



DECODING REDD: Negotiating Forest Land-use Change

An Asia-Pacific Perspective

In many areas within the Asia-Pacific region, there are compelling short-term incentives to degrade or to convert forestland for other uses. A common example is poorly regulated timber markets, which provide financial rewards for logging that is inadequately managed, unsustainable, and often illegal. Other examples include poorly planned land conversion for mining, agriculture, and large-scale agribusiness plantations as well as spontaneous clearing by farmers.

For successful REDD+ programs, many current land-use patterns will have to change dramatically through the provision of more powerful, alternative incentives – largely financial – that promote sustainable forest management. To achieve this, identifying the underlying economic and governance situations that result in ‘perverse’ incentives is important so that the necessary changes can be identified, planned, and then implemented.

Nineteen participants from eight Asia-Pacific countries met in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan, Indonesia from 27 to 28 July 2009 to share regional experiences on changing forest land use, exchange ideas, and highlight lessons learned for future land-use planning in preparation for REDD+ implementation.

Key Conclusions

- Sustainable land use on a large scale can be achieved, even in highly contested situations.
- Protecting and improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent people are paramount, or it is likely REDD+ initiatives will fail.
- Incentives and benefit sharing must be fair and transparent for all stakeholders, especially for those who depend on forests for their subsistence and income.
- Market mechanisms alone are not enough to ensure appropriate land-use planning and implementation.



What is REDD+ ?

REDD without the plus focuses only on reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. REDD+ goes further by rewarding activities that improve forest health; including better forest management, conservation, restoration, and afforestation. Not only will this enhance carbon stocks, it will improve biodiversity, water quality, and provide other vital environmental services.

FOREST LAND-USE CHANGE

Approximately 20% of global CO₂ emissions are generated from deforestation and forest degradation – roughly the same amount as the global transport sector. Land use, land-use change, and forestry¹ are therefore of major significance to climate change, and efforts to restrict climate change to acceptable levels will not succeed unless more sustainable forest land-use patterns and management can be achieved.

Current land-use planning, policies and practices will need to be fundamentally transformed in countries that seek to enact REDD+ agreements. These agreements will need to redress the imbalance between forest exploitation and conservation in favor of improved forest management practices. A shift in this balance will impact upon many productive and extractive activities apart from forestry, such as mining, agriculture, and plantations. REDD+ is likely to lead to major shifts in the location, type, and intensity of numerous rural activities, and consequently livelihoods. Stakeholder involvement will be essential to ensure that land-use changes result in equitable and sustainable outcomes.

The financial incentives or market mechanisms developed under REDD+ agreements will not be the sole drivers of land-use patterns. Land-use plans, policies, and practices in the Asia-Pacific region are as complex and diverse as the region itself. Land-use planning and policies at community, local, and national levels will play a critical role in guiding and directing REDD+ incentives towards smarter land-use planning, policies, and outcomes. This should help to reduce pressure on high conservation value forests (HCVF), along with the use of non-forest lands for productive activities such as plantations. Such outcomes must be carefully planned and not left to market forces alone.

¹ Commonly referred to as LULUCF in REDD discussions.



LAND-USE CHANGE AND FORESTRY CASE STUDY LESSONS

To highlight some of the key issues, challenges, and lessons learned from negotiating major change to forest land use, case studies from Australia, China, Indonesia, and Vietnam⁴ were shared and discussed during the workshop. Although these countries have very different approaches to land-use change, the discussion drew out a number of commonalities.

Three key themes emerged:

- Strengths and weaknesses of land-use ***policy and practices***
- Opportunities and constraints for ***stakeholder participation***
- **Environmental and social impact** of forest land-use change

Land-use Policy and Practice

The case studies demonstrated that it is possible to balance stakeholder interests and reconcile issues of scale, even in highly contested situations. Several strengths and weaknesses were apparent in the processes used for developing land-use policies and practices.

Strengths

Decentralization: Decentralization was generally considered to be beneficial given its potential to create a more enabling environment for improved multi-stakeholder participation. However, this was only the case when the government relinquished control over the land-use planning approval process in a planned and sequenced way. This must be backed by efforts to enhance the capacity of local communities and their institutions for natural resource conservation and management.

Participation drives policy: Increasing the quality of participation enhanced community interest in the sustainable management of land resources. Community support increases the likelihood of legislative change. This, in turn, provides a crucial backbone for land-use reform and typically indicates political endorsement. This is required to ensure that adequate funding and resources are available for the implementation of planned land-use change.

An independent body: The Australian case study demonstrated the value of creating an independent body to mediate different interests and seek compromise. Third parties can help to identify clear policy criteria and direction, especially in highly contested cases. Where independent bodies were not established, changes towards sustainable land-use management could not be made without significant change in the organizational culture of the institutions involved in land-use planning and forestry.

Balanced, integrated policy: Policy implementation can only be effective if it balances the interests of all stakeholders, and continues to protect the interests of vulnerable forest-dependent communities. Integration between different scales can also help fuse scientific with local knowledge. In order to ensure that policy and practice remain flexible to local situations, the case studies emphasized the role of transparent reporting and review. In the most successful examples, policy was informed by practice – learning and responding to the experience of stakeholders over time improved negotiation and management.

³ Available at <http://www.recoftc.org/site/index.php?id=693>



Weaknesses

Scaling-up local thinking: The Indonesian case study demonstrated the difficulty of scaling-up local-level knowledge to district-level planning. Large-scale planning increases the potential for elite-dominated decision making. This risks developing a 'one-size-fits-all' top-down policy that may not match the full range of grassroots priorities.

Institutional constraints: Overlapping government department responsibilities, inter-sectoral conflict, and outdated institutional arrangements can result in confusion, apathy, and poor motivation for all stakeholders. This increases the risk of inadequate reporting, reviewing, and monitoring, resulting in a lack of transparency and accountability. Corruption erodes trust, which is especially problematic in locations where land tenure arrangements are unclear and/or contested. Lessons learned from China and Indonesia highlight the importance of accompanying devolved authority with sufficient resources for capacity building.

Stakeholder Participation

Planning for land-use change increases the need to consult and negotiate with stakeholders to achieve desirable outcomes. This presents new opportunities and constraints.

Opportunities

Establishing participation as a best practice: Stakeholder participation and consultation are becoming regular thanks to international debate, donor requirements and principles, and the demands of social movements and human rights groups. Indeed, lack of consultation with stakeholders in land-use decision making is now rare. There is now widespread acknowledgement among policy-makers that reallocation of productive forestland to protected status must be accompanied by adequate social security and alternate livelihood provisions for local people who are dependent on the forest or the local forest economy.

Promoting a sense of ownership: Local development strategies can provide a useful tool for enabling stakeholder participation in land-use decision making, and give them a sense of ownership over these strategies. However, such strategies may not always be beneficial for all stakeholder interests. Indeed, the exclusion of some stakeholders may be formalized through such strategies.

Practical benefits: The case studies demonstrated that participation and dialogue between grassroots stakeholders and land-use planning officials can also:

- Provide opportunities for transparent data sharing, facilitated by advances in information technology.
- Clarify trade-offs and benefit sharing, making the process of land-use change easier to navigate.
- Contribute to alignment of national strategies and local priorities, and establish a common position.

Constraints

Low capacity to participate: Stakeholder capacity is often impeded by lack of information, weak skills, or poor knowledge. Strengthening capacity will require time and resources that may not be readily available. Certain stakeholders may be unable to conceptualize beyond their own borders, or be biased against other stakeholders based on negative publicity or perceptions.

Nominal participation: Participation can be passive, or be invited only as a token gesture rather than being meaningful. Outcomes and resolutions from participatory processes may not be recognized in final land-use plans; this can result in disillusionment, dissatisfaction, and conflict.

Lack of 'honest brokers': Balancing the range of stakeholder interests in land-use requires a high level of specialized expertise that may not always be available. Facilitators or mediators of participatory processes may lack the capacity to build consensus among diverse actors. This can be compounded by social, gender, language or other barriers to communication.



Sustaining participation: Achieving effective and sustainable land-use management is a long-term process, and requires ongoing participation. However, loss of stakeholder interest over time, a lack of follow-up on behalf of relevant agencies or shortage of funds can negate this. Stakeholders may also change over time, so follow-up and ensuring continuity is important for ensuring past agreements remain relevant.

Environmental and Social Impacts of Forest and Land-use Change

The case studies indicated that significant forest land-use change has both positive and negative impacts on the wider biophysical, institutional, and social environments.

Positive Impacts

Generation of new knowledge: Planning for significant land-use change can immediately generate large volumes of data and information, providing the impetus for greater understanding of the potential impacts of land-use options. The generation and analysis of this data can help to develop improved planning processes and land-use management.

Clarification of land tenure: Resolution of land tenure has the potential to help improve incomes for smallholders or reduce inequalities between stakeholders. Reduced poverty and inequality may then reduce pressures on natural resources. However, to achieve these outcomes, planners need to guard against elite capture (see Negative Impacts).

Enhanced environmental services: Effective land-use planning can be employed to reduce deforestation, enhance biodiversity conservation, and maintain other environmental services. In particular, soil and water quality may be improved. Such benefits can enhance awareness of the environmental value of sustainable land use.

Long-term livelihood benefits: Many positive short-term impacts can be consolidated over the long term. In addition, more skilled jobs, wealth, knowledge, and capacity may be built among stakeholders enabling greater holistic management by the various sectors that impact upon forested areas in the long term.

Negative Impacts

Increasing the rich-poor divide: Elite capture of benefits during land-use negotiations is a risk in many countries. Likewise, one case study demonstrated that while there is potential for participatory land-use change to alleviate poverty, this link was not guaranteed. Should benefits from land-use change fail to materialize for local stakeholders, it is likely that poverty will remain and deforestation and degradation will continue.

Adverse social outcomes: Clear and strong land and forests rights do not automatically result in positive social outcomes. Social upheaval and dislocation can occur, resulting in forest loss and degradation elsewhere. Uncertainty over outcomes, especially in the case of livelihoods, can lead to inertia, resistance to change or even conflict.

High initial costs: The high costs of negotiating change may reduce the net material benefits from SFM and thus the availability of incentives to encourage such management. If this is not overcome, any reconfigured land-use management may not result in increased income or enhanced equity.

Environmental damage: Inappropriate planning and policies may lead to an imbalance of protection versus production forests. This can increase illegal logging, particularly in protection forests, if benefits for forest-dependent communities are limited. Changing land-use practices can also spur short-term exploitation if forest-dependent stakeholders feel that their livelihoods may be threatened, or if exploitation becomes a more profitable alternative.

LAND-USE CHANGE: ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS OF REDD+

Many of these key lessons have implications for the development of REDD+ agreements. As defined under REDD+, greater incentives will be available at the macro-level for the preservation of forest health. However, to be effective, these incentives must be equitably distributed between national, district, and local levels. Workshop participants considered the potential implications of land-use change under REDD+ in their own national contexts in order to identify appropriate strategies and implementation tools that will help to facilitate both climate change mitigation and adaptation.

REDD+ Strategy Development

Participants understood that REDD+ strategies must arise from the coordination and intersection of national and sub-national policies on land use and climate change. Furthermore, well-aligned policies depend on well-coordinated institutions within a government. In turn, this coordination depends on information quality and flow, and the degree of participation – especially at the grassroots level.

The success of REDD+ will depend on the extent of local people's involvement and consultation. Effective strategies to ensure local views are built into land-use change include:

- Documenting the effects of land tenure change on local livelihoods.
- Recognizing that, at the household level, REDD+ benefits are likely only to supplement other incomes. REDD+ strategies should therefore complement rather than replace local income-generating activities, and at the very least, compensate for any lost income faced by forest users and potential investors resulting from land-use change.
- Ensuring availability of funds for REDD+ at the global level.
- Capacity building for meaningful participation.

The case studies demonstrated that consensus on large-scale land-use change can be achieved. However, secure long-term financial and human resources are needed to realize this opportunity. Priority should be given to deploying these resources at the local levels where the majority of costs are likely to be incurred.



REDD+ Implementation

Participants considered improved governance to be an essential requirement for the practical implementation of REDD+, drawing on past experiences of planned land-use change within the region. A stable and just governance structure is required to ensure that appropriate policies are implemented and that agreed incentive structures are maintained, as long as they produce the desired outcomes. Again, this will require substantial and reliable flows of resources to local levels.

All elements of a REDD+ implementation framework must be flexible and responsive to changing needs and circumstance, and complex challenges. Capacity building for REDD+ implementation should be addressed in two ways:

- 1) Building a basic understanding of climate change concepts and REDD+ amongst planners, policy-makers, and all affected stakeholders.
- 2) Equipping forest users with the necessary skills to monitor and manage forests more effectively and access livelihood alternatives.

Climate Change Adaptation: Strategies and Plans

Climate change adaptation is another major priority for Asia-Pacific countries, due to the region's vulnerability to the damaging effects of global warming. A successful REDD+ strategy must therefore be closely aligned with national climate change adaptation plans. Like REDD+, these plans will influence and be influenced by extensive changes in land use, as agricultural patterns change, rainfall patterns fluctuate, and populations shift. Successful adaptation is unlikely to be *ad hoc*, and will require holistic and inter-sectoral coordination and integration into socio-economic development plans.

Once more, participants stressed the importance of good governance for successfully integrating land-use and climate change adaptation strategies. Governments should act now to ensure that policies, institutions, and populations are prepared for the inevitable changes. They should also initiate long-term monitoring of the response of both forest ecosystems and associated populations to these changes; this will identify how forest-management strategies must adapt to maintain sustainability and build resilience.

KEY MESSAGES FOR POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

It has been demonstrated in the Asia–Pacific region that large-scale land-use change can be achieved, while successfully addressing many of the common challenges that affect both the planning of land-use change and REDD+ implementation. Building upon this key conclusion, participants formulated the following messages for national policymakers and international-level climate change negotiators.

National Policymakers

- REDD+ implementation will require up-front and ongoing investments in both human and financial resources. This is also a key issue for international climate change negotiators.
- Potential REDD+ revenue must not come at the expense of the benefits that forests currently provide to local governments, communities, and enterprises. For sustainable outcomes, local stakeholders must enjoy better livelihoods than those provided by current land-use patterns. Alternative livelihood opportunities must be developed to supplement REDD+ incentives.
- REDD+ can contribute to biodiversity conservation and the maintenance of environmental services. This should be considered in relation to national commitments to the Convention of Biological Diversity.
- REDD+ is unlikely to be successful without secure and equitable land-tenure systems, allowing local stakeholders to meaningfully influence negotiations for land-use change.
- REDD+ involves risks for local stakeholders as well as potential benefits. Independent mediation between governments and local stakeholders will be required to mitigate risks, negotiate benefits, and build trust.

International Climate Change Negotiators

- The interests of Asia-Pacific countries in climate change negotiations are closely aligned. A common regional negotiating position for REDD+ will enhance regional influence, while acknowledging the diversity of national contexts.
- Negotiators should use the existing evidence from the region – that negotiated large-scale forest land-use change is possible – to inform and strengthen the position of REDD+ in negotiations.
- International consensus and high-level political commitment to REDD+ is necessary to achieve the desired outcomes.
- The sustainability of any REDD+ mechanism will be best ensured by including provisions in international agreements that encourage the creation of enabling conditions at national levels for improved forest governance through enhanced stakeholder participation and capacity building.



DECODING REDD 2009 WORKSHOP SERIES

As an international organization focused on people and forests, RECOFTC is concerned with the impact of forest policies and practices on the livelihoods and well-being of forest-dependent people.

Together, RECOFTC and the Nature Conservancy-led Responsible Asia Forestry and Trade (RAFT) program are building a network of government and civil society representatives from Asia and the Pacific to develop and share knowledge and emerging experience on this important climate change strategy.

In 2009, the 'Decoding REDD' workshop series will focus on unresolved issues, feeding expert knowledge and opinion into national climate change strategy discussions, and into key UNFCCC meetings leading up to December's COP-15, where final decisions on REDD will be made.

For further information please contact Ben Vickers, RECOFTC climate change focal point (ben@recoftc.org) or visit RECOFTC's website www.recoftc.org



DISCLAIMER: The findings of this workshop represent the group as a whole and are not necessarily reflective of individuals, their respective organizations or of RECOFTC, USAID and TNC.



RECOFTC

PO Box 1111, Kasetsart Post Office

Bangkok 10903, Thailand

Tel: +66 (0)2 940 5700

Fax: +66 (0)2 561 4880

Email: info@recoftc.org

Website: www.recoftc.org