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# The Gendered Politics of Natural Resource Management: Gender Mainstreaming in UN-REDD+ Programs in Latin America

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The Gendered Politics of Natural Resource Management:

Feminist Political Ecology Discourse and Gender Mainstreaming in UN-REDD+ Programs  
in Latin America

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A MASTERS RESEARCH PAPER

Submitted to the faculty of Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts in partial  
fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in the department of  
International Development and Social Change

## **Abstract**

This paper uses a feminist political ecology framework to critically examine rural women's relationship with UN-REDD programs throughout Latin America. It looks at the ways in which UN-REDD has attempted to integrate women into the larger REDD+ development paradigms vis-à-vis gender-mainstreaming. I pay particular attention to how gender dynamics operate in the context of REDD+ with respect to cultural sovereignty, access to land, and benefit sharing and draw on Ecuador's National REDD+ Socio Bosque program to illuminate how National REDD+ programs can adversely affect rural women's livelihoods despite UN-REDD's discourse of "gender equality". In light of these considerations, I argue that UN-REDD programs disadvantage women disproportionately and posit UN-REDD's gender mainstreaming initiatives as ill equipped to address the concerns of activists and community members speaking out against REDD+ in their territories.

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## **Introduction**

This paper uses a feminist political ecology framework to critically examine rural women's relationship with UN-REDD programs throughout Latin America. It looks at the ways in which UN-REDD has attempted to integrate women into the larger REDD+ development paradigm vis-à-vis gender-mainstreaming. I pay particular attention to how gender dynamics operate in the context of REDD+ with respect to cultural sovereignty, access to land, and benefit sharing. In light of these considerations, I argue that UN-REDD programs disadvantage women disproportionately and posit UN-REDD's gender mainstreaming initiatives as ill equipped to address the concerns of activists and community members speaking out against REDD+ in their territories.

Put simply, REDD+ is a climate change mitigation scheme that provides communities economic incentives for practicing sustainable forest management and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. While myriad development organizations, including the United Nations, have advocated for REDD+ as an appropriate strategy for sustainable development, there exists widespread controversy over the expansion of REDD+ in Latin America (Lang 2015, Lang 2016, Carbon Trade Watch, FDCL, and IGO 2013). This controversy is steeped in larger debates regarding the dangers of imperialist capitalist development interventions in the region, particularly for rural women.

There exists a long history of imperialist "sustainable" development interventions throughout Latin America. Initiatives promoting the marketization of the climate and environment have received substantial criticism from those who argue that processes of capitalism and imperialism have resulted in epistemologies that separate humans from

nature (Santos 2009; Cabello and Gilbertson). In their piece, “A Colonial Mechanism to Enclose Lands”, Cabello and Gilbertson (2012), characterize REDD+ as simply the latest iteration of this paradigm. They argue that REDD+ is “part of a longer historical wave of neoliberalism, which establishes new property rights regimes and fights regulation in an attempt to reduce the power of national governments, labour unions, social movements and local communities over corporate activity”. Indeed, REDD+ has received enormous backlash from communities who regard REDD+ as part of a larger neoliberal climate regime which has historically displaced and silenced some of the most marginalized and vulnerable communities in the rural Global South (The Munden Project 2011).

In many cases, this resistance to REDD+ has come from Indigenous and Black feminists who have developed their own iterations of feminism based on personal, place-based experiences. Indeed, women’s organizing and feminist movements throughout Latin America have emerged from centuries of resistance to neoliberalism. The growth of myriad feminist movements throughout Latin America is thus regarded as intimately related to struggles for cultural sovereignty and independence (Aguinaga et al. 2013). These feminisms are also wary of development policies and international interventions that seek to provide monetary “benefits” to poor, rural women (ibid).

In what follows, I critically examine how issues of gender inform the effect REDD+ has on women throughout Latin America in terms of stakeholder engagement, competing notions of responsible land stewardship and ownership, and benefit sharing. I argue that UN-REDD’s model of gender mainstreaming does little to address the negative impacts REDD+ has had on communities throughout the rural Global South. Here, I use a

feminist political ecology framework to explore how local and global relations of power prevent women from benefitting from market-based development interventions such as REDD+.

### **Framing REDD+**

The *reduction* of greenhouse gas *emissions* from *deforestation* and forest *degradation*, or REDD, is an international mechanism that provides developing countries with financial incentives to invest in low carbon paths to sustainable development. In 2010, the Cancun Agreements, set out at COP-16, officially expanded the terms of REDD to allow public and private investors to incentivize a range of low-carbon paths to development in addition to forest conservation. The term REDD thus became REDD plus (REDD+) to incorporate additional components of sustainability. Today, REDD+ includes reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, the sustainable management of forests and the increase in and the enhancement of carbon sinks (The REDD Desk 2010).

Deforestation and forest degradation account for approximately 15 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions (Forest Carbon Partnership Facility 2015). As such, deforestation and forest degradation are the second leading cause of global warming (ibid). In addition to reducing the rate at which trees are cut down, efforts to reforest areas have also garnered attention. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (2010), the world currently has an estimated 850 million hectares of degraded forests which could be restored and rehabilitated in order to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation. Carbon sequestration rates due to reforestation will vary depending on various

factors including management practices, geography, and the tree species involved.

However, on average, a forest planted in a temperate zone can sequester approximately 4 tonnes of carbon per hectare annually (Food and Drug Organization 2010). Proponents of REDD+ cite these figures in advocating for the importance of protecting and restoring forests vis-a-vis a payment for ecosystem services approach, such as REDD+.

Before delving into the negative ways REDD+ may impact women specifically, I survey resistance to REDD+ throughout Latin America in order to contextualize the scope and gravity of place-based resistance to REDD+ in the region. Feminist political ecology requires that we understand that forest-dwelling women interact with and at times form part of larger movements and political affiliations that invariably shape their perception of development schemes such as REDD+. As a political project, feminist political ecology is concerned with the eradication of all forms of oppression, not only women's subordination. Unlike gender mainstreaming, this approach regards women as political persons whose concern with gender oppressions does not supersede their resistance to other forms of domination. Thus, women may remain suspicious of development initiatives imposed by the West regardless of whether or not these interventions purport to advance gender equality.

Communities throughout Latin America argue that market-based approaches to protecting forests may well be the source for the next round of dispossession of marginalized peoples. In many ways, REDD+ has illuminated the absence of clear and formalized forest tenure throughout much of the Global South (Osborne et al. 2014). Indeed, REDD+ activities often intersect with land conflicts and disputes between the state

and Indigenous and/or forest-dependent peoples (ibid). Activists have argued that REDD+ promotes land grabs that forcibly displace local and Indigenous communities who have managed forests for hundreds of years (World Rainforest Movement 2016). Although the United Nations has set in place safeguards that uphold Indigenous peoples' rights to free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) many are worried that these safeguards will not be implemented and that the State may not officially recognize the existence of Indigenous peoples or forest based communities in certain areas. Further, while the UN-REDD+ Programme does acknowledge fears that REDD+ "might close traditional or customary tenure rights to local communities generally, and to poor women in particular" in its piece "The Business Case for Mainstreaming Gender in REDD+", the authors do not offer solutions to this predicament beyond investing in more research, specifically a "research programme to strengthen the empirical case for women's tenurial land ownership rights" (UN-REDD Programme 2011: 26).

Of equal concern is that REDD+ significantly alters and constrains communities' ability to access forests for livelihoods and cultural practices (Dipti and Goldtooth 2015). This is particularly worrisome for communities that depend on forests for their livelihoods and cultural meaning but whose claims to land and territory are not legally recognized by the state. This becomes particularly problematic for communities if REDD+ projects adopt more restrictive laws and practices to prevent entrance into the forests and/or limit activities that can be carried out in the forests. As a result, individuals and communities who can no longer access forest resources may be forced to engage in exploitative wage labor, poaching, illegal logging and other activities in order to survive. For women who

have traditionally been responsible for collecting wood, medicinal plants, wild honey, seeds and other products from the forests, loss of access can be catastrophic for their families. Some regard this as constituting a “new form of violence against women because it limits or prohibits women’s access to the land where we farm, gather food and draw water to feed and quench our (their) families” (*Global Alliance of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities on Climate Change against REDD+ 2012*). Rocheleau et al. argue that reducing access to forest results in greater harm to women. She argues, “consolidation and the development of strictly defined boundaries, as well as the reduction of common lands and the creation of titled lands from common lands have restricted the flexibility and diversity of farming systems. The reduction of open access lands has affected women all over the world, particularly poor women, as they are often highly dependent on forest and grazing resources for meeting their daily needs and responsibilities” (1996: 302).

At the most recent COP21 Climate Talks in Paris, activists from all over the world organized demonstrations to condemn governments and major corporations for advancing REDD+ as the tool to combat climate change. The Indigenous Environmental Network staged an action led by Indigenous activist Xiuhtezcatl Tonatiuh at the Solutions 21 Concert. Tonatiuh invited representatives of the Indigenous Environmental Network’s Indigenous Risings and the Global Grassroots Justice Alliance to the stage. While onstage, they made a statement against REDD and fracking<sup>1</sup>. Tonatiuh, a well known Indigenous member of the youth-led climate movement, stated, “I am standing in solidarity with the

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<sup>1</sup> Fracking is a method of natural gas extraction that involves drilling shale and other tight-rock formations.

front line communities affected by fossil fuel extraction, as an Indigenous youth representing the generation most affected by climate change. I strongly stand against false solutions such as fracking, carbon trading and REDD” (Gursoz 2015). The Global Alliance against REDD, Indigenous Environmental Network, Friends of the Earth International, No REDD+ in Africa Network, and Grassroots Global Justice also staged a protest outside of the main conference center (Lang 2015). In addition to organizing actions, activists also participated in a press conference at COP21 organized by the Indigenous Environmental Network where they spoke out against REDD+ as a “false solution” to the issue of climate change (ibid).

In addition to staging protests and organizing forums, Indigenous and forest dependent peoples from Latin America have published many reports, declarations, and agreements that articulate their rejection of REDD. A look at these texts reveals the extent to which Indigenous and forest-dependent Peoples have articulated their positions against REDD+ to the international community. In April 2010, the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth published a People’s Agreement that described climate change as the result of a “patriarchal model of civilization based on the subjugation and destruction of human beings and nature that accelerated since the industrial revolution” (World People’s Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth 2010). Unlike the United Nations, this agreement does not posit “market-based solutions” vis-a-vis REDD+ as a solution to the threat of climate change and environmental degradation. Rather, it poses REDD+ as an instrument of capitalism and thus a perpetuation of domination and coercion. Here, The People’s Agreement states, “We condemn market mechanisms such as

REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation) and its versions + and ++, which are violating the sovereignty of peoples and their right to free, prior and informed consent, as well as the sovereignty of nation states, and violates the rights and customs of Peoples and the Rights of Nature” (ibid). The Global Alliances of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities on Climate Change Against REDD+ also published their own Declaration against REDD+ in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. In yet another example of collective resistance to REDD+, social and environmental groups established the “Margarita Declaration on Climate Change” . This Declaration was established in July 2014 during a meeting entitled The Social PreCOP on Margarita Island in Venezuela. It warns that the implementation of UN-REDD+ has already resulted in the “seizure and fragmentation of land” (Social PreCOP on Climate Change qtd in Lang 2015).

### **UN-REDD and The Tradition of Gender Mainstreaming**

The United Nations has attempted to address some of the aforementioned concerns by developing myriad safeguards and standards for UN-REDD programs throughout the Global South. One of the ways UN-REDD has done this is by “gender-mainstreaming” their program. However, I argue that simply “adding” gender to neoliberal development models such as REDD+ does little to mitigate its negative affects on women. More specifically, I consider the ways in which UN-REDD fails to ensure full stakeholder participation and equitable benefit sharing, particularly for women. This section provides a brief history of the UN-REDD Programme and its utilization of gender mainstreaming.

The United Nations launched its UN-REDD Programme in September 2008 following COP13. It was established to “convene power and technical expertise” of the

UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (UN-REDD Programme 2015) to promote nationally-led REDD+ processes. UN-REDD seeks to provide a framework for planning and executing UN-REDD+ National Programs throughout the Global South. The United Nations supplies national governments with guidelines for REDD+ readiness, implementation, and measurement and provides monetary support for national operations. As of May 2015, sixty countries are involved in the UN- REDD Programme (ibid). In Latin America, the Programme supports fourteen partner countries. Six of these countries receive direct support for their national UN-REDD programs. These countries include Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Paraguay (ibid).

Although there exist many institutional frameworks for implementing REDD+, the UN-REDD Programme has been a major player in shaping standards for REDD+ programming all over the world. In this regard, the United Nations has published various standards and guidelines regarding proper stakeholder engagement, REDD+ phases, and the implication of international laws on the implementation REDD. The UN-REDD Programme has also developed guidelines on stakeholder engagement in collaboration with other REDD+ initiatives that are not affiliated with the United Nations. These international partners include, but are not limited to, the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, the Global Environment Facility, and the International Tropical Timber Organization (UN-REDD Programme 2015). The United Nations has also received

substantial funding support from the European Union, as well as the governments of Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, Spain and Denmark (ibid).

The United Nations has not only advocated REDD+ as a strategy to mitigate climate change; rather, it has framed REDD+ as a tool to encourage sustainable development in the Global South by addressing longstanding social and economic challenges. According to the United Nations, “one of the basic motivations for governments and stakeholders to become engaged in REDD+ is the potential to achieve social and economic benefits that go beyond climate change mitigation” (UN-REDD Programme 2015:11). In this vein, The United Nations has paid particular attention to the ways in which National REDD+ Programs can advance gender equality for women. In order to achieve this goal, the UN-REDD Programme has institutionalized gender mainstreaming in their development strategies. Gender mainstreaming, according to the UN Economic and Social Council, is

The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

(United Nations 1997)

The UN-REDD Programme's use of gender mainstreaming thus follows a two decades old tradition in UN development work that posits gender equality as a major indicator of development. The United Nations officially adopted gender mainstreaming as a strategy for equitable development in 1995 following the Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing. At the Beijing Conference, thousands of representatives from a range of non-governmental organizations and delegates from 192 countries adopted a “Platform for Action”. This

“Platform for Action” called on the United Nations and all of its signatory states to “mainstream” gender concerns in every policy action, including legislation and programming. Today, many developed countries and international organizations, including the World Bank, European Union, and UNDP, embrace gender mainstreaming in their program design (Hafner- Burton and Pollack 2002).

Gender mainstreaming has garnered much attention since its official inception in the United Nation’s policy in 1995. Since this time, there has been a substantial increase in the adoption of tools to implement gender policy and resources allocated to issues of gender in development (Daly 2005). In large part, “gender mainstreaming” emerged as the result of decades of organizing by feminists who criticized development institutions as centering the advancement of men and boys to the exclusion of women and girls (Hafner- Burton and Pollack 2002). The history of this model stems largely from two preceding dominant ideologies in development discourse known as the “Women in Development” model and the “Gender and Development” model that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century. A look at these theories reveals the extent to which gender mainstreaming remains attached to the practice of modernization. The debates and concerns that preceded gender mainstreaming efforts continue to inform how institutions, like the United Nations, conceptualize women’s participation in and relationship to development.

In many ways, the United Nation’s current policy of gender mainstreaming is built upon the preceding frameworks of WID and GAD (Hafner-Burton and Polack 2002) “Women in Development” or WID came about in the 1970s during a time when many

development actors were particularly concerned about women's welfare around the world. A network of development professionals based in Washington, D.C. coined this term as a way to more effectively integrate women into the development process (Reeves and Baden 2000). This took place around this same time as both the 1975 World Conference of the International Women's Year at Mexico City and the United Nations Decade for Women (1976- 1985) when there was substantial international attention being paid to women's role in development. Some feminists, such as Rounaq Jahan, refer to WID as an "integrationist approach", insofar as men's interests remain central while women are added as a "special interest" group (Porter and Sweetman: 2005). Other feminists refer to WID as the "add women and stir" model in which women are simply added as an extra ingredient while the recipe, cooking method, and end result remain largely the same (ibid). This strategy developed women-specific activities where women were considered as passive recipients of development aid. WID advocates were also concerned with how women's integration in the development process could lead to more efficient and successful development (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002). The efficiency argument, taken up by institutions such as the World Bank, (World Bank Gender Action Plan 2007-2010) asserts that investing in women's development does not only improve a woman's individual livelihood but is likely to result in a return on investment for her entire community. That is, WID relies on the notion that women's development will produce substantial economic returns (Razavi and Miller 1995; Chant and Sweetman 2012). This theory drew investment and donor support from development agencies who wanted to empower women in order to generate income and develop entire communities (ibid).

“Gender and Development” or GAD emerged in the late 1980s as a way to examine how relations of gender and power informed women’s subordination. Rather than focusing primarily on empowering women financially and materially, GAD sought to transform the ways in which cultural ideologies constructed “femaleness” and “maleness”. Here, gender relations replaced “woman” as the main category of analysis in development (Razavi and Miller 1995). Unlike WID, GAD not only works to meet women’s practical gender needs but also strives to respond to strategic gender needs (Reeves and Baden 2000). Strategic needs, unlike practical needs, refer to methods in which women can challenge gender inequities of social and economic power (ibid). Although GAD does employ a more holistic understanding of gender as the product of social processes, critics from the South argued that GAD continues to homogenize and victimize Third World Women (Sen and Grown 1987; Kabeer 1994). Although these alternative approaches to development consider how development initiatives affect men and women differently and seek to mitigate gender inequities in development outcomes, neither WID nor GAD call into question the notion of development itself. Both approaches regard women’s participation in development as inevitable and thus seek to improve its various dimensions for female stakeholders. Further, neither WID nor GAD necessarily address the ways in which institutions themselves inscribe gender norms. Feminist scholar, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, for example, has criticized development’s construction of womanhood insofar as it establishes “Third World Women” as a homogenous category of development recipients (Aguinaga et al. 2013). In her seminal article, “Under Western Eyes”, Mohanty argues:

What is problematical, then, about this kind of use of "women" as a group, as a stable category of analysis, is that it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination. Instead of analytically demonstrating the production of women as socio-economic political groups within particular local contexts, this move limits the definition of the female subject to gender identity, completely bypassing social class and ethnic identities.

(Mohanty:

1988: 344)

Thus, despite its popularity in development organizations, gender mainstreaming has been criticized as serving to depoliticize feminist agendas within development institutions (Eyben 2014). Feminist scholars Lorena Nunez and Ingrid Palmary, for example, explore how institutions and development actors employ gender mainstreaming as a tool to legitimize conservative agendas (2014). Standing (2004) also argues that the use of gender 'focal points', tools, and checklist in policy work depoliticizes feminist agendas (cited in Eyben 2014). Charlesworth (2005) is another scholar who establishes evidence of the limitations of institutional gender mainstreaming. She argues that UN and other development organizations' failure to effectively translate "gender mainstreaming" into other languages and socio-cultural contexts has created uncertainty and opposition to development projects. She also maintains that the United Nation lacks adequate training and support for gender mainstreaming efforts and has thus created a "gender mainstreaming fatigue". In their piece, "Is there Life After Gender Mainstreaming", Rao and Kelleher (2005) also establish the shortcomings of gender mainstreaming. They focus on gender mainstreaming's inability to reform inequitable institutions. Rao and Kelleher state that institutional change requires "changing organisations which, in their programmes, policies, structures, and ways of working, discriminate against women or

other marginalised groups” (2005: 50). This perspective is particularly important to consider in the context of REDD+ given that many groups believe REDD+ projects are inherently discriminatory and oppressive, regardless of their institutional affiliation and response to “gender issues” (Bhatnagar and Goldtooth 2015).

Feminists are concerned with whether achieving women’s empowerment requires discursive and organizations transformation. Much of the debate concerning gender mainstreaming thus centers on whether “adding” gender into existing paradigms of development will truly lead to women’s empowerment (Eyben 2014). This article does not attempt to resolve these issues or take a position regarding the nature of development. Rather, it explores the shortcomings of UN-REDD Programme’s gender mainstreaming model and offers feminist political ecology as an alternative way to understand women’s relationship with national UN-REDD Programs.

In 2011, the UN-REDD- Programme published a report entitled “The Business Case for Mainstreaming Gender in REDD+”. The report, a collaboration between the UN-REDD Programme and the UNDP Gender Team, aimed to include gender equality measurements into the UN-REDD Programme (UN-REDD Programme 2011). The document outlines four main components for REDD readiness including, “stakeholder engagement; addressing property rights and land and resource tenure; ensuring multiple benefits of forests and REDD; and transparent, equitable, and accountable management of REDD+ funds” (ibid: 5). With respect to stakeholder engagement, UN-REDD acknowledges that there is a comparatively low level of women’s participation in REDD+ at all levels and that women’s participation in these processes is essential. Low

participation among women stems from the fact that women possess different knowledges about their natural environment, have unique responsibilities, and may desire to express their opinion about REDD+. However, women in Latin America face wide-ranging barriers to their participation in development programming. For example, female forest dwellers in Latin America may feel uncomfortable attending public meetings and expressing their opinions to development practitioners. A host of factors contribute to their discomfort. One, women may face backlash from community members for participating in public debates. However, simply asking women to attend meetings and share their perspectives does not ensure that they will feel comfortable expressing themselves. Female forest dwellers in Latin America may feel uncomfortable and could be coerced into expressing particular viewpoints. Local relations of power shape the extent and ways in which women can feasibly participate in community action and decision-making. In addition, because women have less free time to attend and participate in meetings, the UN-REDD Programme recognizes that it may be more difficult to collect data from women than it is from men. Further, women may already be spending their time building or participating in coalitions against REDD+. What UN-REDD practitioners could therefore benefit from would be attending community meetings to learn about local perspectives without imposing standard interview questions in order to accumulate statistics.

Additionally, many women from rural communities do not speak Spanish or Portuguese and must work with practitioners who can speak the languages Indigenous to the region. This is particularly important because there are more than 550 different languages spoken in 21 countries in Latin America (López 2009). As Craig and Porter

argue, even if some members of a group (ie: women, the rural poor, etc) are consulted during the development process, marginal groups within these categories often remain unrecognized (1997). Although UN-REDD programs purport to provide broad-based legitimacy and representation by consulting with some “women”, particular groups of women (such as those who do not speak Spanish or Portuguese) may remain excluded from the conversation.

The United Nations acknowledges many of the aforementioned concerns regarding barriers to women’s participation. The United Nation’s Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Millennium Development Goals all articulate the importance of and difficulty in insuring women’s representation in development (UN Women 2012). The 2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women’s political participation states: “Women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalized from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women” (United Nations General Assembly 2012). However, UN-REDD does not offer adequate solutions to address these concerns. With respect to participation, UN-REDD would do well to acknowledge the ways in which development projects influence the way women construct and report their ‘needs’. That is, individuals may feel obliged to report in particular ways to appease the researcher. UN-REDD thus needs to incorporate more safeguards to ensure that development practitioners are not imposing narratives unto stakeholders, particularly women. Further, it is unclear how UN-REDD might respond to or operationalize women’s

input and expectation pertaining to REDD+. What might happen, for example, if women expressed interest in alternative climate change mitigation strategies in lieu of REDD+? Further research must be conducted to explore the extent to which women's testimonies may be used to legitimize official REDD+ discourse.

In addition to issues of participation, the "Business Case for Mainstreaming Gender" also explore issues of property rights and land and resource tenure. Here, the UN-REDD Programme acknowledges that REDD+ has alienate communities from their lands. This is especially concerning for women who face particular disadvantages to access and ownership. As primary users of forests, women are also more likely to be negatively affected by an inability to access land. In response to these concerns, the UN-REDD Programme advocates for countries to improve women's ability to own land in their respective countries. While women's land tenure certainly is an important issue to address, this recommendation perpetuates a very particular idea of land tenure that is based on individual rather than collective property ownership. Further, it does not mandate that countries institute any particular reform to recognize women's property rights before initiating National REDD+ Programs.

Although the report establishes the importance of recognizing the social inequities between men and women and the social practices that contribute to women's subordination, however, its commitment to improving women's livelihoods is inherently pragmatic and reflects more traditional development logic. For example, much of the work explores the ways in which investing in women and gender equity will produce material benefits for families and communities. This implies that improving women's income will

necessarily translate to household and community betterment. The document relies on the over-used assumption that women are more likely to reinvest their income in their children and spend their material resources for the betterment of their communities. It also asserts that women may take better care of their natural environments and be more adept at natural resource management. The work cites several examples to justify these assumptions. For example, the UN-REDD Programme draws on Bina Agrawal's findings based on her work in India and Nepal that show women's participation in decision-making results in improved forest condition (UN-REDD Programme 2011: 22). Here, the "Business Case" for incorporating women into REDD+ is as much about advancing the development agenda vis-a-vis material accumulation as it is about enhancing the livelihoods of communities of women. Women's participation in UN-REDD+ programming is thus rendered important insofar as it aids the development project rather than benefits communities of women. This document therefore justifies the importance of gender mainstreaming based on the assumption that women are "productive" and "profitable" investments rather than the idea that women have the right to express their opinion about what kind of development they seek or if they seek "development" at all.<sup>2</sup>

### **Feminist Political Ecology and Alternative Epistemologies**

While gender mainstreaming continues to dominate mainstream development discourse, other iterations of feminism permeate the women, environment, and

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<sup>2</sup> While the instrumentalization of women in development is of concern, some feminists inside development institutions argue that aligning themselves with mainstream development's prioritization of efficiency and pragmatism might be the fastest way to persuade organizations and donors to prioritize women's empowerment (Eyben 2014).

development debate (WED). The WED debate emerged around the same time as WID in the early 1970s and continues today (Tiondi 2001). What makes WED stand out from WID and GAD is its focus on the way globalization and modernization has negatively affected women and the environment (Schultz et al 2001). Ecofeminism, ecological feminism, and feminist political ecology emerged as the three major intellectual positions from the WED debate. In what follows, I examine how feminist political ecology allows us to better understand how issues of power and gender inequality operate in the context of REDD+.

In their book entitled “Ecofeminism”, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies lay the foundation for the theory of ecofeminism, building on Shiva’s earlier chronicle of the Chipko forest-dwellers of India. The authors draw a connection between the subordination of women and the oppression of nature and describe women as having a spiritual connection with the natural world. According to these theorists, however, capitalism undermines the importance of women’s ecological knowledge, rendering it unproductive, backward and unessential in the process of modernization (Mies and Shiva 1993). Environmental or ecological feminism is unique from ecofeminism insofar as it does not establish an intrinsic or biological connection between women and environmental knowledge. Rather, environmental feminism centers on the material realities that informs individuals’ knowledges of and relationships to the natural world.

Feminist political ecology differs from environmental feminism and ecofeminism insofar as it politicizes the Women, Environment, and Development debate. At first glance, feminist political ecology may appear similar to environmental feminism. Indeed, feminist political ecology, like environmental feminism, does not purport “a feminine essence that

places women closer to nature than men” (Aguinaga et al: 2013: 48) and recognizes that one’s material realities and positionality inform their relationship to the natural world (Rocheleau et al 1996). What makes feminist political ecology distinct, however, is the way in which it acknowledges women’s participation in place-based affinities and coalitions. Rather than taking women out of their local contexts and establishing universal standards of engagement with the natural world, feminist political ecology meets women where they are. In this regard, feminist political ecology stresses the importance of place-based understandings of ecological and social contexts (ibid). Feminist political ecology is thus antithetical to the UN-REDD’s practice of gender mainstreaming which serves to integrate women into larger development projects without nuance.

The UN-REDD Programme does not address the politics of gendered natural resource management in the same way that feminist political ecology allows. By viewing women vis-à-vis a lens of gender mainstreaming, the UN-REDD Programme ignores how women throughout Latin America have -and continue to resist- neoliberal development initiatives. Indeed, in order to have a better idea of what women want and need, one must contextualize how individuals construct their own identities not just in terms of their gender but in relation to their cultural mores and place-based *cosmovisions* or lifeworlds. In order to move beyond these simplified constructions of womanhood, we should turn to the work of feminist scholars who unpack the relationships between imperialism, natural resource management and feminisms. In this way, feminist political ecology aids us in this process of understanding how the environment is political and

gendered insofar as it reveals the multiple factors that inform women's relationship with the natural world (Rocheleau et al 1996).

### **Case Study: Socio Bosque in Ecuador**

Feminist political ecology challenges us to embrace a more holistic and infinitely complex understanding of gender and natural resource management. As previously mentioned, activists and environmentalists from Latin America have established myriad declarations and public actions articulating their distrust for REDD+ as an effective strategy for addressing climate change. This organizing, however, is not merely a way to express theoretical opposition to western development. It is a direct response to the ways in which REDD+ alters the material realities and livelihood-based strategies of those living in the Global South. In order to understand REDD+ through a feminist political ecology lens, we must situate political resistance to the project of REDD+ and its impact on rural communities in a particular time and place. In what follows, I examine Ecuador's Socio Bosque program in order to illuminate how local realities and power dynamics complicate the implementation of REDD+.

The government of Ecuador began designing the Socio Bosque Program in March 2008 and a ministerial agreement formalized the Program in November of that year (Fehse 2012). Socio Bosque was established with the objective of incentivizing forest conservation throughout Ecuador. Ecuador has a total surface area of 283,56000 hectares and 11,307,600 to 12,262,000 hectares of native forest (Raes and Mohebalian 2014). As of 2014, conservation agreements through the Socio Bosque Program have been signed for 630,000 hectares (The REDD Desk 2014). The Ecuadorian Ministry of Environment

monitors the compliance of Socio Bosque agreements and can conduct on-site inspections at any time. In addition to the Ministry of Environment can check compliance of conservation areas through aerial photography and satellite imagery (Raes and Mohebalian 2014).

Socio Bosque offers a set payment per hectare of maintained forest cover. Individual participants with properties larger than 20 hectares receive \$30 per hectare annually for the first 50 hectares, \$20/ha/yr for the following 50 hectares, and \$10/ha/yr for the following 400 hectares (Fehse 2012). If communities and individuals are compliant with the terms of their conservation agreement, they will receive payments twice a year in May and October (Raes and Mohebalian 2014). However, if participants are not compliant, their agreement can be terminated indefinitely. Further, if participants choose to stop participating in the program before the agreement expires, the environmental authority can request a reimbursement of the incentives that they have received from the Ministry of Environment thus far (ibid).

According to the REDD Desk, The Program's three objectives are

- “1. Conserve native forests and other native ecosystems to protect their tremendous ecological, economic, cultural and spiritual values. The goal is to conserve 4 million ha of forest and other native ecosystems over the next seven years.
2. Significantly reduce deforestation and associated GHG emissions.
3. Improve the well-being of farmers, indigenous communities and other groups living in the country's rural areas with the hope to benefit between 500,000 and one million people.”

(The REDD Desk 2016)

The Government of Ecuador was initially the sole funder of Socio Bosque. While the Government remains the largest contributor, it now seeks to diversify funding sources

for the program (Fehse 2012). These funding sources could include new green taxes, earmarked for Socio Bosque, payments by industry to offset extractive and other high-impact activities, international cooperation funds, international REDD+ payments, and voluntary contributions from domestic and/or international companies (Fehse 2012). As of 2012, Socio Bosque receives funding from the German Development Bank and NGOs such as Conservation International (Raes and Mohebalian 2014). The company General Motors Omnibus BB also signed a cooperation agreement for the conservation of 10,00 ha through an annual payment of US \$230,00 over the course of five years (ibid).

The emergence of the Socio Bosque program came at a time when Ecuador was establishing new legislation that recognized a range of rights for marginalized communities throughout the country. In 2008, Ecuador adopted a new Constitution of Ecuador that explicitly acknowledged the plurinational character of the country, the importance of civic participation, and the rights of nature. The following year saw the establishment of new development guidelines and policies set forth in the Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir (National Plan for Living Well (2009-2013) that articulated policies for confronting climate change and reducing deforestation (Núñez 2011). The government of Ecuador has argued that the establishment of a national REDD program will help the country achieve the goals set forth in these federal documents (ibid). Critics of Ecuador's national Socio-Bosque program, however, argue that the program has failed to benefit and consult with some Ecuador's most marginalized populations (ibid).

Numerous studies have been conducted to determine how Socio Bosque has impacted a range of stakeholders. A look at these studies reveal the gendered differences in

rates of participation and benefit sharing in the context of REDD+. For example, Krause et al. 2013 conducted a study in the Ecuadorian Amazon to study how Indigenous peoples perceive and benefit from Socio Bosque. This study is based on interviews with 101 individuals in five communities. The interviews were conducted in two communities in Sucumbíos and three communities in the provinces of Napo. Each of the five communities had been involved in the Socio Bosque for at least 18 months. Just over half (51%) of the women respondents reported that they participated in the initial decision to join Socio Bosque. Further, a mere 27% of women respondents reported that they were aware of the terms of the REDD+ investment plan signed by their community. Only 20% of the women reported that they had participated in the decision of what to include in the investment plan and only just over half (51%) of women participated in the initial decision to join Socio Bosque. Perhaps most telling of all is that none of the female respondents reported that they were aware of the terms of the Socio Bosque agreement in their community (Krause et al 2013).

There are many factors that explain the results in the aforementioned study. For example, Krause et al.'s study cited language as a major barrier to women's participation in decision making regarding the Socio Bosque conservation agreement. All information regarding the implications of signing the conservation agreement was written in Spanish and signed by elected representatives of each community. Community meetings regarding Socio Bosque were also conducted in Spanish (with infrequent translation to Kichwa) and used technical terms. As mentioned previously, this particularly prevents women who may not speak Spanish and/or understand the technical terms from participating fully in the

REDD+ process. Not only do language barriers inhibit informed consent, but they also impede women's complete and effective participation. This may allow male members of the community and other powerful members to dominate community meetings (Krause et al 2013).

Women are also less likely than men to report receiving benefits from the Socio Bosque Program (Krause et al. 2013). This is due to myriad factors including discriminatory laws and social norms. For example, women's lack of titled lands has prevented them from receiving benefits from the Socio Bosque Program (Fehse 2012). Indeed, critics of carbon mitigation programs have long argued that secure land tenure and certification costs present barriers to participation and benefits (Corbera et al. 2007; Boyd et al. 2007). Female residents who took part in Krause et al's study also stated that they were concerned about how Socio Bosque was affecting their community's access to and ownership of Indigenous territory (2013). A Sápara Amazon woman describes the ways in which the Socio Bosque program strengthens state control over subsoil resources and does not defend Indigenous territory from expropriation by third parties. She states:

I met with (staff from) Socio Bosque and asked them, "what is happening? They are buying up our territory'. They asked me know I knew. And then payments- no one gives away money for conservation, conservation of Sápara territory. And he (sic) sad, "No, here above is your Indigenous land, and below is the state's'. That's what he told me!

(Gloria, research interview in August 2012 qtd in Radcliffe: 92 )

Individuals without "proper" titling may not receive payment for Socio Bosque schemes in their territory. This is particularly difficult for women who are less likely than their male partners to possess rights to land that are legally recognized by the State.

Although the Ecuadorian Government instituted a large land titling program to remedy

this, developments are expected to be too slow to make a significant difference to Socio Bosque (Fehse 2012). In order to achieve the poverty reduction goals of Socio Bosque, UN-REDD must pay particular attention to how payments are distributed into communities and whether they positively impact marginalized community members, such as women (Brown and Corbera 2003).

Even when women do participate in meetings and consultation, women may be concerned that their knowledges will be “co-opted” by foreigners or development practitioners in order to advance outside agendas and displace them from their communities. According to CONFENAIE (a CONAEI affiliate), the Socio Bosque Program collects “local” knowledge without acknowledging Indigenous calls for informed prior consent on development projects (CONFAENAIE 2009). Radcliffe (2014) also argues that the Socio Bosque Program uses Indigenous ‘local’ knowledge while ignoring Indigenous peoples’ “demands for informed prior consent on all major infrastructure and extractive projects that continue unabated in/around/ overlapping with Indigenous ‘territories’” (92).

### **Conclusion: Rethinking “Gender” in the Context of REDD+**

As a political project, feminist political ecology is concerned with the eradication of all forms of oppression, not only women’s subordination. Unlike gender mainstreaming, this approach regards women as a political subjects whose concern with gender oppressions does not supersede their resistance to other forms of domination. Thus, women may remain suspicious of development initiatives imposed by the West regardless of whether or not these interventions purport to advance gender equality. By using a feminist

political ecology framework, we understand that forest-dwelling women interact with and at times form part of larger movements and political affiliations that invariably shape their perception development initiatives such as REDD+. Feminist political ecology also helps us understand the ways women experience REDD+ differently due to myriad factors regarding access to and ownership of land, equal participation in decision-making, and benefit sharing.

The Socio Bosque UN-REDD Program in Ecuador provides a case study example of how issues of power and gender inequities operate in the context of payment scheme conservation interventions like REDD+. Language barriers, gender expectations and norms, and insecure access to land tenure all contribute to women's experience of REDD+. The way REDD+ operates in the context of local communities thus mirrors the devastating effects other development interventions have had on rural women in Latin America (Corebera et. Al 2007, Gurung and Quesada 2009).

Establishing a connection between REDD and other neoliberal development schemes, Indigenous movements consider Socio Bosque "a continuation of the type of policies that have impeded their quest for sovereignty and self-determination" (Reed 2011: 525). Despite this backlash, the United Nations continues to advocate for REDD+ as a tool for addressing climate change vis-à-vis UN-REDD national programs despite widespread controversy. In 2015, the United Nations published the UN-REDD Programme Strategic Framework for 2016- 2020. Nowhere in the document does UN-REDD mention the numerous coalitions organizing against REDD+. Instead, the United Nations reflects on the 2013- 2014 external evaluation of the UN-REDD Programme that was established to

assess results and inform adjustments to the Programme strategy after 2015. With respect to tenure security, the United Nations' Strategic Framework 2016- 2020 leaves it up to individual countries to determine "appropriate ways to deal with tenure issues" and offers the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests to aid in this process. With this, the UN-REDD Programme does not obligate country partners to reform their land tenure systems in a way that improves women's land tenure. Section 4.4 of the UNRP Strategic Framework 2016-2020 includes a response to this recommendation and sets forth the following plans to offer technical support to REDD+ program countries in establishing gender equality:

- "Increase gender sensitive participation: Promoting gender balance and integrating gender equality and women's empowerment concepts within UN-REDD Programme workshops, consultations, decision-making, capacity building and training at both global and national levels;
- Booster awareness on gender considerations: Increasing the depth of understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment concepts, and addressing the misperceptions concerning gender issues at both global and national levels
- Undertake gender-sensitive assessments: Conducting gender analysis and stocktaking exercises, which establish a gender baseline and identify areas for improvement in REDD+ policy and programming, where gender equality and women's empowerment can be promoted; and
- Develop gender responsive UN-REDD Programme reporting and monitoring frameworks: Collecting data to monitor and evaluate the implementation of gender mainstreaming actions and the reporting of corresponding results."

(UN-REDD Programme Strategic Framework 2016-2020: 2015: 42)

While the aforementioned approaches and methods certainly establish the importance of instituting a "gender sensitive" approach to REDD+, the United Nations REDD+ Programme does little to address power and political agendas for change. If the

United Nations is serious about instituting “gender sensitive” approaches to sustainable development, it must take seriously the concerns of Indigenous and forest-dependent peoples throughout the Americas who resist capitalist intervention strategies in their territories. Presently, there exists minimal information regarding women’s experiences of UN-REDD programs in Latin America. In order to get a better idea of how women engage with REDD+ in their communities, UN-REDD must invest significantly in evaluating how their programming has affected rural women. Thus, in order to gain a better understanding of how carbon schemes impact women and gender relations more broadly, more field-based research must be conducted. Here, researchers must consider the following themes: 1) women’s knowledge of and participation in establishing REDD+ terms of agreement, 2) how the program has affected women’s ability to access and/ or profit from their land, 3) how the program has affected their relationships with their family and community, and 4) the extent to which they perceive they have materially and socially benefitted from their individual or community’s participation in the REDD+ program. As the aforementioned case study demonstrates, this information can reveal great deal of critical information regarding gender and REDD+.

Conducting this research is crucial and has the ability to illuminate some of the more detrimental consequences of REDD+ programming. However, the development community must also begin to challenge REDD+ as an “inevitable” solution to climate change and take seriously the alternatives proposed by individuals living in the Global South. As Cabello and Gilbertson (2012) establish, many academics and practitioners who have criticized REDD+ (both on a national scale and in the private sector) continue to

advocate for REDD+ as a possible solution for climate change mitigation. Feminist political ecology requires that we reject this tradition in the literature. Rather, as feminist political ecologists, we must challenge the larger neoliberal climate regime that places undue burdens on communities who are least responsible for and least likely to benefit from environmental degradation and exploitation (Carbon Trade Watch 2013; Cabello and Gillbertson 2012).

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