Background

At its 4th meeting, the Taskforce reached Decision 4/5, which stated:

“The Taskforce instructs the Secretary to prepare a briefing on the role of women in REDD+ in Myanmar, for presentation to the 5th meeting of the Taskforce”

This document represents an initial briefing, which will be further developed, based on feedback from the Taskforce.

Overview of gender dynamics and women’s involvement in the forest sector in Myanmar

Similar to other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, there is differentiated use and management of forests among women and men within Myanmar. For example, women often gather firewood from forests as well as collect forest products, such as mushrooms, wild fruits, nuts, wild vegetables, and medicinal herbs. Men, on the other hand, often hunt wild animals and cut logs and bamboo, and are involved in the sale and export of timber. While men dominate the timber industry, women are still involved in the sector as collectors, producers, and users of non-timber forest products, such as bamboo and rattan, mushrooms, nuts, and medicinal plants.1

Men’s work within the country is perceived to be more valuable than women’s in relation to both status and income. This can be seen in social and material practices, such as unequal wages favoring men and listing women as dependents on family registration cards. While the value of education for girls is increasing, it is still measured against job opportunities and marriage prospects, rather than seen as a right in itself.2

Various gender inequalities exist within Myanmar’s forestry sector as well. These inequalities are often the result of customary practices and gender norms. Patriarchal social norms are common within the family and community, with men mostly acting as the decision-makers. In addition, the forestry sector is still governed by social norms that reinforce forestry as a male-dominant profession in which women’s rights are seen as secondary. In the case of ownership of forested land and forest resources, administrative and institutional frameworks are oftentimes not clear and as a result, women’s rights to owning and accessing land and forest resources are generally ignored. This is compounded by a lack of gender-disaggregated data and limited research on gender differentiated rights and women’s knowledge and contributions to sustainable forest management practices within the country.3

Similar gender inequalities are also present within Myanmar’s ethnic groups, many of which are also forest dependent. For many ethnic women, as they make their living by selling forest products, forests provide their only income source. As primary users and managers of the forests, ethnic women are engaged in various forest activities, such as establishing nurseries for plantations; selecting seedlings and tree species; replanting timber trees; practicing controlled burning for assisting regeneration; and protecting germinating seedlings and new saplings among other activities, and have thus contributed to the prevention of forest degradation. Nevertheless, they do not often have control over the forest resources as their rights have not been recognized in the statutory forestry related regulations. Notably, the Farmland Law, Vacant, Fallow or Virgin Land Law and Forest Law are gender-neutral. This, coupled the unequal social and gender norms within country, ethnic women’s views are mostly represented by their spouses, and as such, they remain very underrepresented in forestry planning and management meetings and decision-making processes. Often these ethnic women are also prevented from entering forests and are even arrested if they are caught visiting restricted forest areas. In addition, oftentimes they do not have a good understanding of their legal access rights to the forest and lack information on the permission required from forest authorities to enter the forest and sell forest products. In the absence of land ownership rights, ethnic women then have limited access to opportunities such as credit facilities, training and appropriate technology. Gaining rights to land tenure has thus been a great concern for them, and some ethnic women groups have expressed interest to hold joint-tenure with their spouses, or separate land tenure rights according to applicable forestry laws and policies.  

Women’s involvement and gender integration in REDD+: Efforts undertaken to date

Myanmar has taken steps to promote a gender perspective and women’s involvement in its work on REDD+ over the years, with varying results.

For example, in development of the 2013 REDD+ Readiness Roadmap, the Stakeholder Consultation and Safeguards Technical Working Group (TWG) commissioned an in-depth analysis and identification of stakeholders that support or represent women and ethnic minorities in Myanmar. The goal of this work was to promote the participation and representation of these specific stakeholder groups during the National Roadmap Consultation Process and to ensure their future involvement in Roadmap implementation through their membership within the National REDD+ Network. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2.3 within the REDD+ Roadmap. In addition, the Roadmap acknowledged that gender integration in forest resource management within the country was still in a juvenile state and there was a need to 1) assure the promotion of gender equality and the respect of ethnic minorities’ rights in REDD+ readiness activities as well as 2) promote and integrate gender and ethnic minority issues in REDD+ implementation.

As part of its readiness for REDD+, Myanmar developed Guidelines for Stakeholder Engagement in Policies and Programmes for Sustainable Forest Management and REDD+. Led by the TWG on Stakeholder Engagement and Safeguards, the guidelines are a means to ensure men, women, youth, ethnic nationalities representing government, civil society, academic, private sector at all levels engage meaningfully, from the design to implementation of REDD+. It recognizes that women, men and youth’s specific roles, rights and responsibilities, and knowledge of forests, shape their experiences differently. Socio-economic, political and culture barriers can limit women, youth and ethnic nationalities’ ability to participate equally. As such, the guidelines highlight tools, tips, methods that will minimize these inequalities.

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4 Ibid
Within its efforts on safeguards, 27% of the members of the Stakeholder Engagement and Safeguards TWG are women (4 women, 11 men). In addition, the consultation workshop for the REDD+ Safeguards Roadmap involved a total of 57 participants (20 women) from various government departments and civil society organisations. However, no explicit gender or women’s empowerment considerations are integrated into the REDD+ Safeguards Roadmap itself (September 2017 version).

Within the existing REDD+ Taskforce, of the 14 seats present, only 2 are occupied by women. Additionally, no seat within the Taskforce is reserved for a representative from a women’s and/or gender-focused organization, department or group or the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR). Similarly, during the establishment of the UN-REDD Programme Executive Board, an institutional gender representative was proposed and considered, but deferred until proposed REDD+ policies and measures are available and ready to be prioritized.

Nevertheless, the REDD+ Knowledge Management and Communications Strategy will design and deliver products aligned to the needs and capacities of all stakeholder groups, taking account gender and ethnicity. In addition, the first draft of the National REDD+ Strategy (NRS) does include some gender considerations. To illustrate, it briefly highlights women’s important role in forests and the importance of integrating a gender perspective within REDD+, as well as including the following gender-sensitive policies and measures to address direct drivers:

- Establish gender-responsive Forestry and Agricultural/ Agroforestry Extension services in rural and hill areas;
- Establish participatory and gender equitable land use planning approaches at region/state district and township level;
- Provide low interest rate credit mechanisms and incentives, which are accessible to both women and men, to facilitate investment and technology transfer for forestry and agriculture; and
- Promote farmers and growers’ associations, including equitably for women and men, in order to facilitate cooperative market access.

These considerations provide a good basis for the NRS in starting to address gender inequalities around forests and women’s lack of involvement in REDD+, which should be built upon and strengthened moving forward.

Efforts to promote and ensure women’s participation during the NRS subnational consultations (November 2017 – April 2018) were also undertaken such as promoting at least 30% women representation in each consultation and training facilitators to encourage women’s contribution during group discussions. Of the 644 participants who attended the 12 subnational consultations, 139 (21.5%) were women. Although efforts did not successfully meet the 30% benchmark, 21.5% were considered high by national standard. Part of the challenge is the multitude of on-going events with overlapping dates where participating organizations had to prioritize who attends which events. Overall, the quality of participation varied; in some places, women actively participated in group discussions, in other places they were less forthcoming with their comments.

**How women’s active role in REDD+ can be supported moving forward**

**National level**

Women’s equitable and active participation within national level efforts on REDD+ can be supported in various ways. Increasing their role within REDD+ policy review, decision-making and quality assurance is recommended. This can be achieved through the following actions.
• **Institutional arrangements:**
  o Include the minister of the MSWRR, as the Chair of the Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs, within the REDD+ Taskforce (and request the UN-REDD Programme to issue a similar invitation for inclusion in the UN-REDD Programme Executive Board). Doing so can help in integrating gender expertise into these REDD+ institutional structures and thus help to encourage the integration of a gender perspective into national processes, decision-making and policy level work being undertaken to develop and implement the national REDD+ strategy. To note, pending the existing capacity of the MSWRR on REDD+, additional capacity building efforts might be needed to orientate them on REDD+ and help to ensure their active and meaningful participation in such institutional arrangements. Additionally, to encourage their active involvement, synergies with MSWRR’s own goals and targets on gender and women’s empowerment should also be explored and identified.
  o Membership of the REDD+ Taskforce can be reviewed to assess the percentage of women members. If membership is less than 30% women, recommend setting a target/quota on women’s participation to encourage more equitable involvement of women in these structures. The Taskforce might also request the UN-REDD Programme Executive Board to undertake a similar review.
  o Options for setting up a sub-working group on gender under the Stakeholder Engagement and Safeguards TWG can also be explored. This can be a group of SES TWG members dedicated to focus on gender and provide gender guidance. This action also provides the opportunity to bring in new members with gender expertise (e.g. representatives of women and/or gender-focused organizations, gender experts, etc.).

• **Capacity building:**
  o Where necessary, complement existing training on gender and REDD+ for the REDD+ Taskforce and TWGs. The UN-REDD Programme may be invited to undertake similar training for its Programme Executive Board. Such targeted training can focus on building their capacity to understand the importance of integrating gender equality and women’s empowerment concepts into REDD+ design and implementation as well as provide them with concrete guidance on how a gender perspective can be mainstreamed within various REDD+ work streams. If gender experts are integrated into the institutional arrangements (as recommended above), options can be explored to see if they can undertake and support this training. This training can also be undertaken through hiring a national gender and REDD+ expert. The UN-REDD global gender specialist and regional stakeholder engagement specialist can also help assist in these efforts and provide guidance on this work.
  o Integrate a gender approach with the competency framework and capacity building plan. As above, this work could be supported by 1) gender expertise in the institutional arrangements (if recommendations above are implemented); 2) a national gender and REDD+ expert; 3) and/or UN-REDD global gender specialist and regional stakeholder engagement specialist.
  o To note, these are just some ways capacity can be built internally to help promote the increased active involvement of women in REDD+. Feedback from the REDD+ Taskforce would also be helpful to help identify additional capacity building needs and possible solutions at the national level.

• **Tools:**
  o A checklist for the REDD+ Taskforce can be developed, which provides activities and options to support women’s active participation in REDD+ (this can be modelled to be consistent with activities in annual work plans, etc.)
It would also be helpful to receive feedback from the REDD+ Taskforce on any additional gender and women’s empowerment tools that they would find valuable for their work.

**Possible additional actions that can be further explored to promote women’s active role in REDD+**

The analysis on how to promote women’s active role in REDD+ in Myanmar can also be further explored and expanded upon. These options can include identifying ways women’s active role in REDD+ can be promoted in subnational level activities, including within institutional arrangements and capacity building and REDD+ implementation efforts. It can also include identifying options for financing and implementing such work, including the recommendations provided within this informational note.

Additionally, where necessary and if not currently addressed by existing gender reports produced by development partners, civil society organizations and others, a larger more in-depth gender and REDD+ analysis and corresponding gender action plan can also be considered to explore the issues discussed within this information note in more detail. This will then be expected to provide concrete recommendations on how a gender perspective and women’s active role in REDD+ can be further promoted and achieved in Myanmar, at both national and subnational levels.

**Conclusions**

a) The Taskforce might like to consider taking one or more decisions on issues raised in this initial briefing, including on:
   - Institutional arrangements relating to the TF and TWG’s – a gender position within the TF and gender targets for membership of the TF and TWG’s
   - Training for TF and TWG members
   - Inclusion of a gender focus in the competency framework
   - Development of tools such as a checklist for women’s participation

b) The Taskforce could consider what additional guidance should be developed in a follow-on briefing

c) The Taskforce might consider submitting a request to the UN-REDD Programme to take action on membership and on training as recommended in this briefing.