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Drone view of the Amazon rainforest and the Caeté River, Cazumbá-Iracema Extractive Reserve, Acre, Brazil. Photo: Andre Dib

Promoting gender in the Brazilian forestry sector

The importance of networks

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The Forest Women's Network is driving the development towards gender equity within the forestry sector in Brazil and has achieved progress in breaking down gender barriers and consolidating women's leadership.

Gendered barriers

Gendered barriers stem from historical, cultural and institutional factors that have traditionally excluded women from equal participation. Forestry has long been perceived as a physically demanding field, dominated by men, which reinforces stereotypes that limit women's access to employment, leadership roles and technical training.

Despite progress in the sector, significant challenges persist. To facilitate experience sharing and advance gender equality in Brazilian forestry, the Forest Women's Network (*Rede Mulher Florestal*, or RMF; literally, “Forest Woman Network”) was founded in 2018. An independent and pioneering initiative, RMF brings together individuals and organizations from the forestry sector to exchange knowledge, advocate for women's inclusion, and drive positive change. Over the past six years, the network has

experienced a remarkable 356% increase in participation, which now encompasses 30 private-sector enterprises and 192 civil members.

Originally created in the context of planted forest industries, with most companies and planted areas concentrated in the central-southern part of Brazil, RMF has been trying to expand its scope by increasing the participation of more women from the north and northeast of the country, and from native forest management at the large and community scale. Currently, two of eight women on the board of directors' work in the north of the country in native forest management, one of them the winner of the Wangari Maathai Prize in 2017 (RMF, 2023; RMF 2025).

Although women remain a minority in Brazil's forestry sector, their representation has steadily increased across most professional areas over the past five years (RMF, 2024). However, according to the *Gender Panorama* report for 2023, women are still under-represented in the Brazilian forestry sector. This disparity highlights the urgent need for initiatives such as RMF to promote gender equity and foster a more inclusive industry. Women in forestry continue to face discrimination, harassment and systemic obstacles in attaining leadership roles.

To address these challenges, RMF implements initiatives aimed at strengthening inclusive governance and combating discriminatory practices. This article highlights the RMF's work, reflecting on its activities and impacts.

The Forest Women's Network (RMF)

RMF focuses on promoting gender equality and inclusion within the forest sector. It encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing through various initiatives aimed at fostering more equitable work environments. Its objectives include empowering women in the industry and supporting the creation of diverse and respectful workplaces. The organization also provides opportunities for individuals and businesses to participate in and contribute to these objectives, while emphasizing values such as empathy, ethics and leadership.

RMF governance comprises a board of volunteer members who play a range of roles. Elections take place annually.

All network activities take place in working groups (WGs); these are composed of volunteer's members active in the forest sector who support RMF in implementing its strategic planning. Of the total RMF members, 103 are

distributed among four WGs. All working groups have one coordinator and one vice coordinator who organize monthly meetings with the group to outline goals and objectives. These are the four working groups:

- Equality and empowerment — create an environment to foster discussion and actions that support gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Education — foster education and training in the forestry sector.
- Women in decision making — identify barriers to the presence of women in decision-making and develop strategies to increase their presence in this area.
- Maternity and women in the job market — identify actions to support pregnant and nursing women in the workplace and diagnose the challenges to and incentives for women in the job market.

The RMF working groups promote gender equality in the Brazilian forestry sector through strategic actions such as holding thematic workshops with members and non-members and using semi-structured questionnaires with women in the forestry sector to better understand gender issues.

Between 2020 and 2023, RMF conducted various initiatives, primarily involving large companies in the forestry sector who engage with local communities. Notable practices adopted by companies affiliated with RMF include: a) tailored training programmes for women in forestry, harvesting and field operations;



Logo of the *Rede Mulher Florestal*.



View of forest cover of Barro Alto, Goiás, Brazil. Photo: Geliane Rocha

b) policies that support women professionals, such as designated breastfeeding spaces, flexible working hours, and extended maternity and paternity leave; c) inclusive recruitment practices, including the creation of women-only job positions and gender-sensitive human resource management; and d) initiatives that encourage participation in gender-related events, research and publications.

Success stories such as the Dona Della Project and the Impact Business Promotion Program by Bracell, the Female Leadership Programme, Mechanical Forestry Machine Operator Training, Hiring and Inclusion of Women, and the Construction of a Shellfish Processing Unit in Belmonte (BA) by Veracel, as well as the promotion of heavy-vehicle qualifications for women by Sylvamo, are tangible examples of the RMF's direct impact on women's empowerment within the sector. Below are further details on specific actions within RMF.

“It was essential for contributing to decisions in my professional career, in addition to having gained a friendship for life, the match was super positive and assertive.”

Pamela Bahia, Mentee in the 2024 Forests for all Women programme

Mentoring programme: Forests for all Women

One of RMF's flagship initiatives is the Forests for all Women mentoring programme, launched by the Equality and Empowerment working group in 2022. The initiative was designed to foster women's personal and professional development within the forestry sector. The programme, for women affiliated with RMF, facilitates monthly exchanges and sessions between mentors and mentees. Through mentoring, participants gained access to valuable networks, knowledge-sharing opportunities and leadership training. These connections are crucial for women to build confidence, overcome workplace challenges, and advance in their careers.

The latest iteration of the programme, held in 2024, saw a notable increase in participation, with 29 mentors (up from 22 in 2023) and 31 mentees (compared to 22 in 2023).

The initiative also emphasizes the importance of creating support networks among women in forestry. These networks foster solidarity and provide a platform for women to share their experiences and strategies for success. Participants have reported increased confidence in addressing workplace challenges, have successfully advocated for more inclusive policies in their organizations, and have even progressed to leadership positions within their companies.

Additionally, these networks have facilitated collaborations on sustainability projects, demonstrating the power of collective action in achieving both professional and environmental goals. The programme also includes workshops on critical issues such as harassment prevention, pay equity and the contribution of women to environmental sustainability. By addressing these topics, RMF empowers women to become advocates for change within their organizations and communities.

Gender Panorama report

RMF's efforts to promote gender equality are informed by data and research collected through an extensive questionnaire. This led to the publication of the *Gender Panorama* report. The first edition, published in 2019, had 21 responding organizations; it represented a significant milestone in and starting point for promoting actions in favour of equality between men and women. In the second edition, published in 2021, 41 organizations responded; and the third edition, published in 2024, had 32 responding organizations (RMF, 2024). It is important to emphasize that these 32 organizations directly or indirectly influence the lives of more than 150,000 people, with a significant and multiplying impact.

The latest report, from 2023, highlights the state of women's representation in the forestry sector: women occupy only 18% of positions across the forest sector, with significant underrepresentation at almost all hierarchical levels. Notable exceptions include sustainability boards (50%) and human resources (56%), where women have achieved greater parity. However, at the highest decision-making level, such as forestry directorates, women's representation remains alarmingly low at just 7% (RMF, 2024).

Despite these challenges, there are signs of progress. The report notes an increase in policies promoting diversity within the forestry companies that replied to the questionnaire, rising from 62% in 2020 to 87% in 2023. Similarly, the adoption of policies that specifically address gender equity has grown from 46% to 72% (RMF, 2024).

Women in forest governance

RMF actively promotes women's participation in governance by providing data and insights on their roles in the forestry sector. The *Gender Panorama* report has played a key role in encouraging more inclusive hiring practices within forestry companies and in shaping corporate policies to close gender gaps. Progress in companies' adopting policies or statements

“I met an admirable mentor during the meetings. We were able to exchange experiences and define achievable goals for my professional development.”

Gabriela Maia, Mentee in the 2024 Forests for All Women programme

on gender equality and non-discrimination marks a significant improvement. This shift reflects a growing acknowledgment of the need for formal guidelines that reinforce equal opportunities and for the elimination of workplace discrimination (RMF, 2024).

Inclusive workplaces

Creating inclusive workplaces is a cornerstone of RMF's mission. Beyond advocating formal policies on issues that affect women, RMF encourages informal practices that drive cultural shifts within workplaces. These include fostering mentorship opportunities, promoting dialogue on unconscious biases, and celebrating women's achievements to normalize their presence in leadership roles, as well as posts on social media to promote more inclusive workplaces.

By addressing both formal structures and informal dynamics, RMF aims to create a workplace culture that genuinely values diversity and inclusivity. The organization works closely with forestry companies to implement



Instagram post by RMF promoting the registration of women forest engineers in Brazilian class councils. Source: RMF

policies that promote gender equality and workplace safety. These policies address issues such as equal pay, maternity leave and harassment prevention, ensuring that women can work in environments free from discrimination and fear. Examples of practices that have been adopted by companies associated with the network are spaces for breastfeeding, adjustments in working hours and extension of maternity or paternity leave (RMF, 2024).

Education and advocacy

Education and advocacy are central to RMF's efforts. The organization conducts awareness campaigns to challenge stereotypes and highlight the contributions of women in forestry. These campaigns aim to shift public perceptions and inspire more women to pursue careers in the forest sector; they include informative posts on social media.

Workshops and training sessions are another key component of RMF's strategy, aimed primarily at

women in the forestry sector, both professionals and students. These events provide women with the skills and knowledge they need to excel, while also helping them to address challenges such as gender bias and workplace harassment. By empowering women through education, RMF helps create a new generation of leaders; it also considers men to be allies in gender equality, who can help drive progress in the forestry sector.

Sustainability through gender diversity

Gender diversity is not only a matter of fairness, but also a critical factor in achieving sustainability. For example, in community-based forestry initiatives, the inclusion of women has led to improved resource allocation and enhanced biodiversity outcomes by incorporating diverse knowledge systems and perspectives. Specific case studies, such as women-led reforestation projects in Pará, have demonstrated higher seedling survival rates and ecosystem recovery compared to initiatives dominated by men (Cavalcante and de Souza, 2023). This



Tocantins River, Municipality of Imperatriz, Brazil. Photo: Clarice Sousa

highlights how gender-inclusive practices can contribute directly to environmental resilience and sustainable forest management.

Women's specific perspectives and experiences contribute to more balanced and effective decision-making processes, particularly in areas such as resource management and environmental conservation (IUCN, 2024). By promoting gender equity, RMF enhances the forestry sector's ability to address complex challenges and adapt to changing conditions.

Looking ahead

The journey to gender equality in forestry is far from over, but RMF's work provides a model for how change can be achieved. As the network continues to grow, its impact on the Brazilian forestry sector is becoming increasingly evident. Through its programmes and advocacy efforts,

RMF is helping to create a more inclusive and sustainable industry that values the contributions of all its members.

RMF's initiatives align with broader global efforts to promote sustainable development. The organization's work supports several United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including gender equality (SDG 5), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), and climate action (SDG 13). By integrating these goals into its programmes, RMF demonstrates the interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental sustainability (UN, 2015).

In the years to come, the success of RMF will depend on continued collaboration and commitment from all stakeholders in the forestry sector. By working together, these stakeholders can build a future where women's leadership and gender diversity are integral to the industry's success and sustainability.

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