by establishing a Platform Coordination Unit at the regional, district, and village levels that required a woman, as well as an Indigenous People's representative, to be a part of each unit. As a result, a decentralized platform was created that gave women access to decision-making and leadership roles—ultimately giving women influence in REDD+ policy, programming and processes. The government of Cameroon has been open to REFACOF and the civil society platform's participation, as it endeavors to gather data from communities and villages so that the contributions of rural women and men can be included in the national REDD+ strategy.

In addition to its civil society platform and women's organization efforts, REFACOF strives to build strong networks and strategic alliances with those in positions of political power, including traditional chiefs, parliamentarians, and mayors. As a result of these linkages, every ministry in Cameroon now has a gender focal point and is attempting to build gender sensitivity within its staff.



OUTCOMES & FUTURE IMPLICATIONS:

To date, REFACOF has realized some impressive results, including establishing a Women's Observer Seat in FCPF, which is significant in that now a woman will be invited to every FCPF meeting, ensuring that the interests of rural and indigenous women are raised, considered and fulfilled. This is an impressive step in realizing women's rights in natural resources access and ownership. Additionally, REFACOF has triggered great progress on national forest policy reform, including by raising awareness on differences between forest and tree ownership; advocating for secure land and forest tenure for women; and increasing access for women to benefit-sharing mechanisms.

In particular, REFACOF has achieved remarkable headway in reforming national land tenure laws through the lens of gender and REDD+ by presenting women's legislation for land tenure reform and using REDD+ as a window for opportunity. While this work is still ongoing, today in Cameroon, 30-40 percent women are included in decision-making positions at the village, district, regional, and national levels—contributing toward integrating gender into REDD+ policies and planning, as well as and other processes. Some of the strategies employed in REFACOF's work and successful implementation of the project include:

- Involving men at the local and national level, especially traditional leaders; ensuring culturally appropriate understanding of 'gender';
- Building capacity of actors, partners, stakeholders, women and indigenous peoples through information-sharing, sensitization, education, and communication;
- Creating alliances and networks of gender-sensitive people working on projects; building strong networks of women's organizations, with technical know-how;
- Developing gender-sensitive criteria and indicators, and identifying baselines prior to trainings and awareness activities;
- Participating in forest and land reform processes and advocating for more gender-sensitive reform processes; and
- Ensuring gender monitoring and evaluation of the activities, projects, and programs.

“REDD+ and gender are like something you cannot separate. If you want REDD+ to succeed, you need to work on the relationship between men and women towards forests, towards agriculture, towards natural resources.”

CECILE NDJEBET,
President of REFACOF

However, this positive work has not been accomplished without challenges—many of which still persist. Some of these challenges include a lack of local resource allocation, as sustained resources to get and keep women engaged have been insufficient; limited support to women's networks and from donors who understand the importance of gender in this context; a lack of opportunities for women to access information or training to strengthen their capacity, participation, and contribution to REDD+ processes; persisting insecure tenure rights, which limit women in their ability to mitigate and adapt to climate change; and finding opportunities to scale up REFACOF's successful strategies and capitalize on experiences that will inspire other REDD+ countries.

NEXT STEPS:

- Continuing to champion strategies for ensuring that rural and indigenous women's voices are being considered and taken into account
- Diversifying REFACOF's governance structure and sources of financial support
- Developing a strategy for membership so that existing members are able to ensure that whoever joins REFACOF in the future can fully contribute and is aligned with its vision and mission

CONCLUSION

Looking ahead, strategies for ensuring that the voices of rural and indigenous women are being heard and progressively taken into account will be crucial in order to achieve the desired outcomes of REDD+. This can only be done with strong political will and support from governments, increased capacity of civil society organizations, and more concrete resources for effective advocacy. REFACOF demonstrates that it is not only possible to have women involved if there is a political will, but advantageous to do so. Resources must be allocated in order to enhance capacities of women and women's networks.



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This case study is part of the Gender and REDD+ Case Study Series. It was prepared for IUCN with the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) via the Gender Equality for Climate Change Opportunities (GECCO) initiative. GECCO leverages advancements in women's empowerment and gender equality through, and for, the benefit of climate change and development outcomes and is designed to provide an array of support options for national, regional, and global activities that advance women's empowerment and gender equality.

More information about GECCO can be found on the IUCN Global Gender Office's website at <http://genderandenvironment.org/>; more information about gender and REDD+ can be found on the REDD Desk at <http://theredddesk.org/>; and more information about USAID's climate change work can be found at www.usaid.gov/climate.