Women’s roles along Ghana’s timber value chain: Implications for sustainable forest management

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In most parts of Africa, women are impoverished and largely depend on forest resources for their livelihoods. For sustainable forest resource use, several schemes/reforms including FLEGT-VPA are active in Ghana but without proper understanding of women’s unique situation and realities especially in the informal sector. Notwithstanding the good intent of such schemes, efforts are required to ensure that they do not deepen the already wide gender gap considering male dominance in the sector. Using Ghana’s timber value chain as a case, this study examines gender roles, livelihood assets and profit/income redistribution to ascertain VPA impacts on women’s livelihood to provide evidence on safeguards that improve women’s contributions to VPA implementation and Ghana’s forest sector. Gender-Sensitive Value Chain (GSVC) Framework which conceptualizes gender, value chains and livelihoods was applied. Participatory rural appraisal methods, group discussions, document reviews and interviews were conducted with actors along the timber value chain. The study found that men dominate the timber value chain but with women’s presence in all nodes of the chain. Though more women were engaged in processing activities, men play more rewarding roles with women’s remaining largely supportive to men’s. Societal construct, religious & traditional norms, economic status and regulatory environment which determines access to livelihood assets are all skewed to limit women’s access to resources. In effect, natural, financial and physical capitals core to women’s livelihood and mobility along the chain are all declining with appreciable stability in their social and human capitals. A large proportion of women's income/profits from timber-related activities are devoted to household subsistence needs compared to men who expend more on investments. With adverse effect on their access to resources, cost of doing business, work relations, etc., women are generally unaware of VPA developments and other sector regulations. This signifies women’s vulnerability to VPA repercussions; threat to its successful implementation. The study recommends instruments that guarantee equitable opportunity for men and women including tailor-made decisions and regulations on gendered resource access, allocation and use, together with gender-responsive safeguards to ensure all actors operate and contribute effectively to VPA implementation and the entire Ghana’s forestry sector.