



Forest Communities and REDD Climate Initiatives

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I S S U E S

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INTRODUCTION Loss of the world's forests contributes an estimated 17 percent to all global greenhouse gas emissions, creating both a major challenge and an opportunity for international climate change agreements.¹ In response, global policymakers have proposed that new carbon agreements include rewards for reducing forest-based emissions, an initiative known as REDD—Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation. By creating financial incentives to reduce forest-sourced greenhouse gases, REDD projects could generate funding from developed countries to reduce deforestation in developing countries. In addition, some climate change specialists believe that REDD projects could benefit forest-dependent communities, whose participation is key to controlling the local forces that drive deforestation.² Some communities are already learning about the new REDD carbon projects. As one villager from Cambodia explains, “We are going to sell our air to the people who are polluting in the city.”

Between 2000 and 2005, forest cover in Southeast Asia decreased by 2.76 million hectares annually

The increased attention to forests in international climate change negotiations indicates that policymakers are giving greater recognition to the importance of natural forests as terrestrial carbon sinks. While it is generally acknowledged that forests are an important source of timber, fuelwood, fodder, and other nontimber forest products, forests also provide crucial ecosystem services. These “services” are functions or benefits that are provided by the natural environment including sequestering carbon from the atmosphere, protecting upstream watersheds, and conserving biodiversity. Forests also help regulate the water cycle and climate, while supporting soil formation, nutrient recycling, and plant pollination. The failure of markets, and society in general, to accurately value these services in economic or financial terms has undermined attempts to conserve forests.³ The REDD climate initiatives represent an important international attempt to place a value on forests and to commoditize their services in storing and sequestering carbon. The value of forest carbon stocks will need to be based on rigorous monitoring of field inventories and remotely sensed data. It is anticipated that REDD projects will need to empirically demonstrate that deforestation and forest degradation have slowed as a direct result of project activities. The resulting change in carbon storage will need to be verifiable before it can be traded in commodity markets and other exchange platforms.

Between 2000 and 2005, forest cover in Southeast Asia decreased by 2.76 million hectares annually, or 1.3 percent, representing a total loss in that five-year period of 13.8 million hectares.⁴ While industrial forest clearing and degradation have resulted in immense carbon emissions into the atmosphere, they have also affected hundreds of millions of forest-dependent peoples who rely on forest resources for their subsistence. New climate change agreements that place a monetary value on the conservation of natural forests have the potential to support a new generation of sustainable forest management strategies implemented by resident peoples. However, a recent study found that, under prevailing market conditions, commercial crops like palm oil offered higher returns than those available for conserving forest carbon sinks.

In tropical countries, like Malaysia and Indonesia, the net present value of a 30-year palm oil concession was \$3,800 to \$9,600 per hectare. This compares to just \$614 to \$994 per hectare net present value that could be expected under a REDD mechanism in the voluntary carbon market.⁵

Forest carbon prices are not fixed, but could rise in the future. If REDD is implemented at a landscape level, potential revenues are quite significant. For example, a recent study in the province of East Kalimantan, Indonesia, estimated that 305 million tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂) could be conserved between 2003 and 2013 if the province’s protected areas were effectively conserved. At \$4 per ton of CO₂, conservation efforts would generate a potential income stream of \$120 million per year.⁶ Optimistic projections such as this, however, depend on halting the powerful political and economic forces that have decimated Kalimantan’s forest over the past 40 years. To be effective, it would be necessary to address long-standing indigenous forest rights claims and give forest-dependent communities a meaningful role in REDD conservation and forest restoration programs.

Community Forestry

Community forestry could provide legal frameworks and operational systems for building strong alliances between government and forest-dependent communities. These alliances, in turn, could support the emergence of effective REDD strategies in developing countries, while also providing ancillary benefits, such as improved tenure security, reduced social conflict, and increased income. As a flexible, participatory approach to forest conservation and management, community forestry can also act as a vehicle for rural development, community capacity-building, technical training, and innovative livelihood strategies. Participatory REDD projects need to consider a range of components, including poverty alleviation, benefit sharing, tenure rights, and mitigating drivers of deforestation, as well as other key factors, such as rigorously evaluating additionality, establishing baseline deforestation and forest degradation

scenarios, discounting for increased emissions through leakage, and implementing mechanisms to ensure permanence.

Poverty Alleviation

While community forest management systems have emerged in a number of Asian nations in recent decades, including the Philippines, Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and India, project implementation has often been constrained by a lack of financing and political commitment.⁷ The REDD climate initiatives provide new opportunities to fund key policy and fiscal actions that could bring greater stability to the region's forests and forest-dependent peoples. The emergence of private, voluntary markets for forest carbon provides long-term funding opportunities to support national community forestry programs. However, without initial grant support from public sources, project design and early development costs are often difficult to secure, which suggests that diversified sources of REDD project funding be directed at both the national and subnational levels.

Market-oriented advocates of REDD are primarily concerned with creating forest carbon as a robust, tradable commodity. To monetize forest carbon credits, projects must undergo a rigorous process of quantification, based on approved methodologies, with credits validated and verified by a third party and placed in a reputable registry. While some carbon project developers believe that, in the future, biodiversity and social benefits will be considered in the pricing process, most voluntary carbon markets today are not sophisticated enough to attribute additional value to carbon-plus forest credits. In other words, it is currently unclear whether there is any market upside to investing in forest carbon projects that specifically address poverty alleviation, apart from the probable decrease in failure rates for community-supported projects. If, however, pilot strategies are financed through funds and grants, donor organizations that place importance on social and other environmental benefits may help establish REDD initiatives that explicitly value these aspects.

While poverty issues may not be a core concern of market-oriented REDD projects, they may be key to

Forests and Climate Change Agreements

United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC or FCCC)

An international environmental treaty produced at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), informally known as the Earth Summit, held in Rio de Janeiro from June 3–14, 1992. The treaty aspired to stabilize greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would limit the impact of anthropogenic interference with the climate system.

Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on December 11, 1997, and became effective in February 2005. To date, 184 parties of the convention have ratified its protocol. The Kyoto Protocol established binding targets for 37 industrialized countries and the European community for reducing GHG emissions. Targets reflect an average of 5 percent against 1990 levels over the five-year period 2008–2012.^a Within the protocol, the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) was established to allow for afforestation and reforestation (A&R) mitigation projects. However, few A&R projects have been approved, representing only 0.3 percent of the anticipated CDM portfolio by 2012.^b

^a For full text of the Kyoto Protocol, see http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php.

^b D. Huberman, "Status of International Negotiations and Voluntary Action with Respect to REDD" (draft paper for the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), (2009).

achieving carbon objectives when forest protection can only be secured through meaningful engagement with local communities. For decades, the international environmental discourse has recognized the link between forest conservation and poverty issues. As one analyst notes:

Following the Brundtland Report (Brundtland 1987) and the Rio 1992 conference, tropical conservation gradually headed in a more people-oriented direction. The trend reflected the conventional wisdom that alleviating poverty was the only way to conserve and protect the environment.⁸

While resident communities are often strategically positioned to restore and conserve local forests, some forest-dependent community leaders are doubtful that they will be able to secure fair and equitable benefits from REDD projects. Much depends on how much revenue is generated through carbon credits, who controls those funds, and how the money is

The international environmental discourse has long recognized the link between forest conservation and poverty issues

utilized. Past experiences with national reforestation funds in Indonesia and India are not encouraging, as finances were poorly utilized in terms of reforestation goals. To be effective, any new international fund would need to place a greater emphasis on using carbon revenues to build community forestry and alleviate poverty.

Benefit Sharing

Globally, there are an estimated 1-to-1.6 billion forest-dependent⁹ and indigenous peoples.¹⁰ Many are heavily reliant on forest resources for food, energy, timber, medicines, fibers, and other nontimber forest products that provide a modest income. Over the past century, much of the forestlands upon which they depend have been deforested due to agricultural expansion, unsustainable timber harvesting and illegal logging, or infrastructure expansion, such as road building or urban growth. Tenure rights and ancestral domain claims have not been recognized in many countries. While the growth of rural populations has certainly contributed to forest loss, much of the decline is directly driven by urban and industrial demands and by private investors. Forest peoples are gaining political leverage, especially in countries like India, Indonesia, Nepal, and the Philippines, and are demanding recognition of their tenure and ancestral domain claims, as well as the rights to participate in any future REDD initiatives. The nonprofit organization Forest Trends reported that the area of forestland officially owned or managed by local communities doubled between 1985 and 2000, representing 22 percent of all forests in developing countries.¹¹ Still, many indigenous groups remain skeptical that forest-dependent peoples will benefit from REDD initiatives.¹²

Channeling financial and technical support to the communities is challenging, as there are many other “stakeholders” who seek to benefit from the sale of future forest carbon credits. Asian forestry agencies are often justified in seeking a portion of carbon revenues for overseeing national projects and providing field support for subnational projects. Local governments may also require support to facilitate planning

and ensuring the territorial integrity of project sites. In addition, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), universities, and other civil society groups may require support to provide necessary technical guidance to community REDD participants.

The benefits of REDD projects for communities could include: (1) strengthened security of forest tenure rights through legal recognition under national legislation and international agreements; (2) increased revenues and/or grant funds that could support a range of forest management and community-development activities, such as sustainable agricultural programs, microfinancing, infrastructure development, and capitalization of the local economy; and (3) empowerment of local communities as equal stakeholders in multitiered agreements among forest-dependent communities, national governments, and international carbon markets.

Designing an equitable structure for the distribution of REDD project benefits will require transparent negotiation among stakeholders with varying degrees of political leverage. Politically disempowered communities must benefit from the projects and receive significant incentives to participate in forest protection and restoration activities. Attempts in some developing countries to decentralize the management of forest resources have done little to enhance the equitable sharing of those resources. To overcome the resistance of central governments to share forest benefits with communities and local governments, some researchers suggest it will be necessary to create “broad coalitions” that bring together diverse interest groups to promote transparent benefit sharing and access.¹³ This may be a key to the future of successful REDD financial management.

Tenure Rights

A number of international forums and coalitions for indigenous peoples have voiced concerns that REDD projects may jeopardize ancestral domain claims and tenure rights. Part of this concern stems from the incomplete process of negotiating forest claims in many developing countries. Most countries are still at an early stage of creating policies and legal frameworks

The area of forestland officially owned or managed by local communities doubled between 1985 and 2000

Most developing countries are still at an early stage of creating policies and legal frameworks to secure forest rights

to secure forest rights, and have only implemented such strategies in limited areas. In Asia, while most forestlands are claimed by national governments, they are yet to be demarcated. Even where demarcation has been completed, boundaries are often disputed by local communities. In Indonesia, tenure disputes over forestland have created social conflict for decades and fostered deforestation in the outer islands¹⁴ and Java.¹⁵ State forestry agencies have often failed to ensure the sustainable management of public forestlands, while indigenous groups and local communities continue to contest the claims of central government to these resources. Jeffrey Sayer, the former director general of the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR), comments:

In many countries, the most visible symptom of bad governance has been abuse of forest and land, and the lightning rod for expression of public dissatisfaction with corrupt governments has been the struggle for equity in access to natural resources.¹⁶

While some developing countries have undertaken national forest-sector reforms through community forestry, ancestral domain legislation, and decentralization,¹⁷ devolving control over valuable resources typically meets substantial resistance from forestry agencies and political actors who share in forest benefits.¹⁸ As a financial leveraging mechanism, REDD has the potential to facilitate structural reforms in the forestry sector that are already under consideration, but lack the political support to be effectively implemented. Whether this happens will likely depend on the size of the “carrot,” in the form of carbon revenues, and the effectiveness of the “stick,” in the form of REDD conditionalities and performance criteria. Countries with emerging national community forestry programs and supportive legislation may find that REDD projects provide the financial incentives required to allow forest-sector transitions to move forward.

Mitigating Drivers of Deforestation

The success of future national and subnational REDD programs, as well as community-based REDD projects, will be determined by their capacity to control

the powerful drivers of deforestation. In Cambodia, as in many developing nations, drivers operate at a number of levels and spatial scales, and assume diverse forms. Major drivers of deforestation in Oddar Meanchey Province, where a subnational REDD project is under development, include at least two forces operating at the international level, three at the national level, and six at the subnational level (see table 1). The extent to which these diverse forces can be contained will depend on the effectiveness of the respective mitigation strategies. Some drivers in the project area are currently causing very rapid deforestation, while others lead to a gradual degradation, all of which contribute to CO₂ emissions.

The fundamental strategy to slow deforestation and degradation in Oddar Meanchey involves supporting grassroots community efforts to conserve forests which had emerged before the REDD project was identified. Support includes providing legal recognition of forest management rights and responsibilities, technical capacity-building, and financial assistance. Community groups are being assisted to complete the six-step process mandated by the Forestry Administration, which leads to renewable, fifteen-year stewardship agreements. Part of the community forestry establishment process involves training local members to map and demarcate their forestlands. Local activities to be supported by the REDD project include forest patrols, fire control, assisted natural regeneration, fuel-efficient stoves, sustainable agricultural intensification, microfinance institutional development, and livelihood strategies. While community-based activities can effectively control fires, poaching, illegal felling, and small-scale encroachments within a confined area, external drivers, as well as activity-shifting and market leakage, must be addressed by stakeholders with greater political and policy leverage.

Senior Cambodian officials from the Forestry Administration discussed the project with the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries, as well as with military commanders, to secure political support and agreements that the project areas should not be allocated for other uses, such as economic land concessions and military bases. Cambodia is also actively exploring a national

Table 1. Major drivers of deforestation in Cambodia and Community Forestry Mitigation Strategies

MAJOR DRIVERS	MITIGATION STRATEGIES
INTERNATIONAL	
Commodity Markets —rapidly rising prices for timber, sugar, rubber, and palm oil	Controlling commodity prices is beyond the national and subnational project capacity.
Investment Capital —for commercial plantations and land speculation	Transboundary capital flowing into forestland development may be subject to national government control, especially related to policies on concessions to foreign firms or investors.
NATIONAL	
Military —military bases and roads for legitimate defense purposes, as well as support for illegal logging and encroachment on forests by soldiers	National defense needs will likely trump forest conservation, though more routine military demands on forests may be negotiated at the national level. A dialogue between forestry officials and military commanders may be required to resolve illegal activities.
Government Officials —local government officials engaged in illegal land sales and forest clearing	Transparent and public meetings between national government planners and local government officials can communicate the importance of protecting project areas from manipulation and illegal activities.
Economic Land Concessions —large tracts of forestland allocated to private-sector firms displace local residents and stimulate social conflict	Senior forestry staff and national REDD project directors need to be in close dialogue with key ministries and committees involved in issuing economic land concessions, as well as with long-term public land planning processes.
SUBNATIONAL	
Forest Fires —fires suppress natural regeneration of degraded forests, create carbon emissions from burning	Advise and monitor hunters, gathers, farmers, and other forest users who often start fires. Fire control strategies require funding, tools, and capacity building to maintain fire lines and suppress fires.
Migrant Encroachment —migrants seeking forestland to farm or resell	Educate migrants regarding community-protected forest territory, combined with patrolling, demarcation of boundaries, and sanctions for land clearing.
Land Speculation —forests are felled to establish a claim on land that is later sold or resold as land prices increase	Identify middlemen financing land grabs and report forest crimes to the police, local government, and forestry agency. Monitor areas. Patrols, boundary demarcation, and signage are also required throughout the project area.
Agricultural Expansion —population growth drives additional forest clearing for agricultural land creation	Develop plan, maps, and implementation strategy for community-based land use. Design and implement sustainable agricultural intensification project to raise productivity.
Illegal Logging —“high grading” of luxury woods causes ongoing forest degradation and loss of biomass	Limit access of illegal loggers with small tractors through patrols, trench boundary access points, identify agents, and gain support of forestry agency, police, and military.
Firewood Consumption —90 percent of fuel use derives from wood, with increasing demands from subsistence and commercial users	Introduce fuel-efficient wood stoves in early project phase, with gradual transition to liquid petroleum gas and solar.

REDD project with possible support from the World Bank's Forest Carbon Partnership Facility. While the project strategy includes ground-level activities to help communities restrain local drivers of deforestation and degradation, it also includes strategies for linking into such recent national community forestry programs and emerging national REDD initiatives to mobilize political support in the capital

to control higher-level threats to project forests. Ultimately, REDD could help finance community management of millions of hectares of threatened forests in Cambodia. With a time frame of 30 years or more, REDD projects could provide the long-term financial support needed to facilitate an important forest-sector transition to more sustainable forest management systems. A national REDD program

in Cambodia could create an enabling framework for local REDD projects to emerge across the country.

The Future of REDD

Currently, much of the international dialogue regarding REDD focuses on national carbon accounting systems (NCAS) that generate revenue to leverage forest and land-use policy changes. While there are tremendous advantages to monitoring carbon stocks on a national basis, it is doubtful that a top-down approach alone will adequately address many local drivers of deforestation and degradation. National REDD initiatives need to support subnational and community-based programs as well, especially emerging grassroots conservation initiatives. Through community forestry strategies, localized REDD programs could address the needs of the rural poor in ways that create tenure security, a prerequisite for forest conservation, while channeling financial resources into alternative livelihood activities.

While incentives for halting deforestation need to be incorporated into global agreements on climate change, there also is a need to fund and encourage the restoration of degraded forests through assisted natural regeneration. New “REDD-Plus” initiatives under consideration by policymakers could link projects that halt deforestation with projects that concentrate on forest restoration and sustainable forest management. Rules governing REDD need to support projects in countries with rapid deforestation like Indonesia and Brazil, as well as projects in nations with vast areas of degraded forests in need of regeneration, even if the deforestation and degradation occurred in the distant past. In India, over 21 million hectares of forests, mostly degraded lands, are being protected and restored by some 500,000 villages, an initiative which is credited with helping to stabilize India’s forest cover after decades of degradation and deforestation. On Java, community-based agroforestry and forest gardens have contributed to an increase of 600,000 hectares of forest cover between 1985 and 1997.¹⁹ REDD and other forest carbon projects could catalyze such grassroots movements, providing governments and communities with the financial incentives to transition

New initiatives could link projects that halt deforestation with forest restoration and sustainable forest management

Community Forestry REDD Project, Oddar Meanchey, Cambodia

The Royal Government of Cambodia and the Forestry Administration, together with Community Forestry International and Terra Global Capital, submitted the world’s first avoided deforestation project to the Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS) and the Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Alliance (CCBA) in June 2009. Building on the commitment of the Cambodian government to support national community forestry through their Community Forestry Sub-Decree, the project involves 13 community forestry groups, comprised of 58 villages, which protect 68,696 hectares of forestland in the northwestern province of Oddar Meanchey. The project is expected to sequester 7.1 million metric tons of CO₂ over 30 years.

The community forestry groups in this remote corner of Cambodia are highly motivated to protect local forests due to their heavy dependence on them for subsistence goods and environmental services. The project communities have allies in their efforts to protect threatened forests, including Buddhist monks and local NGOs. As one of the first REDD projects to be approved, the learning from this project will be invaluable.

to community-based forest stewardship. Restrictive rules on project eligibility and additionality, imposed by the United Nations Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), as well as the high cost of implementing forest carbon projects—which include methodology development, third-party certification, and marketing requirements—could limit the participation of hundreds of millions of poor, forest-dependent, and indigenous peoples in future REDD projects. If a global REDD initiative is to succeed, the rules and programs emerging from the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNFCCC COP 15) will need flexibility and financing to support community forestry initiatives in diverse contexts around the world. REDD presents opportunities and incentives both to slow deforestation by clarifying domain claims and to invest in conservation and restoration by providing tenure security. Creating an enabling global environment for community-based forest conservation initiatives is an essential step in stabilizing forest ecosystems and addressing global warming.

Notes

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- ⁸ Sven Wunder, "Payments for Environmental Services: Some Nuts and Bolts," CIFOR (Center for International Forestry Research) *Occasional Papers*, no. 42 (2005).
- ⁹ According to John Palmer of the UK Department for International Development, forest-dependent means "dependent on forest/woodland/tree-derived goods and services. The dependency includes water, fuelwood, shelter, medicinal plants and culinary herbs, nutritionally important forest fruits and other foods, timber, fodder, dry-season grazing, the broad suite of nontimber forest products (bamboos, rattans, gums, resins, latex, oils, etc.)." See "Numbers of Forest Dependent People: A Feasibility Study," by Calibre Consultants and the Statistical Services Center, University of Reading (May 2007): Appendix 10.
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