DEV INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT University of East Anglia

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Global Environmental Justice

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REDD+: Justice effects of technical design

This briefing paper considers the justice implications of three core design features of REDD+: the scale of implementation, methodology for carbon measurement, and the distribution of benefits.

The paper argues that these features bear critical influence on the justices and injustices of local and national REDD+ actions. Global negotiators cannot consider these features as purely technical matters, they should view them together with the so-called safeguards in order to make REDD+ actions socially just.

1. REDD+ design and justice

The global REDD+ architecture involves ambitious attempts to achieve reductions in carbon losses and increases in carbon stocks in a socially just manner. The UNFCCC agreements contain important references to justice in relation to REDD+ actions including provisions for forest people's participation in local and national REDD+, recognition of forest people's particular significance as REDD+ stakeholders, and acknowledgment of Indigenous Peoples' collective identities.

Too often, global negotiators separate justice matters from the core design of REDD+, favouring effectiveness and efficiency over justice matters relegated to safeguards. This brief uses three core design features of REDD+: scale of implementation, the methodology used for measuring carbon and the nature of the benefits provided to forest managers to illustrate their justice implications.

2. Implications of REDD+ design features for (in)justice

While these features may appear purely 'technical' at first glance, they in fact have direct implications for the justices and injustices of REDD+ actions.

Implementation: national programs or decentralized local level initiatives?

The programme approach: Implementation of REDD+ in the form of programs carried out by national governments and centralized forest departments allows governments to establish national funds to receive global carbon finance, report national emissions to a global REDD+ institution, and allocate REDD+ actions and benefits within their territories. Supporters of this approach highlight the possibility that local-level project interventions may not lead to emissions reductions but simply shift emissions to other locations. However, it is possible that this approach may motivate central governments to emphasize national interests over local perspectives. The governments may have increased incentives to reassert control due to the increased monetary value of forests, feel compelled to assert national interests against global interventions, and affirm their technical superiority in dealing with the technocratic demands of REDD+.

The nested approach: Local level approaches enable the REDD+ architecture to provide a space for local actions where developers can manner and at the same time directly engage in global carbon finance, allowing for action at both local and national levels.

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Proponents of this approach point out that most countries lack the required institutional framework to implement a national program, and that local-level projects promise more rapid emissions reductions.

Much of the debates over the program versus nested approaches centre on the effectiveness of each approach in bringing about reductions in carbon emissions from forests. Concerns with effectiveness may work out in different ways. They may speak in favour of the nested approach and community involvement because forest degradation tends to be lower where local collective action and rule enforcement are more developed. Yet, they may also cause governments to prioritize a programme approach and support for (private or state-owned) companies in the hope for economies of scale.

Depending on the balance between national and global powers, REDD+ could increase the transparency of decision-making in forestry and make it more rule-based. Yet, it can also lead to the (re)centralization of forest governance and a turn-away from governance reforms, decreasing forest people's participation in forestry decisions.

The justice dimension: Changes in the distribution of decision-making powers between central governments, local governments and communities as well as modifications in the procedures used for decision-making over forests will affect the opportunities for forest people to participate in public decisions. If REDD+ proceeds through national programmes, it may also take many more years of capacity-building and other investments benefitting central governments and their international advisors until the first funds reach the local level.

Would remote-sensing based measurement be able to capture increases in carbon stocks in this smallholder-managed landscape? Source: Thomas Sikor

Measuring carbon: methodological implications

With REDD+ designed to provide payments to tropical countries on the basis of performance, that performance must be measured, reported and available for verification, a process referred to as MRV.

In the absence of affordable techniques to directly measure carbon emissions, efforts have concentrated on developing new remote sensing-based techniques for the quantification of forest carbon stocks. However, the problem with this measurement methodology is that accurate measurements of actual carbon stocks cannot be supplied and the partiality of this measurement methodology has direct implications for the distribution of REDD+ actions, forest people's participation in REDD+ and the recognition of their knowledge about forests and forest management.

It is possible for REDD+ to promote the involvement of villagers in carbon measurements as efforts to capture the process of forest degradation and enhancement

requires fine-grained techniques conducted by forest engineers or villagers. Danielsen et al (2013) show that participatory monitoring is more efficient than expert monitoring. While remote sensing is attractive to REDD+ decision-makers because it affords the scale of analysis required for a global initiative and national programs, the view it offers on changes in forest carbon stocks is a partial one.

The justice dimension: The partiality of measurement bears direct consequences on the kinds of forest management recognized under REDD+. It can lead to a hegemonic hold of remote sensing on forest measurement replacing other scientific and non-scientific ways to know about forests and forest management. This has direct implications for the distribution of REDD+ actions and can lead to an inequitable share of forest people's participation and insufficient recognition and utilization of their knowledge about forests and forest management.

	distribution	participation	recognition
scale of implementation	proportion of benefits reaching local-level actors	location and procedures of decision-making over forests	role of forest people's own collective bodies of decision-making and representation
carbon measurement	kinds of forest management included in REDD+	access to information, participation in forest monitoring	recognition of forest people's experiential knowledge
benefit distribution	distribution of responsibilities and benefits	participation in decisions about benefit distribution	kinds of social values that come to matter

Benefit distribution systems: benefits to whom and for whom?

Global negotiators have designed REDD+ as a global financial mechanism to distribute climate finance from industrialized nations to tropical countries. The expectation is that tropical countries will put in place benefit distribution systems to receive global finance, use it to incentivize emissions reductions by offering suitable selected 'benefits', and distribute the benefits at national and sub-national levels. The core issue of REDD+ benefits is who gets how much of the benefits disbursed under REDD+ actions, and who gets to participate in decisions about benefit distribution.

The vertical question: What share of REDD+ benefits is claimed by the central government, and what is made available to other actors, particularly forest people?

The horizontal question: In local level issues, what kinds of local actors receive REDD+ benefits, and who participates in decisions about their distribution?

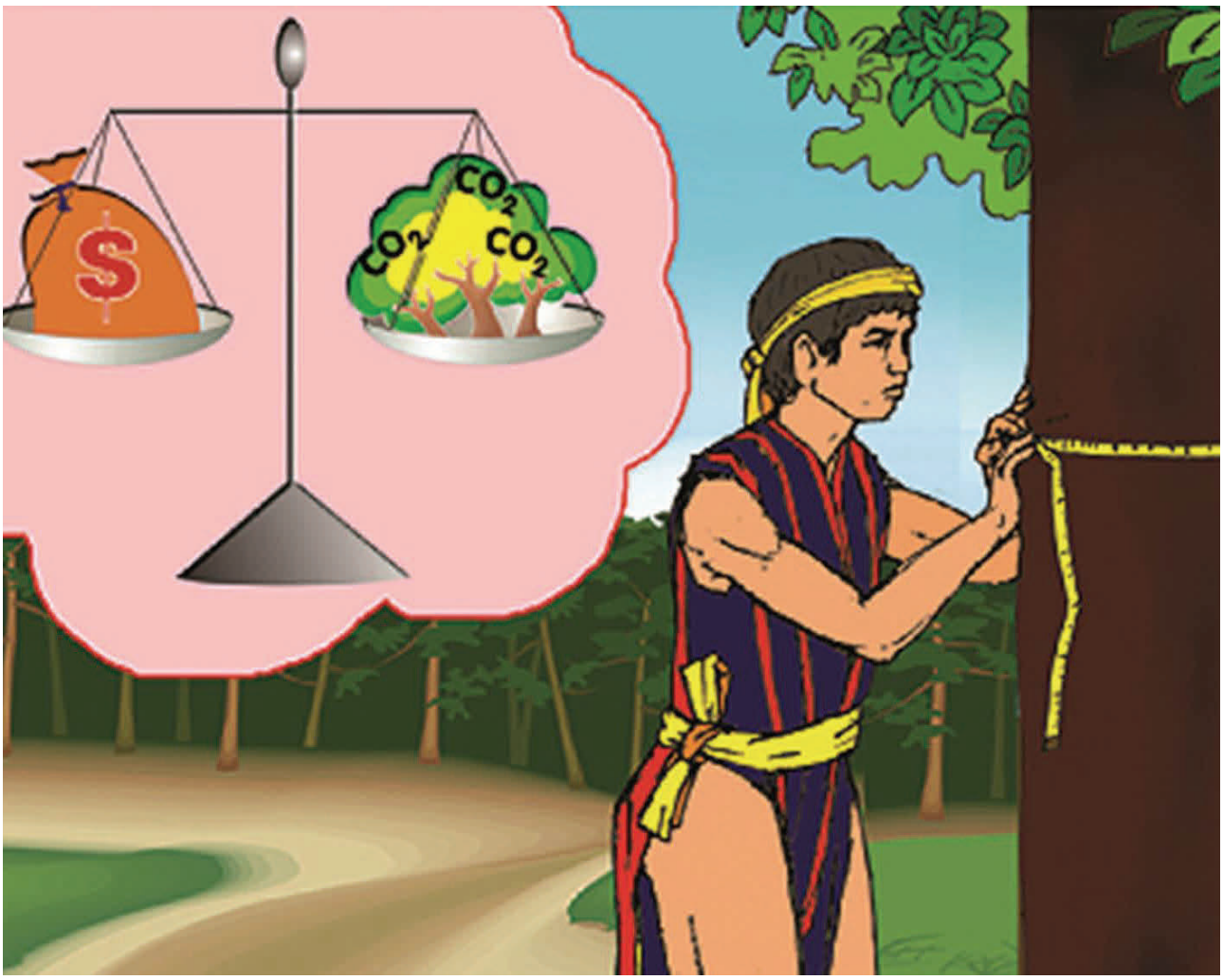
REDD+ benefits are not limited to their distribution among multiple actors and participation in decisions about distribution. They extend to the effects of new available REDD+ benefits on how people value forests. REDD+ affects not only the magnitude of benefits derived from forests, it also holds the potential to transform the values attributed to forests by forest people, professional forests, and national societies.

The justice dimension: The distribution of benefits most directly raises questions about what actors can receive, an apparent issue of distributive justice, and how the available benefits are distributed among them, touching on issues of decision-making and participation. Additionally, the creation of new carbon value through REDD+ involves an element of recognition of whose social values come to matter. Is it the new carbon value, or is it the values and visions asserted by particular actors in particular places?

3. Making REDD+ actions socially just

The three core features covered in this brief have direct implications for justice and pose direct consequences to the distribution of costs and benefits, participation in decision-making, and the recognition of particular identities. Justice matters cannot simply be separated from technical design features.

This technocratic discourse characterizing REDD+ may primarily serve to cement forest professionals and scientists' privileged positions. After all, forest management in practice is not solely about the effectiveness and efficiency of reducing carbon losses and increasing carbon stocks, justice is as important a principle in decision-making.



Is justice served if dollars balance out with carbon? Source: UN-REDD Programme in Vietnam

Further reading: Thomas Sikor, forthcoming, REDD+: Justice effects of technical design, in T. Sikor (ed.) The Justices and Injustices of Ecosystem Services, London, Earthscan.

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