



Forests, climate change, and equity in Cambodia

REDD+ equity challenges and solutions according to national stakeholders

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Overview

- Equity has featured prominently in international climate change discourse since the establishment of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992. Looking forward, equity is expected to be of even greater relevance in this year's hoped for landmark climate agreement, to be finalized at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris.
- Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) remains a focal point of global debate at the intersection of forest and climate change policy. While the exact financing mechanism for REDD+ has yet to be determined, it is clear that demonstrating equity will be an essential part of accessing REDD+ payments and financing in the future.
- At the national level, Cambodia recognizes the importance of equity for ensuring an effective REDD+ framework. Therefore, this brief is designed to present key REDD+ equity challenges as identified by national policy makers and other stakeholders in Cambodia and potential solutions to address those challenges. By highlighting national equity priorities identified during a workshop held in advance of COP21, we aim to ensure that future capacity development efforts are directed where there is the greatest need and national buy-in.
- Priority REDD+ and forest governance equity elements identified in Cambodia include: participation and decision-making, governance and regulations, and access to information.

Equality of opportunities means that all people should have equal rights and entitlements to human, social, economic and cultural development, and an equal voice in civic and political life.

Equity of outcomes means that the exercise of these rights and entitlements leads to outcomes that are just and fair. (Adapted from DFID 2000)

Forests and REDD+ in Cambodia

In order to understand the development of REDD+ in Cambodia and related equity concerns, it is important to understand the context of the nation's forest sector. In 2011, 46.4% of greenhouse gas emissions in Cambodia were the result of land-use change and deforestation (FAO 2011), and over the last 20 years the country has experienced the loss of roughly 2.85 million ha of forest (FAO 2010). Between 2005 and 2010 the annual change in forest area in Cambodia was -1.2% and, as of 2011, 57% of land area in Cambodia was forest area (recent estimates suggest that forest cover fell to 51.5% in 2014). During those years (2005-2010), Cambodia reported the highest rate of deforestation in the Greater Mekong Subregion (Costenbader et al. 2015).

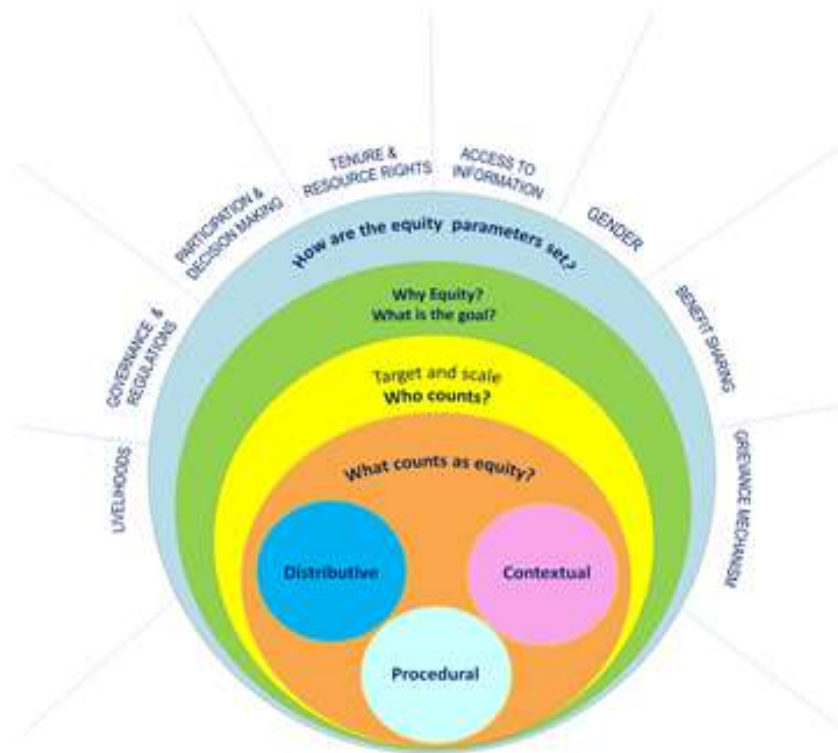


Figure 1. RECOFTC's Equity Framework (Amended from McDermott et al., 2013)

At the same time, Cambodia has taken a number of steps to facilitate reforestation and encourage the sustainable management of existing forest cover, including the development of REDD+ pilot sites, policies and programs. In 2011, the country's Readiness Plan Proposal (R-PP) to the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) Participants Committee was approved, along with its UN-REDD National Programme Document. Cambodia's National REDD+ strategy is currently being finalized following intensive stakeholder consultations; and a number of REDD+ pilot sites, including the Seima Protection Forest and the Southern Cardamoms Protection Forest projects, have been developed. Further, community forest management, broadly speaking, has become an important part of Cambodia's national forest management strategy - in recent years progressive legislation has advanced both the titling of communal indigenous lands and community timber collection and extraction (to varying degrees based on tenure regime).

REDD+ equity challenges and solutions in Cambodia: voices from the field

Despite the longstanding global emphasis on equity in climate change discourse, the term has traditionally been understood with regards to international equity, or the allocation of emission reduction responsibility among countries. However, in the context of forest-based responses to climate change, stakeholders are increasingly noting the importance of equity at national and subnational levels (Di Gregorio et al. 2013). For example, Parties to the UNFCCC acknowledged a number of national and subnational equity dimensions at COP16 with the adoption of the Cancun Agreements, which outlined

seven specific REDD+ safeguards including respect for indigenous and community rights, transparent and effective forest governance, and full and effective participation (Chapman et al. 2015). And, despite the potential for REDD+ to positively contribute to strengthening equity in forest governance, observers in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond have noted how REDD+ may result in the displacement of rural communities, exacerbate economic disparities, and lead to corruption and financial fraud (Barr and Sayer 2012).

Table 1. Defining the eight equity elements in forest governance (based on the RECOFTC Equity Framework, Figure 1)

| Element | Definition |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Access to information | Because forest-based communities are typically geographically isolated, additional efforts are often needed to ensure information reaches communities in a timely fashion and in a form (including language) that is easily understood |
| Benefit-sharing | Requires deciding upon an incentive distribution mechanism that rewards inputs fairly (while recognizing that REDD+ is results-based) and does not penalize those who have historically managed their forests well |
| Gender | Women often bear the disproportionate burdens of labor, poor health, illiteracy, and other barriers. Including women in REDD+ processes and interventions produces greater positive impacts, benefiting society at large |
| Governance, policies, and rules | The transparency and accountability of government to respond to the requirements of rights-bearers. Corruption, inaccessibility, and political insecurity all hamper policy implementation, and policies and rules are themselves often inequitable |
| Grievance mechanism | Even if policies are supportive and officials cooperative and effective, prompt and non-partisan judicial and/or other recourse mechanisms should be easily accessible to forest populations to ensure all equity elements are upheld |
| Livelihoods | The needs of local communities for food security, access to water, and/or other development activities, which result in higher household incomes and must be balanced while addressing drivers of forest loss |
| Participation | Procedural equity related to engagement with local communities in the forest landscapes in which they live, including obtaining Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) when making decisions related to inhabited forest landscapes |
| Tenure and resource rights | Secure rights and tenure are necessary for sustainable forest management, and include the right to access and extract forest products |

With a view to assessing these concerns, RECOFTC - The Center for People and Forests, in collaboration with Cambodia's General Secretariat for Sustainable Development, brought together national forestry and climate change stakeholders, including policymakers from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the Ministry of Environment, the Cambodian REDD+ Taskforce, civil society representatives and development partners, for a dialogue in Cambodia ahead of COP21. During the dialogue, national stakeholders identified priority equity concerns related to REDD+ and forest governance in Cambodia,

based on the eight elements listed in RECOFTC’s Equity Framework (see Figure 1 and Table 1). They outlined specific challenges related to each priority element and proposed solutions to address those challenges. Specifically, participants identified participation and decision-making, access to information, and governance and regulations as critical equity elements that need to be addressed in Cambodia. Their detailed responses are presented below:

Table 2. Challenges and solutions: participation and decision-making

| Challenges: participation and decision-making | Proposed solutions |
|---|--|
| <p>Communities have limited knowledge regarding rights and responsibilities related to forest management (i.e. community forestry (CF) management laws and regulations).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more opportunities for forest-based communities to engage in constructive dialogues with forestry officials, with a view to strengthening equity. • Community Forestry Management Committees (CFMCs) can serve as useful institutions for facilitating engagement between communities and local government. • Capacity development for preparing Community Forestry Management Plans (CFMP) may serve as an entry point to address this challenge. |
| <p>Barriers limit the participation of marginalized groups, such as women and youth, in CF management activities. In part, this is due to the higher labor burdens placed on poor and marginalized community members, which make participation in consultations and other meetings difficult or impossible.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations with marginalized groups must occur prior to REDD+ intervention activities, in order to ensure that Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) has been obtained, and to allow these groups to influence the scheduling of activities and meeting times. • Linkages between CF and livelihood enhancement must be prioritized in order to encourage the participation of marginalized groups. |
| <p>Lack of perceived incentives for participation in CF meetings and decision-making processes.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All CF consultations, meetings, etc., must incorporate feedback and accountability mechanisms, and be linked to outcomes, allowing members to assess how participation responds to their interests, needs and priorities. • It is important for officials and decision-makers to survey and understand what community interests and priorities are in order to develop appropriate incentives and activity designs. |

Table 3. Challenges and solutions: access to information

| Challenges: access to information | Proposed solutions |
|--|---|
| <p>Forest-based communities and CF members often lack access to appropriate information on CF management (including information on their rights and responsibilities, their legal status according to specific ministries, available grievance mechanisms, and best land use practices).</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A set of simple, yet comprehensive, guidance materials for CF members should be developed. Attention should be paid to using clear language that villagers can easily understand and to the need for translation into minority languages if appropriate. • In addition to ensuring the dissemination of information from national and subnational levels of government to the community level, a focal person within the CFMC should be tasked with the responsibility of intra-community information dissemination. |
| <p>The remoteness of many forest-based communities and CF sites limits effective information sharing with government officials, extension officers, private sector representatives and other forest-based communities.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the capacities of institutions (e.g. CFMCs) to identify and advocate for community needs, which may include infrastructure development, enhanced market access and/or increased adaptive capacity to climate change. • CFMCs can provide an effective channel for community inclusion and information sharing on a broad range of issues. |

Table 4. Challenges and solutions: governance and regulations

| Challenges: governance and regulations | Proposed solutions |
|--|---|
| <p>Limited implementation and enforcement of forest-related laws due to a range of challenges including: inequitable, conflicting and overlapping regulatory frameworks, limited capacity of enforcement staff (including limited numbers), corruption, poor institutional collaboration, and a lack of buy-in from local communities.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation and enforcement of forest laws can be strengthened through greater investment in capacity development and financial support for local-level officials and enforcement officers. • Survey, identify and support community interests and participation in order to facilitate policy implementation. • Improve access to GIS and other mapping technologies. |
| <p>Overly bureaucratic and technical community forestry formation process.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify and enhance community forestry formation guidelines. • Seek opportunities to shorten the steps in the review and approval process for CF |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>Operational Plans.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and revise the existing CF planning legislation. • Develop the capacities of local communities to undertake as much of the initial CF application process as possible. |
| <p>Complex and conflicting legal and policy frameworks due in part to insufficient interagency and cross-sectoral collaboration. This creates a lack of clarity regarding appropriate land use management jurisdictions, rights and practices. Officials themselves often lack clarity in regards to jurisdiction due to overlapping sectoral policies.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review, analyze and harmonize legal and regulatory frameworks. • The roles and responsibilities of governmental agencies should be more clearly delineated and communicated. • Systematic mechanisms for the coordination of different sectoral agencies should be encouraged. This may take the form of inter-ministerial working groups and committees (e.g. the REDD+ Task Force) or strategic topical events that aim to facilitate interagency exchange. |

Capacity development for equity in REDD+: some targeted recommendations for Cambodia

While acknowledging that national governments as well as international partners have limited financial and human resources to draw on, this brief is designed to present several priority REDD+ and forest governance equity challenges and solutions proposed by national-level policymakers and stakeholders in Cambodia. The following recommendations for targeted capacity development efforts related to strengthening equity in REDD+ and forest governance draw on the results from the national pre-COP21 workshop.

Recommendations directly related to forest-based communities:

- Forest-based communities and CF members in Cambodia lack sufficient knowledge regarding forest management rights and responsibilities, and natural resource access and use. Therefore, Khmer and indigenous language community forestry management awareness-raising materials should be developed for community groups and disseminated widely. Further, these materials must be regularly reviewed and revised to reflect changing policies and regulatory environments.
- Simple assessment and decision-making tools should be developed and made available for forest-based communities, NGOs and local officials to systematically assess local-level land use priorities and aspirations. These tools should focus particularly on the needs and priorities of marginalized groups in order to address equity challenges.

Recommendations for sub-national forestry officials:

- Capacity development activities for sub-national forestry officials to strengthen facilitation and community outreach skills are needed. Specifically, officials require trainings and information-sharing networks on skills related to: participatory processes, assessing and supporting equity, negotiation skills, collaborative land use planning, and identifying interests as they relate to forest resources.

Recommendations for national policymakers:

- National policymakers must work to improve coordination and collaboration across sectors and governmental line agencies. Without guidance and direction from ministerial levels, meaningful coordination in local-level planning is difficult. Therefore, institutional efforts should first be made to establish functional cross-sectoral working groups at the national level.
- A review and analysis of the national policy and regulatory frameworks that impact the forestry sector is needed, along with the identification of strategies to harmonize land use-related policies. Capacity development activities are required to facilitate needed legislative revisions and future implementation.

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