



## Land, Biodiversity, Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights

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**Goal 15 on land, forests and other terrestrial ecosystems, and biodiversity** is critically linked to gender equality and sustainable development. Despite playing a major role in biodiversity conservation, forest management and restoration—such as through intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge, keeping seeds, energy generation, collection of traditional food and medicine, and sustainable livelihoods—women and indigenous peoples are often excluded from participation in local, national, and global natural resources governance, especially managerial positions and decision-making bodies. They are also often systematically excluded from accessing, owning, and controlling land and resources.

### Key data

- Forests account for 30% of the Earth's surface and are home to more than 80% of all terrestrial species of animals, plants, and insects. Between 2010 and 2015, the world lost 3.3 million hectares of forested areas.
- Approximately 1.6 billion people around the world—mainly in tropical regions— depend on agroforestry farming and forest resources for their livelihoods. This includes approximately 70 million indigenous people.
- As many as 80% of people living in rural areas in developing countries rely on traditional plant-based medicines for basic healthcare.
- 2.6 billion people depend directly on agriculture, but 52% of the land used for agriculture is moderately or severely affected by soil degradation. 74% of the poor are directly affected by land degradation globally.
- More than 2.4 billion people - about one-third of the world's population - still rely on the traditional use of woodfuel for cooking, and many small enterprises use fuelwood and charcoal as the main energy carriers for various purposes such as baking, tea processing, and brickmaking. Of all the wood used as fuel, about 17% is converted to charcoal.
- Women and children are primarily tasked with the collection of fuelwood. For example, women spend approximately 374 hours every year collecting fuelwood in India.
- Land and property can form up to 75% of a nation's wealth, yet three quarters of the world's population cannot prove they own the land on which they live or work. For example, 90% of Africa's land is still completely undocumented.
- Women own less than 20% of the world's land, yet more than 400 million of them farm and produce the majority of the world's food supply. Female farmers lack equal rights to own land in more than 90 countries.
- In more than half of all countries, patriarchal tradition and ancient social beliefs threaten women's land rights even when they are enshrined in the rule of law. Recent figures show that in 34 countries, daughters do not have equal inheritance rights to sons. And in 35 countries, widows are particularly vulnerable as they do not automatically inherit their dead husband's property – it may go to his family or to their sons.
- The slaughter of people defending their land or environment continues unabated, with new research showing almost four people a week were killed worldwide in struggles against mines, plantations, poachers, and infrastructure projects in 2017. Defenders are also being beaten, criminalized, threatened, or harassed.
- Less than a quarter of the 173 Focal Points to the UN Forum on Forests (UNFF)—an intergovernmental forest policy forum—are women.

### Key messages

1. Laws, policies, programs, and services must fully and intentionally integrate a gender-responsive approach in their formulation and delivery. They must engage and recognize women and indigenous peoples as rights holders, and ensure their access to information and roles in decision-making and governance in all related processes on local, national, and global levels in regards to access, ownership, and control of land, forests, biodiversity, food and water.

2. The UN member states must protect and support women human rights and environmental defenders that are safeguarding the environment and their communities from repression, extractivism, degradation, contamination and the overall destruction of healthy ecosystems.
3. There should be recognition of the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and local communities, especially that of indigenous women. There should be support for their sustainable livelihoods and local economies, community-based biodiversity conservation, and community-led restoration of forests, to ensure lasting benefits to human health and wellbeing for all.

## Recommendations

- Implement gender-responsive strategies and women-led resource and land management initiatives as well as gender-sensitive, community-led interventions with strong legally and socially legitimate land tenure for women.
- Ensure rural women receive land documents and technical solutions, financial services, subsidized equipment and access to free basic energy for household consumption and production use, including for agriculture, and small-scale enterprises.
- Respect the rights, including Free Prior and Informed Consent, of indigenous peoples and women's leadership in negotiations, policies, and programs. Most importantly in regards to the land tenure, territorial, and governance rights of indigenous peoples and indigenous women's rights to their community forests, as well as their rights to lead in protecting their communities' traditional knowledge and livelihoods.
- Monitor large-scale land-based investments to ensure gender-responsive, socially-responsible consultation and consent by indigenous peoples and communities.
- Ensure effective implementation of SDG 15.2 to halt deforestation by 2020 and to conserve terrestrial ecosystems by prioritizing gender-responsive policies and women's participation in governance and decision-making.
- Implement existing international environmental agreements and ensure policy coherence between the three Rio Conventions:
  - The Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) has adopted numerous policy recommendations to address land and soil degradation through community-based, participatory approaches that respect and foster the role of women in land management;
  - The Parties to the Convention on Biodiversity (CBD) have agreed to the 20 Aichi Biodiversity Targets, which include targets to redirect or phase out perverse incentives and subsidy schemes that might trigger the destruction of biodiversity by 2020 as well as to restore ecosystems to ensure health, well-being and livelihood needs of women, indigenous peoples and local communities. Streamline CBD's post-2020 strategic plan and targets with SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls.
  - The UNFCCC Gender Plan of Action and the CBD Gender Plan of Action 2015-2020 recognize women's rights and gender-mainstreaming in biodiversity and climate action policy, including capacity building on gender and engagement of indigenous women.
- Close the gender gap in evidence-based responses by collecting sex-disaggregated evidence of actual and perceived tenure security nationwide along with sex-disaggregated data on proportion of land that is degraded as per definition of indicators 1.4.2 and 15.3.1.
- Eliminate or redirect perverse incentives for unsustainable agriculture, livestock production, and monoculture tree plantations, and revise trade policies of the corporate free trade model that benefit the few and are skewed in favor of large agribusinesses and export-oriented food production, as opposed to women's small-scale farming practices, which benefit the many.
- Amend the FAO definition of forests to exclude plantations and to include the concept of forests as complex ecosystems with different functions that not only hold vast biodiversity but that are also key in the regulation of climate, including the water cycle.