Equity and justice, two closely related concepts, have become an increasing source of concern and interest in the design and the implementation of payment for ecosystem services (PES) projects that aim to achieve both development and conservation outcomes. Justice is multi-dimensional and includes procedure, recognition, or representation, where the recognition and representation are important for procedural justice, which is important for distributive justice. In a similar vein, equity is also often portrayed as multi-dimensional and multi-layered, where elements of contextual, procedural, and distributive justice are core components of the “content” of equity, which are influenced by international as well as local actors. Equity departs in a key way, however, from justice: its connection to and emphasis on fairness (versus “equal” or “impartial”) asks us to engage more deeply in our understanding not only of the extent to which PES projects benefit the poor, but also the poorer and marginalized groups within a community.

Equity plays an important role in successful PES projects. Its emphasis on comparisons and relationships, combined with the historical marginalization of women, highlights the urgent need to better understand gender equity in PES projects. While women have been long-recognized as important players in both agriculture and forestry, they often do not reap the benefit of PES projects. A focus on gender equity calls attention to how gendered roles and norms affect the extent to which women participate in and benefit from projects. This study draws on the multi-dimensional equity framework presented in McDermott et al., (2013) to examine how gender equity is negotiated in carbon market projects. This research investigates eight different carbon market projects in sub-Saharan Africa and applies the equity framework to understand how—if at all—project developers negotiate gender equity at different stages of the project, from project design to implementation. The results highlight that project developers have considerable latitude in shaping the extent to which projects can be gender equitable and offers suggestions on how projects can achieve more equitable outcomes despite numerous challenges.