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Research Article

Women's Participation in the Implementation of the Gola Rainforest National Park REDD + Carbon Project in Malema Chiefdom

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Abstract: Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) is a new mechanism under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for climate change mitigation perceived to offer a "triple win" solution by simultaneously reducing carbon emissions, promoting green economic growth and improving local communities (UN REDD, 2010). The objectives of this study were to examine women's involvement in decision-making in the REDD Forest Edge Communities (FECs) project, investigate the barriers to women's participation in the REDD FECs Project and assess Women's right to access land and other forest resources as perceived by the community. The study population was drawn from all sectors of women engaged in farming, petty trading, community observation volunteers and Traditional Birth Attendants (TBAs) having bearing on the improvement of the livelihood activities implemented by the Gola Rainforest National Park REDD+ Project. The study was conducted in five settlements made up of small hamlets of 15 and big villages of 750 to 800 people. A sample size of 78 was selected in a meeting summoned for the five settlements. From the findings, it is concluded that the extent of women's participation in the implementation of the Gola Rainforest National Park REDD+ Forest Edge Communities Project is very important that if neglected would have adverse implications for both the communities and the REDD+ project.

It is recommended that: i) The Gola Rainforest Management should ensure that National and Regional level REDD+ strategies comply with national laws and international agreements. ii) Advocacy should be done for higher levels of women's membership in the governing bodies. iii) Education and other forms of capacity building for women in the Forest Edge Communities should be provided. iv) Ways should be sought to increase women's engagement by reducing their workload and biases against their participation. v) Governments in developing countries should be supported to develop land tenure frameworks that officially recognize women's rights to forest products. vi) Forest protected area laws and management should be drawn from other sectors and pilot project to develop innovative strategies to increase and expand women's knowledge and roles of forest management. vii) Systems should be developed to aid the equitable distribution of benefits in accordance with men and women's contribution to REDD+ activities. viii) Gender analysis should inform the design of REDD+ projects and strategies to ensure the design is responsive to the different needs and roles of men and women.

Keywords: Women, Participation, Implementation, Gola Rain Forest National Park, Carbon Project, Malema Chiefdom.

Introduction

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) is a new mechanism under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) for Climate change mitigation perceived to offer a "triple win" solution by simultaneously reducing carbon emissions, promoting green economic growth and improving local community well-being through the forestry sector. REDD+ is also an effort to create a financial value for carbon stored in forests offering incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions form forest lands and invest in low carbon path for sustainable development. REDD+ goes beyond deforestation and forest degradation and includes the role of conservation, sustainable management of the forest and enhancement of forest carbon stock (UN-REDD, 2010).

Forest plays a number of important roles in climate change. Deforestation and forest degradation release the carbon that is stored in trees into the atmosphere as carbon dioxide and other gases that contribute to global warming. Scientists estimate that deforestation and forest degradation account for between 12% and 17% of annual carbon-dioxide emissions. However, healthy forests absorb from the atmosphere approximately 2.4 billion tons of carbon-dioxide a year (Margoluis *et al.*, 2009). When forests are damaged and destroyed, not only the carbon storage provided by trees is lost, but also the forests ability to absorb carbon-dioxide from the atmosphere. It is a double loss. When combined with other climate functions that forests play, such as regulating and maintaining atmospheric moisture, the loss is even greater. It is a simple idea for people who manage the forest so that they reduce the emission of the greenhouse gases from deforestation and degradation.

There is need to make it more profitable to keep forests healthy than degrade and destroy them. REDD+ proposes to do this by linking financial and non-financial incentives for conservation with the carbon stored in the forest. Forest owners and managers would receive credits to avoid deforestation", based on the carbon that has to be submitted. The credits are tradable in the international non-market from REDD+ fund. The + includes the role of sustainable management of the forests and enhancement of forest carbon stock through reforestation. The Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP) REDD project is the first in Sierra Leone. The project area covers over70, 000 hectares of upper Guinea Forest, an internationally recognized bio-diversity hotspot and the largest remaining tract of forest in Sierra Leone (GRNP Report, 2013). The project area provides critical refuge for a number of endangered species and provides a range of ecosystem services including watershed protection, local climate stabilization and an important source of natural resources for nearby local communities.

The seven (7) chiefdoms surrounding the National Park being Gaura, Koya, Nomo and Tunkia in Kenema District; Malema in Kailahun District and Barrie and Makpele in Pujehun District are the customary land owners of the project area and the project zone which surrounds approximately 85 communities with an estimated population of 23,500 people. In the 1920s, the management of the current project area was assigned to the government of Sierra Leone when the Gola Forest Reserve was created as production forest reserves.

In 2011, the reserve became the Gola Rainforest National Park (GRNP). This was an important milestone which paved the way for the REDD+ project. The park is Sierra Leone's second national park and its first rainforest park. The REDD+ project was developed to meet the climate community and bio-diversity (CCB) standards and the verified carbon standards (VCS).

The vision for the project is to "act as a catalyst for peace, prosperity and national pride in Sierra Leone ensuring that the globally important habitats, biodiversity and environmental services of the GRNP and that neighboring communities are active environmental stewards of the natural resource base that underpins and enhances their livelihood". To facilitate the achievement of the project vision and ensure the attainment of net positive benefits for climate communities and bio-diversity, the project activities are built on three key areas of focus: conservation strategy and effective management for the GRNP, sustainable natural resource management and enhanced socio-economic benefits from the use of the project zone forests and agricultural land.

Objectives/purpose of the study

The objectives of the study were to:

- ✓ Examine women's involvement in decision making in the REDD FECs project.
- ✓ Investigate the barriers women experience in REDD FECs project
- ✓ Assess how women's right to access land and other forest resources is perceived by the community.

Methodology and sub headings

This study was conducted in Malema Chiefdom, Kailahun District in Eastern Sierra Leone. Malema chiefdom is one of the seven chiefdoms where the Gola Rainforest National Park is found. Before the war Malema Chiefdom experienced a tremendous level of commercial development than the other chiefdoms around the Gola North including Gaura, Nomo and Tunkia Chiefdoms. Jajoima, the Chiefdom headquarters of the study communities is the commercial and administrative Centre. The main weekly market is scheduled for Fridays. Warehouses for produce buying are located in Jajoima and public transport provides links via feeder roads to large towns such as Daru, 34km and Kenema, 85km.

The five selected communities for the study Fobu, Bendu, Bongeima and Geima are located some distance from the main road thereby making accessibility difficult. Fobu lies 32km from the chiefdom headquarters and about 117km from Kenema, the regional headquarters. Produce buyers and power saw operators bring truck and other light vehicles to the village most frequently during the dry season to transport their wares. There are two primary schools and one health post in the area which are understaffed and lack qualified personnel. The level of literacy is high. About 80%-90% of the people are Mendes. Few other ethnic groups are Gola, Madingo, Kissi, Gbandi and Temne. Two main religions practiced are Christianity and Islam. Islam is the most predominant religion in the area.

Design of the Study

The research design was descriptive. It focused the reduction, emission, deforestation and degradation (REDD+) project in the Gola Rainforest National Park Forest Edge Communities with regards women's role and responsibilities in the implementation of the livelihood project and their level of participation.

Population: A total of 3040 from the five villages-Fobu, Bendu, Bongeima, Jenneh and Geima being 1240, 230,120,600,850 respectively, made up the study population.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

A simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents for the study. With the approval of the people, a meeting was summoned for the five villages. In the meeting, 78 pieces of white paper with the dissertation topic were folded and placed in an empty carton.

The same quantity of blank papers were also folded and placed in the same carton and gently shaken. A systematic counting in fives was done and the fifth person of any count was chosen to take one of the folded papers from the carton. If the paper chosen contained the topic, the person who picked it was selected as an interviewee or else asked to retire to their seat. Counting and selection continued until the 78 respondents of intent were obtained. At the end, the sample was made up of 10 youth, 10 men, 48 women and 10 chiefs. Additional females were selected from youth, 4 and chiefs, 3 to round up the number of females to 55 since they were the target of the research.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Questionnaires, participant observation and focus group discussion were used to collect primary data while secondary data were obtained from the Eastern Polytechnic Library, Gola Rainforest National Park, Library Conservation Society of Sierra Leone and Internet. The questionnaires were developed, piloted and modified before final administration. The researcher and or his assistants observed the respondents to ascertain their level of involvement in the REDD+ project. Focus group discussion was used to assess the impact of women's participation in the implementation of the GRNP+REDD+ FEC carbon project.

Result/ Findings and Discussions

The data collected were analyzed using the Excel software package to construct the tables and graphs.

Sex of Respondents

In Malema, like Sierra Leone as a whole, the number of women outweighs the number of men (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2015). However, the participation of women in development activities is usually low. Table I shows the Sex of respondents involved in the research. This table shows that 71% of the respondents were females while only 29% were males. This was so because more women were targeted in the research since it was intended to investigate their participation in the implantation of REDD+ project. They were targeted because they were considered to be vulnerable; a position may especially those in rural settings accept without a pinch of salt. Therefore they are marginalized in decision making, accesses to family property and therefore little or no access to the project activities.

Table 1. Sex of Respondents

Sex	No. of Respondents
Male	23
Female	55
Total	**78**

Level of education of respondents in the study area

Education is paramount in every development activity. This is because it singularly provides the means for human resource capacity development. Information about the level of education of respondents shows how enlightened respondents were.

Figure 2 shows that about 72% of the respondents did not have formal education. None of the respondents acquired tertiary education while 16% were literate in Arabic. Another 16% acquired primary education while only 2% received secondary education. This shows that illiteracy was widespread in the community which contributed to poverty and therefore formed a barrier to women's participation.

It should be noted that a lot of is premium put on Arabic education. Many children non-formal Arabic schools before they attend western schools. Some attend the two simultaneously especially at tender age.

The level of attainment of education by respondents is shown in figure 1.

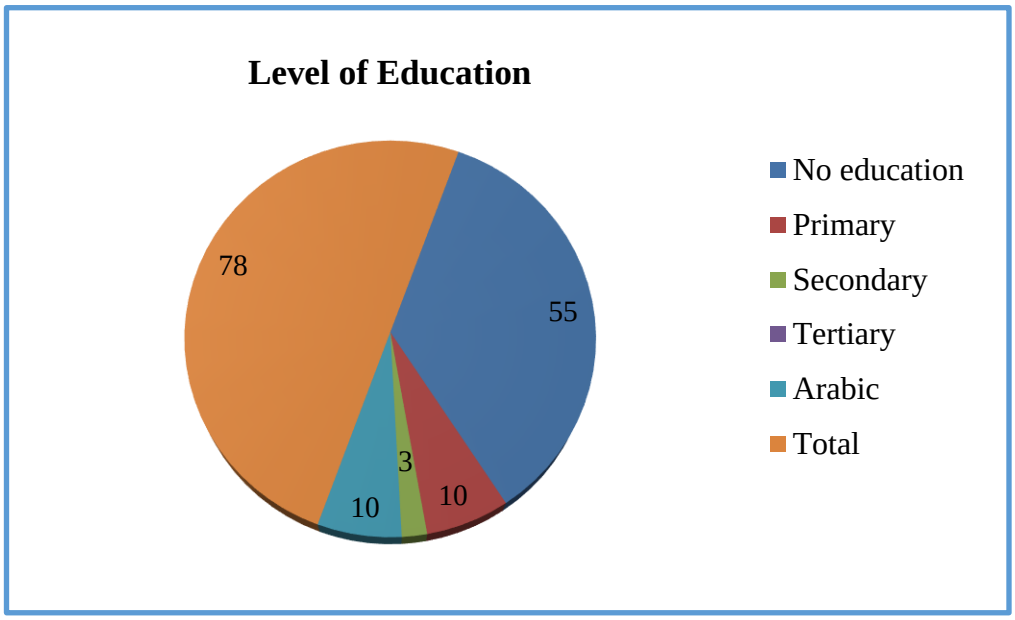


Figure 1. Educational Attainment of Respondents

Religion of respondents

Religion is derived from culture to serve as a check on man's excesses. Information on religion in this research gives an idea on how it influences women's participation in the forest edge communities of the REDD+ Carbon project.

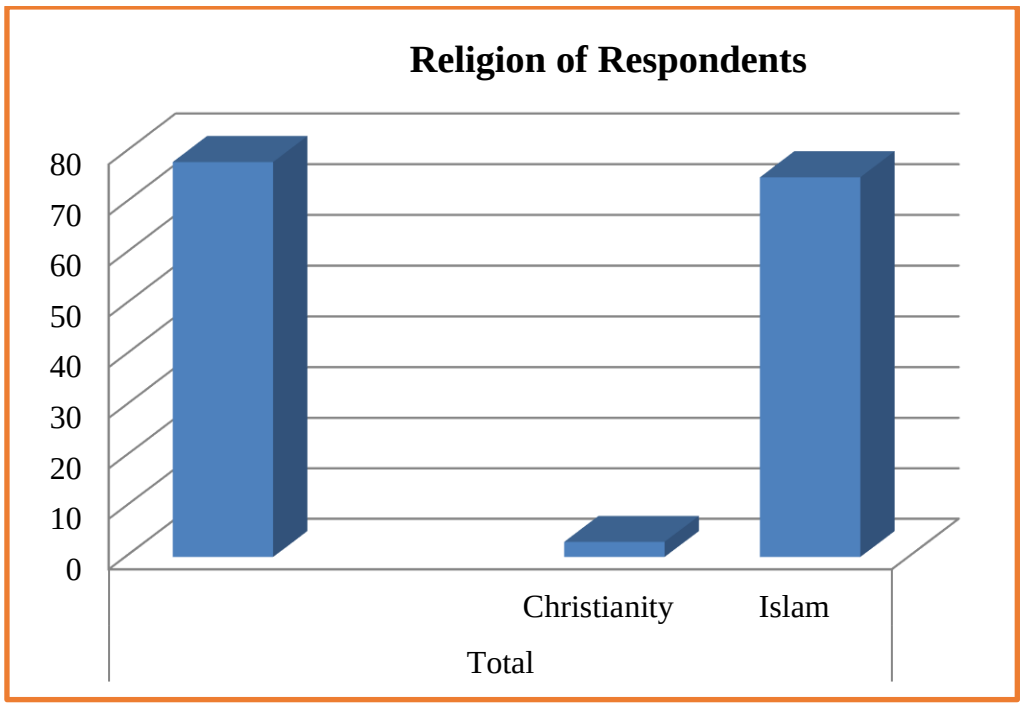


Figure 2. Religion of respondents

96 %(75) of the respondents were Muslims while just 4 % (3) were Christians. More people had Arabic education and therefore practised the Islamic religion than Christianity in the communities. The implication is that in Muslim dominated communities, women have very little right and their voice is often not heard in decision making even on issues that affect them. The religious inclination of respondents is shown in figure 2.

Involvement of women in decision making in the REDD+ project

Women should be part of the decision making process in communities because obvious reasons, but are most times not considered for cultural considerations.

As specified in the methodology, the study community is predominantly made up of the Mende ethnic group whose culture does not normally give women the right to express their views on matters that affect them

Figure 3 shows the level of involvement of women in decision making in the GRNP FECs project. According to the figure, 32% of the respondents interviewed stated that women were involved in decision making while 78% said they were not. This was so because by the culture, women are mainly to be seen but not heard especially in gatherings of men and women.

The level of education of women in particular which was dismally low in the study community also promotes discriminatory practices against them. Education enhances people's participation in decision making. The involvement of women in decision making in the study area is shown in figure 3.

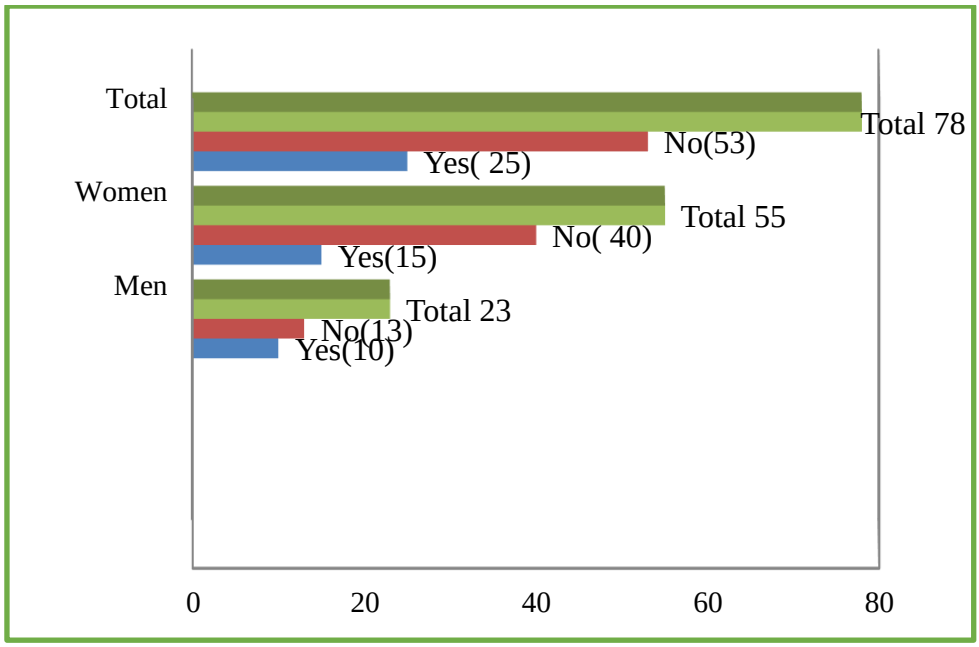


Figure 3. Involvement of women in decision making in the study area

Barriers to Women's Participation in GRNP REDD+ FECs Project

The challenges faced by women in their participation in the GRNP REDD+ FECs projects are shown in table 2. The table shows that 62% of respondents had little or no level of education which prevented them from participating in the project activities. 10% blamed their inability to participate on matrimonial problems. They had a lot to do at home that they did not have time for other things outside their homes. Another 10% blamed the lack of participation on

myopic culture while 18% attributed the lack of participation on marginalization by men in the communities.

Table 2. Barriers to Women's Participation in GRNP REDD+ FECs Project

Barriers to Participation	No. of Respondents by Percentage (%)
Low level of education	62%
Matrimony	10%
Marginalisation	18%
Myopic culture	10%
Total	**100%**

Women's Ownership of Land and other Resources

In developing countries that are agrarian in nature, land is a major economic resource. However, women's access to and control of land and other resources is tremendously limited because of various considerations. Figure 4 sheds light on women's ownership of land and other resources. 91% of the respondents stated that women do not have right to own land and other resources. This is mostly the case in patriarchal societies where women's right is sought through the husband and children's right through the father. If a women owns land it has to be one she has out rightly bought or has inherited from her deceased spouse. In fact even on the death of a spouse ownership of his property and his wife/wives and children is most times transferred to his surviving relatives. This however seems to be changing with the passing of the three Gender Acts in 2007-the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, the Devolution of Estate Act and the Domestic Violence Act. Family land is owned and controlled by male members of the family.

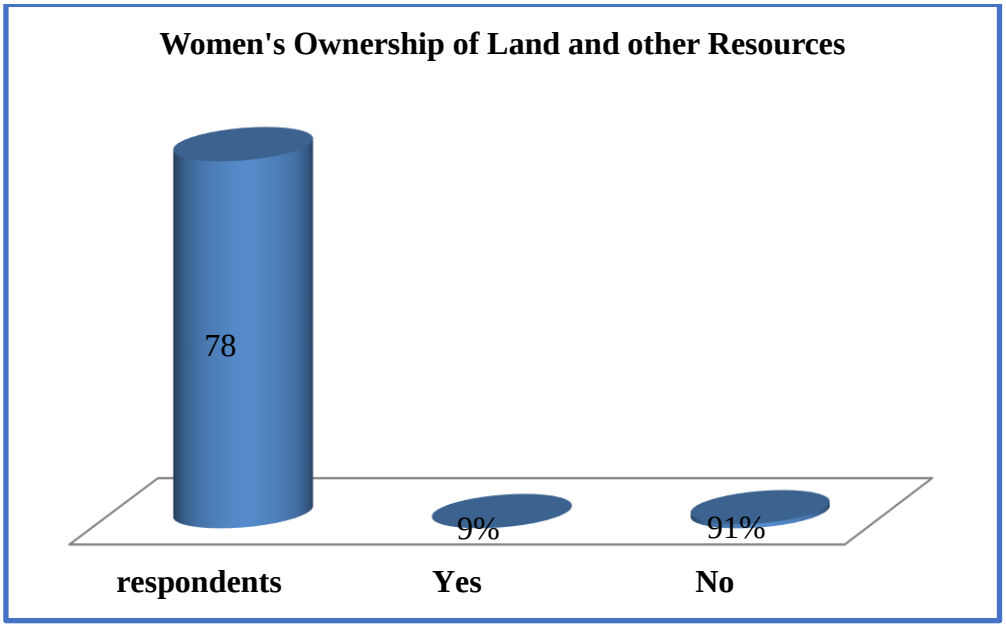
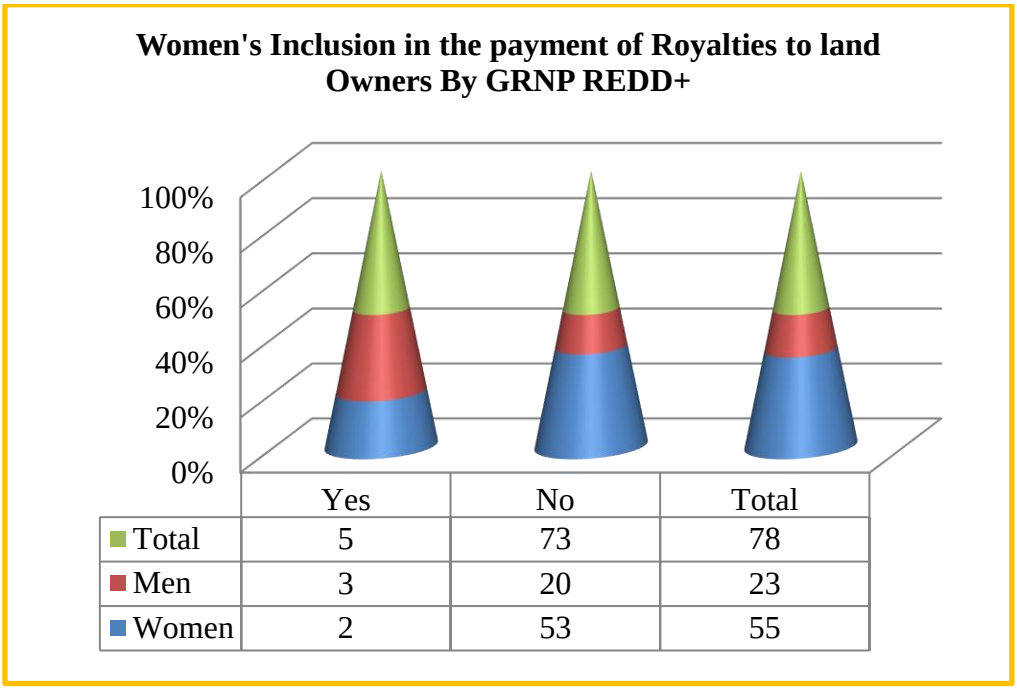


Figure 4. Women's Ownership of Land and other Resources in Malema Chiefdom

Women's Involvement in the Payment of Royalties to Land Owners by GRNP REDD+ project

The GRNP REDD+ project annually pays a whooping sum of money as royalty for the sustainability of forest conservation. Part of the money goes to the District Council, part to the chiefdom administration and part to the land owners (GRNP reports, 2013). Figure 5 shows the level of women's involvement in the payment of the royalty.

The figure shows that 96% of the respondents indicated that women are not involved in any way in the payment of the royalty while only 4% percent said that they do. This has implications for the REDD+ Carbon project which demands the inclusion of women in the benefit sharing arrangement because of their vulnerability. Women's limited or lack of access to economic benefits is a reason for the perpetration of poverty in the locality.



	Yes	No	Total
Total	5	73	78
Men	3	20	23
Women	2	53	55

Figure 5. Women's inclusion in the Payment of Royalty to Land Owners by GRNP

Conclusion and Recommendation

From the findings, it is concluded that the participation of women in the implementation of the Gola Rainforest National Park REDD+ project though significant because it is a requirement by the project, is very low. The low participation of women denies them a worthy share of the benefits of the project and therefore left in object poverty and a vulnerable situation.

Recommendations

Stemming from the research findings, the following recommendations are put forward:

1) The Gola Rainforest management should ensure that national and regional level REDD+ strategies comply with the national laws and international agreements (such as the UN convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) that provides for men and women.
2) Advocacy should be done for high level of women's membership in bodies for community forestry, local and national development including those that make decision related to the design of REDD.
3) Education and capacity building support network should be provided for women in the forest edge communities.
4) Ways should be sought to increase women's engagement by reducing workload and biases against their participation, increase their mobility and instill in them skills and confidence needed to meaningfully engage them.

5) Governments in developing countries should be supported to develop land tenure frameworks that officially recognised women's rights to forest products and carbon credit from forests.
6) Systems should be developed to aid equitable distribution of benefits in accordance with women and men's contribution to REDD+ activities such as forest protection and carbon monitoring.
7) Gender analysis should inform the design of REDD+ project and strategies to ensure the design should be responsive to the different needs and roles men and women.
8) Gender- sensitive monitoring and evaluation tools should be used for REDD+ projects requiring the collection and analysis of sex disaggregated data and social indicators that measure the challenges in status and levels of inequality.
9) Forest Edge Communities (FECs) should be educated on different types of sustainable agriculture systems.
10) The GRNP office should provide micro credit facilities for women living in the FECs so that the profit can be used to support their farming activities and provide food during the rains or in terms of crop failure due to climate change or destruction by animals.
11) Educational facilities should be improved in the communities to reduce the widespread illiteracy rate in the FECs.

Conflicts of interest: There is no conflict of interest of any kind.

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