

## Women's Participation in Social Forestry: A Case Study in Five Provinces

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Manuscript Chronology: received 16 March 2022, revised 1 April 2022, accepted 11 April 2022

### Abstract

Social Forestry (SF) is one of the government's community-based forest management programs, which aims to balance environmental needs with the welfare of communities around the forest. However, in the program's implementation, due to social norms and gender inequalities, women are often marginalized in access and management of SF. This study analyzes women's participation in SF, primarily from the perspective and experience of women at the site level. This study used qualitative research; data mining was carried out through focus group discussions (FGD) and interviews with women at the site level and with assistance from civil society organizations (CSOs) in five provinces (Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Bengkulu, West Kalimantan, Central Sulawesi, and Papua). This study shows how cultural barriers affect the forms and good practices of women's participation in SF and their impacts.

Keywords: social forestry, women's participation, gender norms

### Introduction

Social Forestry (SF) is a forest management system that is based on the autonomy and involvement of local communities. This system is expected to ensure direct role of the community. Pursuant to the Regulation of the Minister of Environment and Forestry No. P.83/MENLHK/SETJEN/KUM.1/10/2016, Social Forestry is a forest management system that targets the involvement of forest communities and indigenous peoples in the access and governance of forest. The program, which was launched in 2016, has allocated 12.7 million hectares of forest areas to be used as SF with 5 schemes, namely Village Forest (*Hutan Desa, HD*); Community Forests (*Hutan Kemasyarakatan, HKm*); Community Plantation Forests (*Hutan Tanaman Rakyat, HTR*); Forestry Partnership (*Kemitraan Kehutanan, KK*); and Customary Forests (*Hutan Adat, HA*). As of December 2021, SF achievements have reached 4.807.825 hectares, with a total of 7.437 decrees for permits/ rights for 1.049.096 Heads of Families (KLHK 2022).

As an effort to support the gender mainstreaming program (*pengarusutamaan gender, PUG*) by the government in every ministry and work program, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (*Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup dan Kehutanan, KLHK*) is committed

to promoting inclusive and gender-just forest access and governance by adopting policies that provide opportunities for men and women to be involved in SF. Through the Minister of Environment and Forestry (MENLHK) Regulation No. 9 of 2021, men and women could be the subjects who apply for and have forest management permits in the HD, HKm, HTR, KK, and HA schemes.

The SF policy regulates the registration process, certification, licensing requirements, and so on. The MENLHK Regulation has provided an opportunity for women's legal involvement, but has not responded to the problem of structural inequality and gender norms that have hindered women's involvement in SF. Gender-sensitive policies, according to Bina Agarwal (2000), need to accommodate the condition that women do not compete in the same arena because their capacities and opportunities are impeded by gender values and norms. Meanwhile, gender-sensitive social policies and practices should empower individuals and community at the grassroots to be legally involved in social change.

Referring to the report of the Center for Regional and Information Study (Pattiyo 2021), it was revealed that the implementation of the MENLHK Regulation No. 9 of 2021, particularly regarding the submission of the HD

scheme, is not yet fully gender sensitive. The Regulation explains that the application for a SF permit can only be made by the head of the family. According to Indonesian law, for example, Marriage Law No. 1 of 1974, the head of the family is male, not female. As a result, most of the SF permits are held by men who are structurally constructed as the head of the family. Although the official SF policy does not prohibit the involvement of women and has included gender mainstreaming, the policy has not fully recognised and accommodated the needs of women in rural areas.

This research aims to explore and analyse the experience and knowledge of women at the village level with regard to their involvement in SF. This research identifies the barriers that they experience,

how they respond to them, and good practices, and the transformation that women's groups and forest communities experience when they are involved.

### Methodology

This research is qualitative research that refers to the practice of women's participation at the village level in social forestry. The focus is the exploration of the experience and knowledge of women at the village level who are involved in the access and governance of social forests from five provinces, namely Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam (1 village), Bengkulu (2 villages), West Kalimantan (3 villages), Central Sulawesi (1 village), and West Papua (1 regency).

**Table 1. Research Area**

Province	Place
Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam	Damaran Baru Village, Bener Meriah Regency
Bengkulu	Sumber Bening Village, Rejang Lebong Regency
	Sumber Jaya Village, Rejang Lebong Regency
West Kalimantan	Sungkup Village, Melawi Regency
	Belaban Ella Village, Melawi Regency
	Sungai Asam Village, Kubu Raya Regency
Central Sulawesi	Bondoyong Village, Parigi Moutong Regency
West Papua	Merdey Village, Teluk Bintuni Regency

Source: Processed from Interview Data

The selected resource persons represent the good practices at the village level, who have been involved in fighting for the issuance of SF permits or management approval letters and demonstrating active involvement in the management, monitoring, and maintenance of forest areas. Meanwhile, there were 27 research subjects involved in this research, namely women at the village level and companions from CSOs. Information gathering was carried out through online FGDs due to the pandemic, hence there were limitations in data mining and the absence of direct and in-depth observations related to the work and interaction of women at the village level. Specifically for resource persons from West Papua, data was collected through telephone interviews because they were unable to attend the FGDs.

The main question in this research is "what is the form of women's participation in SF?" The main source of this research is the experience of women at the village level which is complemented by the views and experiences

of the companions, namely CSO activists, who are also partners of the Asia Foundation (TAF). These activists are people who are in the field and follow the process of applying for SF approval and/or access and governance processes after the issuance of SF permits/approvals. A further question to be answered is "how is the experience of women in the village with and/or without any legal access, or Social Forestry Agreement? Furthermore, does legal access result in social transformation for women in the village?"

### Gender Norms and Women's Participation in Social Forestry

Gender norms and structures in a patriarchal society have an impact on the form of women's participation in forest management, including in SF. Governance issues, environmental destruction, and resource conflicts are often seen as global issues that have the same impact on everyone. Whereas in the gender analysis, there is

a disproportionate impact on women who have been positioned as subordinates in society (Colfer & Elias 2016). This situation has a direct impact on women's access to forest, the division of labour, form of participation, and how women get benefits from the program.

According to Agarwal (2000), women's participation in various aspects including forestry is common,

nothing extraordinary. The problem is about the form of participation practiced by women, and whether this participation genuinely has a transformative impact on themselves and their communities. Agarwal shares a typology of participation to examine the forms of women's involvement in natural resource management, especially in forest governance.

**Table 2. Typology of Participation**

Participation Level	Participation Characteristics
Nominal participation	Group membership oriented.
Passive participation	Member is informed of the results after a decision is made; or attend public discussions only as listeners without providing views or comments.
Consultative participation	Being asked for an opinion in specific matters without any guarantee of it being accommodated.
Activity-specific participation	Being asked to (or volunteering to) undertake specific tasks.
Active participation	Expressing opinions, whether or not solicited.
Interactive participation (empowerment)	Having a voice and influence in group decision making; having authority.

Source: Agarwal 2000

Furthermore, according to Agarwal, women's participation in resource management such as forest management is influenced by the differences in social/political networks, values, and gender norms. The criteria for good forest management must ensure community participation. According to Agarwal, good forest management must ensure: 1) Community participation in policy making; 2) Efficient distribution of benefits and equity; 3) The substantive participation of women in forest management (Agarwal 2000, p. 284).

### **Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam Province**

Women's participation in social forestry in Aceh stems from the flash flood disaster that occurred due to ecological damage in forest areas in 2015 and hit Damaran Baru Village, Timang Gajah District, Bener Meriah Regency, Aceh Province. The incident swept away 11 houses in Damaran Baru Village. In such a situation, women's sources of livelihood were severely affected and their access to clean water was lost. Social norms, cultural beliefs, and collective practices determine gender roles. In society, the role of women is associated with family life, hence the continuity in the private sphere becomes the responsibility of women. Women often feel guilty when social expectations to meet household needs are not available (Danielsson 2020). Women have to spend extra money, time, and energy to ensure the availability of clean water as a primary need in household care.

According to the experience of Sentia and Sumini (2022, FGD 2 February), the flooding in Damaran Baru Village was caused by deforestation. Their village is located in a protected forest area of 251 hectares, but trees in that area are often encroached on by residents outside Damaran Baru Village to meet the fuel needs of the brown sugar factory in the opposite village.

Initiative to carry out patrols and forest monitoring by women's groups since 2009, even before the SF program was introduced. However, they only applied for and received legality in the form of a permit in 2019 with the accompaniment of CSO "Forest, Nature, and Environment of Aceh" (*Hutan, Alam dan Lingkungan Aceh, HAkA*). The initiative and accompaniment of CSO to support women to have legal access to forest is very instrumental in the role and position of women in social forestry. According to Meinzen-Dick (1997) & Colfer (2013), property right and/or forest management right has a fundamental role in forest management as it is related to equitable distribution and sustainable resource management. Therefore, without legal access, women will remain a poor group, being excluded from the process of sustainable forest use and not being involved in environmental disaster mitigation. The vulnerability described by Meinzen-Dick & Colfer is evident in the experience of Damaran Baru women.

According to Rubama— Damaran Baru women's companion from HAkA Foundation—prior to the Decree on Village Forest Management Rights (*Hak Pengelolaan*

*Hutan Desa, HPHD*), even though the Damaran Baru women were cognisant and well aware that the impact of encroachment, which was ecological damage could be fatal to the survival of the local community, they were powerless to expel the encroachers because they did not have the authority and legal basis to prohibit them. *Mpu Uteun* women's group, also known as forest rangers, was created from the initiative of local women who were called to maintain the sustainability of the ecosystem in the village area.

Being aware of the importance of legal recognition and forest management right, in 2019 with the accompaniment of HAkA and the SETAPAK TAF program, women of Damaran Baru Village applied for a social forestry permit under the HD scheme. The women's group in Damaran Baru Village was involved in the mapping, identification, submission of the decree, and forest management after the issuance of the decree. According to the experience of Sentia and Sumini (2022), the submission process of HPHD Damaran Baru decree was initiated by the women's group, and in fact the process for obtaining legal recognition of forest management right was troublesome. One of the main reasons was the existence of gender bias in society. Although the decree was finally issued, the process for submitting the LPHD Damaran Baru decree was hampered at the earliest stage, namely at the village level due to the gender bias of the village officials.

"In 2019, in February, I submitted an application letter for social forestry. We encountered problems with the village officials...the Head of Village was doubtful about our offer and initiative. (If) these women talk about the forest, it is considered uncommon because all they know is that forest is (the realm) of men" (Sentia 2022, FGD, 2 February).

In the experience of Rubama, women of Damaran Baru Village had to make a number of visits and dialogues with village officials so that their application was processed properly. Gender norms that associate forest with masculine values, directly or indirectly, become the basis for eliminating women's participation in forest access and use (Agarwal 2000; Colfer 2013). Forest management is associated only with physical work that is identical with masculine values. Meanwhile, women, who are associated with domestic work, are considered not having adequate capacity and knowledge to be involved in forest management. Furthermore, Rubama stated that prior to the issuance of the decree, women already had a concern for the forest, but the work of monitoring and preserving the forest becomes stronger with legal access.

"If you count, it has only been 3 years (after obtaining the decree), but the changes are noteworthy. It is not my intention to discriminate against men, but when the HAkA Foundation worked with many groups of men, the changes were not that significant. But when we work with women's groups, we are seeing real changes made by women's groups." (Rubama 2022, FGD, 28 January).

Since the issuance of the HPHD Damaran Baru decree, women's participation in forest management has legal recognition. It is evident that deforestation process caused by illegal logging has decreased intensely. Before women were involved in forest protection, the process was ineffective. In the past, all-male village patrols had a tendency to respond to encroachment with verbal to physical encounters. Unlike *Mpu Uteun* rangers, who use a strategy of dialogue with the encroachers, women invite the encroachers to talk about the danger of encroachment to their village and other villages in the area and explain the legal consequences against them. This method proves to be more effective because the encroachers never come to Damaran Baru village again. Women also record in detail what and where the encroachment occurs. They document and then plant in the area of encroachment.

As Agarwal (2010) points out, inclusive participation becomes important in forest governance because women and men can share and practice different experiences—their knowledge and ability are overlapping and complementary. Women's participation in SF in Damaran Baru confirms a more effective forest protection process due to inclusive management.

Through SF, women have access to forest management right. This allows women to carry out routine patrols and forest restoration by planting more than 10,000 trees in the Damaran Baru Village area to prevent landslides. Even in identifying forest potential, Damaran Baru Village is currently developing ecotourism or educational tourism in its area. This forest development plan is based on the observation and planning of women's groups in the village.

Barriers to women's participation in Damaran Baru Village are gender norms. As noted by Colfer (2017), women's mobility is often limited by the assumption that women do not need to be involved in forest management because 1) The forest terrain is dangerous; 2) Women should stay at home; 3) Women must be accompanied for activities outside the house. This belief is also circulated and generally accepted by the people of Damaran Baru, including by women. Gender norms influence women's motivation to be involved in SF. Sentia stated that it is

not easy to convince and gather women to be actively involved in forest management. However, a number of women, such as Sumini, Sentia, and others, still chose to be actively involved in the forest. According to Sentia, the active involvement of the *rangers* was also because of the communication and support from their husbands. In fact, according to her, the forest patrols in Damaran Baru Village have become more effective since the patrol activities are carried out jointly by husband and wife because there is an exchange of knowledge and practical innovation from various perspectives.

### Bengkulu Province

Women's participation in the access and governance of social forestry in Bengkulu can be found in the stories of women members of Environmentally Concerned Women's Group (*Kelompok Perempuan Peduli Lingkungan, KPPL*) Sumber Jaya, Karang Jaya Village, and KPPL Sejahtera, Sumber Bening Village in Rejang Lebong Regency. Both are groups of women that are directly involved and apply for licenses for social forestry access in the KK scheme, notably the conservation partnership. The conservation forestry partnership area managed by KPPL Sumber Jaya and KPPL Sejahtera is the *Kerinci Seblat National Park* (TNKS). TNKS has an area of 1.389.510 hectares, which includes Bengkulu, Jambi, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra provinces. Women in Karang Jaya and Sumber Bening villages, who are part of KPPL Sumber Jaya signed conservation partnership cooperation agreements with TNKS Center and KPPL Sejahtera both in 2021.

Similar to the stories of women in Damaran Baru village, women from KPPL Sejahtera and KPPL Sumber Jaya initially found it difficult to get involved in forest and land governance in TNKS area. For women in Rejang Lebong, forest is a terrifying place. Not because of the geographical situation, its darkness, or the presence of wild animals, but because of the forest rangers. Prior to signing the conservation partnership agreements, forest was an unwelcoming place for women in TNKS area.

KPPL Sumber Jaya submitted an application for a conservation partnership cooperation in 2020 and signed a conservation partnership cooperation agreement with TNKS Center in 2021. Similarly, KPPL Sejahtera applied for a conservation partnership cooperation in 2020 and signed a conservation partnership cooperation agreement in 2021. Women in Rejang Lebong experience barriers to accessing the forest due to prevailing gender norms in society. Dedek Hendry, who accompanies KPPL Rejang Lebong from the Institute for Research, Advocacy and

Education (*Lembaga Kajian, Advokasi dan Edukasi, LivE*), in the FGD (2021) stated that there are a number of key challenges with regard to women's participation in TNKS, namely 1) Women's bad experiences with TNKS that made them afraid and not wanting to be involved with TNKS; 2) Barriers from the family; without permission from the husbands it is certain that the wives cannot be involved in KPPL; 3) Culturally, women's mobility is very limited; 4) There is a bad stigma on women who are involved in organizations; 5) When KPPL had the initiative to apply for SF under the conservation partnership scheme, local residents did not believe it and believed that the women in KPPL were victims of fraud by the officials.

Women in the villages in TNKS area are very close and depend their livelihood on the forest. Most of them work as forest farmers. But ironically, before signing the conservation partnership cooperation agreement, their access to the forest was labelled as illegal.

"All this long, to cultivate (the forest), women played cat and mouse (with the officials). The villagers' trees were cut down and their houses were burned down—destroyed. This is the experience of Mrs. Melly, Mrs. Donsri, Mrs. Roisa, and Mrs. Sugini. Mrs. Melly once stayed overnight in the area. Meanwhile, Mrs. Donsri, when she was pregnant, ran when she saw the officials because of doing some activities in the area. Due to fear of meeting the officials, Mrs. Donsri and Mrs. Roisa, ran to a bamboo tree near a cliff while pregnant and holding a child. When they could not run anymore, they usually used the tactic of saying that they are widows (known as seasonal widows)" (Dedek 2021, FGD, February).

Based on Dedek's experience accompanying women, women experience immense vulnerability when accessing forest without a legal guarantee. It is true that the lack of access does not only apply to women but also men in TNKS area. However, in a situation where there is no legal access to forest, women become a group that bears multiple layers of vulnerability.

The lack of access to TNKS for rural communities, including women, has kept them away from their environment, source of income, and main livelihood. In fact, they really need land and forest harvests for their daily life. In such a situation, women are forced to access forest without legal permits, risking their physical and mental safety just to get basic household needs such as firewood, or plants for consumption purposes—not for their own benefit.

As stated by Agarwal (2000), in various studies in the poorest areas of India, when women were excluded or prohibited from accessing state-owned forests, it was often found that women had to access these forests

because of their family's daily needs. If the situation of women as a group that experiences structural inequality comes from the underprivileged group and does not own land, then a just and sustainable forest management will not be achieved because the requirements for an inclusive management are not fulfilled. Based on the FGD with LiVE companions and the experience of women in KPPL, they admitted that they had to play 'cat and mouse' to access the forest areas for the sake of their family's survival.

As a response to the deprivation of access to living space, women's groups in Rejang Lebong area, which are assisted by LivE, are organised to voice women's interests. The collective action of women in KPPL Sumber Jaya and KPPL Sejahtera is seen as the basis for their political strengthening because through organizations women's voices are taken into account. However, women's collective action in KPPL Rejang Lebong also faces challenges from gender norms and biases in government institutions at the village level. Just listen to what Donsri, the Head of KPPL Sumber Jaya said:

"It was difficult to get the Head of Village's approval for KPPL. Now there is a license from TNKS, so there is already a license for management. At that time, we asked the approval from the Head of Village, but he did not believe it, "it is impossible for women to restore the ecosystem". In fact, to be able to have access to SF, we must have a letter from the Head of Village. It took up to 3 months to get the letter, which could have been issued within a week" (Donsri 2022, FGD, 2 February).

In the story of women's participation in Rejang Lebong TNKS area, women had to meet, negotiate, and convince the village officials that they really have the capacity to be involved in restoring the ecosystem in TNKS area. Ecosystem restoration is also part of their concern because ecosystem sustainability affects their daily livelihood. Their role as direct cultivators strengthens their argument in demanding the right to obtain a decree.

Sumber Jaya KPPL women have been involved in the restoration of the ecosystem. They plant avocado trees, jackfruit trees, durian trees, bitter beans (*petai*), *jengkol*, nutmeg, and other trees. KPPL members also plant 70 trees per person per year. With 40 members, in 2021 KPPL Sumber Jaya women have contributed to the planting of 2.800 trees since joining SF. Likewise, KPPL Sejahtera with 42 members until 2021 has planted 2.940 trees. Agarwal (2000) believes that inclusive participation of women will increase forest efficiency and sustainability. This is evident from the ecological changes to TNKS area.

Significant changes when women are involved in forest management are the increase in forest restoration practices, reduced deforestation, availability of clean water discharge, and the absence of floods and landslides. At the same time, the women's community in KPPL gets the benefit of economic empowerment from the processing and selling of forest products such as jackfruits and avocados. KPPL is currently developing liquid organic fertilizer products and selling tree seeds. These activities provide additional income for women. Not only that, having a legal access makes KPPL women the subject of SF and thus, they have the right to be facilitated by TNKS.

### West Kalimantan Province

Women's participation in social forestry in West Kalimantan region highlighted in this research is under two forest schemes, namely customary forest, LPHA Rimok Adat Bukit Semungo in two villages, namely Sungkup and Belaban Ella, Melawi and village forest, LPHD Permata Jaya, Sungai Asam village, Kubu Raya. Both are assisted by Bela Banua Talino Institute (*Lembaga Bela Banua Talino, LBBT*) and JARI.

Of the two regions assisted by the CSOs, the ideal active and interactive participation has not been fully realised in LPHD Permata Jaya. Two women representatives in the villages shared their success in managing pineapples from forest commodities. Pineapple derivative products, such as chips, *dodol* (a fudge-like sweet), *manisan* (preserved fruits), syrup, and *nastar* (pineapple tarts) are the result of the participation of village women as SF managers. Based on the typology of participation by Agarwal (2000), women at the village level only participate in certain activities. This means that they have not been involved in the whole process of forest management. This assumption departs from women at the village level who state that:

"For women, the focus is more on the processing, marketing, and creation of products. They focus more on that. So, for serious work, let them (men) handle it, ma'am... like field work and all" (Tri Susanti and Nur Faizan 2002, interview, 2 February).

From such a statement, women are placed in the pineapple processing role that is considered not as heavy as the work of men in the forest. This condition is justified by the companion:

"During village meetings, they (women) come and are asked for their opinions, input, and roles. What is certain is

that input from women is taken into account in preparing documents. This means that (women) are not only present to follow the initial and final processes, but also to provide input. Although currently JARI's focus is still on reaching the target of 30% female members in LPHD structure" (Bima, 2022, FGD, 2 February).

Gender and social norms also influence rural women in Rimok Adat Bukit Semungo customary forest, Ketemenggungan Belaban Ella, Menukung District, Melawi Regency. In 2016, the Indigenous community of Ketemenggungan Belaban Ella together with other Indigenous communities submitted a customary forest recognition request to the Regional Government. In 2018, Regional Regulation (Perda) No. 4 of 2018 on the Recognition and Protection of Indigenous Communities was issued.

This Regional Regulation is general/regulating in nature and does not mention the identity of any Indigenous communities. In 2019, the Regent of Melawi issued a decree that specifically recognises the existence of Ketemenggungan Belaban Ella Indigenous community. This Decree is a recognition of the legal subject, while the object—Rimok Adat Bukit Semungo customary forest—has not been technically verified (*vertek*) by the Ministry of Environment and Forestry as a prerequisite for the issuance of the decree of the Minister of Environment and Forestry on the recognition of Rimok Adat Bukit Semungo customary forest. Maria Fransisca Tenot, one of the indigenous women in Sungkup village, Ketemenggungan Belaban Ella stated that:

"In my village, the involvement of women is still very minimal, ma'am. Especially if we have an opinion. So, we really have not been involved. But ma'am, we did not back down, we continued to join in spirit although we were not involved, ma'am" (Maria Fransisca 2022, FGD, 2 February).

In addition to the management and protection of forest harvests, women's involvement in the customary forest management in Melawi has been significant with Maria Fransisca Tenot as the Secretary of Rimok Adat Bukit Semungo Customary Forest Management Body (*Lembaga Pengelolaan Hutan Adat, LPHA*). However, if we look at the number, out of 46 LPHA members, there are only 15 women or less than 30%.

According to Agustinus (2022, FGD, 2 February), a companion from LBBT, the involvement of indigenous women is still hindered by the patriarchal culture. It is difficult for women to share their problems. Village women are shy and not confident to be involved in various activities (meetings/ village gatherings). Therefore, companions from CSOs have to develop

strategies, such as accompanying women to the fields and building friendship in order to gain their trust and experience. Furthermore, according to the companions and women at the village level, the involvement of women has not been welcomed by LPHA members, the majority of whom are men.

"There are a lot of obstacles, ma'am. When attending a meeting, it is difficult for men to accept the fact that we want to express our opinion. Secondly, we are also uneducated, we are ordinary people so we do not really understand forest issues. If we say we want to create a group, my friend's husband will not allow it. So, he disagrees" (Maria Fransisca 2022, FGD, 2 February).

According to Agarwal (2000), individual attributes such as education, knowledge, and social status in society are one of the factors that influence women's participation in environmental governance. Knowledge is a factor that determines a person's power, expertise, and legitimacy to express opinions or ideas. Meanwhile, women, who are often excluded from formal and informal education due to cultural limitations, become a powerless group in society.

Young (2009) states that people who are powerless tend to be excluded from public dialogue process. This happened to the women's group at Rimok Adat Bukit Semungo LPHA. The sense of inferiority is often internalised within the subordinate group. As a result, they do not have the courage to demand for justice. They may also not realise or surrender to the situation, which ultimately results in a voiceless community. The accompaniment of CSOs and strengthening of women's collective action is an empowerment tool for women to have a voice. In women's group organization, each member is empowered to be involved in public life as equal partners. Mental barrier to speaking up is responded to through various trainings and capacity building activities. Although women's participation in forest governance in West Kalimantan province is hampered by gender norms, technically their participation is apparent. In Sungai Asam LPHD, of its 19 members, six are women. Meanwhile, at Rimok Adat Bukit Semungo LPHA, out of 46 members, 15 women have participated in the structure of the LPHA.

The main way to empower women is by building women's collective action, creating a safe space for women to participate to the extent that they can freely engage in public discussions with men as equal partners (Colfer 2013 & Tripathi et al. 2012). Individual attributes such as education are an asset to make women have a position and bargaining power in society. In the experience of rural women in West Kalimantan province,

education and strengthening of knowledge by CSOs have become the foundation for strengthening women's position in society as well as in LPHD and LPHA.

### Central Sulawesi Province

Similar to women in other provinces, forests and farms are very important resources for the livelihood of women in the Seroja farmer group, Bondoyong Village, Parigi Moutong Regency, Central Sulawesi. Around 98% of the population work as farmers managing farms in forest areas. According to Onna Samada, Head of LPHD Bondoyong, women's initial involvement in the SF program was because of GPS information that indicated that their village area was part of a protected forest area.

"So, our activities came from the farms. We were very worried when we found out that our land was part of that (protected forest) area because that would make our activities there illegal. During the hearings with related parties, we asked how we could make our activities legal, because if they are illegal, we could not live. How could we eat? In our areas, there are clove, nutmeg, cocoa, and monthly crops such as corn, chilies, etc." (Onna 2022, FGD, 2 February).

The submission and issuance of Bondoyong HPHD decree was a result of the collective initiative of women's groups. Women in LPHD Bondoyong, which was initiated by Onna, carried out a number of self-help activities to obtain the decree. Based on Onna's experience, organising women's groups in her village is not an easy task. When they wanted to apply for the decree, not many Bondoyong village women wanted to be involved.

After the women's group was created, the next challenge in obtaining the decree was the lack of funding for the administrative process. At that time, Seroja women farmers, Bondoyong Village's women's collective initiative group, did not have any savings or group membership fees. This kind of challenge is related to structural inequality, in which village women, including women in Bondoyong Village, have limited access to the economy that prevented them from financing the logistics for the mapping of the area.

Meinzen-Dick (1997) states that in many cases in various countries, women's participation in forest access and governance is not prohibited in regulations or policies. In fact, policies related to forest governance often state that access is open to all genders; however, it is important to acknowledge that forest access and governance is not equal for both genders. According to Meinzen-Dick, the process of obtaining a decree in various regions is a fairly

complex process, requiring money, political connections, knowledge, capacity to negotiate and lobby, and various other resources. With the support and accompaniment of CSOs and the negotiation process with the government at the village level, Seroja women farmers group received Rp6.000.000,00 in funding for the administrative process of the decree. They used the fund for the logistical needs of women cadres who conduct mapping of forest areas.

This shows that gender-neutral policy and implementation alone are not enough to ensure that women and men become beneficiaries of the program equitably. In the situation where women, who experience structural inequality and limitations in both economic access and education, justice should follow the principle of equity instead of the principle of equality. This means that in order for women to enjoy the same empowerment benefits from a program, women's groups need affirmative actions or a number of special facilitations as carried out by CSOs that assist women's groups.

The involvement of women in SF, in Bondoyong Village, seems quite strong. This means that Onna as a woman at the village level took the initiative and organised a group of women to initiate the HPHD decree. Under Onna's leadership at LPHD Bondoyong and in the Seroja women farmers group, women were involved in almost all forest management activities. At the pre-license stage, women carried out mapping, identification, monitoring, and forest management. Post-HPHD decree issuance, women's groups were involved in forest patrols, training, management, and sales of forest products, such as coffees, bitter beans (*petai*), and gingers as well as forest derivative products such as rattan handicrafts. Although women's involvement in SF shows a significant impact on more productive and efficient village forest area management, at first this involvement was hampered by gender stereotypes within society, both gender biased practices by the village officials and internal barriers from the families of Seroja women's group members.

One of the challenges that Onna faced as a woman was that the work that she did was overlooked by local village officials as well as the community. One time Onna was assaulted by fellow residents of Bondoyong Village who supported an illegal mining located in a forest area, but that did not stop her struggle to protect the environment. Although at first the community and village institution did not take Onna's work seriously, in the end, Onna's evidence and argument were accepted as a basis for the closure of the illegal mining in Bondoyong Village, whose existence caused floods that inundated two villages, Sidoan Barat and Sidoan. The mining also

disrupted the river that previously flowed smoothly from Bondoyong Village.

Another challenge in promoting the involvement of women in Bondoyong Village in SF was the difficulty of recruiting and empowering women members. Onna had to implement a number of strategies so that Seroja women could organise, gather, and participate in discussions and trainings. At the beginning of the recruitment of Seroja women, the community still doubted the benefit of organising because in their understanding, benefit must be in the form of money. However, through discussions, Onna explained that collective action is important for village development and sustainability as well as women's welfare, even though the results and benefits could not be directly felt. After gaining understanding, many women wanted to be involved in SF although there were still other obstacles, namely not getting permission from their husbands. This obstacle was overcome through education and participation so that men understand the meaning of equality and husbands have the opportunity to participate in existing programs.

In the case of Bondoyong Village, legal access to the forest protects women's work. While there is a division of labour that refers to gender roles, namely that men are mainly involved in production activities while women are involved in the forest protection, women benefit from both aspects. According to Onna, the division of labour is based on physical condition. Production work related to land provision, planting, and harvesting requires great power and thus, the work is dominated by men. However, women are involved in the process of identifying plants, what will be planted, and what will be produced in the future as well as in determining the management of the SF area.

The existence of legal access to village forests makes women recognised legal subjects. Accordingly, they have the right to have their needs facilitated, whether it is the provision of tools to support the production process, training related to product processing, disaster mitigation, and others. An important achievement of women's participation in forest management is the support for farming development for women's groups and better monitoring and protection of forests. The courage and persistence of women in the village to refuse illegal mining have also succeeded in encouraging the local government to close down illegal mining. From the ecological aspect, after Seroja women were involved in forest management, there was no more flooding in the village area because the landslide areas had been planted

with trees and the mines that caused the flooding had been closed.

## West Papua

Ogoney Indigenous peoples are part of Moskona tribe. Their customary area of 21.210,75 hectares is located in Merdey Village, Teluk Bintuni Regency, West Papua Province. According to Sulfianto, Head of Panah Papua, currently the Ogoney community is still fighting for the management right of Indigenous peoples from the KLHK (FGD 2022, 28 January). The initiative to apply for a Customary Forest Decree began from local community's concerns over the issuance of the annual work plan (*Rencana Kerja Tahunan, RKT*) of a timber management company whose concession extends to customary areas in the Merdey district. Forest concession along the Moskona tribal area has been issued. With this permit, the customary forest area is threatened (Elisabeth 2020 & Panah Papua 2020).

In an effort to protect the living space of Ogoney Indigenous peoples, Yustina Ogoney as a government representative who serves as district head and as part of Ogoney Indigenous peoples initiated the submission of a Decree on the Recognition of Indigenous Peoples as an initial prerequisite for submitting a Customary Forest Decree from the KLHK. This process was burdensome. According to Yustina, initially Indigenous peoples were not aware of the purpose and importance of the Decree on the Recognition of Indigenous Peoples, which has an impact on the legal recognition of customary territories. The Decree on the Recognition of Ogoney Indigenous Peoples was obtained from the Regent of Teluk Bintuni.

In the process of applying for the customary forest, instead of getting their support, the community initially mistrusted her, questioning her capacity because of her gender and assaulting her. Yustina was the initiator of the Decree on the Recognition of Ogoney Indigenous Peoples. She was involved in the entire process of the issuance the Decree. She explained that the initial assessment process was very challenging because there were conflicts between fellow communities regarding the determination of territorial boundaries. In Moskona culture, women do not have the space to speak and be involved in customary decisions. In traditional ceremonies, even if women are involved, they are only involved in the rituals and logistics of customary activities.

In the process of submitting the Decree on the Recognition of Indigenous Peoples, Yustina was the only woman involved in the submission. This is because

Yustina is an educated woman and has a position as a district head or government representative in her area. Her position as a leader and knowledge of bahasa Indonesia and local traditional languages allowed her to understand and communicate the aspirations of the Indigenous peoples to the village government. But this is not the case for other Indigenous women. Their voices do not define the decisions at the village level. Even if women are said to be participating, the form of their participation is only limited to organising customary ceremonies. This situation justifies the opinion of Agarwal (2010) concerning the importance of education and knowledge attributes possessed by women so that their participation in environmental governance is taken into account.

"Yes, women were involved. They were present in the process of determining customary boundaries. But the role of women was to remind their brothers to not forget about territorial boundaries based on ancestral heritage. Women were also involved in customary ceremonies. Women made oaths of peace. The goal was to ensure that there will be no more conflicts" (Yustina 2022, interview, 9 February).

Based on Yustina's explanation, the involvement of Moskona Indigenous women is to prepare rituals and remind their brothers, but they are not able to raise their voices fully and autonomously in customary ceremonies.

In a patrilineal kinship system, women's right to resources is determined by their male relatives. This factor becomes one of the reasons why it is very difficult for women to own a land (Meinzen-dick et al. 1997). A further implication is that women do not have access nor the right to manage land. In the context of Moskona Indigenous peoples, Indigenous women are involved as a whisperer to their brothers. Their opinions could be heard—or could not be heard. This means that their voices are not elevated openly let alone recognised in customary decision-making. The kinship system and local customs are the basis for gender inequality in forest distribution. Women do not have any territory in their customary lands nor access to forest products. In Ogoney's customary rules, women cannot directly access forest products, let alone take and sell them. Yustina stated that customary lands are only inherited to sons or male relatives, so women could only take or manage the products if allowed by their brothers.

"There are no other functions for women in accessing customary forests. Men are in charge. For example, at the time of harvesting nutmeg, brother and sister go together to harvest, but it is up to the brother to share the sale

proceeds with the sister. So, women only receive what men give. They do not know the selling price or the profit and so on" (Yustina 2022, interview, 9 February).

In terms of land ownership, women have been excluded from the patrilineal kinship system. The same goes for access to trees and forest products. Furthermore, the mobility and participation of women in Indigenous communities is very limited.

According to Yustina, the lack of women's participation in customary forest management is not due to the lack of motivation from women, but because they are prevented/restricted from being involved.

"The refusal (of Indigenous women's involvement in organizations) comes from husbands who are not supportive. If the wife comes to activities in the district hall, after returning home, she will surely be beaten or scolded. The husband usually asks why the wife is involved in activities while the children at home are starving. This is the reason for the refusal" (Yustina 2022, interview, 9 February).

When women organise and participate in public affairs, they are considered irresponsible women because they neglect their household. Similar to De Beauvoir's view about women being trapped in domestic work (Veltman 2004) and that is why a strategy is needed to bridge this situation. One of Yustina's strategies is to prepare a day care room in the place where she conducts trainings for Indigenous women. Yustina also took a family approach to husbands by asking their permission so that the wives could be invited to activities.

In the context of SF, Ogoney Indigenous peoples are still fighting for the Customary Forest Decree from KLHK; however, an important result that they have achieved is the issuance of Regent's Decree No. 188.4.5/ H-10/2021 concerning the Recognition of Ogoney Indigenous Peoples. This Decree signifies the legal recognition of the existence of the Ogoney tribe, its customary territory, territorial boundaries with customary territories of other tribes, recognition of customary territory map, and recognition of customary law in the Ogoney tribe.

After the recognition of Ogoney Indigenous Peoples, the community has the legal right to manage their customary territory. Unfortunately, the benefits of equitable distribution of welfare and transformative participation have not yet reached Moskona Indigenous women's group. In general, the community has the awareness of preserving the environment since the issuance of the Decree, but there has been no significant change in the form of women's participation in forest

management. They remain marginalised and still have no rights to the forest. The position of women in society does not become more empowered or recognised.

Another interesting thing in the process of obtaining the Decree on the Recognition of the Ogoney Indigenous Peoples by Yustina is how customary law is used as a strategy to press for the issuance of the Decree. In the process of submitting the Decree, initially Yustina and the Indigenous peoples were not treated seriously by the local government. The application process was made unclear and confusing until Yustina burst into tears on one occasion. At that time, Ogoney Indigenous peoples imposed customary sanctions on the village government in the form of customary fines for treating their sister with disrespect, mocking, and/or neglecting them. Based on these customary rules, Yustina succeeded in pressuring the local government to take them seriously, until finally the Decree on the Recognition of Indigenous Peoples was issued.

Unfortunately, customary law does not generally apply because the same rules are not applied to fellow Indigenous peoples who discriminate and assault Yustina. In the process of submitting the Decree for Recognition of Indigenous Peoples, Yustina often received inappropriate comments and death threats from fellow Indigenous peoples. The customary law unfortunately was not enforced to punish the perpetrators of the violence against Yustina. According to Yustina, customary law only applies when there is a violation against a customary member who has a position or customary nobility, while she is not a noble. This has often been the concern of feminists such as Okin (1999) that in the cultural group or Indigenous peoples' movements, women are a sub-marginal group. They are often at the forefront of the struggle but injustice against women in culture is not intervened. In the context of Indigenous peoples, with the justification of customary authorities and in the interest of maintaining traditions, gender inequality continues to be reproduced and the exclusion of women continues. Therefore, gender-sensitive policies should also integrate cultural revitalisation efforts and/or meaningful affirmative efforts so that women can be fully involved in forest management.

### **Women's Participation and Empowerment**

Over the last few decades, the issue of women's participation has become the basis for development

and research programs in every sector. The concept of participation becomes the foundation for ensuring the empowerment of vulnerable and marginalised groups, the basis for inclusivity practices as well as good democratic practices and promotes efficiency. In many approaches, women's participation is used as a measure of success or an objective of a program. The Gender Mainstreaming Program (PUG), for example, is translated into technical regulations to ensure the involvement of women in development and as beneficiaries of a program. Nonetheless, Agarwal (2000) believes that participation has many faces. Often, participation is used and misinterpreted to obscure the fact that women remain a marginalised vulnerable group. In the concept of participation, the issues of inequality in power relations and cultural and structural challenges are considered to have been fully answered only by proving that there are women involved in a program or there is evidence that a number of women are present in an activity. The broad concept of participation often obscures the situation of inequality that remains rooted in the community and does not bring about transformative change. Agarwal (2000) in her typology divides various forms of participation that can be applied to the practice of involving women in SF program at the village level.

Various typologies show the types and levels ranging from the least effective, namely nominal participation, which emphasises on numerical/physical presence to the most effective participation, namely interactive participation and empowerment where female subjects are able to take the initiative and show their influence in the community. Various practices of women's participation encouraged by both CSOs and/or the State often only focus on numerical strength than women's ability to fully participate in decision-making. This is evident from the practices of involving women in village level meetings or discussions but without any efforts or assurances that women's voices are guaranteed to be considered and accommodated. In an effort to promote transformative participation, a number of companions from CSOs have identified barriers for rural women to participate. These challenges include the lack of organizational experience, the lack of self-confidence, and the lack of skills to engage in public spaces. Another challenge faced in the research area is strong gender norms that assume that it is men who have the capacity to talk about forests and that women's interests are/or can be represented by men.

**Table 3. Typology of Women's Participation in Five Provinces**

Participation Level	Participation Characteristics
Nominal Participation	Nominal participation is the initial form of participation. In the creation of women's organizations supported by CSOs, the first way to ensure participation is to target women's involvement in a certain quota. Almost all villages involved are trying to ensure a certain number of women involved in village institutions managing SF (LPHD and LPHA).
Passive Participation	Papua Province shows passive participation because Indigenous women generally have no space in village discussions. They only accept and follow the decisions made by their brother who is the representative of the family. Customary rules do not allow them to participate.
Consultative Participation and/or Active Participation	West Kalimantan Province is in the consultative and active typologies. Rural women both in LPHD and LPHA schemes have been involved in village meetings and village policy making processes even though the main subject in the discussions are men. Women have also given their aspirations, although they are not always or completely accommodated in the RPJMDes. However, women already have certain tasks in social forestry management, such as planting tree seeds, managing medicinal plants, and joining the Fire Care Community ( <i>Masyarakat Peduli Api</i> ) as a form of environmental care.
Interactive participation (empowerment)	Interactive participation is found in women's practices in Aceh, Bengkulu, and also Central Sulawesi. The three regions show the practice of substantive involvement of women in forest management. This is evident from the presence of women in strategic positions in LPHD organizations in Aceh and Central Sulawesi Provinces and TNKS Conservation Partnership Forests. In the three provinces, women hold a chairship position in the organizational structure of SF management. As a result, the interests of women's groups are genuinely asserted and realised in the SF management program. These three provinces have not only presented successes in ecological transformation, but have also strengthened women's political status in society. This is evident from the fact that women have been involved in forest planning and management.

Source: FGD data which was processed and analysed using Agarwal's (2000) typology

Women's participation in SF has proven to be important because it improves the management and distribution of resources in an effective and sustainable manner. This research found that the participation of women in SF offers them empowerment. According to Agarwal (2000), empowerment is a process that enhances the ability of disadvantaged and powerless individuals or groups to challenge and change existing power relationship that places them in subordinate economic, social, and political position. Empowerment can also be defined as a situation where women's capabilities and interests are considered in forest governance. Therefore, the main condition for generating empowerment is the presence of women's voices (Colfer 2016). The research in the five provinces above shows that the emergence of women's voices has become the engine/power for various innovations in environmental management. Women have the knowledge, skills, and concerns for various issues that may go unnoticed by men.

A number of empowerment strategies from CSOs have proven to have strengthened the capacity of rural women in four provinces, namely Aceh, Bengkulu,

West Kalimantan, and Central Sulawesi to express their opinions and to be actively involved in dialogues regarding the determination of the governance of their SF areas. Meanwhile in Papua, due to customary culture, women have not been significantly involved in the management of SF nor do they get a fair distribution of the customary forest SF program. Nevertheless, Yustina still strategises and fights so that women have a safe space in the women's community and learn to voice their opinions. In the case of West Papua, the authors note that SF policy must further identify and intervene in the structural and cultural barriers experienced by women. Through facilitation from the government and CSOs, a patriarchal culture revitalisation program must be carried out. Gender-based perspective and analysis in forest governance aim to promote interactive engagement that creates social transformation. Empowerment should not only stop at economic and ecological empowerment. Furthermore, gender-sensitive SF programs should also intervene in issues of cultural norm and cultural essentialism in rural areas that are used to justify women's exclusion. If not, women will not get a fair distribution of meaningful resources.

## Closing

The Social Forestry program has a good vision and mission, namely a fair and inclusive distribution of resources with the principle of maintaining the sustainability of forests. Social forestry policies do not prevent women's participation and open up opportunities for women to be involved. However, the existing policies are not sensitive to seriously respond to concrete situations that occur in the field, especially in the village forest scheme model. However, good achievements have been seen in the participation of women in TNKS, Rejang Lebong Province. TNKS has encouraged women's participation through KPPLs which are managed and run entirely by women's groups. What is missing from the policy intervention is the existence of masculine hegemony in the forest and gender hierarchy. Social norms, gender perceptions, and attribute limitations on women have prevented them from having equal access to resources from the beginning.

The five provinces demonstrate that collective actions and group organising are essential to empowering women—to make women's voices heard. This research also shows the importance of disseminating the understanding of gender justice to village officials given that they are the face of government in rural areas. The absence of a gender justice perspective from village officials ultimately becomes an obstacle to women's participation in SF. Women still have to work hard to simply get their rights as villagers and citizens.

The responsibility of policy makers does not stop at the concept of equality or the assumption that women and men have an equal access. The special needs of women who experience layered marginalisation due to cultural and gender norms need to be recognised and intervened. Hence, to achieve gender justice in SF, the policies should not only be at the gender-neutral level that focus on equality or parity. Gender transformative policies are policies that are based on equity; policies that recognise and accommodate marginalised voices—women's voices. If not, the gender mainstreaming effort will fail to reach the target group.

This research also found that accompaniment was the most effective form of empowerment and responded to the challenges of women's participation. The accompaniment process carried out by CSOs included empowerment so that women are able to speak in public and have the knowledge of forest management, approval administration, as well as the values of gender equality. The success stories of women in rural areas cannot be

separated from the various strategies carried out by the companions and *champions* to ensure that gender norms no longer become a barrier to women's participation in forest management.

The key role of companions is to build awareness and encourage women to have legal access to forests. In addition, policies related to forest management and their implementation must have a gender perspective. If not, women will remain a marginal group that does not get a fair distribution of resources. Based on the practices and challenges experienced by the resource persons from the five provinces, things that need to be considered in resource management are women's collective actions, women's knowledge of the environment, economic empowerment, women's participation in decision making, and the dismantlement of unfair gender structures at the village level. In the context of Papua, although the Decree on the Recognition of Indigenous Peoples was successfully obtained, in the end women remained a marginal group. This is the risk that needs to be noticed and intervened up front. In involving women in SF, cultural aspects and gender norms of society must also be the target of intervention. Local culture also needs to be revitalised to achieve social and ecological transformation. Without a feminist-based analysis, in the end women are only used as a tool to achieve group interests, but the ideals of gender equality are not touched, let alone pursued.

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