

Gender Equality Guidance Paper for Fieldwork

Human rights are intrinsic to achieving Proforest's mission to help people produce and source natural resources sustainably. Women are among those most vulnerable to the impacts of unsustainable practices because they often have no independent income or land rights. Intersecting factors, such as age, disability, ethnicity, caste, geographical location, income levels and so on can further exacerbate women's and girls' as well as men and boys' experience of agricultural practices.

At Proforest, our vision for gender equality is that our workplaces and our projects and programmes promote equal opportunities and benefits for both women and men, uphold the rights of women and girls and men and boys and support women's empowerment.

Proforest's approach to mainstreaming gender has been based on the following key elements:

1. High level commitment.
2. Equipping and supporting people to work on the topic.
3. Thinking through internally, in a participatory process, what is desirable, practical and feasible to do for different types of work and our internal policies and procedures.
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5. Monitoring, evaluating and learning from outcomes of implemented practices and procedures to assess their effectiveness in achieving gender mainstreaming objectives.

As part of our approach we developed a series of internal Gender Equality Guidance papers. These papers aim to provide a rationale and recommendations - developed by and for colleagues - on how to integrate women's rights and gender equality into our projects and identify opportunities for gender sensitisation and/or transformation in this work. These guidance papers have been prepared for different types of Proforest work in recognition of the different opportunities for leverage and different types of actions that may be appropriate.

An important part of our gender equality mainstreaming strategy is to document and disseminate our lessons and experiences of applying our approaches, to increase the impact of our work. We therefore decided to make our series of internal guidance papers available publicly. We hope that by doing so this practical guidance will support our partners, clients and other sustainability practitioners as we collectively work towards gender equality as part of responsible production and sourcing.

Proforest's Gender Equality Policy includes the commitment to find ways to mainstream gender- sensitive strategies and approaches into policies, projects, programmes and consultancies as appropriate. We have also agreed to remain open to opportunities to be gender- transformative in our work¹.

- 1 The term 'gender sensitive' is when an approach challenges gender stereotypes, exposes gender discrimination and promotes gender equality. Gender Transformative is when an approach addresses the root causes of gender inequality and promotes the value of women and girls.

1. Area of work: Fieldwork

This guidance is intended to be used in projects and programmes where we do fieldwork visits to collect information from multiple sources.

The visit is usually focused on a processing plant (e.g. mills) and its supply base – i.e. production sites (plantations, smallholders etc.). The work may include – amongst others – visiting processing plants (mills), plantations, communities, independent producers' farms, and other stakeholders such as local government or NGOs.

Typically, the fieldwork is to see how an operation is performing compared to a standard (set of criteria) – which might be based on a buying company's own requirements (supplier guides, or contract) or a certification scheme's standard.

Some examples of fieldwork: Responsible sourcing site visits (e.g. for palm and sugar); HCV assessments and Social Impact Assessments; Responsible production gap assessments (e.g. for a palm oil company wanting to become RSPO certified).

In many cases, fieldwork is done in partnership with local organisations and/or with local consultants/auditors.

Since Proforest develops capacity through training courses for auditors and assessors which includes what to look for in the field and how to plan visits, the advice here can and should be built into those courses.



2. Rationale – how we would work on gender equality

What is Proforest hoping to change in relation to women's rights and gender equality?

We are hoping to change the following:

- That women's rights are upheld and gender equality considerations are implemented by companies that are part of responsible production or sourcing initiatives that we support.
- Give visibility to the differences in men and women's roles, barriers, opportunities and experiences, and avoid harm that can be caused due to assumptions and generalisations about these.
- Positively influence attitudes about the rights of female and male workers, and of women and men in affected communities.
- Positively influence working conditions and livelihoods of both female and male workers through changes in companies' policies and practices and organisational culture.

- Shift attitudes and behaviour to give more voice and leadership to women, help value their role/contribution and potentially shift their roles out of rigid confines related to traditional gender roles.

For which groups do we want this change?

- Female and male workers in mills, plantations and out growers' farms – whether formally or informally employed, and their families (wives, husbands, children).
- Female and male management and technical staff from companies making decisions, developing policies, implementing good practices.
- Men and women and girls and boys in households and communities in the area of influence of the production regions.

What is Proforest's role or its levers for influence?

- **Methodology:** We can develop and use methodologies for gathering data before and during assessments which ensure that the perspectives and experiences of women and men are included in our data collection (See Section 3 below). This includes team composition, the way we plan the visits, and how we conduct interviews in the field.
- **Presenting Results:** We can ensure that we give visibility to the perspectives and concerns of women as well as men when presenting our findings back to the company/producers visited, and to the clients who paid for the work (if different). We can highlight positive steps made by the company as a way of celebrating successes.
- **Follow-Up Action:** We can highlight opportunities to address challenges in relation to gender equality and choose to emphasise them in action planning and follow up.
- **Partner Selection, Contracting, Training:** We can actively seek partners who share our gender equality mission, and/or have experience in this work. We can establish constructive dialogues with our fieldwork partners about gender equality; and/or provide capacity building, and/or require certain minimum standards when working with us.
- **The issues being assessed:** In some cases, we can influence the content of the standards being used for the field work (see Gender Equality Guidance Paper number 3 for Responsible Sourcing projects).



3. Recommendations and guidelines

3.1. Engaging with Responsible Sourcing clients

A lot of our field work is commissioned by downstream buyers of the commodities being grown or processed at the sites we visit. Our work with these companies on the development and implementation of their responsible sourcing strategies, provides us with other opportunities to ensure that our work is gender sensitive. **See separate Proforest Gender Equality Guidance number 3 for Responsible Sourcing**, available on the Proforest website: www.proforest.net

3.2. Prior to starting any field work: planning a responsible sourcing or responsible production site visit

Information gathering, to influence methodology and team composition

The more we understand the context before visiting, the better we will be able to plan and execute the visit in a way which is gender sensitive.

Aim to find out information in advance, which will help you select the most appropriate team (languages, male/female ratio), and the best agenda (time needed for male/female focus groups with workers, or in communities), and the logistics (time of day to interview women/men, transport needed to reach communities, culturally appropriate ways to meet with women's groups, needs of field team e.g. childcare, personal safety considerations). The kind of information you should try to find in advance includes:

- **Labour:** Numbers of male and female workers, and what jobs they are carrying out, and in which parts of the operation; If migrant workers used, are these both men and women? And are their families accompanying them? Typical start/break/end times? Are these different for men and women?
- **Smallholders:** How many 'smallholders' are women? Who owns the land and who has access to it? Who benefits from the land's resources and how? Who does what? (farming tasks, decisions).
- **Communities:** what languages are spoken? Will talking to women require different languages/ translator? What times of day would be best to talk to men and women (bearing in mind that these may be different for different sexes)?
- Staff should use the internal document *Process for Preparing for Social Issues on Site Visits*; which is

designed to support a field team to be well prepared to address labour, land-rights and community engagement issues, and to take a gender sensitive approach. This includes a Pre-visit Guidance Sheet. Additionally, where possible information should be obtained in advance from the company to be visited via the use of the internal *Company Background Information Form*.

Choosing partners

When working with a partner organisation or an individual consultant/auditor for a field visit find out in advance:

- Do they have a policy about gender equality or gender mainstreaming in their own work?
- Do they have any experience or training about gender sensitivity in their work and in site visits?

Discuss with them in advance what Proforest's commitment to women's rights and gender equality is, which includes ensuring that our methodologies are gender sensitive and ask them to commit to supporting this in our work together. There may be an opportunity to build this into your contract with them.

If partners already have a lot of experience, this may represent an opportunity to learn from them and improve our methodologies.

Agree with them in advance how you will collectively ensure that a methodology is used which is gender sensitive..

Consider if it is possible to give them some training about gender sensitive methodologies and presentation of the results, in advance of the field work.

Partner/Assessor Capacity

Where databases of consultants/assessors are held, it is recommended to add information about the degree of experience or confidence on bringing a gender-equality perspective to the field work. Likewise, for new partner or assessor selection.

Ideas for partnership criteria = a policy on gender equality, internal training on gender for team.

3.3 Methodology and Approach During the field work

Interviewing staff, producers, workers, and community members:

Ensure that the sample includes both male and female workers when interviewing individuals.

- Women workers should be interviewed both where they are in the minority (roles often considered 'men's work'), and where they form the majority (roles that may be considered typically women's work).
- Find out in advance about the number of women and men smallholders and visit some of each. If you are told that all smallholders are men, be sure to investigate on site what in practice is the role(s) of women in the different production processes, decision making selling/finances, and use of the land.
- Ensure that your questionnaire(s) / interview technique allows for open ended questions to explore the experiences of the interviewees.
- Consider how the sex of the interviewer/interviewee will affect answers given and hence the visibility of issues for women and men
- Where possible arrange women interview women, and men interview men so that each can speak more freely.
- Women – often with children- who have accompanied men to live and work at a production site (e.g. seasonal and/or migrant labourers) risk being overlooked in interview schedules. Yet their experiences are important inputs to understanding living conditions, health and safety, pay etc and the degree to which their own rights and those of their families are protected. Make sure they are interviewed too.

Community Consultations:

- Find ways to ensure that community consultation methods are not limited to men only. Where mixed groups are interviewed, be sensitive to the possibility that women may not feel comfortable voicing their experiences or opinion (depending on culture): in such cases, seek to speak to women in separate, confidential spaces. e.g. use all-female and all male focus groups in communities in HCV assessments.
- Consider talking to existing women's groups (e.g. those formed by churches, NGOs or schools). In particular seek to understand what women's roles are, and how this might be relevant to the interactions with companies, and the impacts on communities of production/processing. Ensure that you specifically ask women about the impacts of production/processing on them and their families: this can identify different issues and help to increase visibility of community needs for companies (eg. see box below).

An example of gendered experiences of living near a sugarcane mill:

Informal interviews with women that lived near a sugarcane processing mill identified that they reported children with respiratory problems and frustration about the layers of ash on their homes and washing from stack emissions. This was not reported by the men in the meetings of local authorities with mill management.

Tip: Don't make assumptions about 'smallholders' being men or women. Nor assume that you know the role women will have on a smallholder farm. Even when the producer known to the mill is a man, find out in practice what women's roles are and how they access the land.



Scope

1. Look beyond those criteria and indicators that are most clearly associated with gender equality (e.g. no harassment, no discrimination), to be sure to assess whether women and men are experiencing differently any of the other requirements of a typical standard (e.g. payment of minimum wage/decent wage, use/provision of Personal Protective Equipment, conditions in accommodation provided; impacts of production on environmental services)
2. There may be opportunities to highlight positive examples of gender equality (policies, practices) at a site and mentioning these can support further positive change: there is no need to bring up only the challenges and 'non-compliances'.

Proforest has a safeguarding policy for those it works with, and for its own staff: this includes a grievance mechanism to support staff and address any systematic problems.

Safeguarding of interviewees, partners and our own team

1. Safeguarding of the field team themselves is important. Men and women will have different experiences of interactions with colleagues, partners, and staff at the companies to be visited.
2. Consider the needs of fieldwork team when designing the visit, be aware of risks caused by negative attitudes, or harassment, or lack of respect towards women team members – also to other members who may not conform to social norms around gender or sexuality.
3. Acknowledge and respond to the fact that men and women have different needs and experiences in the field.

Team leaders should consult with team members about their needs and concerns in advance and seek feedback on their experiences post-field work. Note that team leaders should avoid assumptions about the capabilities and needs of their colleagues.

Reporting back on findings

To the company you've visited (closing meeting, action planning etc):

- Present your findings to the company you've visited using sex-disaggregated data. E.g. present how many men and women workers there are in different areas; how many are registered as smallholders/outgrowers. Highlight any gaps in knowledge.
- Explain any differences you found in the way that men and women experience the issues that you've been reviewing. E.g. if you found that women were particularly affected by piece-rate pay, or if they had no access to collective bargaining.
- NB. While it may also be helpful to mention the number of men and women interviewed, discretion may be needed to protect interviewees so ensure anonymity in terms of findings.

In the written report and/or reporting back to buyers in responsible sourcing:

- Include sex-disaggregated data throughout the report.
- Highlight those findings where the experiences of men and women were significantly different to raise awareness.
- When reporting on human rights risks, highlight those findings which suggest that women's rights may be at risk.

Celebrate and Explain

In addition to talking about performance against a standard, field work presents opportunities to celebrate successes where a company has made progress, however incremental.

The way in which the field work is described is important, for example explaining that both women and men smallholders, workers and community members were interviewed and why this was done helps to reinforce the message.

In follow-up after field work

For the sites visited:

- Highlight key gaps around women's rights and gender equality and include specific actions for redress in Action Plans or Management plans.
- If capacity building is developed, design trainings to include references to the different experiences of men and women, women's rights, etc. as appropriate.
- Support companies at the supply chain base with simplified methods to identify and analyse gender equality issues and use the information to develop actions or approaches to address those issues.

For responsible sourcing clients:

- Consider an analysis of collected sex-disaggregated data from the different areas of data collection of the fieldwork to understand gender equality issues and share it with buyers, NGOs and relevant stakeholders to raise awareness and therefore influence decision making.
- Support buyers and others along the supply chain to identify the best approaches to women's rights and gender equality issues and supporting actions.

Case Study: Site Assessments for Responsible Sourcing

Site assessments to sugarcane mills and their smallholder supply base are carried out with partner organisations in Mexico.

Hostels are provided for the harvest season for the predominantly male migrant cane cutters. Visiting these shelters while the men are at the cutting fields offers an opportunity to talk to some of the wives who have accompanied them, as well as to see the living conditions and access to education for the children.



Case Study: Understanding the use and value of forest resources by women and men.

A Proforest-led team of 9 people carried out an **HCV assessment** in Ghana for a proposed new oil palm and rubber plantation.

The stakeholder consultation team included 2 men and 1 woman. They carried out meetings in 20 communities. In addition to community meetings (attended by chiefs and elders, various community groups (e.g. women and youth), Assembly members (local government representatives)), they arranged focus group discussions separately with female and male community members.

Focus groups (semi-structured conversations with groups of people in the village with a shared activity or interest) allowed the assessment team to hold separate meetings with hunters, gatherers of Non-Timber Forest Products, women, and men in the communities.

The HCV report explained that this methodology was used because:

“Women and men have a varying dependence on the natural resources and derive varying utilities from forests; it is thus important to capture these separately.

Secondly, in some communities, women do not freely express their opinions in the presence of their men folks, particularly if those opinions differ or contradict the men folk’s. As such, separate meetings ensure that all views are adequately captured”.

Source: Public Summary Report: High Conservation Value Assessment for Plantation Socfinaf Ghana Limited Subri River Forest Reserve Concession, Western Region, Ghana, Final| Version| July 2017



E: gender@proforest.net



Proforest acknowledges the support for our gender equality mainstreaming work from the UK Aid’s Forest Governance, Markets and Climate (FGMC) and Partnership for Forests (PF4).

International Office (UK)
T: +44 (0) 1865 243 439
E: info@proforest.net

Africa (Ghana)
T: +233 (0)302 542 975
E: africa@proforest.net

Latin America (Brazil)
T: +55 (61) 3879 2249
E: latinoamerica@proforest.net

Latin America (Colombia)
T: +57 (2) 3481791
E: latinoamerica@proforest.net

Southeast Asia (Malaysia)
T: +60 (0)3 2242 0021
E: southeastasia@proforest.net