



Fostering Gender-Transformative Change in Sustainable Forest Management

A CASE STUDY OF THE DGM NATIONAL STEERING COMMITTEES

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Executive Summary

Across the DGM country projects, the National Steering Committees (NSC) play a critical role in determining priorities, guiding project implementation and making funding decisions on eligible subgrant proposals. The DGM's ability to elevate and legitimize women's voices and agency at a national level, and at international exchange events, has been an important contribution to the overall achievement of project results.

This case study seeks to understand how NSCs serve as an important platform for supporting and advancing women's leadership and effective participation, with possible second-level impacts on broader societal perceptions and beliefs about indigenous and local women in prominent leadership positions. The DGM experience with establishing NSCs composed entirely of Indigenous and local community leaders has provided a unique opportunity to test a governance model that has few precedents.

The study is based on a desk review of DGM literature, interviews with key World Bank staff (mostly TTLs) and 35 semi-structured interviews, including with seven male and nine female NSC members or observers from seven DGM countries, representing a cross-section of views from each region, with NSCs that have had a long track record of operation. The selection process to form the NSC has varied across countries, reflecting guidance that explicitly states a preference for gender as a consideration in NSC membership, but has the flexibility to allow each country to determine the appropriate governance structure within a set of common requirements. NSC representatives were selected by IPLC communities themselves based on criteria they identified.

Across the entire DGM, one in every four NSC members is a woman, with NSC percentages of women members ranging from 0 to 46%. While the NSC selection process was largely perceived to be fair, and quotas were not widely adopted in the first cohort of DGM countries, interviewees acknowledged the existing inequalities that can disadvantage women. Despite their underrepresentation, the perceived legitimacy of women NSC representatives was widely observed. The combined experience of the first cohort of DGM NSCs suggests that moving from greater awareness of gender parity as a principle to practice is happening, albeit slowly, as greater consideration of gender quotas is evident in the more recently formed NSCs.

Leadership experience, nomination from national or regional organizations, technical, political or cultural experience and socio-economic status are among the enabling factors that explain women's and men's journey to the NSC. Support from GEA/NEA members, GCS members, World Bank TTLs, government officials and national IPLC leaders also opened crucial space.

The array of obstacles hindering women from entering leadership positions such as the NSC is not necessarily well understood or appreciated. Men tend to place less emphasis than women on challenges in their leadership journey. Cultural norms influence whether women would step forward and engage as NSC members.

NSC participation has enhanced women's voice, agency and leadership, but the overall impact varied based on where women were on their own leadership trajectory. The NSC role enhanced women's legitimacy and leadership skills before new, larger audiences, widened



Photo: DGM Mexico/ Gladys Garcia Osorio, 2020

access to new technical training and learning opportunities, and expanded their networks and influence. The NSC role also provided women an opportunity to better serve their community in a new and more visible way. However, key debates on gender strategy and representation underscore the limitations of women's NSC influence and upward mobility.

Women's influence on NSC governance and decision-making was highlighted in discussion of NSC representation, inclusion of women-led or women-focused subprojects and other aspects of emerging gender strategy. Perspectives on NSC influence by men and women leaders underscored the heterogeneity of views on women's influence within the NSC, particularly regarding NSC decisions over the need to tackle structural barriers to women's inclusion, such as tenure reform. In contrast,

there was a greater convergence of views about the influence women NSC member had over access to subgrants, support for particular women and enhancing the interest of women community members in the DGM.

Some indicators of gender-transformative change, more at the individual than at the societal level, could be attributed to NSC women acting in leadership positions. At a local or community level, more enduring, if uneven, gender outcomes included the creation or consolidation of women's groups or networks as the basis for greater articulation of women's interests. There were also reports of shifts in attitudes or behavior toward supporting of gender parity or gender norms at the household level or within community institutions.

NSC impact on wider societal change was less clear. A few strong women were integrated, contributing to improved NSC impacts, but reported little change in larger IPLC organizations. Where NSC women focused on efforts to 'organize women' as a central element of DGM gender strategy, interviewees suggested this approach as a key indicator of farther-reaching impact. In contrast, some NSC members set a low bar for societal change, suggesting that the influence of women leaders in the NSC may be encouraging women to settle for less.

The DGM NSC experience offers some important wider lessons:

Closing the gender gap must be a clear priority. To help achieve it, the DGM should have a project gender strategy that supports a pipeline of IPLC women leaders. As this case study clearly demonstrates, one of the key challenges in getting closer to gender parity on the NSC is a lack of pre-qualified women leaders with the skills, knowledge, interest, and ability to engage in this type of leadership position. Readiness training must be available to prepare women for success in the event that a quota systems opens new space. This should include targeted support and mentoring for existing women NSC members to ensure they are effective and supported.

Introducing procedural norms for managing decision-making spaces that support gender equality could be an area of innovation for the DGM. In spaces where men or women are not equally represented or not equally able to influence decisions, innovative ways of structuring decision-making could help. This includes requiring women and men to have the same allotment of time to voice their opinions, assigning meeting leadership that alternates between women and men, or separating men and women into smaller discussion groups.

The approach of improving results frameworks as an accountability tool to address gender on the DGM and NSC was largely overlooked in the interviews for this study. While inclusion in project monitoring activities provided opportunities for women NSC members to demonstrate their leadership skills, the focus of DGM project monitoring was not on the quality of measuring women's empowerment or gender-transformative change. Greater innovation in the area of DGM performance indicators related to gender transformational change is needed if recognition of women's leadership, voice and agency in decision-making spaces like the NSC is to get the recognition it deserves.



Photo: DGM Ghana/Edward Kyere

1. INTRODUCTION

Across the DGM country projects, the National Steering Committees (NSC) play a critical role in determining priorities, guiding the implementation of the projects and making funding decisions on eligible subgrant proposals. The design and implementation of DGM national steering committees composed of indigenous and community leaders represents one of the most innovative and potentially transformative elements of this pilot initiative to empower Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities (IPLCs) in the direct delivery of natural resources management and climate solutions. Like all DGM-supported activities, the NSCs were not explicitly intended to be designed and implemented in a gender-sensitive and inclusive manner, but over time took steps and received guidance that sought to improve key gender equality outcomes based on the particular contexts of DGM countries.

This case study seeks to understand how NSCs served as an important platform for supporting and advancing women's leadership and effective participation, with possible second-level impacts on broader societal perceptions and beliefs about indigenous and local women in prominent leadership positions. The issue of gender parity on NSCs—how women secure and use positions on the NSC to influence decision-making at different levels of DGM action (both indirectly as role models or as direct drivers of change on the design and implementation of country project work plans)—defines the factors that have opened key pathways for emerging women leaders. This case study examines the impact that female membership in NSCs has had on personal leadership trajectories, on the governance within NSCs, and on broader societal impacts.

Representation and effective participation of women at the NSC level is important for several reasons. Research across multiple disciplines, including community-based forestry, demonstrates that gender inclusive decision-making bodies lead to better decision-making which results in increased forest cover (Agarwal 2010). Women in visible leadership positions can help shift gender norms and provide role models for other IPLC women (and girls) that validates their leadership pursuits. Evidence from the political and academic spheres (e.g., Campbell & Wolbrecht 2006, Bettinger & Long 2004) demonstrate the positive effect of female role models in encouraging young women and girls to enter and succeed in those professions. Finally, because the NSCs play a primary role in selecting subprojects for support, their composition could influence which subprojects are selected. Specifically, a gender-balanced NSC may be more likely to select sub-projects that are women-led or women-focused, or which have included strong gender mainstreaming.

The DGM experience with establishing National Steering Committees composed entirely of Indigenous and local community leaders has been a unique opportunity to test a governance model that has few precedents. For that reason, no direct qualitative or quantitative indicators of NSC performance were included in DGM results frameworks. This case study of how NSC members viewed their roles and the DGM in general as a means for leveling the playing field for women, in addition to advancing the wider agenda of indigenous and community forest-user rights, is by nature exploratory. The ideas and lessons captured in this case study can hopefully serve to inform the design of similar governance mechanisms as well as the appropriate results indicators that might better assess the performance of this key component of the DGM.



2. METHODOLOGY

This case study was developed through a desk review of DGM literature, interviews with key World Bank staff (mostly TTLs) and 35 semi-structured interviews, including seven male and nine female NSC members or observers from seven DGM countries (see Annex 1 for full list of NSC interviewees)¹. NSC interview requests were sent to eight of the 13 DGM NSCs, of whom seven responded affirmatively. This selection of countries was based on having a cross-section of views from each region, with NSCs that have had a longer track record of operation. Additional insights were drawn from interviews with four National Executing Agencies (NEAs), several additional interviews with World Bank TTLs and key informants. All interviews were conducted in the national language.

The questions were designed to elicit the views of NSC members on the role of men and

women in NSC decision-making and wider DGM governance. Interviewees were asked about their personal trajectory to become NSC members, how being part of the DGM NSC had impacted their own leadership, and in turn how they viewed the influence of women on NSC decision-making. Upon obtaining the consent of the interviewee, interviews were recorded through virtual media (Zoom, Teams, phone) and the recording was transcribed (and translated in many cases) into English.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of the interviews. Where appropriate, contrasts of men and women's views are highlighted in the analysis, however with very limited generalization. The low number of total NSC interviews does not permit meaningful comparisons between indigenous and non-indigenous views, although some examples of how intersectionality informs power are highlighted.

TABLE 1. NSC CASE STUDY INTERVIEWS

Interviews	Total	NSC members (7 DGM countries)	NSC observer	Other (TTL, NEA, key informant, NGO)	Indigenous NSC members	Non-indigenous NSC members
Women	18	8	1	(9) 2+1+2+1+1+1+1	3	5
Men	17	6	1	(8) 1+2+3+1+1	1	5
Total	35	14	2	17	4	10

¹ Not all requested interviews with NSC members were completed, either due to non-response or personal conflicts. One NSC interview (Republic of Congo) was conducted as a group.

This analysis focuses on some aspects of gender equality within a sample of all NSCs. The NSC representative interviews were limited in scope and therefore not intended to provide a full detailed representation of the DGM country project activities or of NSC governance. The NSC selection process, for instance, is a foundational moment for understanding the DGM governance. Yet the details of NSC formation are not well documented. Efforts in interviews to understand how women were selected, appointed, or elected to become NSC members (including through the selection of leaders to serve or guide the formation of an interim steering committee) leaves many gaps in understanding how these key decisions were made. Our analysis is based on fragments of this complex and highly varied process, but acknowledges that observations are dependent on a full accounting of the NSC selection process that is beyond the scope of this study, but worthy of careful analysis.

A second challenge was that most DGM projects did not track overall performance in terms of gender equity beyond one or two high-level indicators (beneficiaries). The lack of systematic sex disaggregated results on NSC membership over time, subgrantee proposals or awards to women-led or women-focused subprojects, or participation in trainings and other DGM benefits, limits the ability to align NSC interview claims with actual gender responsive achievements. With the patchwork of evidence compiled, our analysis provides selective comparison of claims by NSC leaders to reported results for women more broadly.

The responses to questions by a cross-section of men and women NSC representatives therefore does not attempt to capture the entirety of work that formed the NSCs and shaped country-level DGM projects that for some countries are nearly a decade in the making. Instead, this case study provides an admittedly partial view of the multifaceted issues and debates of which an exploratory analysis is presented here.

The interviews with NSC members were conducted by the Conservation International (CI) research team of Vince McElhinny, Kame Westerman, Alli Cruz and Theresa Buppert, and Juliette Crepin (for French language interviews in Burkina Faso) as well as by the country consultants, Suyana Huamani (two NSC interviews in Peru) and Paramita Iswari (one NSC interview in Indonesia). For interviews conducted directly by CI staff, efforts were made to clarify that the researchers were not associated with the CI GEA team to minimize any positive or negative bias that might stem from this perceived association.

Nevertheless, through either emphasis or omission, these interviews provide relevant insights into how the NSCs have served as an important platform for supporting and advancing women's leadership and participation, and what impact this may have had for stakeholders of the DGM.



3. NSC CREATION

The history of NSC formation began in 2010 when the DGM was established as part of the Forest Investment Program (FIP). The DGM originated in global consultations between 2010-2012 between IPLC leaders, FIP and the World Bank. The first NSC in Peru was established in 2013 and an interim Global Steering committee was formed in 2014. When the first DGM country project was approved in March 2015, the Brazil NSC became the first official NSC to begin operation. Since then, 12 additional NSCs have formed, with the number of voting members ranging from eight in Côte d'Ivoire to 39 in DRC. The DGM's staggered approach means that the first cohort of DGM country projects such as Brazil and Peru are drawing to a close while the most recent NSCs in Guatemala, Republic of Congo and Nepal were just established in 2020.

The selection process to form the NSC has varied across countries. The DGM Framework documents deferred to the IPLC leadership in DGM countries to define a selection process for forming an NSC. This process varied depending on the organizational structure for IPLCs in each country. Several factors influenced the discussions that led to the formation of an NSC, including the nature of the FIP investment plan in the country and the centralized or decentralized level of IPLC organization, among others. As indicated in Table 1, most processes included a thorough consultation that was guided by both the World Bank, the government and an interim steering group. Some processes then selected from the nominations at the national/regional level to form the final NSC. Encouragement of these highly democratic and norm-based selection processes to establish project governance is in and of itself a fascinating and instructive dimension of IPLC-led governance that is a signature feature of DGM design. This paper does not attempt to fully represent these complex processes to ensure equity in DGM decision-making.

As a defining feature of the DGM, the guidance on NSC formation was flexible to allow each country to determine the appropriate governance structure within a set of common requirements. The DGM Global Project Document indicates that membership of the NSCs should include both Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities and be defined based on national circumstances and broad, participatory dialogues with IPLCs. IPLC members will be representatives from Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, balanced to the extent possible by geographic area, community/ethnic group/tribe and gender. As appropriate, government representatives may be members of the NSC acting as observers with no voting power. In addition, observers will be invited to the NSC from the World Bank, civil society, the private sector and other groups, as appropriate in the country circumstances. A representative of the NEA will support the NSC meetings providing secretariat and logistical support.

DGM guidance documents do explicitly state a preference for gender as a consideration in NSC membership, however there is no specific requirement or mandate for a minimum number or percentage. The DGM's operational guidelines call for NSC members to be "representatives from Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities, balanced to the extent possible by geographic area, community/ethnic group/tribe and gender" (p. 6). The guidelines further explain that "in all cases, it is important that the process [of establishing the NSCs] be inclusive and generate broad support for the NSC's composition. The process should be inclusive and participatory and take into account gender, geographic and other diversity considerations as appropriate in the final composition" (p.9).

While each DGM country followed different processes in selecting the NSC, they were similar in that representatives were selected

by IPLC communities themselves based on criteria they themselves identified. These criteria were often focused on previous leadership, knowledge of the forestry sector, education/literacy, and ability to represent the

communities' interests. DGM countries took varying approaches to encouraging gender parity on the NSC. As Table 2 shows, some countries were more concerned and proactive about gender on their NSC than others.

TABLE 2: DGM NSC FORMATION AND ACTIONS TAKEN TO SELECT NSC REPRESENTATIVES AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH GENDER WAS CONSIDERED IN SELECTED DGM PROJECTS.²

<p>Ghana (11 men, 2 women)</p>	<p>The process of selection was open to anyone to compete, with 52 target communities selecting their representative. There was no quota for women and no way to control the number of women selected, and this resulted in 11 of 52 communities electing women focal points. Of these, only one woman was selected in the first instance for the 14 member NSC. NSC members recognized this discrepancy after the election. When the opportunity arose to replace a male representative, there was unanimous consent among the NSC that the community should appoint a woman; that's how the second woman came to the NSC.</p>
<p>Indonesia (5 men, 4 women)</p>	<p>Indonesia's National Forestry Council (DKN) facilitated a consultative process with IPLCs in each of the seven of DGM Indonesia's geographic regions. Additional resources were requested by IPLC leaders to ensure a proper consultation. One representative for each of these seven regions (5 men, 2 women) was selected as a voting member of the NSC based on a list of criteria. Per the NSC design as outlined in both the DGM Country Project Appraisal Document (PAD) and Operations Manual, two seats on the NSC were specifically allotted to one Indigenous and one local communities woman representative, who were selected through a national consultation of IPLC women. The DGM-I General Assembly of Community constituents (sitting per region) was designed to participate in periodic evaluation (every 2 years) of the program starting from DGM-I Project commencement and may decide to change or extend the term of their elected Representatives.</p>
<p>Burkina Faso</p>	<p>The process for selecting the NSC was an election during a series of workshops with stakeholders throughout the 5 target regions and 32 communes. Candidates met a list of criteria including belonging to a local organization, experience in managing natural resources and local development, having computer skills and access to the internet, availability for activities, as well as character. There was no quota for gender representation, but targets for 40% of women as beneficiaries, and 20% of women included in forestry-related training.</p>
<p>Peru</p>	<p>The two Amazon indigenous confederations in Peru, CONAP and AIDSESEP, had significant influence over the composition of the NSC, with each defining 5 representatives, and selecting 1 woman and 4 men. Despite AIDSESEP adopting a policy of 50:50 gender parity for federation councils, the number of women on the NSC did not change. Representation on the GSC rotated between CONAP (a woman) and AIDSESEP (both men and women).</p>

2 DGM NSC formation processes are described in the respective World Bank Project Appraisal Documents and Operation Manuals, referenced in this table. No information was available for Republic of Congo.

Mexico	<p>In 2014, the Government and World Bank carried out a consultation process of over 650 leaders in 16 informed and free consultation workshops to identify inputs to the DGM design and to assure a participatory consultancy to design the project's governance structure. This included two regional meetings with indigenous representatives in the Yucatán Peninsula and Oaxaca that selected the <i>Consortio Chiclero</i> from Yucatán as the Chair of the NSC. Other community and <i>ejido</i> representatives and leaders from <i>ejido</i> organizations and producer groups emerged that were invited to serve on the NSC, which is composed of elected representatives of each one of three regional subcommittees: Jalisco, Oaxaca, and the Yucatán Peninsula. The NSC receives direct support from a small (four person, all male) technical committee composed of members from the NSC. One regional subcommittee has added four women alternates for each representative in the regional committee, two of which have become official NSC representatives. Despite plans to replicate the approach in the remaining two regional committees, as of the 4th year of project execution, the NSC currently has 2 indigenous women and 13 men.</p>
Nepal	<p>For the NSC in Nepal, selection of representatives focused on ensuring a diverse group (e.g., indigenous women, forest users, Dalits, disabled indigenous women, etc.). However, a prior agreement between FECOFUN and NEFIN (the two largest community and Indigenous federations in Nepal) identified a desired 50:50 gender balance. In all, 5-6 women's organizations are represented by the federations that make up the NSC. Of the 7 IPOs and 7 Local Community organizations that make up the 14 member NSC, 2 seats from each are agreed to be represented by women. In addition, there is an observer committee of 15 alternates of which 7 are women. If a NSC representative can't serve, the first priority for replacement is a woman.</p>
Brazil³ (9 men, 5 women)	<p>According to the PAD, the preliminary selection of IPTC representatives in the NSC was balanced by geographic area, ethnic diversity and gender, and complied with the criteria established in the FIP Design Document⁴ and its Annex III (Guidelines for Consultation). Accommodating a request by the Government of Brazil, GOB representatives, will take part in all decisions made by the NSC. The Brazil NSC has had joint coordination by men and women leaders since its establishment, but this is by far the exception.</p>
Global Steering Committee⁵ (9 men, 4 women)	<p>The GSC formation was informed by a prior interim steering committee established several years before the Global Project started. GSC members were selected based on three criteria: identification as an IPLC person, active representation and membership in an IPLC organization, and respected as an IPLC leader in the forest sector. Membership of the GSC originally included as decision-making members one IPLC representative from each FIP pilot country (<i>initially 14 countries, but now 12 with the exit of Lao PDR and Ecuador</i>) and one representative from a non-FIP pilot country (originally a total of 15, now 13). The GSC was formed on the basis of established or interim NSC's electing or appointed one decision-making member and one alternate to represent the DGM country project at the global level. One GSC seat was held by a non-FIP country IPLC representative, which in this case was a woman IP leader from the Philippines, which was the IP observer to the FIP at the time. The GSC has had joint coordination by a man and women co-chair since its establishment. Non-decision-making GSC members can include, as appropriate two representatives from FIP pilot country governments, two from MDBs (World Bank and one other MDB), one from the FCPF, FMT/UNREDD Secretariat, and one from the CIF AU. No gender quota was considered, but women representation was encouraged.</p>

Source: NSC member interviews; DGM Country Project documents

3 Although no NSC interviews were conducted in Brazil, this well-known feature about the NSC was included in the table as a relevant reference.

4 See Brazil DGM PAD (2015), citing FIP Design Document (paragraphs 16.d and 20.b), FOG (paragraphs 26 and 27),

5 World Bank, DGM Global Project PAD, pg. 16

Lessons related to the NSC selection process are limited by the lack of documentation and analysis across DGM countries. The detail reflected in Table 1 provides only a superficial description of the NSC selection process. This foundational moment in the DGM governance process at the country level is also a baseline assessment of power sharing between men and women IPLC leaders. The lack of a complete documentary record of the selection process limits our ability to assess influence, agency and voice of women in the NSC governance process. For example, several aspects of the NSC selection process are frequently incomplete or missing altogether in DGM project documentation, including a) how the interim steering committee was formed; b) how the geographic boundary of the DGM was decided⁶ – which informs the eligibility of IPLC leaders; c) how the size of the NSC voting membership, and the number and role of observers, was decided to best represent different groups⁷ d) how national, subregional and local IPLC decision-making units were invited to nominate NSC candidates; e) how fixed term versus multiple-term appointments were defined (duration) and decided; and f) what were the criteria to select a co-chair or technical committees.

Our interest in these questions is primarily to better understand how, when or if gender targets were introduced in any part of the NSC design and formation process. The evidence we have presented is incomplete, allowing for limited insight into how initial NSC gender representation was decided. The piecemeal descriptions provided in Table 1 attempt to represent what is known and what interviewees highlighted in evaluations of the country level DGM processes that are featured in this study.

6 Often, the DGM footprint aligned with Forest Investment Program geography, but not in all cases.

7 For example, how the role of the government, NGOs and other non-IPLC organization representatives were defined



Photo: DGM Brazil/ Magno Arnaldo da Silva

4. GENDER PARITY, QUOTAS & 'LEGITIMATE REPRESENTATION'

Across the entire DGM, one in every four NSC members is a woman. For the 13 DGM countries, over 187 Indigenous and Local Community leaders were appointed or elected to serve on their National Steering Committees. Of these, 24% were women. In addition, approximately 75 individuals serve as alternates, about one third of whom are women. One person from each country is further selected to represent their NSC at the Global Steering Committee.

The Global Steering Committee has always had one man and one woman as co-chairs. The 14 current GSC members include three countries (Peru, Côte d'Ivoire, and Nepal) that rotate their representatives. For Peru, both representatives are women, for Nepal and Côte d'Ivoire, a man and a woman take turns. With 11 current GSC seats and three alternating countries, the women's representation on the GSC can range from 55% (6 of 11) to 36% (4 of 11).

Across the DGM countries, women are largely underrepresented within NSCs. This is a reminder of the challenges to gender equality that persist and have elicited a variety of explanations from interviewees (see Annex 1, Table 1). When asked about women's leadership in the DGM, World Bank interviewees often pointed to one or two "very strong" women who have secured or maintained their place in the male-dominated leadership space. One non-NSC member interviewed suggested that because these women were so strong (i.e., outspoken), their presence compensated for the absence of more women leaders around them. In another DGM country where quotas for women's representation were not considered necessary, the female NSC leader observed that women had an equal opportunity to compete even though they were outnumbered by male candidates:

“ For the election of the representatives of the forest-dependent communities, we demanded that in each of the five regions concerned, there be at least one woman. But since it is by election, we did not dispute the results too much (three women out of 11 were elected). In the South-West region, where I had to conduct the selection process for representatives of forest-dependent populations [in the NSC], there were no major problems. The women fought well even though they were in the minority (NSC member, F) ”

The NSC selection process was perceived by NSC members to be open and fair but is built on existing inequalities which can disadvantage women. Most men and women NSC members or observers interviewed said that the selection process was one that allowed communities and IPLC representative organizations to choose who they thought was best suited for their representation. The criteria on which communities selected their representatives were focused more heavily on previous or demonstrated leadership, knowledge of forestry-related or business issues, educational level or status within the local governance structure, connections with key public and private actors in forestry or agriculture sectors, and ability to effectively represent a community.

While these are clearly commendable and important criteria for selection, underlying societal inequalities in many DGM countries mean that women often don't have the same access to

acquiring these credentials and therefore to develop those skills to leadership assets. These inequalities include unequal access to higher education, unequal distribution of household duties, legal barriers to land and access to community decision-making roles, and societal norms that may force women to defer to men. Absent any affirmative measure to offset this unequal starting place, such a selection process results in fewer women having the necessary education, experience and skills, or ability to engage and succeed in the NSC selection process.

In order to overcome inequalities such as these, the use of quotas have been championed by governments and others.

While a quota system would ensure a minimum percentage of female (or male) representatives, it calls into question the legitimacy of that representation. Those representatives may be regarded as just filling a spot and not necessarily selected as true representatives of the community.

When considering quotas, women's leadership is often held to a higher standard.

Communities have increasingly formed a variety of women's organizations, both for economic, social, and political objectives. Two male interviewees commented on the risk of appointing or electing women leaders of women's organizations as an insufficient qualification for making decisions that affected both men and women. These interviewees questioned whether leaders of women's organizations could properly represent men's interests within the DGM. Whether someone is considered a legitimate leader or representative is subjective, especially when the starting place is unequal.

One World Bank interviewee reflected on the legitimacy of a woman leader who represents only a women's group, compared to a woman leader who rose to that position based on other

expertise and thereby enabling her to represent both men and women. Given the choice, it was inferred that one may view representatives of women's organizations as less legitimate and less desirable for the DGM NSC.

No such standard was reportedly applied to men's ability to represent women's interests.

Unless advocacy of women's rights has reached a threshold of national visibility, as in countries such as Indonesia and Ghana, this double standard effectively discounts one important space for women's leadership that has advanced at the community level. This is not to say that women have preferred to be solely confined to the space of leading only women, and the majority of the interviewed leaders (including all women NSC members interviewed) have clearly demonstrated their ability and recognition as societal leaders.

The growing perception of the wider leadership capacity of women NSC members was largely borne out in interviews.

Female and male NSC members (Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mexico, Nepal, Peru, Indonesia) indicated that women (even those who are representatives of women's organizations) are seen and respected as legitimate representatives of both men and women in their communities with real influence in the NSC.

Finally, women's perceived legitimacy as leaders can be explained by multiple factors.

The legitimacy of NSC women as leaders can be explained not only by their confidence in speaking out on behalf of women (a skill supported by the DGM), but also influenced by their class, age, family background, etc. which may give them more bargaining power within the community. Conversely, lower-caste, more impoverished, landless or illiterate women (and men) experience differentiated opportunities that adversely affect their ability to claim those leadership rights. There were cases of women who were indigenous,

coming from poor backgrounds, rising through a male-dominated community social structure to take leadership positions as a pathway to the NSC. Equally, indigenous and non-indigenous women with greater education, and some material advantages, were also invited to represent IPLCs on the NSC. The effect of intersectionality on power imbalances for women can offer important insights into the quality of representation by women (and men), but the evidence presented did not allow for further investigation in this case study.

Still, only one of the DGM country projects interviewed chose to institute a partial quota system. Indonesia set aside two of its nine NSC seats for women. Two additional women were selected as regional representatives, giving Indonesia the highest NSC ratio of women to men. There are a variety of opinions about quotas as a method that could have been used in this situation. Multiple interviews from certain countries (e.g., Ghana, Indonesia, Nepal, Peru) indicated that a quota system could have been a good way to increase the number of women and give women a better chance at being chosen. However, in some of the first cohort of DGM countries that started operations between 2015 and 2018, NSC members were clearly ambivalent and divided on the need for quotas. As such, no clear guidance was provided in the early stages by the GSC, which was essentially composed of NSC members.

One NSC member indicated that while gender parity quotas were mandated within the governance structure of his organization⁸, it was largely ignored without sanction in much of the community-level councils. Additionally, the lack of attention to cultivating indigenous women leaders through more ambitious and customized engagement and capacity building at the community level left the organization without a supply of prepared women leaders to move into higher decision-making roles, such as the NSC.

The other NSC member of the same country offered a different view that focused more on the interest level of men or women to serve as NSC members.

“ *In most of them [the regional federations] it is not working. Currently only my organization [at the national level] is working with quotas, where there are three men and three women. But in the nine regional federations... such as in my federation they only have one woman. And so, they have one, one, just to accomplish. There is nothing else. They are not complying. (NSC member, M)* ”

⁸ AIDSESEP adopted a gender policy, which outlines several workstreams to promote the rights of indigenous women. <http://www.aidsep.org.pe/index.php/node/13210>

“ Gender quotas... actually, in the case of [our organization], there were no quotas. We were simply summoned, both the available technicians and the leaders, who, in some way, were from [our organization]. This work [as a member of the NSC] was proposed with those willing to participate and commit themselves for five years, do the follow-up, and all the work that this implied. It was something democratic within [the organization]. I am speaking on behalf of my [organization]. (NSC member, F)

”

Interviewees from most other countries also suggested that a quota would not necessarily be the optimal NSC design option for different reasons. A few men and women suggested that the expected results on the ground would require other factors that were as or more important than any specific number of women on the NSC. They suggested focusing on supporting women's skills and ability at the community level to influence decision-making on the NSC would be better.

“ Gender mainstreaming was a key issue from the first consultations for the DGM project. There is of course flexibility in the different countries but with a strong incentive to address gender. The quota approach does not address gender. The issue of women should not be approached as a conflict issue. It is better to be strategic to get better results. If we proceed with flexibility and intelligence, we will have a better consideration of women. (NSC member, M)

”

“ I think that we must first let women fight naturally to deserve their positions. But when the results are too segregated, we must apply the principle of positive discrimination to achieve a quota. (NSC observer, F)

”

Quotas or power-sharing arrangements related to ethnicity and caste, or indigenous versus community organizations, were often competing with gender consideration in terms of NSC composition.

“There is not a male/female quota but rather a native/bantu quota. Furthermore, it is not easy to find highly educated indigenous women. There is a real need for capacity building among indigenous women. (NSC member, F)

”

When it came to NSC selection in another DGM country, the consideration wasn't so much “X number of men, X number of women.”⁹ The consideration was more about representation of diverse groups—there was representation for indigenous women, forest users, lower castes, disabled indigenous women, etc. While the NSC was chosen in a way to ensure wide representation of ethnicity, caste and gender, pushing for a 50:50 gender balance was part of a prior agreement between the two largest community and Indigenous federations in this country.

“We discussed within our two organizations and made a common decision on 50% women in the NSC. Women are already very empowered in the CBFM [Community-based Forestry Movement], already practicing a 50% quota at the community level. Why not practice at the NSC as well? This is key natural resource decision-making space, we should give priority to women. We invited seven IPOs, seven Local Community organizations to make up the official 14 member NSC. Two of the IPOs and two of the community organizations would be represented by women. My organization is not a women's organization, but I represent them at the DGM, so some women represent men and women. In addition, there is an observer committee of 15 alternates, seven are women. For the NSC if a representative can't serve, the first priority is a woman, and the second option is a man. In all, 5-6 women's organizations are represented in the NSC. (NSC member, F)

”

⁹ Interview, World Bank TTL, March 2021.

How women are selected to the NSC varies in terms of who they are intended to represent.

While the evidence is anecdotal, an important question relates to the diversity of people within the project area of influence that women leaders in the NSC are expected to or were perceiving themselves to represent. In Brazil, both Quilombo and Indigenous women in Cerrado were represented on the NSC by different leaders. In Peru, only indigenous people were eligible stakeholders, so the two indigenous women on the NSC were clearly representing the interests of indigenous people (both men and women). In Mexico, only indigenous women represented men and women from their region (Oaxaca). In Ghana, two local community women leaders seemed to represent a wider cross-section of community-level women. Women on the NSC in Indonesia and Nepal represented both men and women at the national level, but it was apparent the former represented indigenous people, while the latter represented non-indigenous people. How this representation was understood or changed within the NSC over time suggests another dimension of empowerment that merits further exploration.

With or without quotas, NSC inclusion of women leaders can have longer term positive impacts for governance, just as exclusion can have longer term costs.

A few men and women respondents made the point that insisting on the selection of a woman did not mean that she was unqualified. The presence of women on the NSC due to a quota system did not necessarily equate to a deficit in their skills or knowledge. They pointed to skills and capacities that women were likely to introduce to NSC decision-making that would ensure overall better governance. Several women and men NSC members observed that women were becoming stronger and more forceful and more willing to take on greater leadership roles. The quota system can work to bring women with those important

qualities and skills to the table. The absence of a quota for contexts in which women leaders are substantially underrepresented, such as all levels of decision-making in forest sector organizations or communities, can also have deeper costs for governance in terms of lost access to technical knowledge, a diminished ability to pursue more integrated solutions, a less balanced and efficient distribution of work, and lower levels of trust, accountability and ethical commitments. Three NSC members went as far to suggest that by not pursuing gender parity more aggressively, the DGM may have missed an opportunity to strengthen the overall project performance.

The combined experience of the first cohort of DGM NSCs suggests that moving from greater awareness of gender parity as a principle to practice is happening, albeit slowly. There is an indication that NSC quotas for women are given greater consideration in the more recently formed NSCs, whether this reflects learning within the DGM or is tracking other trends (e.g., momentum behind a gender strategy in the World Bank). One NSC member summarized the situation: "It is hard to reach ideal [gender] balance, but at least now they try." (NSC member, F). Even without quotas, the indication provided by the more recently approved country DGM projects (Côte d'Ivoire, Republic of Congo, Mozambique and Nepal) is that learning from DGM experiences is encouraging greater proactivity and the desirability of adopting minimum thresholds for women's representation on the NSC.



5. JOURNEY TO THE NSC

Being an established and recognized leader within the community or the country was a critical criterion for selection to the NSC.

Across the female and male NSC interviewees, each recounted their previous leadership experience—often organizing local groups or associations and being active in community meetings. This was also true of the NSC observers we interviewed. Like their male counterparts, NSC women representatives brought deep technical, political and cultural expertise at the local, national and global levels. Women NSC members have previous or ongoing professions that include a wide range of leadership positions: environmental engineer, the first woman member of her community's Agrarian Committee, Queen Mother of her community, president of a women's organization, chairperson of a National Federation of Forestry User Groups, chairperson of the district level Charcoal Producers Association, and a deputy to the secretary-general of a National Indigenous Federation. Some had been founders and leaders of national women's organizations.

NSC nominations also came through national or regional organizations. The majority of the NSC representatives (both women and men) were established, internationally recognized leaders in prominent national, regional or local IPLC organizations before joining their DGM NSC. Two of the interviewees (a man and a woman) were present at the early stages of negotiation of the DGM in 2010-11, while others had learned about the DGM only recently. Each pointed to the internal governance processes of these organizations when explaining how they were invited to serve as an NSC member.

a. Enabling conditions

Overall, interviewees indicated a number of supporting factors that helped them become leaders and continue on their leadership journeys to successfully achieve placement on the NSC. The respondents identified important enabling conditions in their own leadership experience, including context factors in their community or upbringing and formational factors that defined their leadership skills. Such conditions also highlighted types of material, cultural, and psychosocial support that had helped them to be successful.

National-level social movements for women's rights eased barriers to NSC gender parity.

Longstanding women's rights movements at a national level and among indigenous and community organizations has raised awareness of the importance of involving women in decision-making. In some countries (such as Indonesia and Nepal) the change within the economic, political and societal spheres catalyzed by the movements was seen as an important enabling factor for arguing for gender parity on the NSC. The hard-won achievements of women leaders and the advance of women's rights movements in some contexts enabled certain options for securing gender parity on NSCs that may not have been as widely available in all DGM countries.



Photo: DGM Brazil/ João Rocha

“ I think it’s because of the history of the movement here. We have been fighting for the rights of women for a long time. Many organizations, like my own, have a woman’s wing organization, so the awareness of the importance of the involvement of women in decision-making is already there. But the process of the selection for NSC members in my country is different than other countries. When we first started the DGM in my country, women had to lobby the Bank to provide us with more money so that we could do the consultation process in all seven regions. This is the official selection process of the NSC, a member is chosen from each region. So, we had additional funds, on top of the DGM funds, to do this consultation—this isn’t the same in other DGM countries. (NSC member, F)

”

Support from Community Authorities or National IPLC organizations elevated some women leaders. About a quarter of the leaders interviewed, both men and women, emphasized the firm endorsement and support provided by their membership in a large organizational structure. In one country, within indigenous communities, community property is governed by an assembly of communal landowners. In order to have standing in the NSC, a representative must first receive the support of these local authorities, which are almost entirely men.

“*The challenges have been great. The NSC made an agreement, because they had to meet certain requirements set for social (safeguards), that there needed to be women as alternates... I received great support from my community, including from my president, I assumed a great responsibility to be able to speak for them, to make known the challenges they face every day as marginalized communities in accessing possible grants from the project. Still, most of the NSC are men, we are only two women. Before it was only one woman, now we are two, something is something.* (NSC member, F)

”

Elsewhere, a female NSC representative had worked for 25 years in the community forestry movement before joining the NSC, progressively moving up from a grassroots leader to her current role as chairperson of the large national community forestry federation. Her success both in that space and with the DGM NSC recently helped her become selected as a CIF observer.

The presence or absence of a larger organizational structure to articulate the interests of Indigenous peoples or local communities can be an enabling condition but can also act as a constraint on women’s leadership. As noted in the next section, the Asociación Interétnica de Desarrollo de la Selva Peruana (AIDSESP) has encouraged quotas for women leaders at the national level since 2017, leading to important changes to AIDSESP’s bylaws including equal participation between women and men to be one full delegate for each AIDSESP base.¹⁰ However, this effort has met with resistance within the federations at the local level.¹¹ As a result, some women may feel demoralized by seeing a directive ignored.

Education, Technical or Political Skills, and Socio-economic status elevated certain IPLC leaders. It was clear that for some men and women NSC members that overall socio-economic status, including educational level, were significant enabling factors in privileging their eligibility as NSC members.

¹⁰ <https://www.servindi.org/actualidad-noticias/22/12/2017/lizardo-cauper-es-el-nuevo-presidente-de-aidesepe>

¹¹ <http://www.aidesepe.org.pe/noticias/la-participacion-de-la-mujer-indigena-debe-ser-un-compromiso-de-todos-y-to-das>

“ At the University, I did my thesis on the Indigenous woman. I then worked in different associations related to the Indigenous woman. It helped me to work now on [gender equality issues] with a focus on Indigenous women. With the platform [to fight] against climate change, there was not really an application [for NSC] but an encouraged choice, so I was nominated. (NSC member, F) ”

For many others, technical expertise in the forestry or agricultural sector, experience engaging in international climate change issues, familiarity with international cooperation, or political representation of a larger IPLC or women’s constituency were important factors for their selection. One NSC woman reported that she was likely selected due to her sensitivity to women’s suffering in her community and is driven and motivated by a desire to help them.

For women leaders, support from champions and allies opened crucial space. Particularly for women NSC members, some reported having significant, direct encouragement and support from GEA/NEA members, GCS members, World Bank TTLs, government officials and national IPLC leaders in ways that enhanced their selection to their committees. While these relationships were rarely the exclusive factor, the importance of involving champions in the overall selection process can’t be underestimated. In two interviews with women NSC members, men on the NSC were also noted in some cases as the gender champion.

“ Women are in the minority in the NSC, but this does not affect the work. For example, many women’s organizations have received DGM funding. It must also be admitted that there are gender-sensitive men in the NSC. Moreover, the three women members of the NSC with voting rights are supported by three other women members as observers. (NSC member, F) ”



Photo: DGM Mozambique/Virgilio Conijo

b. Challenges

The myriad obstacles that hinder women from entering leadership positions are not necessarily well understood or appreciated. Despite the presence of these enabling conditions, most women that were interviewed pointed to the multiple, persistent challenges that IPLC women and men have had to overcome to attain this level of leadership.

Men tended to place less emphasis than women on challenges in their leadership journey.

Respondents were selective in their responses, but men tended to either omit identification of major challenges, or to cite policy or wider economic barriers to their vision for change, but not necessarily to their own individual access to a leadership opportunity. One might attribute this difference between men and women to difficulty for men to recognize privilege.

Cultural norms influenced whether women would come forward to engage and participate as NSC members. Women did not necessarily feel comfortable coming forward to engage in the selection process and the invitation would not necessarily be passed on to them by male traditional leaders.

“ We didn’t know we could compete and make progress on that level; if we were educated and encouraged to come forward, more women would have come on board. (NSC member, F) ”

“ We [women] have a challenge with reading and writing and I think that will be our disadvantage [in] good leadership. (NSC member, F) ”

“ *The challenges are enormous, including the coexistence between female and male leadership and the difficulty of mobilizing women and their organizations. (NSC member, F)* ”

“ *The NSC would have loved to have more women on board, however because of some cultural norms, such as women taking the back pew and being intimidated by the men, they could not come forward boldly to engage and participate as NSC members. A lot of the trainings we have had made us realize, that women need to participate more, and this is one of the reasons why the team insisted the new member be a woman. Insisting on a woman, however, does not take away the element of bringing a more qualified person on board because these days, the women are becoming ... more forceful and are willing to step in the shoes of men. (NSC member, F)* ”

“ *The cultural settings consciously ... misinform women and make them think they are incapable, so they end up stepping back and taking the back position. I am speaking from the community perspective, and sometimes the men assume they are to make the decisions even when they have no jobs, do not provide or play any influential role. The low level of education of women also retards their progress and they grow up with the mind-set of the setting within which they grow, thinking that that is how the life of a woman should be, which is not true. Unfortunately, there is less exposure and they end up growing up with that mind-set. Also, there is not enough capacity and opportunity available for women to notice that there are options where they can demonstrate who they are and their full potential, and so it is false how we look at women. (NSC observer, M)* ”

Some male NSC members also spoke of the challenging social structures in which they worked.

One man from a rural community said he had attracted criticism and disbelief from the “Big Men” in the city who didn’t understand how a mere local man could be leading a World Bank project.

The political nature of NSC selection and representation was also indicated as a specific challenge for women.

Running for office and campaigning is challenging both personally and professionally. This was said this could be a big deterrent for women, especially if the position is a ‘service job’ like NSC.

Existing or underlying inequalities were mentioned as posing challenges for women. Willingness to accept the responsibility for the work required of an NSC member was another important

criterion for selection. Women who are mothers are not as free to accept the obligations that come with the role. NSC members were not paid and had to take their NSC responsibility on top of other jobs and obligations. The work of an NSC member involved a five-year commitment to undertake a variety of collective and individual tasks.

These could include meetings away from home for multiple days at least twice a year, but often more frequently, and receiving and providing a variety of trainings related to DGM operations and to climate and forest technical, policy and safeguards topics. NSC members set the work agenda priorities on an annual basis, reviewed all subgrant proposals, provided follow-up monitoring in conjunction with the NEA, engaged the national government, traveled to represent the interests of DGM constituents at international fora, and helped troubleshoot any problems that arose in the design and implementation of the project. As one NSC member explained, when faced with the scope of the work required, not all women (and some men) were able to commit their time.

“ *I have been on the NSC since the beginning, representing my organization as a technician, not as a leader or as a politician. I support the steering committee. At some point, there has been another woman [as an IPO representative]. In the other IPO representation, there is also a woman. There should be more, but there is the issue of commitment. Maybe because of these obligations or availability of many women leaders... I don't have children, and I can keep up with the project during meetings and trips. Some colleagues can't because they have to deal with other issues... Giving your time was critical. So, to give yourself and take away time from the work that gives you a livelihood, to take on one more job, that was also a decision that one had to make. You are assigned to a [position], you are called to a meeting, you are called to accompany the executing agency or the project executors in the field, you are called to hold a meeting to clarify some issues of the project or their initiatives or [they request] that you give them advice. So, one had to be willing to do that. Upon reflection, many were not ready to share their time and be subjected to this demand for five years... You know, well, the committee did not have a salary, nor a per diem, nor anything like that. (NSC member, F)* ”

More pragmatic challenges to serving on the NSC were also identified that affected both men and women. Tenuous phone and internet connectivity in rural areas necessitates more frequent travel to the city for meetings, calls, and participation in DGM activities. This may be more difficult for women who tend to have more responsibilities at home. However, it may also have implications for male leaders. A male NSC member noted that of the four candidates that initially expressed interest in the NSC position in his province, four were men. One woman was identified by the interviewee as a qualified candidate, but she declined. The other male candidates withdrew from consideration after learning that the position was unpaid. The male NSC member admitted he was the only one in a position to be able to dedicate time and energy to an unpaid NSC position.



Photo: DGM Indonesia / Bastian AS, 2019

6. NSC MEMBERSHIP IMPACTS ON PERSONAL LEADERSHIP JOURNEYS

NSC participation has had a positive, but differentiated impact on women’s voice, agency and leadership, depending on where they were on their own leadership trajectory. At least three of the women interviewed had established leadership credentials before becoming NSC representatives. The other five were emerging leaders, with strong local expertise and visibility. All were asked to reflect on the net impact of their NSC role in strengthening their abilities as leaders or amplifying their voice and influence beyond a pre-DGM space.

Albeit in different ways, all women respondents stated that their engagement with the NSCs had enhanced their voice and agency and advanced their leadership journey. While men also attributed their role as an NSC member as a contributing factor to new leadership opportunities, this view was not as pronounced as with women. The value of serving as an NSC member was widely recognized and meant different things to different people.

The NSC role enhanced women’s legitimacy and leadership skills before new, larger audiences and widened their access to new technical training and learning opportunities. Women, particularly those who were not already nationally or internationally recognized leaders, recalled the access to training or critical skill-building from which they benefitted personally. For these emerging leaders, NSC participation translated into enhanced skills needed to occupy a public space often dominated by men; they learned to engage as equals or lead a decision-making discussion, to mediate a conflict, to provide technical advice to stakeholders, to address donors, to solve problems. For established leaders too, while the effect was implied rather than explicit, most associated the DGM role with their own chance to reach and be effective in new leadership opportunities, for example as a co-chair of the GSC or NSC, as an indigenous/ community observer for a large trust fund, or as a more trusted leader within their own national organization.

“ *The DGM project has strengthened my leadership at the regional and national level. This is noticeable in improved public speaking and especially in the arbitration of microprojects. Also, in the management of sub-projects, my capabilities have been strengthened. Everything that was quoted above, I could not do before. (NSC member, F)* ”

“ *Since joining DGM I can speak in public without fear, my knowledge on how to cultivate crops has expanded and also I have been able to extend my knowledge received to other farmers. I have been able help other women apply for grants as well. (NSC member, F)* ”

“ I have gotten a different mind-set since I joined the DGM. This journey has also helped me understand that women can be at par with men and play the same roles as the men. When I contested and was selected it granted me the opportunity and courage to speak and interact at certain levels, I would normally not have been able to. I have also added on to my skills and experience as a leader due to trainings I have gone through and have come to understand that women need to improve upon their lives, progress and wellbeing. (NSC member, F) ”

“ We are only two women among a majority of men on the NSC. As all of them are experts in negotiations, so I observed them personally, I noted the tone in which they spoke, but I fixed my position in saying, ‘Yes I agree but nevertheless I would like to include this other part as well.’ I had to assert myself, also and above all, to carry the voice that had been delegated to me from the people of my community who have placed their confidence in me. It was a little intimidating, because there were so many men. But I took a little bit of courage from the fact that some of NEA are women, this also supported me in that they joined in the conversation on the parts that I could not explain well, they helped me to explain it, this is fundamental, it made me feel welcome. Most of the NEA team are women. It helps not to feel exposed in front of men. They absolutely supported me. (NSC member, F) ”

The NSC can be an important venue for IPLC men and women to expand their network and influence. Prior to their involvement in the NSC, women’s influence was often limited to their personal lives and within their communities. The NSC brought capacity building and networking with important stakeholders. The many regional exchanges organized by the GSC provided wider networking opportunities for NSC men and women, and increasingly featured women leaders as spokespersons for the NEA.¹² For one NSC chair, this role has opened doors for him—he has direct access to the Ministry of Lands & Resources and can get through the bureaucratic process. They take him seriously because of the World Bank backing and because he is speaking directly from the community. He said some women had achieved the same expanded influence.

“ You’re not a mere person, but a board member of a World Bank-sponsored project. Seen as big person. Gives you more audience. The NSC member in a community becomes the first choice to go to because of their connections. For example, the woman member of our NSC can speak directly to forestry managers given her leverage. (NSC member, M) ”

¹² See for example the regional exchange held in Oaxaca, Mexico in 2019, featured in the [9th SAR \(2019\)](#)

“ NSC is an important decision-making body and therefore brings legitimacy to women. It also values women and confirms their leadership. The NSC has a good visibility with journalists, consultants... They are “important people who are consulted” so it is a nice platform for leadership. (NSC member, M) ”

As the head of an organization that was selected to lead the DGM consultation process in 2014, this NSC member said the experience had helped him to become the national coordinator for the DGM and its representative on the GSC. He has held these positions since 2015.

A female NSC member who became a full representative of the local agrarian governance structure that had been dominated by men, said her connection with the DGM had helped her:

“ Well, yes, then, the DGM has had an impact in this sense, because now I am a member of my community’s Agrarian Committee. I am a regional liaison of the Committee, already appointed, put on record. Now my fundamental role is to lead all the projects that have to do with the social and environmental part. They have placed a great deal of trust in me. (NSC member, F) ”

In addition, this member became a more visible spokesperson for the DGM in her country, starting with her participation in a regional knowledge exchange organized by the GEA in 2019 and later speaking to audiences at the Climate COP in Katowice, Poland. In 2020, she spoke about the gender achievements of the DGM in her country at the launch event of the DGM Annual Report at the Forest Investment Fund meeting in Washington.

Other respondents also noted the importance for both men and women of gaining exposure at the global level. One female NSC member stated:

“ Yes, it has been promising that the international events have provided opportunities where women can express their views such as at the UNFCCC Climate Convention of Parties (COP). We’ve been in many places through the global steering committee participating in this event. Also, there have been various opportunities, because women or men weren’t chosen, but selected according to the rules of each committee in each country... There has been a lot of participation; there has been a lot of public space to talk about our women’s work experiences... There should be more spaces, yes, it is also essential. But I think there should be more spaces, but not only for women. (NSC member, F) ”

The NSC role provided an opportunity to better serve their community in a new and more visible way. For NSC members who represented small rural constituencies, the opportunity to benefit from the DGM was significant. At the same time, past experiences with similar public programs to benefit rural communities have often left a legacy of distrust and skepticism. Research has documented the uneven performance of public programs in the natural resource management sector to reach the most vulnerable, particularly women.¹³ The NSC role provided an opportunity to steer DGM benefits to the communities that the NSC members were elected to represent. To do so required a range of skills, not least of which for women was the courage to challenge business-as-usual approaches to project delivery.

At the same time, the DGM was never resourced sufficiently, and was not expected to address all the unmet needs of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. Service to community interests had to be balanced with creativity in designing a resource-allocation process that sought equity and fairness across multiple dimensions (geography, ethnicity, subgrant thematic focus, in addition to gender) within a specific resource constraint.

An NSC member's contribution to this collective design was informed not only by commitments to and insights from their own constituency, but by ensuring the DGM was effective in its larger agenda—for the sake of its reputation as an IPLC-led initiative. This delicate balance to serve one's own community while consolidating a fragile governance model was perhaps one of the most significant challenges to NSC leadership. Particularly for women who were not invited as full members of NSC governance initially, and who faced significant barriers to ensuring gender equity was not sacrificed to other priorities, insisting on the inclusion of women was at times perceived to have potentially adverse consequences.

The following quote by one NSC member illustrates this challenge:

“*With my community there to support me, it is their voices that speak through me, and I am their spokesperson. Transmitting my knowledge, the knowledge that comes from those behind me, this is part of what I have transcended from what I have worked on as a person, as a woman, because it is not just in any place that they allow you (a woman) to give your opinion or give your assertion, your criticism of something, without you being judged. I have been fortunate, they have allowed me to take this leadership role, that you can give your opinion without being threatened by the factors that have influence. Sometimes, I am told not to give an opinion because something bad could happen, in this case in my communities this does not happen. (NSC member, F)*”

¹³ World Bank, Closing the Gender Gap in Natural Resource Management in Mexico (2019)



Photo: DGM Global

7. WOMEN'S INFLUENCE ON NSC GOVERNANCE

Critical moments of debate within the NSC over strategy or implementation offer illustrations of where women members' influence was decisive.

This section explores some of those examples to understand how have women members influenced governance or decision-making within the NSC. To understand the influence that women have had on NSC governance, we highlight several areas where such influence might be most visible. In each area, interviewees pointed to key debates that defined the moments where the influence of women leaders was tested or demonstrated on NSC representation, inclusion of women-led or women-focused subprojects and other aspects of emerging gender strategy. Several examples highlight the significance of women's direct representation in pushing the DGM to tackle key barriers to gender equality. While these efforts were not always successful, most men on the NSC who were interviewed agreed that the influence of women in these instances improved the overall governance and performance of the NSC to the benefit of all. These experiences motivated some respondents to advocate for women to have a majority of seats in the NSC.

Women's influence on the overall parity in NSC representation reflects an effort to expand the number of women, but with only modest change. In the interviews, women NSC members reported their efforts to expand opportunities for other women to serve on the NSC and discussed whether those who had become voting members had any actual influence on DGM decision-making. Taken together, these views reflect a wide range, from those saying women had a lot of influence to those saying they had relatively little influence. It was perhaps most interesting to compare the views of men and women NSC members from the same country. Within the same country's NSC, we found contrasting views regarding the gap in women's representation and the factors that contribute to this gap. This variability underscored the complex range of factors that may explain women's voice, agency and influence in decision-making spaces like the NSC.

In one country, male and female interviewees offered a similarly positive view regarding the equity of opportunity for men and women to be heard on the NSC.

“ We the two women on the NSC committee were involved throughout the entire process and insisted more women be taken [for subprojects] with the justification that women are very dedicated and accountable compared to men... I have worked closely with the men, expressing my views during meetings. I am neither relegated, disregarded or intimidated, which made me realize how equally powerful women are. When important decisions are being made, we all share our opinions and agree on the best action points. Even when we were contesting for the NSC positions, I freely contested and won the position as the current organizer. And so, the NSC operates fairly in a very participatory manner. (NSC member, F) ”

“ Even though women are the minority in the leadership role in our meetings, both men and women are given the same opportunity to freely air their concerns and contributions. (NSC member, F) ”

These views correspond those of the men on the same NSC.

“ *In cases of managing issues, the women have been very active. They are given the platform to speak freely. The NSC woman representative is serving a second term as the NSC organizer. She competed unopposed because the committee wanted female representation as part of the leaders of the NSC. I think that speaks a lot for the men too because they insisted a woman be brought on board. So generally, the women have a lot of opportunity to express themselves, make their points clear, and have the full support of the men. (NSC observer, M)* ”

“ *When we meet as the NSC, we're all equal, all community representatives. The two women are given the same respect... Most issues we talk about in the community are about women – e.g., climate leading to water shortages. Women are instrumental in climate – charcoal, water, fuel. Therefore, women should be given 60% and men 40% on the NSC. (NSC member, M)* ”

Does agreement between male and female NSC leaders on women’s influence reflect acquiescence to inequity?

These similarly satisfactory views of men and women on women’s influence in this NSC despite the overall low level of women’s representation raises a question about why adding one additional women leader was considered by both to be significant. That women were given the chance to express themselves and participate in discussion is a recognition of the procedure required for being a NSC voting member rather than a demonstration of influence. The view of the male NSC observer that the male NSC decision to insist on (or allow) a second woman joining the NSC seems to suggest control over gender parity. If so, the male NSC member decision of inviting a second woman NSC member to join suggests an agreement around a relative target. Both male and female interviewees seem content with the addition of a second NSC member as the basis for influence.

Does it hold up to greater scrutiny? Particularly in light of the retrospective view of the positive additionality of women’s participation suggested by the second male NSC interviewee, one might ask why women NSC members seeming to have settled on only two women being enough. The absence of any dissent with the overall minority position of women on the NSC combined with the suggestion of some male control over the NSC selection process leaves the impression that women may be satisfied with the relatively small space ceded by men for them. Without discounting the other evidence of influence that both women NSC members attribute to their role, we can appreciate how the local context, among other factors, may inform what some NSC members view as a significant achievement while some other NSC members see as a problem.

However, it should be noted that in one other DGM country, the male and female NSC member views on women's representation and influence aligns with the example above. In both countries, a significant share of DGM resources was allocated to women-led or women-focused subprojects. So, we cannot easily dismiss the claims that women in a minority position are able to exercise significant influence. This lesson is also evident in other cases.

Agreement between men and women NSC leader views on low representation of women diverges in their focus on the different root causes. For example, a second pair of interviews that illustrate a contrasting view of a similar outcome to the prior example. Both interviewees offer a differing critical analysis of low women's representation. In this country, an indigenous woman who was first included as an alternate on a regional NSC subcommittee, but later became an official representative, described how she analyzed and addressed the challenges of unequal women's representation on the NSC. Unlike the prior NSC example, the minority share of seats on the NSC from this country is clearly viewed as unsatisfactory. Moreover, the structure of decision-making by an all-male Technical Secretariat within the male dominated NSC is also the focus of criticism.

The view is consistent with a more widely observed assessment about power sharing among men and women. Male leaders that have already achieved decision-making power act to protect their self-interest by setting the agenda in a way that disfavors equity of opportunity for women to compete on an equal basis. By acting as gatekeepers, male leaders can regulate any change in power sharing to protect their own power. Despite her efforts to address what she viewed as the barriers to expanded influence by indigenous women on the NSC, she was unsuccessful. Despite disagreement with the outcome, the interviewee describes how the process was resolved by a vote that both reflected the current power distribution, but may also set an important precedent for future influence.

“ Regarding the appointment of the Technical Secretary committee of the NSC, in my region, we have the firm conviction, that if you were appointed, it is for the time that was established, there is no reappointment for us. The time of the current director [National Coordinator] is running out, and I asked that we put his re-appointment to a vote. The four of us from my region (two men and two women) wanted to change the director (National Coordinator), but we could not have more impact because we were 4 out of 15. The majority was for him to continue, because, they said, he is the only one who can travel, who can talk to us. And I said no, not only him, but we can also do it. We have our own limitations, if we change the Technical Secretariat, we should give the opportunity to the others. Let's review the regulations. We had a very conflictive discussion. Yet, in the end everything was solved in the committee, where you can talk, nobody can prevent you from saying what you think, and everything has the support of the NEA in the end, the majority won.... I did not like the outcome, but the majority voted in favor of keeping the same person as National Coordinator. (NSC member, F)



The perspective of the male NSC counterpart from the same country suggests some agreement on the need to close the gender gap in NSC representation but provides a more cautious view that places greater emphasis on the need for policy reforms to overcome the structural obstacle to change.

“ *In terms of how many women should be on the NSC, I think we have fallen short, we should have been more aggressive in recruiting... One of the key challenges is public policy in this country. There are significant opportunities for economic enterprise development in the countryside. The State does not provide the space for these opportunities in the rural economy to materialize. Why aren't women more incorporated into the rural economy? Because the legal framework does not permit that woman can legally access agrarian land rights. (NSC member, M)* ”

This view is consistent with widely documented analysis of the country's legal and policy framework and was echoed by a diverse range of interviewees. However, the apparent intractability of this structural barrier to which this country DGM seems resigned is at odds with the respondent's own personal experience of actions that have influenced equally transformative change in agrarian policy. The suggestion that the root cause of the gender gap is beyond the short-term reach of the DGM nevertheless may confine the NSC to choices around representation and implementation that are of second or third order importance for women.

Men and women NSC members' disagreement about whether women's NSC representation and influence is a problem points more to agency at the organizational or individual level.

In another DGM country, we observe a similar debate about the underlying causes of gender representation and influence on the NSC, but with the gender roles reversed. The male NSC representative from an indigenous organization offers a less positive view of the impact of women's leadership on NSC governance and the DGM impact on women.

“ *I believe that from the beginning the [country] DGM project has not promoted [gender integration] much. I know the project since 2017...and the project has been restructured... it also depends a lot on the decisions of the regional and local organizations, but I increasingly think that not much has been achieved regarding integration related to the subject of women in the actions that have to do with the recognition of native communities or sustainable economic production activities, at least with the economic initiative, it can be said, there has been very little. (NSC member, M)* ”

Yet rather than pointing to legal or policy barriers, the male NSC member highlights the internal gaps in commitment to advancing gender within the male dominated Indigenous organizations themselves as a formidable barrier to change. The invitations for DGM capacity building and other benefits are filtered through community-level governance, which too often excludes women from accessing the tools and skills needed to become the kind of leader who can represent the community on the NSC. The indigenous organization has a gender strategy, but implementation does not flow down to the community level. The problem, in his view, rests more in the realm of organizational agency than structural or systemic impediments.

“ I know, now that I accompany eleven regions in different parts, the invitations [for DGM activities] go to the community leader, and the leader makes the decision, and two or three men come, plus some authorities get tired and the woman does not come, and does not participate. They [women] cannot participate. (NSC member, M) ”



In contrast, a woman representative on the NSC provided a more qualified approval of the NSC efforts to include women. Despite sharing the same concerns regarding educational and capacity gaps as well as economic and household pressures that indigenous women face, she provided a more positive assessment regarding the DGM benefits accessed by indigenous women.

“*The project has been well structured. It has not been a perfect project, but when the project is socialized in their development area, they [the women] were clear that women should have strong participation within the initiative. It’s not that they say, “Oh, look, they had to push to be taken into account.” No, because they knew they had the right to participate. But many of them did not see the channel to do so... Those who were able to access. I believe that all of them have been included in the project. If any of the proposals for the project had observations, we helped them raise them so that their projects could be crystallized. (NSC member, F)*”

Moreover, the challenge observed by this same NSC member (noted above) has more to do with the individual woman’s or women’s led subproject proponent’s willingness to follow through on the responsibility to deliver the project obligations than the need to push a gender strategy for overcoming structural barriers. She also places greater responsibility for any shortcoming in achieving greater influence on the NSC with women’s own choices.

“*Economics is not about whether you are a leader or a man and a woman. It is the same for everyone... When we socialized the project, I told them it was a great opportunity for all of them. They saw it not only as an opportunity but as a great responsibility. Showing leadership is not only about saying, “I agree to be taken into account,” but also about how you respond to this opportunity. I have seen over the years that women may receive resources and lead the project, but when it comes to responding with help, they victimize themselves. They say, “I am a woman. I have no education. I don’t know how to perform.” They disassociate themselves. It is indeed an opportunity to lead and make decisions; you yourselves [refer ring to women] must know how to work and have resources. It is a great responsibility from the moment of making resources work. You don’t just lead for profit but also for when you have to respond. (NSC member, F)*”



Photo: DGM Peru/ Segundo Chuquiopando Chota, 2019

Men and women in NSCs with a higher representation of women may tend to be more aligned on their assessment of the influence that women have on DGM project design and implementation. Another woman NSC leader offered a highly positive account of the influence of women on NSC governance, which is corroborated by the NSC chair. Both at the NSC and GSC level, in this case, women hold a higher than average representation on the Committee. At the GSC level, the catalytic effect of the influence from the interaction between a group of the most effective IPLC women leaders across the DGM cannot be understated. Where these two forces align at the national level depends in part on the country context, but can be an important factor for opening space for wider representation and influence of women at the national level—as is suggested below.

In her account of her influence on the NSC, this member mentioned repeatedly how the GSC encourages NSCs to include more women representatives. She firmly argued that women have the same influence as men across a region where women are already quite powerful, are actually involved and can really influence the decision making, highlighting in her view that *“women can argue with men, and usually, they [men] are the ones who lose.”* She added that countries will often look to the GSC for guidance in the formation of their NSCs, and at the insistence of GSC women members, the GSC recommends that NSCs ensure that there is a balance in decision-making between men and women. (NSC member, F)

The view of the male NSC counterpart seems to converge with hers.

“ *Within the committee, the role between the male and female member was equal. They have the same chances, the same authority, almost in every aspect is as the same. There was no dominant way... I have to admit as the NSC leader, the women parts are so significant, there would be no decision making before the women give their opinion. (NSC member, M)* ”

These paired perspectives on NSC influence by men and women leaders underscore the diversity of views on women’s influence within the NSC. First, there is inconsistency between men and women regarding their perceived level of women’s influence. While some country cohorts converge around positive influence, others disagree. Sometimes men and women see the same general picture for women’s voice and agency, but in other cases, there is divergence. This is not surprising, but worth noting if only to underscore the significance of heterogeneous perspectives within an IPLC cohort of leaders. This observation suggests a certain unpredictability for how men and women view women’s influence. It is worth noting that one perspective that was missing was both men and women holding the view that women were not influential in the NSC.

Secondly, the expected default perspective (women tend to see less relative influence, men tend to see greater relative influence) does not hold in at least two countries, and one where the views are reversed. The first cohort reflects an agreement on women’s representation and influence, which is open to question given the relatively low number of women on the NSC. In the second example, the divergence is also interesting because it calls attention to surprisingly self-critical gender perspectives that point to agency factors within one’s own gender cohort. In this example, the female NSC member placed a greater burden on women’s own choices within a relatively fair process that invited women and men to serve. In contrast the male NSC member underscored structural factors (the concentration of power among male leaders restricting women’s opportunity to prepare to be leaders) as the decisive factor behind lackluster representation of women and their associated influence on the NSC. The contrast is striking because of its reversal of expected gender norms in how women’s influence might be assessed. Both views are legitimately grounded in personal experience and may be in play simultaneously within the county’s NSC process, suggesting the complexity of isolating single factor explanations of women’s empowerment or disempowerment.

Finally, other factors, including country context and a personal sense of efficacy, among others, may contribute to the perception of a gap in women’s influence and why this gap may or may not exist. The contrast between legal and policy barriers versus a lack of agency by an important NSC organization is one example of the importance of country context. How a constituency is represented (e.g. by a large national organization or by smaller, subregional or local organizations) may have positive or negative implications for women’s influence. A larger national organization may be more capable of tackling structural barriers for women, but may not prioritize those objectives compared to other goals. Similarly, a decentralized and fragmented representation of IPLC interests may be less well placed to address legal or policy barriers to women’s influence in the rural economy, and this may in turn pose important questions for a project’s theory of change. Neither scenario (strong, peak organization or decentralized representation structure) is decisive on its own for determining how to increase women’s influence on new decision-making bodies such as the DGM NSC. However, the important insight may be to acknowledge these factors as

important for collective project design decisions that avoid unnecessarily confining women to a space for decision-making influence that is less relevant than it could be.

Interviews reflected important debates and decisive moments about DGM gender strategy and hinted at the influence of both men and women on the central aspects of DGM governance and program design.

A female NSC member described the efforts by herself and others to support the design of a dedicated funding window that would ensure the participation of indigenous women. The example highlights one of the central debates in DGM project design—what kind of women-focused targeting should guide DGM resource allocation. As with the noted ambivalence on quotas, the interviews reflected a wide range of perspectives. Even among female NSC members, there was not agreement about the extent of targeting that was needed. In this case, the experience of past initiatives failing to reach women motivated the NSC member to insist on subproject procedures that eased barriers to participation by indigenous and marginalized women.

“...even when there is a call from the government that says that a project is exclusively for women, it will be men who benefit. A male representative will get the opportunity over all the women because he is able to meet the requirements. So little ‘padlocks’ (affirmative actions) were put in place by the DGM to effectively achieve the participation of women, to ensure that the project directly reaches women.”

A male NSC member from the same country expressed a critique of a woman-targeted subproject approach that was approved, but which settled on distribution of smaller amounts to a wider cross-section of candidates. Instead, he argued for a more selective and longer-term approach for supporting fewer women-led businesses in early stages of development but taking them to scale over time. This approach to targeting women replicates some of the principles of the other project funding window set up for established businesses and was expected to deliver a larger overall benefit to the same community.

“By providing only small grants of \$10-15,000 and contracting out social promoters, this is not going to generate any development... giving them a little bit of money and saying this will empower the women and address climate change just isn’t realistic. The DGM should take less of a mass production approach to gender subprojects and be more selective in providing greater support to scale up fewer projects that have a medium- or long-term plan, with a grand vision, with access to technical expertise that is more integrated into the project cost. Not a bit of bread and then just leave them. We are entering the third year of the DGM and not one subproject has started implementation. (NSC member, M)”

This debate reflects two competing views on gender empowerment within this country's NSC.

The first might be described as a bottom-up approach that seeds many smaller initiatives to ensure that a critical mass of women can benefit in the short-term by piloting or consolidating their ideas, perhaps then to become eligible as a better networked group for the next tier of support. As noted, this approach may be motivated by an inherent distrust with the alternative more *top-down approach* of 'picking winners' that has too often, in the view of the female NSC member, failed to elicit or approve a sufficient number of women-led proposals that are deemed to have the potential to get to scale. If successful, the latter approach can also reach women over time as the women-led business expands with the concentrated support of limited DGM resources and in turn provides greater opportunity to more women to participate in this growth. The funding window with affirmative requirements for women's inclusion has been established and is more in line with the vision articulated by the woman NSC member, which indicates the influence that women leaders can have in key decisions, despite holding only a small number of seats on the NSC. As noted, the support of other actors like the Bank's own TTL and the NEA have been equally influential on this gender strategy design question.

NSC decisions over the need to tackle structural barriers to women's inclusion, such as tenure reform, also reflect varying levels of influence by women on the NSC. In another country, the key barrier to women's economic empowerment in the Community Forestry sector was identified as the lack of access to land tenure. In this case, only about 20% of households have women's ownership over their family farming private land. A woman's name is not on the land title, vastly restricting access to credit for women-led businesses.



Photo: DGM Burkina Faso/ Oumarou Seynou

“ *Enterprise establishment time in the forest sector is a big obstacle for empowering grassroots women in the forest sector. For 80% of women, their name is not on the land certificate. If I am interested in starting an SME, they demand a land certificate, and say they need to talk to a male (husband or brother). This prevents women from certifying a business. Removing this barrier requires a land rights campaign to change policy, which is very conflictive. We tried including this focus within the DGM, but government resisted. If we can't solve this barrier, how can we really support women? (NSC member, F)* ”

This NSC member has led her organization's work on land reform in the country and as a newly elected NSC member argued that this policy objective should be part of the DGM program. The government sits as an observer on the country NSC and has otherwise been supportive of the DGM. The government representative, also a woman, resisted. In the end, the decision was made to continue support for land reform outside of and in parallel to the DGM to avoid conflict with the government. According to this NSC member, this decision reflected the limitation of her influence and the influence of other women on the NSC but did not diminish her confidence that the efforts to remove this barrier would continue in a way that could leverage the DGM support to women in the future.

Targeted interventions in the design and implementation of subproject programs proves to be another NSC decision-making space where women's influence was visible and had lasting impact. These efforts include shaping the gender strategy of the DGM program and engaging directly with women beneficiaries. Often this influence was most conveyed in response to specific requests for support from female stakeholders. Women leaders reported efforts to expand opportunities for the DGM to recruit, mentor and support other emerging IPLC women leaders. Efforts to elevate the leadership of the women on the NSC may have proven to be critical to reaching and retaining the support of key elements of the DGM constituency.

A female NSC member explained her influence this way:

“ *The obvious example was my participation in the selection of micro-projects where I defended body and soul a significant number of micro-projects for the benefit of women for their selection. The women of the NSC have been very much in their support for the micro-projects submitted by women (28 out of 53) and at the sub-project level many women's organizations have had their capacities strengthened and some of these organizations have been equipped with transformation equipment and infrastructure. It should be added that we have received the unwavering support of the eight (8) men of the NSC. (NSC member, F)* ”

“ *I was able to fight for some of the women to access grants. I believe that if there were other women in leadership roles, we could have fought for most of these other women to also access grant opportunities. (NSC member, F)* ”

“ I took the lead in further explaining to farmers the benefits of what they were being encouraged to practice, and then they became convinced. They said they appreciated the way I handled the situation and spoke to them and wished to keep in contact with me for any further engagements. Due to the fact that I was a woman, it also gave them some level of trust, and made them believe they were not just being deceived by the men. Usually when we visit the communities and meet with them, the women normally regard what the female leaders tell them because they believe they can relate more to the situation of women and would not mislead them. (NSC member, F)

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A similar decisive moment of influence for another NSC representative involved her intervention when the NEA wanted to exclude a community from benefiting from a DGM project due to its low level of response and interest at the beginning.

“ Since I was the NSC member of the area, I was given a call and I intervened. After convincing the NEA not to, and speaking intensively with the community members, they turned out to be one of the most active communities who successfully implemented subprojects. The community members now regard me very highly and assign me all forms of titles. According to them they did not show interest initially due to deceit and bad experiences with the men that bring them such projects... (NSC members, F)

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These perspectives highlight a more fundamental insight - that women’s representation in the NSC has enhanced the interest of women community members in the DGM. All women NSC members suggested that a certain level of women’s representation on the NSC is a necessary factor in the DGM reaching and benefiting from full participation of IPLC women. The impact of having visible women leaders on the NSC may prove to be crucial in unlocking knowledge, expertise and innovation that only women can bring to natural resource management initiatives. These examples of personal interventions by NSC women were likely consequential for the overall legitimacy and effectiveness of the DGM.

DGM’s contribution to amplifying women’s influence in designing more effective capacity building for women (and men) suggests a pathway to gender transformation. One NSC leader said that her experience with women-led small enterprise underscored the need for a more intensive effort to support livelihoods and enterprise development for women entrepreneurs in the forest sector. Effective capacity building to help women (and men) entrepreneurs scale their businesses will require more sustained engagement than the 1-2 day orientation to these topics that most NGOs in her country now only provide in the capital city. Building Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) enterprise skills transformation (management, marketing, equipment, training) will require tapping into expertise and organizational approaches that have already proven effective for women leaders.

“ There are many good examples of successful women SMEs in vegetable farming, grass plantation, nurseries, handicrafts, NTFPs, nurseries, candy, juice, handmade paper, prayer icons, charcoal briquettes for renewable energy. What they need are grant funding and greater training. When I was younger, the trainings for youth were one month long and we would go back and train others. This level of support is needed to truly empower women-led businesses. (NSC member, F) ”

This same insight about the women’s voice and agency in the design of the core DGM activities, such as capacity building, was echoed by an interviewee in another DGM country. Nearing the end of the project, NSC women leaders were instrumental in designing an empowerment training course for women leaders of traditional, Indigenous and Quilombo communities. This training was designed jointly by women on the NSC and representatives from subprojects. The aim of the workshops was to build on the achievements of women-led subprojects by promoting women’s role and leadership in various spaces. The trainings centered on how to provide women and men with the same benefits and conditions of participation in the subprojects or networks supported by the DGM, enabling the construction of an inclusive political organizational space, and valuing the role and contribution of Indigenous women, Quilombos and traditional communities in biodiversity conservation. The course modules, which were designed to be delivered over multiple weeks, addressed how to speak up and occupy the public spaces, how the community members could organize themselves to support women—not just in private space, but in the community as well.

This innovative initiative came late in the DGM Brazil program and reflected lessons learned by the project during implementation. The focus on occupying public space beyond the subproject within the wider community decision-making process through more carefully designed trainings for women by women suggests how empowered women are planning to build on their DGM-supported achievements. The way DGM has helped shape the design process for capacity building could potentially influence other opportunities to extend this approach more systematically.



Photo: DGM Mozambique/ Virgílio Conjo



Photo: DGM Mozambique/Virgilio Conjo, 2019

8. BROADER SOCIETAL IMPACTS OF WOMEN NSC MEMBERS

The NSC members were asked how DGM had contributed to any positive impacts for women beyond the project, at the societal level. The responses focused on perceptions of how DGM placing women in the prominent position of NSC representative had influenced perceptions or beliefs about women as leaders more generally. In these perceptions, we looked for any signals or pathways leading toward gender-transformative change at the individual or societal level that may be attributable to women acting in DGM leadership positions.

The DGM theory of change did not explicitly call for, but increasingly encouraged, gender transformational change at the societal level. Assessing comments about change at the societal level must be framed by two limiting factors. The DGM is a relatively short intervention that engages IPLC stakeholders within a flow of activity that started earlier. First, the ability to attribute impact to the DGM may be limited by its relatively brief influence, which if the project preparation period is included, may be no more than 3-4 years for the majority of stakeholders. Second, DGM support may be only one factor contributing to change (or lack of change) at the societal level. Policy, political, institutional, and community-level factors that preceded the DGM were equally likely to have contributed to any perceived change in gender norms or institutional change regarding the rights of women in the forest sector. Moreover, the respondents may also not associate the observed changes with their leadership as women in the NSC, but to other DGM activities.

Any attribution of societal change must be moderated by these methodological considerations. As in all the case studies, the focus was on detecting indications that DGM had seeded the process of gender-transformative change. From the privileged

perspective of NSC leaders, any optimism or pessimism about the likelihood of change takes on particular importance.

Societal level change stemming from DGM NSC influence can be observed in different ways. Impacts on society prompted by the women leaders' prominent role in the DGM NSC may be detected in a number of different areas: a) sustainability—the ability to leverage additional resources or benefits beyond the DGM project; b) shifting attitudes or behavior further in support of gender parity or gender norms at the household level or within community institutions that reinforced women's full and effective participation in the forest sector; c) maintenance, replication or extension of innovative gender strategy practices through uptake by local, regional or national institutions; d) assisting other women leaders to move into positions of greater responsibility or authority; or e) the creation or consolidation of women's groups or networks as the basis for greater articulation of women's interests.

At a local or community level, more enduring gender outcomes were evident to some, but there were differing views on this among the leaders who were interviewed. Evidence of lasting change at the local level in favor of gender equality builds on examples of voice and agency among NSC women and the value added to the successful delivery of women-led or women-focused subprojects, both of which involved NSC members but were associated as well with other women leaders involved with the DGM. Most interviewees spoke with confidence that the positive changes they had experienced would continue in their community, but often without specifying how. However, concrete examples of local change associated with NSC influence were largely limited to the subproject scale or were aspirational.

“Of course, having women in this position of public leadership has an influence on broader social or gender norms and on how communities do when we know the vital role that women play in our communities. (NSC member, F)”

“For the record, when meetings are to be held within my community, I mobilize the people, and the turnout of women is usually higher than normal. (NSC member, F)”

When asked about the NSC, members observed that their NSCs could have done more to recognize women’s leadership and put them front and center in the project implementation. A male NSC member suggests that effective community engagement in his country depended on having more visible women leaders on the front lines.

“One NSC women member’s community was not really interested in the DGM, but once she was at the forefront people were much more interested; the NSC realized that if they’d gotten 3-4 women maybe they would not have had as many challenges engaging communities. (NSC member, M)”

Two female NSC members suggest that despite the DGM contribution to NSC women leadership, their local or country context had not yet approached the threshold for the number of visible, empowered leaders necessary to catalyze wider societal change in gender norms. While the DGM may have demonstrated the model to follow, these interviewees did not indicate whether they expected that these practices would inform the design of a next generation community-led project similar to the DGM or would be taken up by another local or national institution. A pathway for replication or uptake was not specified.

“I believe we will see that broader change when we put women at the forefront of many activities and many leadership roles. For example, women see their fellow women exhibiting certain modern traits, like dressing well and appropriately, speaking confidently, travelling to places, and begin to watch and copy. (NSC member, F)”

“We cannot say for a fact that broader gender transformations can be observed, however, there have been improvements at the project level and (it is) evident how women now participate in DGM activities and make contribution boldly during meetings and discussions. (NSC member, F)”



Photo: DGM Burkina Faso/ Oumarou Seynou

The significance of women’s representation in highly visible positions of authority was both a contribution of the DGM and a reflection of the enabling environment. More than one woman NSC leader referenced the established leadership achievements of IPLC at a national level in their countries to explain women’s influence in the NSC. For example, one female NSC member stated:

“ In our country now, most of the biggest advocacy organizations now, their leaders are women. The leading Indigenous federation has a woman leader, the Agrarian Reform Consortium, the peasant movement, the leader is a woman. The national Friends of the Earth leader is also a woman, as is the legal aid organization. Lots of woman leaders for many years already—there is a big difference when women lead. Sometimes, people have the wrong perceptions about women—that we are weak, easy to influence, whatever. But we are proving, with women in these leadership positions, they are the strongest voice. All of the leaders are very strong. And these are influencing at the community level—now the women at the community level have examples. In the National General Assembly last month for my organization, I can see clearly how these women have really changed. The women in the village have more knowledge, and they can speak so articulately about their situation, their rights, they really understand it. (NSC member, F)

”

Is DGM contributing to or benefitting from enabling contexts where women are already visible leaders? The theory of change suggests that gender empowerment can flow up from the project level to open space for women’s leadership at a wider institutional or societal level. From the perspective of most confident women leaders, the shift in male attitudes was happening in parallel with the DGM. It is likely that the local or societal trend toward increased women’s voice and agency in certain contexts has influenced the DGM NSC as much as the reverse. For these countries, it becomes difficult to separate the project effect on increased women’s leadership in the NSC from the enabling environment effect of strong women national leaders in prominent organizations.

Even where NSC members observed that their influence may have fallen short of expectations, the learning process points to important recommendations for future success.

For one of the first DGM countries to begin implementing, the NSC assessment of change was mixed. One male NSC member suggested that efforts to integrate women had fallen short, that very little lasting inclusion of women had been achieved. In his view this represented a missed opportunity to fill a gap in new women leaders to eventually take on greater leadership roles in local indigenous organizations. As a result, few eligible indigenous women would be candidates for any future steering committee. As noted earlier, for this NSC member, the critical barrier that DGM failed to overcome was within these local organizations themselves. At the same time, this experience highlights lessons for future project design that could surmount barriers to full and effective inclusion of women.

“ *If the [women] are summoned with a presence and through an official letter or a letter that is put out to the public, look, we have been invited or I have been invited and they [women] can go in representation of their community, they are encouraged, they feel valued, that they are putting her in that line, then they participate, they make their effort to participate. The common thing is that the public and private invitations reach the authorities, sometimes the community does not even know and only the authorities go... If we want to empower women, we call, for example, twenty women, and we have to follow up for a year, for example, to see how many meetings they have participated in, if they are the same and evaluate them. But not to evaluate in order to discourage them, but to evaluate in order to integrate much more, to increase the number of women.* (NSC member, M)

The perceptions of change in a subregion of another DGM country were perhaps the most wide ranging and showed indications of incremental change in gender norms in the political, economic and social spheres. These changes speak to an erosion of cultural barriers that have restricted women's role in the community that began before the DGM. The agrarian structure that has been dominated by men is slowly changing, and one NSC representative said she believed that her role in the NSC was both reflective of and contributing to that change:

“ *In the past in our region, we women did not have an income, we only depended on our husband's income, or on whoever could provide for us. There was no major concern to do anything else. In the past women could not go to enjoy a drink in the center of the community, near in the playing fields, it is the meeting center of the community. Now they can do it, they can even talk with me, and participate in small training sessions. They are more willing to listen and give their opinion. Now, under these current conditions, women are the first ones to look for ways to support their families economically. There are even women that are substitute representatives in Agrarian Committee, they can fulfill their work responsibilities and are still present in discussions. Some women have become part of the community governance structure and we even have a representative of the Agrarian Committee who is a woman, and this is because people have trusted in their abilities to discern, to give their opinion and to take the project or any project that has been started in the right direction. With the DGM projects, ... many communities have given their approval, and the projects are going to have an impact not only economically but also socially. Women are now not only able to take care of their children, but to support their community. These processes are advancing. It is not 100% of what we want, but it is a super achievement because at least there are more women, I am not alone. This part I have observed in the communities. (NSC member, F)* ”

In this same context of this subregion, the NSC representative also pointed to a more important shift in terms of attitudes that contribute to gender-based violence.

“ A fundamental part is that women can give their opinion without expecting violence at home, by their husbands, that their husbands are also community members. Because sometimes they give their opinion and later it results in a conflictive discussion at home. That for me is a very big achievement, maybe not economically, it is that women can give their opinion without being threatened or abused when they get home. And it also changes the mentality of the men in my community, because I take opportunities to talk with them. Our meetings are often eight hours walking between communities, it helps to spend the time talking to men about their goals, their achievements as a family, about machismo, asking them how they feel, what they have achieved or want to achieve in their life, if they have solid relationships with their wife, these things don't sound so nice, but it helps them to recognize that their wife has value and has an opinion. (NSC member, F) ”

These reflections offer an incomplete picture regarding how much influence the NSC has had on the observed shifts in gender norms. However, the views of many if not all women NSC representatives were consistent in pointing to promising trends or signs of change in attitudes toward women's leadership in the forest, agriculture and climate change space.

A few strong women were integrated and improved NSC impacts, but few pointed to significant organizational change beyond the DGM project itself. While many NSC members recognized the voice and agency of the women NSC leaders, there were only two NSCs that replaced a man with a woman during the implementation process. The change may come in some of the more recently formed NSCs that have established higher standards for women's representation.

Many pointed to the importance of capacity building as the key to reaching and empowering both men and women.

“ Women within beneficiary communities have also been trained, and so it is opening their eyes to things and practices they were not aware of before, making them bold enough to engage at different levels. Both men and women are receiving trainings and capacity building which is gradually bringing them to the same level and offering them equal opportunities. The women feel more geared up to engage in things that better their lives. (NSC member, F) ”

Some felt that while the DGM did well, women did not receive adequate capacity building or other inputs to make the most use of the DGM.

“ *More capacity building, financial support and availability of more opportunities (are needed for) to women to enable them engage more on projects like DGM. (NSC member, F)* ”

“ *I think the capacity building and empowerment is changing things at the project level, where women are actively involved in decision making, and opportunities have (been) offered them. However, I think it will be difficult to say for certain that DGM has influenced the broader gender structure in the society or at the community level. (NSC observer, M)* ”

NSC women focused on efforts to ‘organize women’ as a central element of DGM gender strategy, suggesting a key indicator of farther-reaching impact. NSC members stressed the achievement of having organized women’s groups or associations and the strengthening of networks as the basis for expecting DGM’s impact on women to endure and grow. More importantly, this organizing lens included the political sphere. Discussing the advances or challenges for political advocacy on women’s rights in their respective countries, several women NSC representatives cited their own efforts as a model, and said there was a critical need for DGM to fortify women’s organizations to build the power needed to tackle the structural barriers to women’s empowerment in the forestry sector (Mexico, Peru, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, Nepal).

In contrast, some NSC interviewees argued for a lower threshold for societal change, suggesting how the influence of women leaders in the NSC may be encouraging women to settle for less. When women’s lack of access to land or to leadership positions in rural governance structures was discussed, few NSC members were inclined to associate small two-year subprojects with wider gender-transformative change. However, in one case, having access to cashew seedlings that would take 5-10 years to produce was an outcome associated with transformative change for women.

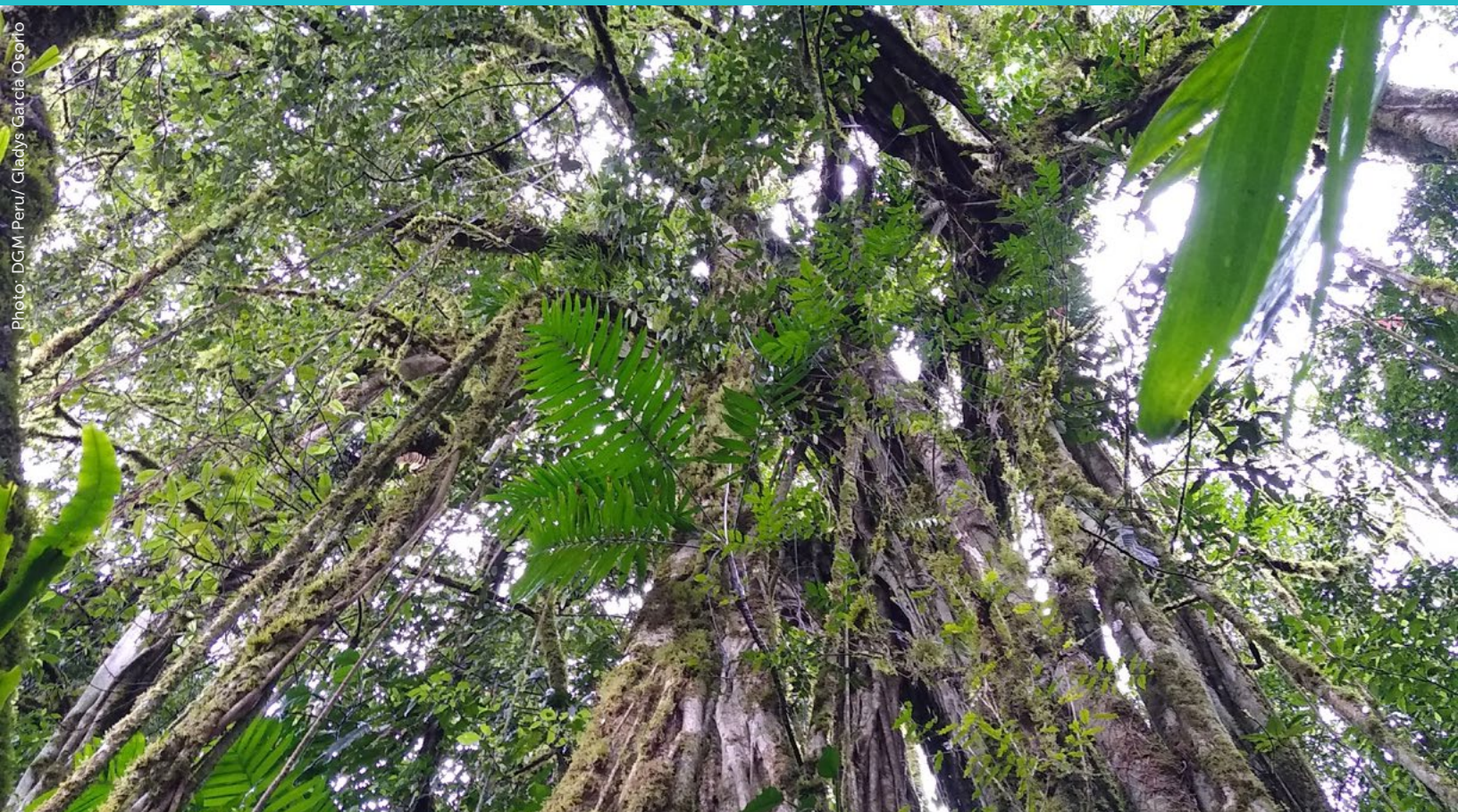


Photo: DGM Peru/ Gladys García Osorio

9. CONCLUSION

a. Lessons learned

The DGM NSCs present an important opportunity for indigenous and local women to enter prominent leadership positions.

The project's ability to elevate and legitimize women's voices and agency at a national level, and at international exchange events, has been an important contribution to the overall achievement of project results. The lessons learned within the DGM, and this case study specifically, can help identify best practices for replicating, scaling, and even more effectively supporting strong women IPLC leaders.

Being an established and recognized leader within the community or the country was a critical criterion for selection to the NSC.

Women NSC members have previous or ongoing professions that include a wide range of leadership positions. NSC nominations also came through national or regional organizations. Some of the NSC representatives (both women and men) were established, internationally recognized leaders within prominent national, regional or local IPLC organizations before joining their DGM NSC. This may have had the effect of elevating the most capable women, but not necessarily reaching the more marginalized women.

Overall, interviewees indicated a number of supporting factors that helped them become leaders and continue on their leadership journeys to successfully achieving placement on the NSC.

National level social movements for women's rights eased barriers to NSC gender parity. Standing within, or support from, Community Authorities or National IPLC organizations elevated certain women leaders. Education, Technical or Political Skills, and Socio-economic status elevated certain IPLC leaders. For some women leaders, support from gender champions and allies opened crucial space.

The range of obstacles that hinder women from entering leadership positions was not necessarily well understood or appreciated.

Men tended to place less emphasis than women on challenges in their leadership journey. Cultural norms influenced whether women would not come forward to engage and participate as NSC members. However, even some male NSC members identified the challenging social structures that they have had to operate in. The political nature of NSC selection and representation was also indicated as a specific challenge for women. Many reported that existing or underlying inequalities posed challenges for women.

Key debates on gender strategy and representation underscored the limitations of women NSC influence and upward mobility.

On average, only one in four NSC members were women, clearly confining the space for women to move into positions of decision-making authority within the DGM. Interviews underscored that DGM governance reflected a delicate balance in NSC representation among myriad competing ethnic, caste, geographic and indigenous/non-indigenous interests, in addition to gender. Women reported some success in shaping DGM strategy and project execution but fell short in attempting to drive attention to structural barriers to greater change for women stakeholders. The gap in women's representation raised questions about whether certain strategic priorities were never raised perhaps due to a lack of critical mass of women's voices within NSCs.

Despite the increasing recognition of women's leadership capacity, only one of the DGM country projects engaged in the case study's interviews chose to institute a quota system.

While some NSC members indicated that a quota system could have been a good way to increase the number of women and would have given women a better chance to be being chosen, multiple factors were given

to explain why NSC members were clearly divided on the need for quotas. This reluctance in the first cohort of DGM countries (2015 and 2018) appears to have given way to a greater adoption of quotas in the latest cohort.

With or without quotas, the benefits of NSC inclusion of women leaders were clear.

Respondents pointed to skills and capacities that women were likely to introduce to NSC decision-making that would ensure overall better governance. Some observed that women are becoming stronger and more forceful and willing to step into the shoes of men. Even without quotas, the indication provided by the more recently approved country DGM projects (CIV, ROC, MOZ, Nepal) is that learning from DGM experiences has reinforced the desirability of adopting minimum thresholds for women's representation on the NSC.

The NSC role enhanced the women's legitimacy and leadership skills before new, larger audiences and widened access to new technical training and learning opportunities.

NSC membership can also be viewed as an important venue for women to expand their network and influence. In addition, the NSC role provided an opportunity to better serve their community in a new and more visible way.

Women had influence on NSC governance.

The feedback from NSC representatives provided some indications of influence in areas of perceived individual voice and agency. This view was shared widely by men and women, who cited examples of interventions related to subproject allocation and providing technical advice to communities, among others.

DGM NSCs indicate some progress in institutional change in terms of new leadership achievements for IPLC women leaders. NSC women leaders chair one NSC, co-chair the GSC, dominate several other

NSCs and are widely recognized for playing consequential roles in DGM governance. Convergence between male and female NSC members on the positive influence of women was apparent, but at the same time drew into sharper relief the disparity in gender representation in most DGM councils.

Critical moments of debate within the NSC of strategy or implementation offered illustrations of where women members' influence was decisive, but also revealed the limitations.

Women's influence on the overall parity in NSC representation reflected an effort to expand the number of women, but only modest change was actually effected. Interestingly, the views of men and women NSC members did not always converge on the importance of greater women's NSC representation or on the factors preventing gender parity. Several personal interventions by NSC women were consequential for the overall legitimacy and effectiveness of the DGM. While some reported efforts by NSC members to open space for other women, this role model effect for emerging women leaders was largely aspirational or had been going on prior to the DGM.

Some indicators of gender-transformative change, mostly at the individual rather than at the societal level, could be attributed to NSC women acting in leadership positions.

It is important to remember that the DGM theory of change did not explicitly call for, but increasingly encouraged, gender transformational change at the societal level. At local or community level, more enduring gender outcomes were evident to some, but they were uneven across the seven countries analyzed. Although the views of many, if not all, women NSC representatives consistently pointed to promising signs of change in attitudes towards women's leadership in the forest sector, evidence for this was mixed. Most said the NSCs could have done more to

recognize women's leadership and put them front and center in the project implementation.

Fewer indicators were cited of NSC impact on wider societal change. A few strong women were integrated and in turn contributed to improved NSC impacts, but little change was noted for larger IPLC organizations. In cases where women focused on efforts to 'organize women' as a central element of DGM gender strategy, this approach suggests a key indicator of farther-reaching impact. In contrast, some NSC members set a low bar for societal change, suggesting that the influence of women leaders in the NSC may be encouraging women to settle for less.

The benefits of gender parity and women's empowerment (as well as the costs of not having it) within the DGM should be a consistent and top-level point of discussion. According to the Global Executing Agency, communicating and collecting sex-disaggregated data on NSCs and making that a point of discussion helps to reinforce the message about the importance of gender parity in project governance.

b. Recommendations

Building and supporting a pipeline of IPLC women leaders would be an important contribution of the DGM. As this case study clearly demonstrates, one of the key challenges in getting closer to gender parity on the NSC is a lack of pre-qualified women leaders who have the skills, knowledge, interest, and ability to engage in this type of leadership position. The DGM, and other similar initiatives, should include specific focus on identifying and mentoring emerging leaders; while they may not immediately be able to successfully compete for leadership positions, these efforts would help to ensure that future opportunities are not lost. The DGM

is in a position to help break this cycle and support the development of more emerging women leaders who can successfully fill the spaces of legitimate representatives. If those underlying contexts are not transformed, men and women will forever be starting from unequal places.

Targeted support and mentoring for women NSC members would help ensure they are effective and supported. Leading as a woman in a male-dominated space can be challenging and isolating; a DGM initiative to bring women NSC members together to discuss their experiences and shared challenges, and strategies for overcoming them, could be a useful initiative to retain and support women NSC members. Greater engagement with women and men NSC members is needed to better understand the different approaches to effective leadership that women have developed in male-dominated spaces and the associated perceptions that govern the legitimacy of these approaches.

Introducing procedural norms for managing decision-making spaces that support gender equality could be an area of innovation for the DGM. In spaces where men or women are not equally represented or not equally able to influence decision-making, innovative ways of structuring decision-making could be helpful. For example, requiring that women and men have the same time allotment for voicing their opinions, assigning meeting leadership that alternates between women and men, or separating men and women into smaller discussion groups.

Closing the gender gap of emerging IPLC women leadership. We can observe that the effective use of quotas or other affirmative actions may involve a process that starts at the community level, where male leaders often play a crucial gatekeeping role for emerging leaders. While establishing a quota system

may enable eligible women, it is essential that training steps be taken in advance to ensure they are ready to succeed if a quota opens new space for them. How can established leaders on decision-making bodies like the NSC help to demolish local political barriers with customized, sustained training for a cohort of women, some of whom can be groomed for political or economic roles higher in the organization?

Using improved results frameworks as an accountability tool to address the gender issue on the DGM and NSC was largely overlooked in the interviews. While monitoring activities provided opportunities for women NSC members to demonstrate their leadership skills in the field, references to the quality of measuring women's empowerment or gender-transformative change in project results frameworks was largely omitted from the discussion. This may have been due to the limited number of indicators in country project results frameworks specifically measuring gender targets. Besides the GEA and GSC efforts to encourage more systematic reporting on gender, there was little innovation in the area of DGM performance indicators related to gender. Retrospectively, the case

study strongly suggests wide agreement that closing a gender gap in NSC representation constitutes a core strategic objective of the DGM. Following the World Bank's gender tag process, the project would agree that the gap in gender parity on the NSC, a central and influential decision-making body for the projects, should be closed by some standard that reflects the autonomy and direction of the IPLCs. The DGM Framework documentation would then outline common affirmative procedures to identify a minimum threshold for adequate gender representation and ensure actions at all levels to meet this target. Flexibility could be provided that recognizes the absence of universal agreement on quotas.

If projects like the DGM are to help create and support emerging women IPLC leaders to close a gender gap in project governance for the current project or the next project, a dedicated component is required whose purpose is to support leadership skills for men and women (50/50) who were at that early stage in their careers. Recognition of the status quo condition of not having enough women who are ready to lead becomes a precondition for action rather than a result.

Annex 1:

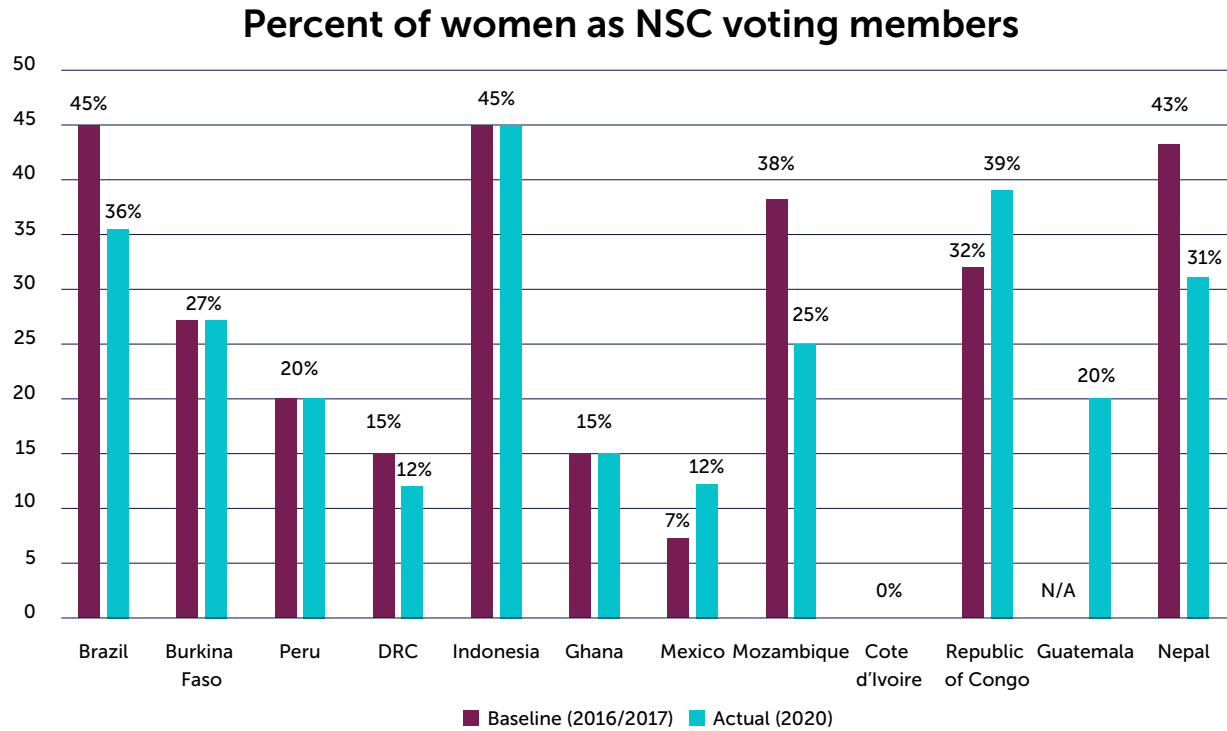


TABLE 3. INTERVIEWS

1	NSC member Burkina Faso	M	May 11
2	NSC member Burkina Faso	F	May 10
3	NSC observer Burkina Faso (observer)	F	May 14
4	NSC member Ghana	M	May 11
5	NSC member Ghana	F	May 14
6	NSC member Ghana	F	May 14
7	NSC observer Ghana	M	May 14
8	NSC member Indonesia	F	May 14
9	NSC member Indonesia	M	May 27
10	NSC member Nepal	F	May 4
11	NSC member, Mexico	M	May 17
12	NSC member Mexico	F	May 20
12	NSC member Saweto Peru	M	May 26
13	NSC member Saweto Peru	F	May 26
14	NSC members Republic of Congo	5 women, 3 men	May 25
15	Rainforest Alliance, NEA Mexico		March 12
16	Project Manager, WWF, NEA Peru		March
17	Solidaridad, NEA Ghana		March 5
18	Samdhana Institute, NEA Indonesia		March 3
19	World Bank consultant		May
20	World Bank TTL Guatemala and Peru DGM Country Projects;		April
21	DGM Technical Director, Global Executing Agency, CI		June

ECO-AUDIT

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