

TURNING PROMISES INTO ACTION:

GENDER EQUALITY
IN THE 2030 AGENDA
FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT



15 LIFE ON LAND



One in six people globally depends on forests for their basic subsistence needs. This includes 60 million indigenous people who are almost entirely forest dependent.¹ Women, particularly those who are poor and live in rural areas, depend even more on forests and communal lands for food, fodder and fuel.² Environmental degradation, deforestation and desertification, as well as large-scale land dispossession all take a toll on their livelihoods. Strengthening women's roles in the management and decision-making on biodiversity, land, forest conservation and restoration is critical for the achievement of SDG 15.

At a glance

- 1.6 billion people around the world depend on forests for their livelihoods. In 2015 alone, the world lost 3.3 million hectares of forest areas.
- Because their access to private land is often restricted, women are more dependent on common pool resources, such as forests.
- Women's specific knowledge of and dependence on forests makes them key contributors to forest conservation and regeneration.
- Globally, women are only 13% of agricultural land holders³ and in 102 countries laws or customary practices still deny women the same rights to access land as men.⁴

Key messages

1) Women are more dependent upon common pool resources for subsistence than men.

Due to their lack of access to private land, poor rural women depend more than men on common pool resources, including community pastures, forests and water.⁵ The use of common pool resources is shaped by a gendered division of labor, whereby women are primarily responsible for cooking, caring for livestock, and ensuring household nutrition. They are hence more likely to draw on forests for household subsistence products, such as firewood, fodder, food items and other non-timber items, and consequently tend to use commons on an everyday basis. In contrast, men tend to draw upon forests and commons for more sporadic income-generating activities, such as hunting or collecting timber for construction or agriculture, in addition to collecting products for household subsistence.⁶

2) The degradation of forests and commons takes a huge toll on the livelihoods of poor, rural women.

The restriction of access to common pool resources can lead to fuel, fodder and food shortages, meaning that women and girls spend more time and energy collecting these items from further afield. Apart from the additional time burden, this can increase the risk of sexual violence and exposure to physical dangers.⁷ Where households rely on the commons for supplementary food items, restricted access can translate into lower quality and/or quantity of

food. This can lead to gender-unequal nutritional outcomes, since boys and men tend to be prioritized over women and girls when there is limited availability of household food.⁸ These impacts are seen especially where common lands (or lands previously devoted to food production for subsistence or domestic consumption) are acquired by investors and converted to commercial production for exports, including of biofuels.⁹ Where women may depend on resources collected from the commons as a source of income, such as selling firewood or non-timber forestry products, reduced access to forests and commons can lead to the erosion of their livelihoods.

3) Women are key players in the conservation and governance of forests and commons.

Women's participation in conservation decision-making boards improves the diffusion of information about the need for conservation among a wider cross-section of people, increases the numbers of people keeping watch for transgressors, creates conditions for taking better account of women's knowledge of plants and species, and can help instill a conservation ethic in children.¹⁰ In addition, some research suggests that a critical mass of women (between 25 and 30 percent) in community forestry institutions has a positive impact on forest condition and regeneration.¹¹ However, women continue to be marginalized in decision-making processes regarding the conservation and governance of forests and commons, such as in community forest management groups and REDD+ initiatives.¹² Even where women are consulted for their opinions in conservation projects, their perceptions and concerns are often overlooked during project implementation.¹³

4) Better data is needed to understand the impacts of land degradation, dispossession and deforestation from a gender perspective.

SDG 15 is one of the 7 SDGs that is gender-blind at the indicator level. It is essential to develop indicators and collect data on how the burden of deforestation, degradation or dispossession varies by gender. This includes sex-disaggregated data on household food collection responsibilities, time use in foraging and commons management, forest/commons-related employment trends and conservation activities, and representation in governance institutions. Such gender-sensitive data should be integrated into Demographic and Health Surveys, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, labor force and time-use surveys.

References

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