Towards integrating gender and biodiversity dimensions into sustainable agricultural and financial landscapes in the Philippines: A Summary Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Philippines faces a critical challenge of biodiversity loss and climate change. Agriculture serves as both a contributor to greenhouse gases and land degradation while also providing opportunities for mitigation and adaptation interventions, including nature-based solutions, that can address these interlinked crises. Agriculture is also a sector that is vulnerable to hazards. When designing interventions, gender dynamics within land management significantly affect decision-making processes and resource distribution. Despite comprehensive laws that enshrine the participation of women in land rights and management, significant disparities persist in achieving gender equality. This hinders the full and equitable participation of women in agriculture and biodiversity protection.

This report examines the intersections of biodiversity, agriculture, climate change, and gender dynamics in the Philippines, with a focus on how sustainable finance initiatives can better integrate gender perspectives to promote sustainable agriculture, particularly considering women's roles in protecting and managing biodiversity. The report utilized a scoping review of literature and expert interviews in order to present the state of knowledge and develop a case study on banana production. A content analysis of sustainable finance policies and frameworks are also in this report.

Key findings highlight the multifaceted roles of women in agriculture, the constraints on their agency and decision-making power, and gaps in access to resources and opportunities.

Women share significant roles in agricultural production, in addition to their existing roles in ensuring household food security, nutrition, childcare, and other responsibilities.

However, current systems and legal frameworks – while showing progress in different aspects of their implementation – lack resources and capacity to close the gender gap in agriculture and effective land management, which also affect biodiversity. These findings underscore the need for sustainable finance mechanisms that prioritize gender equality and empowerment to address systemic inequalities, and promote sustainable agricultural practices and the protection of biodiversity.

The analysis of existing sustainable finance policies, particularly the Sustainable Finance Taxonomy Guidelines (SFTG), reveals gaps in addressing gender considerations within agriculture. While the SFTG focuses on climate change mitigation and adaptation, biodiversity is not yet explicitly considered. The phased and iterative approach emphasized by the Roadmap is helpful and allows for the building of capacities for both financial institutions and civil society. However, this means that the rate of progress is gradual. The SFTG could be used as a catalyst for financing underfunded sectors and improving the accessibility towards marginalized groups. Still, this potential remains to be realized with the continued development and improvement of this new tool in the sustainable financial landscape.

The report offers guide questions based on gender-inclusive criteria that should be considered in the usage of the SFTG. Additionally, recommendations for how biodiversity could be better centered in sustainable finance are also offered. Ultimately, more partnerships are needed between scientific and academic institutions, government and non-government organizations, and rural communities to chart and monitor progress.

Dynamics between biodiversity, gender, and agriculture

Biodiversity is essential for agriculture, because of its provision of ecosystem services and a wide range of values. It is under threat by a myriad of factors. Science and policy have pointed to the fact that society must protect biodiversity in order to protect food security, mitigate environmental impacts, and adapt to climate change. Sustainable finance must be able to support the just transition to food systems that better protect the environment, while also reducing existing inequalities. For example, the intersection of biodiversity, gender, and agriculture in the Philippines reveals a complex interplay of ecological, social, political, and economic factors that significantly impact rural communities and livelihoods. These factors affect the practice of agriculture, and the management of biodiversity.

In the Philippines, traditional gender roles are deeply embedded in agricultural practices. Men typically handle labor-intensive tasks, while women are mostly involved in post-harvest activities. They are thus paid less, and do this work in addition to their existing reproductive and community roles. This gendered division of labor reflects societal norms, which vary across the country. However, it also perpetuates gender disparities in income and decision-making power. In particular, women's limited access to resources, training, and extension services impact their economic empowerment and participation in sustainable agricultural practices.

As a case study, banana production has been shown by multiple studies to have significant environmental impacts in the Philippines. Particularly, large-scale monoculture plantations lead to habitat loss, degradation, and a decline in native species. The sector itself is highly vulnerable to climate change. Given this, organic farming has emerged as a transformative approach within the banana industry. Initiatives like Project GROW, which focus on transitioning Agrarian Reform Beneficiaries (ARBs) to organic farming, highlight the benefits of this approach.

Importantly, organic farming not only reduces the use of synthetic inputs but also enhances biodiversity, improves soil fertility, and provides healthier food products.

However, according to an ARB farmer involved in Project GROW interviewed in the study, the transition to organic agriculture is challenging and requires substantial support in terms of capacity-building and market access.

Across the entire food system, women play crucial roles in the sustainability of agricultural practices. Projects, such as the Adaptation and Mitigation in Agriculture (AMIA) Program of the Department of Agriculture Climate Resilient Agriculture Office (DA CRAO), that involve women in decision-making and provide them with access to resources and training are essential for fostering sustainable agriculture systems. In addition to this, integrating a gender perspective into sustainable finance mechanisms is crucial for addressing systemic inequities and empowering women.

However, despite the many known benefits of organic farming and gender-inclusive policies, substantial challenges remain.

Women often face barriers related to land ownership and unequal distribution of tasks. Efforts by farmers cooperatives and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to renegotiate contracts and promote fairer business models are essential for ensuring a dignified standard of living for all people involved in farming.

Additionally, promoting agroecological practices, such as intercropping and agroforestry can further enhance biodiversity and sustainability in the agricultural section. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes empowering women, promoting sustainable agriculture practices, and ensuring fair economic opportunities for all agricultural stakeholders.

Philippine and ASEAN Sustainable Finance Taxonomy Guidelines

The Philippine Sustainable Finance Taxonomy Guidelines (SFTG) and the ASEAN Taxonomy both have vital roles in shaping the sustainable finance landscape in the Philippines, particularly concerning gender and biodiversity. The SFTG, developed by the Finance Sector Forum (FSF) member agencies, offers a structured guide to a variety of users to evaluate Activities' eligibility for sustainable finance.

It has seven (7) guiding principles

1. Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation
2. Promotion Transition to a Low Carbon Economy
3. Resilient Food Systems
4. Sustainable Cities
5. Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure for Inclusive Growth and Poverty Reduction
6. Environmental Management and Conservation
7. Prohibited Activities

Based on a content analysis of the SFTG, there are gender considerations under climate change mitigation and adaptation, sustainable cities, and sustainable infrastructures; however, gender considerations seem to be lacking in Guiding Principle 3 which relate to Resilient Food Systems. Moreover, the country's gender aspirations are more assumed under the Philippine's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) under Paris Agreement rather than in the taxonomy itself.

In its current form, the Philippines is also adopting a Phased Approach and Principles-Based Approach. The latter entails that Activities will be evaluated using qualitative frameworks. On the other hand, the former states that the SFTG will first focus on Environmental Objectives (EO) on Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation, with minimum social safeguards (MSS) for social aspects. The next iteration aims to include biodiversity and circular economy guidelines, as well as some social objectives.

The adoption of this phased-approach is due to lack of resources and data, as well as readiness of the financial section. Unfortunately, due to the Phased Approach, the current draft of the SFTG lacks explicit biodiversity considerations and frameworks, despite existing opportunities. For example, the climate mitigation objective does not consider biodiversity and ecosystems in forested and coastal areas, but only in the context of degraded land and loss of carbon storage release emissions. Moreover, the Principles-Based Approach only introduces indirect measures that regulate agriculture and biodiversity. Despite these policy gaps, the SFTG has Minimum Social Safeguards (MSS), which, while not explicitly focused on gender, ensure the protection of human rights, prevention of forced labor, and the protection of children's rights. These safeguards entail protection for vulnerable communities and social groups by classifying Activities as unsustainable if they fail to meet these social criteria, even if they meet the environmental objectives. Similarly, on the regional level, the ASEAN Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance, introduced by the ASEAN Taxonomy Board (ATB), provides a flexible and inclusive framework of classifying sustainability of Activities tailored to the diverse needs of ASEAN Member States (AMS). The Taxonomy is designed to guide sustainable finance initiatives across the region, highlighting the importance of both environmental and social objectives. Compared to the Philippine SFTG's two main environmental objectives, the ASEAN Taxonomy has additional EOs on the "Protection of Healthy Ecosystems and Biodiversity" and "Resource Resilience and the Transition to a Circular Economy."

It also sets out three essential criteria:

1 **Do No Significant Harm**

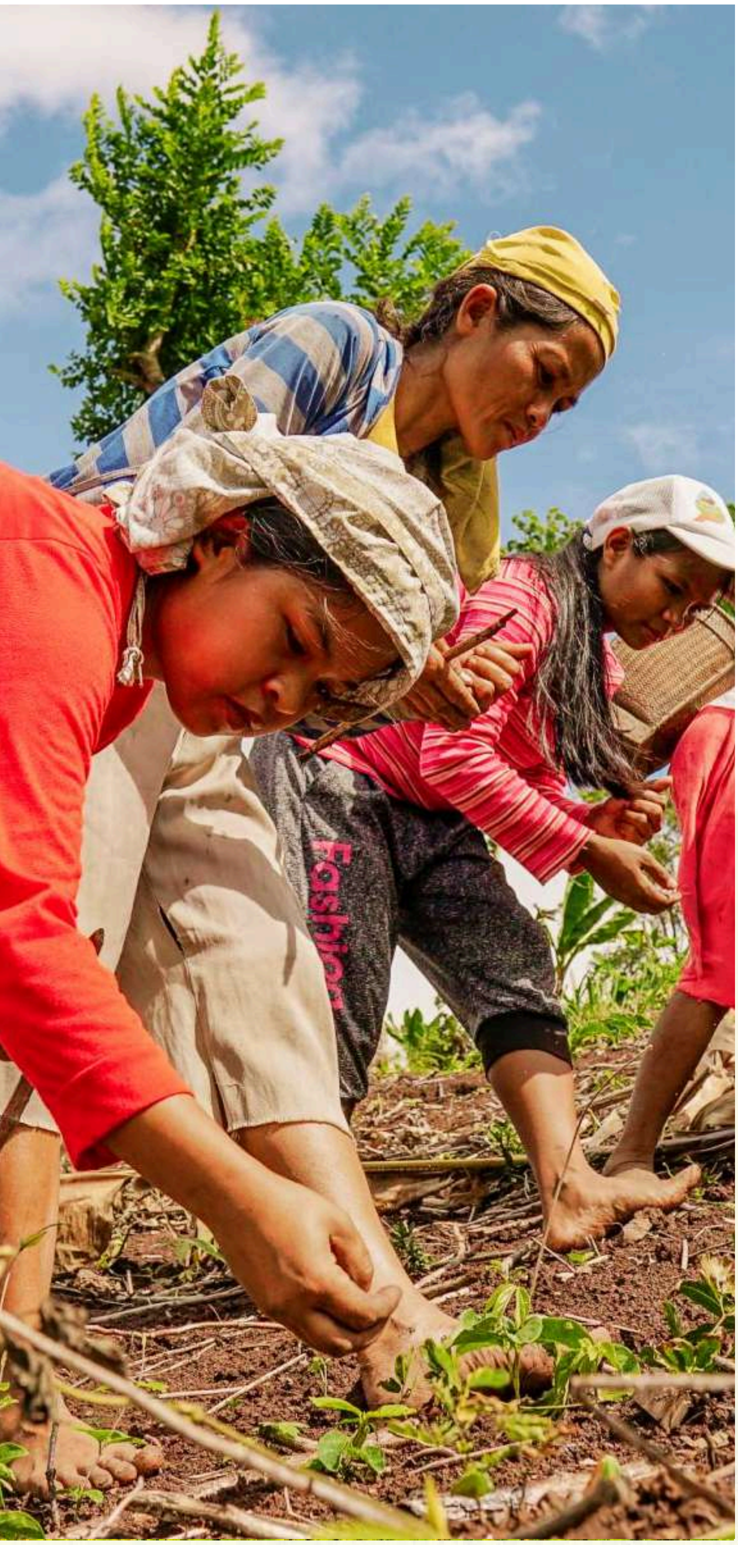
2 **Remedial Measures to Transition**

3 **Social Aspects**

While the ASEAN Taxonomy is more advanced than the Philippines with its broader environmental objectives, particularly EO3 on biodiversity, its role on gender and its dynamic in land management in relation to agriculture and biodiversity management is still vague.

In conclusion, the explicit integration of gender and biodiversity considerations remains limited in both Taxonomies, with the latter consideration particularly absent in the Philippine SFTG. The Taxonomies mostly cluster all vulnerable groups under general social protection measures, and also lack specific gender empowerment objectives. This suggests the need to enhance gender-specific considerations and biodiversity protection to fully realize their potential in fostering inclusive and pro-environmental financial practices in the Philippines and the broader ASEAN region.

Recommendations



Central to the recommendations is prioritizing biodiversity within sustainability initiatives while addressing gender disparities inherent in agricultural management. This involves supporting climate-resilient and biodiversity-friendly agricultural practices and encouraging private sector investment in environmental initiatives. Moreover, the report stresses the importance of transparency and accountability in green financing.

Collaboration and knowledge exchange among diverse stakeholders are also crucial for advancing environmental sustainability and resilience.

The report advocates for holistic approaches that recognize the interconnectedness of social, economic, and environmental factors. It underscores the need for partnerships among government agencies, financial institutions, private sector entities, NGOs, and local communities. These collaborative efforts aim to develop effective sustainable finance mechanisms tailored to biodiversity conservation and gender equality, while also adapting successful international strategies to the local context. The table below summarizes the report's recommendations.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

A greater focus on the nexus between climate resilience and biodiversity

Policy recommendations

- Enhance financial support for smallholders and incentivize lenders to invest in climate-resilient and biodiversity-inclusive agricultural practices.
- Focus on long-term protection and restoration of biodiversity and ecosystem services alongside sustainable agriculture.

Institutional recommendations

- Integrate climate resilience and biodiversity into lending and investment criteria.
- Develop long-term strategies for biodiversity protection and climate-resilient agriculture.

Promote and foster private sector engagement

Policy recommendations

- Encourage innovative financing mechanisms, such as carbon sequestration projects, afforestation, and peatland conservation, to attract private sector investment.
- Ensure nature-based solutions are based on scientific evidence to avoid maladaptation and long-term negative environmental impacts.
- Strengthen frameworks to ensure transparency and accountability in reporting environmental impacts to avoid greenwashing.

Institutional recommendations

- Encourage partnerships between the private sector and scientific organizations to ensure nature-based solutions are evidence-based.
- Establish clear guidelines and reporting mechanisms to ensure private sector investments are genuinely sustainable.
- Focus on reducing investment risks in environmental projects through financial instruments like insurance and blue bonds.

Create inclusive and gender-responsive mechanisms

Policy recommendations

- Develop policies recognizing the rights and leadership of women and other diverse gender identities.
- Implement decision-making tools and taxonomies with guiding questions to enhance gender equality and participation in sustainable finance initiatives.

Institutional recommendations

- Develop policies and mechanisms that are inclusive and gender-responsive, recognizing the rights and capacities of women and other marginalized groups.
- Monitor and evaluate gender equality and inclusive participation in sustainable finance projects.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

INSTITUTIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Facilitate knowledge-building, sharing and awareness of biodiversity

Policy recommendations

- Establish educational initiatives to enhance understanding of biodiversity's role in agriculture among stakeholders.
- Align financial policies and frameworks with biodiversity conservation goals to address the triple crisis of biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution.

Institutional recommendations

- Continue developing the SFTG to be a common language and tool for finance, agriculture and conservation sectors to enhance collaboration.
- Adapt successful international and regional strategies (e.g. ASEAN taxonomy) to the local context through collaborative initiatives and knowledge exchange.
- Support initiatives like the UN Higher Education for Sustainable Development to promote environmental stewardship and biodiversity awareness.
- Work with academe and NGOs to enhance biodiversity education and conservation efforts at all educational levels, and in the development of the biodiversity guidelines of the SFTG.

Foster collaboration among stakeholders from diverse groups (government, non-government, local communities)

Policy recommendations

- Promote collaboration among government agencies, financial institutions, private sector entities, and philanthropic organizations to develop effective sustainable finance mechanisms.
- Facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity building through collaborative initiatives tailored to biodiversity conservation and women's participation in agriculture.

Institutional recommendations

- Foster partnerships among government, NGOs, research institutions, and the private sector to promote sustainable practices and gender equity in the specific industries, e.g. the banana industry.
- Encourage holistic approaches that address social, economic, and environmental factors to support sustainable industry practices.

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https://fairfinanceasia.org/

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