How are women and men differently affected by commercial logging operations in Solomon Islands? In this presentation I will answer that question and provide insights on environmental justice and equity issues in the forestry sector on Malaita, the Pacific archipelago’s most densely populated island.

Large-scale commercial logging in Solomon Islands began in the early 1980s and mostly takes place on customary, collectively owned land. This means that logging companies must negotiate directly with land-owning groups in order to get access to forest resources. In theory, as compared to situations where logging happens on state-owned land, this could result in more equitable benefit sharing between the logging industry and local communities. In practice however, logging in Solomon Islands is foreign (Malaysian) dominated, highly unsustainable, poorly regulated, and based on the export of systematically underpriced round-logs with no long-term benefits accruing to landowners.

Based on semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with Malaitan women and men since November 2016, I will show that women receive least of the material benefits from logging, while they are profoundly affected by its social and environmental impacts. The logging industry in Solomon Islands, as elsewhere, hardly creates job opportunities for women and logging wages earned by men are unevenly distributed within households. Moreover, as landownership in Malaita is patrilinearly organized, decision making regarding logging and royalty payments are a male affair. At the same time, logging money increases alcohol consumption which in turn leads to increased family violence, and sexual abuse of local women and girls by incoming logging personnel is common. Finally, mangrove forests, which are women’s main fishing grounds, are heavily impacted by log pond and wharf construction.

These ethnographic data provide evidence of the highly gender inequitable nature of benefit distribution from logging for a region that is underrepresented in the literature on forestry. Based on these findings I will argue that there is an urgent need for: 1) the design and implementation of social safeguards in the logging sector that specifically focus on the position of women in concession areas; and 2) the development of gender sensitive forestry curricula.