

# THE VALUE OF ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION FOR ADVANCING THE 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



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# Executive Summary



# Executive Summary

This report provides an in-depth analysis of eight case studies, collected by ESCAP from selected partners, to identify strategies and engagement designs that can overcome cultural, socio-economic and institutional barriers associated with participation and engagement of marginalized and vulnerable groups in decision making processes linked to the environment and natural resources. The case studies selected for this report present a spread of strategies and activities that have contributed to inclusive engagement of vulnerable groups involved in the protection of the environment.

Case studies are a review based on a framework building on concepts found in the literature and structured into four areas: (i) stakeholder, context and history identification, (ii) intersectoral interventions (iii) meaningful engagement, and (iv) institutionalization.

The case studies analyzed for this study underline that the assessment of context, collective engagement and coordination, cross-sharing of technical and local knowledge, as well as capacity building efforts targeting women all contribute to improving project outcomes, including gender power balances, cooperation between governments and communities, and enhanced knowledge-sharing, ultimately leading to increased environmental protection and restoration.

Results from the case studies indicate that vulnerability results from an intersection of multiple factors across levels and scales. Vulnerability is found to be triggered by depletion and mismanagement of environmental resources. Contextually, this can be exacerbated by ethnic conflicts and natural disasters. Gender is also a factor to vulnerability. Women are the most vulnerable group among the case studies. Furthermore, vulnerability of certain groups is exacerbated by a relatively lower social, economic and political status as it constraints access to community resources and services, as well as political input into decision-making and processes.

Providing an enabling environment that creates a space for vulnerable groups to discuss their aspirations and voices is critical to their continued engagement during and beyond the project, and needs to be planned for adequately. The case studies indicate that stakeholder engagement increases with their greater involvement in policy processes, especially given that external factors outside communities such as governance measures and decisions play a role in their vulnerability. However, facilitators catalysing engagement processes need to be aware of contested and changing political agendas to be able to reframe them through innovative solutions, because marginalized and vulnerable groups can be caught in multiple power hierarchies. Thus, participatory facilitation is central to guiding inclusive engagement. The report finds poverty, unequal power relations and environmental degradation are interconnected. Creating opportunities to improve the livelihood of vulnerable groups is crucial to incentivize and upkeep their engagement as vulnerable groups operate within the context of pervasive unequal social norms. The research highlights the need to understand vulnerability as a contextual, relational, gendered and cross-scalar phenomenon

Understanding vulnerability is a local process as much as it needs to be embedded into the broader national context. Findings provide important directions for mobilizing the environment sectors in constructive ways in support of implementing solutions that help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Recommendations to strengthen inclusive engagement include:

- Establish a facility that provides conceptual and methodological support to maintain inclusive engagement for achieving the environment-related Sustainable Development Goals;
- Conduct and collate research and evidence to generate tailored information on a contextualized understanding of vulnerability and vulnerable groups across the environment sectors;
- Use contextualized information to design and implement environmental programmes;
- Foster a sustainable culture of transformation through environmental projects.

This report highlights the importance of fostering connections between evidence-making, policy decisions and practical realities by mainstreaming inclusion and the co-production and co-sharing of knowledge. Reimagining practices for protection of the environment as a contextual, institutional and power-related process can provide a new perspective for catalysing stimulus to concrete actions and overcome cultural, socio-economic and institutional barriers associated with participation and engagement of marginalized and vulnerable groups.

The report concludes that inclusive engagement enhances conservation, livelihoods and rights outcomes of environmental projects, and provides important directions for implementing solutions that accelerate implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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