

## KEY MESSAGES

- Approximately 70 million indigenous people are long-time dwellers and curators of vast expanses of forests across the world. In addition, more than 400 million rural people reside in or near forests, and their livelihoods depend on forests.
- Indigenous peoples and local communities are crucial stakeholders – as well as rights holders – in the implementation of the Paris Agreement, notably Article 5 (forest-based solutions to the climate emergency).
- UN-REDD<sup>1</sup> has devised and implemented a wide range of policy instruments and development practices to help countries promote the participation and inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities in forest-based climate solutions.
- UN-REDD has helped more than 30 countries establish participatory and inclusive platforms for REDD+ policies and processes. These platforms are key to continuing the participation of indigenous peoples and local communities through REDD+ financing, including performance payment schemes and emerging carbon market opportunities.
- Countries around the world, from Colombia to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have successfully employed these UN-REDD policy instruments and development practices, helping their REDD+ endeavours become socially inclusive, politically innovative and internationally recognized.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Collaborative Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries.

# INFO BRIEF

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# GLOBAL

## RECOGNIZING AND EMPOWERING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES AS CRITICAL PARTNERS IN FOREST SOLUTIONS TO THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY



## INTRODUCTION

In 2008, three United Nations agencies, together with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, launched [the UN-REDD Programme](#) to advance policy innovations and provide financial support to address the nexus between the deforestation and climate crises. A strong human rights-based approach was integral to the creation of UN-REDD, especially since forest-based solutions and REDD+ schemes are closely linked to the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, who are residents and custodians of many forests around the world and whose livelihoods depend on them.

Over the past decade, UN-REDD has developed and deployed a rich set of policies and practices to advance social inclusion and equity in REDD+ endeavours, with a focus on the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities and on gender equality. Since its inception in 2008, the Programme has supported inclusive, gender-responsible policy formulation and decisionmaking for national and subnational REDD+ processes. This approach is based on recognition of the fact that the women and men who live within or in close proximity to forests and whose livelihoods depend directly on them, are not only the most affected by policy decisions regarding forest and land use, but are also the best positioned to protect and sustainably manage forests. The rights and knowledge of local communities and indigenous peoples deserve primary consideration. To underpin this approach, the Programme delivers technical support to REDD+ countries in three interrelated areas: social inclusion, gender equality and forest tenure, governance and carbon rights.

This approach is aligned with UNFCCC decisions relating to REDD+ (including decisions 4/CP.14, 1/CP.16 and 12/CP.17) which consistently call on Parties to the Convention to ensure the full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular, indigenous peoples and local communities, in the design and implementation of REDD+.

## UN-REDD POLICY INSTRUMENTS FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION AND EQUITY

Over the years, UN-REDD has developed a wide range of policy guidance, based on demonstrated practice, to support countries with social inclusion and equity in the development and implementation of REDD+ policies and measures, with a notable focus on the rights of indigenous peoples and on gender equality. This guidance focuses on the following areas:

- **Stakeholder engagement:** To inform national REDD+ readiness efforts, the UN-REDD Programme and the World Bank Forest Carbon Partnership Facility worked together to develop harmonized Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement in REDD+ Readiness with a Focus on the Participation of Indigenous Peoples and Other Forest-Dependent Communities. This guidance, developed through a two-year consultative process with indigenous peoples' and civil society groups, served as the basis for the now established practice of incorporating national multi-stakeholder platforms into national REDD+ policy development and implementation to ensure that the perspectives of local communities and indigenous peoples are heard and integrated into national REDD+ strategies. The guidance also set in motion a series of consultations to develop guidelines on the right to free, prior and informed consent and how to guarantee access to grievance redress in the context of national REDD+ actions.
- **Free, prior and informed consent:** Responding to calls from local, indigenous and civil society stakeholders, REDD+ countries and donors for greater clarity on consultation and the right to free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) in the context of REDD+, UN-REDD organized a series of local, national, regional and international consultations with indigenous peoples, forest-dependent communities, government authorities, international human rights and safeguards experts and REDD+ practitioners in order to delve into the complexities, challenges and outstanding questions surrounding the matter. This process informed the [UN-REDD Programme Guidelines on Free, Prior and Informed](#)

[Consent \(FPIC\)](#), which outline a normative, policy and operational framework (roles and responsibilities) for seeking and obtaining FPIC in a consultation process in the context of REDD+. The Guidelines' associated [Legal Companion](#) explores existing international law and emerging national practices that affirm that indigenous peoples have the right to effective participation in the decisions, policies and initiatives that affect them and that FPIC is a legal norm that imposes duties and obligations on countries.

- **Grievance management:** A logical and necessary counterpoint to a robust and effective socially inclusive approach that respects the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities is the provision of access to grievance redress. The [UN-REDD/Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Joint Guidance Note for REDD+ Countries: Establishing and Strengthening Grievance Redress Mechanisms](#) is aimed at helping countries involved in REDD+ projects to strengthen their capacity for grievance resolution in order to respond to contentious issues, complaints and disputes. A national feedback and grievance redress mechanism is an important aspect of national institutional arrangements, since the introduction of REDD+ in participating countries is likely to have a significant impact on the dynamics of conflicts over forest resources, and on land, oil, gas, minerals and other valuable resources in forested areas.
- **Land and forest tenure:** Secure land and forest tenure is widely recognized as a critical enabling condition for incentivizing reductions in deforestation and degradation. For indigenous peoples who manage vast areas of forest, often under customary tenure regimes, rights recognition and security of tenure are imperative. In all matters related to tenure, the UN-REDD Programme consistently refers to the [Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security](#), a landmark document developed through consultative and inclusive processes and internationally endorsed by the Committee on World Food Security in 2012. The Guidelines include comprehensive gender-responsible provisions to specifically address

the needs and concerns of indigenous peoples with regard to tenure security. The Guidelines inform the provision by UN-REDD of tenure-related support to countries – from the design of country assessments of tenure regimes to on-the-ground demarcation and recording of forest and land rights, often directly involving local communities and indigenous peoples. Furthermore, UN-REDD emphasizes the need to recognize collective tenure rights, an important priority for indigenous peoples and local communities.

- **Gender equality:** Women's and men's specific roles, rights, and responsibilities, and their particular use patterns and knowledge of forests, shape their experiences differently. As such, the UN-REDD Programme recognizes that gender-differentiated needs, uses and knowledge of the forest represent critical contributions to policy and programmatic interventions that will enable the long-term success of REDD+ actions on the ground. The [UN-REDD Methodological Brief on Gender](#) and its accompanying [Checklist for Gender-responsive Workshops](#) build on the Programme's lessons learned and best practices to provide an action-oriented toolkit for promoting a gender-responsive approach to the design and implementation of REDD+ actions at the national, jurisdictional and community levels.

## UN-REDD PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION

Guided by the above-mentioned policy instruments, UN-REDD has innovated and helped test specific practices to advance social inclusion in policy initiatives and field programmes on forest-based solutions to the sustainability and climate crises.

- **Participatory governance of REDD+ processes:** From inception, UN-REDD has strived for best practice on social inclusion by engaging in multi-stakeholder and inclusive internal governance arrangements. Since 2009, the UN-REDD governing bodies (policy and executive boards) have included representatives of indigenous peoples and civil society organizations around the world, setting

## BOX 1. NATIONALLY DETERMINED CONTRIBUTIONS (NDCS) AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' ENGAGEMENT

NDCs are the major climate policy instrument used by countries, as enacted through the Paris Agreement. Since 2020, UN-REDD has been supporting an initiative of the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact to ensure that governments recognize the rights, roles and knowledge of indigenous peoples in their NDCs. This initiative began with specific assessments of the NDCs in 10 countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam), with a focus on REDD+ and climate adaptation. Utilizing a social inclusion and gender approach, the assessments provide an overview of the progress and deficits in each country with regard to the inclusion of indigenous peoples in their NDCs. The assessments are then used to encourage national participatory dialogues to enhance the inclusiveness of NDCs, with particular attention given to the upholding of indigenous rights and knowledge in climate plans. The initiative represents a lever for participatory policy engagement, enabling use of the diverse instruments and practices of UN-REDD and other partners in NDC processes. As the Glasgow Climate Pact of 2021 requires countries to review and enhance their NDCs during 2022, the initiative also represents a timely opportunity to foster an inclusive and rights-based approach to national climate actions under UNFCCC. In addition, the initiative will act as a model for other climate processes and will be shared through the [Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform](#) to showcase issues, opportunities and approaches relating to the inclusion of the rights and knowledge of indigenous women and men in national policy pledges and processes.

an example for other international programmes and national processes alike. Furthermore, UN-REDD has required partner countries to include indigenous peoples and civil society organizations in the national governance arrangements for their REDD+ processes and projects, providing technical assistance and mediation services when needed. With UN-REDD support, the components of a national REDD+ mechanism are developed and adopted through participatory and inclusive approaches, including national REDD+ strategies, safeguards systems and plans to use REDD+ proceeds. UN-REDD knowledge and UN-REDD indigenous and community stakeholders informed the design and inception of the UNFCCC's Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform and were integral to the pioneer Community-based REDD+ (CBR+) initiative, which is aimed at creating connections between grassroots forest conservation and sustainable forest management efforts with national REDD+ policy (see box 2).

- **Building and implementing REDD+ safeguards:** To be eligible to receive results-based payments for REDD+, countries and

jurisdictions must present summaries of information on how social and environmental safeguards will be addressed and respected. UN-REDD supports countries in undertaking participatory, inclusive and gender approaches to planning and building [safeguard information systems](#) and [summaries of information](#) for REDD+ safeguards, involving representatives of indigenous and local communities and establishing participatory platforms to facilitate ongoing multi-stakeholder engagement on safeguards. [Steps to address and respect safeguards](#) often involve strengthening policies, laws and regulations to deal with environmental and social benefits and risks, such as how free, prior and informed consent processes are being implemented, how grievance redress mechanisms are being delivered and how specific segments of the population (e.g., indigenous peoples and local communities) are contributing to, and benefitting from, the implementation of REDD+ activities. The inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities, and respect for their rights and knowledge, is central to these undertakings.

- Community-based forest management and monitoring:** A national forest monitoring system is another precondition for a country to be eligible to receive recognition and results-based payment for reduced emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. Inclusive approaches such as community-based forestry monitoring – where government, indigenous committees, councils and civil society actively participate – helps foster respect for the rights of indigenous and local communities while also building an important knowledge base of land-use dynamics and forest-cover change for forest policy frameworks. Community monitoring has been recognized as an efficient tool for collecting information and observations about forests, and also acts as an independent forest monitoring mechanism in relation to the utilization of forest resources. UN-REDD supports countries in implementing community-based forest management and monitoring systems by providing training and equipment and facilitating partnerships to link and ensure recognition of community monitoring efforts within national forest monitoring systems.
- Digital inclusion:** In response to the challenges and disruption caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID19) pandemic, UN-REDD is applying innovative digital approaches to sustain multi-stakeholder processes, turning to virtual tools to facilitate the participation of remote communities in a safe and inclusive manner. [Initial experiences in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru](#) have shown that digital cooperation and engagement are feasible, although they require user-friendly tools, capacity-building and new skill sets and mindsets. Issues of social inclusion and gender equality also require careful consideration; digital tools offer new opportunities but do not automatically solve social divisions as underlying structural and cultural factors remain. Digital cooperation reduces travel and the related carbon footprint and opens new avenues for stakeholder engagement, but it can dilute the human contact that is so valuable for inclusive and engaging policy processes.
- Community-based REDD+:** The Community-based REDD+ initiative (CBR+) is a pioneering partnership between the UN-REDD Programme



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and the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme for community action in the REDD+ domain. The main objective of CBR+ is to enhance the engagement and inclusion of indigenous peoples and forest communities in national REDD+ processes, helping channel grassroots experiences and perspectives into national policies to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. Building on the success of its pilot phase (2013–2017), a new phase of the CBR+ was designed in consultation with indigenous peoples and civil society stakeholders with a focus on funding community and grassroots REDD+ implementation, testing community funding mechanisms for REDD+ proceeds, and informing inclusive NDC enhancements.

## BOX 2. COMMUNITY-BASED REDD+: RESULTS OF THE PILOT PHASE

Launched in 2013, the pilot phase of the CBR+ initiative provided grants to indigenous and local communities, becoming a pioneer programme for community engagement in the REDD+ domain. Its management used the UN REDD participatory approach: building from the established GEF Small Grants Programme in-country networks, multi-stakeholder platforms were established to manage community grant allocations, thus bringing together governments, local non-governmental organizations and indigenous community leaders to work on funding REDD+ initiatives locally, helping channel local community and indigenous experiences and perspectives from both women and men into national policy. The initiative was implemented from 2014 to 2017 and received praise from a wide range of stakeholders, from indigenous organizations to national governments.

In its first phase, the Community-based REDD+ initiative was conducted in six pilot countries: Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Panama, Paraguay and Sri Lanka. In total, the initiative financed and helped implement more than 100 community projects, and it supported policy dialogue, capacity-building and knowledge management towards inclusive and rights-responsive REDD+ action in the beneficiary countries. Ultimately, the initiative was aimed at empowering indigenous and local communities to inform national policy, as well as showing governments the value of community funding instruments and informing national schemes to use REDD+ proceeds.

## COUNTRY CASES

UN-REDD promotes its socially inclusive policy guidance and field practices among its 65 partner countries, especially the 26 countries that have implemented UN-REDD national programmes and the 10 partner countries that are currently accessing REDD+ performance finance with UN-REDD technical assistance. The country cases presented here illustrate how UN-REDD instruments and practical knowledge on social inclusion inform national policy processes in relation to the REDD+ mechanism and beyond.

### COLOMBIA: INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-COLOMBIAN PARTICIPATION IN NATIONAL POLICY FORMULATION

The full and effective participation of indigenous and Afro-Colombian peoples in national policy processes relating to forest affairs and REDD+ has had wider consequences. The first milestone was the launch of the national strategy on forests in 2018, the inclusive nature of which was even reflected in the title of the strategy, which was named "*Bosques: Territorios de Vida*" at the

request of indigenous peoples. A year later, this participatory policy became crucial to the finalization, stakeholder negotiation, and public adoption of the National Development Plan – which is a key presidential instrument, requiring parliamentary approval. These two major national policies recognize the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities in forest affairs.

The two policy milestones were achieved thanks to the establishment of a national political platform on forests and climate affairs. The national platform, which linked to outreach efforts at the regional and local levels, served to mobilize and combine the knowledge and proposals of national institutions along with those of indigenous peoples and community organizations. A total of five national indigenous organizations, six Afro-Colombian territorial organizations, two national campesino organizations, more than 30 local indigenous organizations from the Amazon, Pacific and Caribbean regions, and some 40 Afro-Colombian community councils provided input and policy feedback over many months of participatory policy dialogue.

This immense, inclusive endeavour has continued, despite repeated political disruptions. For instance, the two participatory policy developments informed the country's NDC climate pledge and negotiations for the renewal of the REDD+ compact between Colombia, Germany, Norway and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in late 2019. When the COVID19 pandemic locked down the planet and disrupted government work, Colombia pioneered inclusive digital approaches to maintain the participatory policy process (see box 3).

### DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO AND REDD+: A LONG, TRANSFORMATIONAL JOURNEY TO SUPPORT THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, which is home to the second largest rainforest in the world, has been catalytic in the negotiations for REDD+ as an international financial instrument that supports national efforts to reduce

deforestation. UN-REDD has accompanied the country's Government and stakeholders in their efforts to harness the opportunities offered by climate finance to better protect its massive tropical forests. Yet this journey has been long and complex.

When the Democratic Republic of the Congo began to lay the foundations for REDD+, the rights of indigenous peoples lacked sufficient legal protection and were barely recognized by government actors. This required UN-REDD to scale up assistance to the country so that a participatory, inclusive and rights-based approach would inform the REDD+ process, helping the Government to take ownership of and lead it. UN-REDD helped the country to set up a manifold participatory process, in addition to programmes to enhance the capacity of civil society organizations and indigenous peoples so they could fully inform national processes. A pilot Community-based REDD+ programme (see box 2) was also approved to help engage and empower indigenous peoples and local communities in the national REDD+ process.

### BOX 3. INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE DIGITAL ERA: THE CASE OF COLOMBIA

Before the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, UN REDD was working to facilitate dialogue and agreement between the government and indigenous and Afro-Colombia groups over the implementation of the National Development Plan commitments, especially those associated with the management of forests and control of deforestation. Owing to the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, UN REDD organized and facilitated a series of 22 virtual meetings to sustain a critical policy dialogue between the Government of Colombia and indigenous peoples. This policy dialogue, which was at risk of being suspended as a result of the pandemic, has focused on developing two innovative policy instruments that are key for safeguarding indigenous rights and for ensuring that natural resource management and climate action are socially inclusive in Colombia: a national indigenous environmental commission and an indigenous environmental policy.

The pandemic risked halting the process – as it has many policy processes around the world. Therefore, UN REDD rapidly engaged to seek and establish digital alternatives to sustain the process and ensure it would remain productive. In what would become one of the earliest experiences in the digital transition that the COVID 19 pandemic has triggered, UN REDD established and offered the Government of Colombia a series of virtual meetings to sustain the policy process, engaging and connecting civil servants in the capital city with indigenous leaders throughout Colombia, sometimes in remote locations. Several virtual meetings were held, led by the Ministry of the Environment and supported by UN REDD. This solution rescued the policy process by connecting the environmental agenda with indigenous rights, leading to a national and international success story for inclusive digital cooperation.



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Over time, the country drew up a national strategy, in consultation with more than a thousand people, from civil servants and members of the Parliament to representatives of indigenous peoples and local environmental activists. The strategy was adopted in 2012 by the Cabinet of Ministers, chaired by the President of the Republic, and became part of State policy. The strategy and its associated investment plan prioritized the two major claims made by indigenous peoples, namely, a reform of land-use policies and plans and a proper land tenure policy. The country then established a national fund for REDD+, led by the Minister of Finance, to channel and coordinate the expected climate finance for implementing the new forest and sustainable development strategy.

To date, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has received about \$200 million for REDD+ reforms and actions. The funds are being used to implement a land-use reform programme throughout the country and to set a new tenure

policy, as part of several field investments for sustainable and low-carbon development alternatives. A draft law on indigenous peoples is currently being deliberated by the Parliament. The challenges ahead are enormous, but the policy innovations achieved to date are significant and transformational. There is no doubt that the knowledge and determination of indigenous peoples have made a significant contribution to the policy reforms enacted by the country. Without this knowledge, the national strategy would not have been so transformational or be credible enough to have attracted climate finance at scale.

### PERU: AN INDIGENOUS APPROACH TO NATIONAL FOREST MONITORING

In Peru, about 12.7 million ha of Amazon rainforest lie in the territories of indigenous communities, representing more than 19 per cent of the country's forests. The indigenous



communities of Peru play an essential role in the sustainable management of land and forests and, as such, in mitigating and adapting to climate change. By maintaining a close connection with their forests, they remain the best allies of forest conservation and monitoring.

With UN-REDD support, the Peruvian Government has been employing an indigenous approach to national forest monitoring in order to generate useful data and information for the management of forest resources and, ultimately, empower local and indigenous communities to monitor and measure their forests. The approach includes a complex set of activities involving indigenous communities and local, regional and national indigenous organizations representing more than 2,500 indigenous communities. This work between the State and indigenous peoples contributes to the implementation of the National Strategy on Forests and Climate Change and to the achievement of the country's NDC.

Activities are focused on strengthening partnerships at the local and regional levels, enhancing the capacity of local and regional organizations that cover eight Amazon regions to help them scale up their role in forest monitoring in indigenous territories. Additionally, local and regional organizations have established forest monitoring units that, equipped with computers, drones and GPS systems, provide further technical support to the project's communities and other communities affiliated with the organizations. Four community monitoring and surveillance committees have been established and are recognized by the forestry authority, to allow community members to formally monitor their own forests and better control illegal logging and other illegal activities in partner communities. Consistent, specialized training in the communities also serves to improve forest monitoring.

At the community level, committees in charge of forest monitoring have been formed. These committees are recognized not only by the communities, but also by the National Forest and Wildlife Service. This allows them to ensure compliance with forest regulations. Significant progress has been made with regard to recognition of the committees by the National

Forest Authority, which has provided them with equipment and materials to facilitate forest monitoring within their territories. To date, 45 committees have been formed, 20 of which have received recognition from the Authority.

## VIET NAM: PILOTING GRIEVANCE REDRESS MECHANISMS FOR REDD+

Viet Nam, with the support of the UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme, has approached the challenge of developing a REDD+ grievance redress mechanism through a combination of legal and policy reviews and pilot testing. A phased approach to developing the mechanism has included the conduct of a scoping study and a pilot trial period. The foundational "first generation" grievance redress mechanism for REDD+ will be iteratively improved through monitoring and evaluation as it is used to support REDD+ implementation.

In 2014, a scoping study assessed forest resource use, potential REDD+ conflicts and the capacity of existing grievance redress mechanisms to resolve conflicts through the use of international principles for best practice, and it proposed a REDD+ grievance redress mechanism to be piloted in six pilot provinces. Four main types of grievances that were likely to be encountered were identified, namely, conflicts over land use rights; conflicts related to forest protection and development contracts; conflicts related to forest exploitation, development and management; and conflicts related to payment for forest ecosystem services. The resulting REDD+ grievance redress mechanism focused on using the country's existing system of grassroots mediation. This system resolves conflicts through the use of neutral mediators who facilitate discussions between disputing parties to voluntarily resolve grievances at the village or hamlet levels. It does not apply to conflicts and grievances related to government and public interests or violations of the law. As such, the model devised included a system of referring grievances to the appropriate level, when necessary.

In May 2017, an evaluation of the activities carried out under the pilot REDD+ grievance redress mechanism showed that such activities

had led to a significant reduction in the number of forestry-related grievances and highlighted lessons learned. Those lessons included the need for general capacity-building and communications on REDD+ to ensure that stakeholders fully understood the grievance redress mechanism and the legal remedies available. In addition, the evaluation found that existing laws did not adequately support the REDD+ grievance redress mechanism and identified the need for laws tailored to grievance redress mechanisms for forest and land use. The use of community-based and non-governmental actors as neutral mediators in conflict resolution inspired a high level of trust among stakeholders. However, greater transparency regarding their mandate under existing legal instruments, roles and responsibilities was called for in some cases. Lastly, the pilot process reinforced the need for a strong operational framework, embedded in local and national administrative systems, to ensure that the REDD+ grievance redress mechanism will be budgeted for and integrated into institutional action plans and expenditure planning.

### PAPUA NEW GUINEA: COMBINING INCLUSIVE APPROACHES – GENDER EQUALITY AND FCPI

The complexity and variety of social and cultural systems in Papua New Guinea are considerable, but women are largely marginalized from participating in decisions that affect them. Ninety-seven per cent of the total land area is classified as customary and, given existing customary law and cultural barriers, women have very limited rights or abilities to control income and other resources. Even in matrilineal societies where ownership of land is passed down to the woman, the men still commandeer leadership over the management of land. In order to overcome these limitations, deliberate efforts were made by UNDP, through the UN-REDD Programme, to incorporate a gender perspective into the development of the country's approach to free, prior and informed consent for REDD+.

With important decisions in the balance, such as how forest areas will be managed and how benefits generated through a REDD+ mechanism will be distributed, it is imperative that women are consulted and offered the opportunity to

give or withhold their consent to activities that will affect them. It was, therefore, crucial to place gender at the heart of the way in which free, prior and informed consent was understood and promoted as part of REDD+ efforts. Accordingly, gender concerns were integrated into national guidance on free, prior and informed consent for REDD+. This included integrating gender considerations into the operational framework and recognizing both women and men as possible landowners or primary users of land and resources. The guidance on free, prior and informed consent provided advice on how to maintain a gender balance in the facilitation teams that will guide such consent at the local level and how to disaggregate stakeholders by gender throughout the consent process. The guidance also emphasized that any grievance mechanisms aimed at handling complaints should be specifically accessible to women.

The varying experiences of women in the different provinces highlighted the further challenge of tailoring national guidelines to local contexts. To fully understand women's perspectives, a study was undertaken via gender- and youth-segregated focus workshops conducted across six rural communities in each province. The study examined gender dynamics, finding that women were largely excluded from roles in decision-making. Even in East New Britain Province, where women have matrilineal land rights and greater involvement in village-level discussions, their views tended to be overlooked and they were often simply informed of final decisions. The study provided a foundation for local strategies for consulting with communities and integrating free, prior and informed consent protocols that included women. This included promoting the inclusion of village women in decision-making as part of land-use planning approaches.

The study revealed how women's perspectives and priorities differed from those of men. The women in all three provinces were particularly concerned about the environment and the negative effects of logging. The findings demonstrated that enhancing women's voices in the REDD+ process by prioritizing their inclusion is not only a moral issue but a practical one too, as it can aid in the protection and conservation of forests. The country's thoughtful approach to



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pushing gender equality to the forefront of the free, prior and informed consent process and stakeholder engagement actions illuminate how a gender-responsive approach can benefit REDD+ forest protection.

## CONCLUSIONS AND NEW DIRECTIONS

The full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities is essential to the effectiveness of forest governance and forest-based climate solutions. It also results in multiple benefits and societal transformations, such as the promotion of human rights, the development of forest-related policies with high social legitimacy, strengthened democratic governance, the mobilization of forest knowledge, the forging of socioeconomic forest partnerships, enhanced local livelihoods and the fostering of social equity and gender equality in climate finance.

Participatory and socially inclusive processes rely on the goodwill, cooperative spirit and creativity of stakeholders, from governments (which are

meant to lead with a democratic mindset) to the grassroots (who cope with social marginalization and historical distrust of mainstream politics). However, there is a wealth of instruments and practices to provide guidance and inspiration. UN-REDD has worked for a decade to develop and pilot many of those instruments and practices, which are available through UN-REDD knowledge systems as well as through the technical assistance provided to countries by UN-REDD professionals around the world. These range from stakeholder engagement guidelines to facilitating participatory policy platforms, from gender mainstreaming manuals to pilot community schemes, and from forest tenure guidelines to free, prior and informed consent protocols adapted to the REDD+ agenda.

The inclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities must be a permanent policy and an ongoing process. It requires democratic governance in public institutions along with the empowerment of indigenous and local stakeholders. These processes rely on a foundation of trust, dialogue and consensus-building. Combining the knowledge, experience and creativity of diverse stakeholders generates a critical and dynamic mass of policy options and innovations. For complex development domains such as the land-forest-climate nexus, such an approach is indispensable to enable governments to devise and implement actions with social legitimacy. However, the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and local communities requires time, proper planning, adequate financial resources and skilled facilitation.

The practice of social inclusion and participatory policymaking must evolve as new challenges emerge. For instance, the COVID19 pandemic has limited socio-political and cross-stakeholder

interactions, while accelerating the digital transition in public governance. In response, UN-REDD rapidly piloted inclusive digital approaches to help indigenous peoples and local communities continue to engage in forest and REDD+ affairs. In the current era of digital transition, the full and effective participation of stakeholders will require further efforts and innovations.

The engagement of indigenous peoples and local communities must be extended to the new carbon finance schemes, in particular carbon markets, that are being developed under the Paris Agreement. Such engagement, building on the foundational efforts made in relation to REDD+ readiness, will be key to ensuring social equality in carbon finance and carbon markets. The instruments and practices that have been developed, tested, and used by UN-REDD over the past decade will certainly be useful and needed, along with high levels of trust, dialogue and consensus.



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## BOX 4. COVID19 AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

The ongoing COVID 19 pandemic has exposed an urgent need to invest in forests to build a better, greener, and more resilient world. Covid has presented many challenges but has also catalysed innovative solutions. Digital consultation processes undertaken in 2020 and 2021, crafted and supported by UN REDD at the request of partner countries and indigenous communities, resulted in valuable lessons on how to sustain multi-stakeholder processes and social inclusion in the digital transition during the pandemic.

Experience from Colombia, Ecuador and Peru has shown that digital cooperation and engagement are feasible, although they require user-friendly tools, capacity-building and new skill sets and mind-sets. Issues of social inclusion and gender equality also require careful consideration; digital tools offer new opportunities but do not automatically solve social divisions, as underlying structural and cultural factors remain. Digital cooperation reduces travel and the related carbon footprint and opens new avenues for stakeholder engagement, but it can dilute the human contact that is so valuable for inclusive and engaging policy processes. UN REDD will continue to innovate in this area so that socially inclusive processes can continue uninterrupted regardless of stakeholders' physical location, as risks and trade-offs associated with travel and large gatherings evolve over time.

The COVID 19 pandemic also coincides with a time when UN REDD partners are increasingly supporting countries in accessing performance-based payments for REDD+ (to date, eight countries have received \$496.8 million from the Green Climate Fund under its pilot programme for REDD+ results-based payments). Approximately one third of this funding is earmarked specifically for payments for ecosystem services and community-based forest management activities. Payments for ecosystem services schemes reward individuals or communities for undertaking actions that increase water purification, flood mitigation, ecosystem conservation or carbon sequestration. Community-based forest management empowers indigenous and local communities to sustainably manage forests and territories by formalizing customary and collective tenure rights and providing funding for sustainable forest and landscape management activities.

Countries such as Costa Rica, Ecuador and Indonesia have embedded payments for ecosystem services and community-based forest management programmes in their REDD+ results-based payment projects to specifically benefit indigenous and local communities. The use of payments for ecosystem services and community-based forest management schemes as part of the benefit distribution from REDD+ is an important model that can be replicated as more countries access performance-based payments for REDD+. It is especially important as it provides an important mechanism for transferring much-needed cash resources directly to target populations and can serve as a buffer against economic disruptions like the one caused by COVID 19.

## RESOURCES

- [UN-REDD/Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement in REDD+ Readiness with a Focus on the Participation of Indigenous Peoples and Other Forest-Dependent Communities](#)
- [UN-REDD Programme Guidelines on Free, Prior and Informed Consent \(FPIC\)](#)
- [UN-REDD/Forest Carbon Partnership Facility Guidance Note on Establishing and Strengthening Grievance Redress](#)
- [UN-REDD Methodological Brief on Gender](#)
- [UN-REDD Checklist for Gender-responsive Workshops](#)
- [UN-REDD Technical Brief: REDD+ Safeguards Information Systems: Practical Design Considerations](#)
- [UN-REDD Info Brief: Summaries of Information: Initial Experiences and Recommendations on International REDD+ Safeguards Reporting](#)
- [UN-REDD Technical Brief: Conceptual Framework for Country Approaches to Safeguards](#)
- [Community-based REDD+: Supporting Grassroots Engagement for REDD+ Action](#)
- [Collective tenure rights: Realizing the potential for REDD+ and sustainable development](#)
- [Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests in the Context of National Food Security](#)

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programme

The United Nations Collaborative Programme  
on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and  
Forest Degradation in Developing Countries.

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