Engaging critically and creatively with the Sustainable Development Goals from a Gender and Social Justice Perspective

Notwithstanding many of the valid criticisms leveled against the Sustainable Development goals for reinforcing the hegemonic global order, as a major global development agenda that is already influencing policy direction and flow of funds, it is essential for the forestry sector to engage critically and creatively with the SDGs. From a gender and social justice perspective, the SDGs is a much more ambitious global development agenda compared to its predecessor, MDGs. SDGs aim to address many of the fundamental roots of gender injustice that women’s movements have been raising for generations as holding back women’s full enjoyment of rights. Furthermore, SDG 10 acknowledges that vertical, horizontal and intersecting inequalities are of significant development concern, and gives further weight and meaning to the overall SDG vision of ‘leaving no one behind’. In these regards, the SDG framework provides an opportunity for the forestry sector to contribute towards broader, global efforts rather than strive for piecemeal gains. Lessons from over thirty years of empirically sound and locally grounded research in the forestry sector can be leveraged to track progress against the stand alone goal on gender equality (SDG 5) and in other goals where gender equality is mainstreamed (such as SDG 13 on climate action). The growing focus on ‘gender and intersecting inequalities’ within forestry research and policy can contribute towards critically evaluating, fine tuning and achieving SDG 10. At the same time, by framing gender equality, women’s empowerment, inequalities within and across countries as core development concerns in their own right, the SDGs help cement ‘normative’ and ‘rights-based’ agendas in forestry policy and practice. Hence, the SDG framework serves as an opportunity to move beyond justifying ‘gender and social justice’ for instrumental gains, and contribute more deeply and meaningfully to supporting transformative change in rural landscapes, within and beyond forestry. This paper will present a two way relationship between SDGs and forestry, drawing on a synthesis of existing findings and ongoing research in South Asia and South East Asia.