

Unlocking Climate Change Mitigation

Local People Hold the Key to Healthy Forests



The 450 million people living in and around Asia-Pacific forests hold a vital stake in the success of REDD. For effective reductions in emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, such schemes must:

First Do No Harm. Local people's access, use, and management rights to forests must be protected. Special care must be taken to ensure that vulnerable groups – including indigenous peoples, the poor, women, and children – are not adversely affected.

Address Local People's Needs and Aspirations. Local communities and indigenous peoples must be fairly rewarded for the vital environmental services they provide.

Harness Local Knowledge and Skills. Local and indigenous people's experience and skills in forest management make them indispensable partners in REDD.

To unlock their full potential, forest mitigation measures must therefore:

- Reward responsible forest management by going beyond REDD to REDD+
- Secure stronger access, use, and management rights for local people
- Safeguard transparent, equitable, and accountable benefit sharing
- Ensure meaningful participation and effective governance systems
- Build necessary capacity at all levels



Forests and Climate Change Mitigation – Do Local People Hold the Key?

The *Penan*, a nomadic aboriginal people living on the island of Borneo, do not have a word for 'forest.' In a changing world, it remains simply their universe or home, and a store that provides for all their needs. They are among Asia-Pacific's 450 million forest-dependent people. In their daily struggle to make a living, local and indigenous communities rely on the abundance of forests: for food, clean water, medicines, firewood and timber as well as for fertile forest soils.

What will happen if this relationship is overlooked by negotiators attempting to craft a global scheme to make forest management a part of the solution to climate change? What will happen if such a scheme benefits the global community more than it does the local people who have the means to make it work? The logical answer is that it will likely fail.

Many failures in forest protection and biodiversity conservation have occurred because local people's needs, aspirations, skills, and knowledge were ignored. In recent years, we have learned that meaningful participation of local people is essential for sustainable forest management and to secure environmental services such as carbon storage.

Local people are not the only key players, but because of their sheer numbers and dependence on forests, they are the most important. If their traditional forest rights are threatened, they stand to lose the most. They have little to begin with. Major national and international initiatives aimed at forest conservation, such as reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD), must therefore not adversely affect forest-dependent people. 'Do no harm' must be a fundamental principle.



Deforestation and forest degradation contribute some 20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Forest-related mitigation measures, such as REDD, are widely viewed as practical and cost-effective interventions to slow global warming – as well as providing a host of other environmental services. Carbon financing is a promising new opportunity for maintaining and even improving the health of the world's forests and, if designed well, for reducing rural poverty.

The Thirteenth Session of the Conference of Parties in Bali in December 2007 recognized that *the needs of local and indigenous communities should be addressed when action is taken to implement REDD*. However, given that local people hold the key to forest-related climate change mitigation; 'do no harm' is not enough. Their needs must be fully met.

Throughout Asia and the Pacific, tens of millions of people manage millions of hectares of forests under formal and customary arrangements. In Nepal, 1.25 million hectares of forests are managed by 14,500 forest user groups – 33 percent of the population there manages 35 percent of the forests. Many of these were degraded only twenty years ago, but today they are once again healthy ecosystems contributing to both local livelihoods and the national economy.

What Can Be Done?

To ensure that local people work for REDD, and that REDD works for local people, we urge the following:

- Going beyond REDD to REDD+ so that good forest management can be rewarded. REDD+ will capture the full value of the forest sector's contribution to climate change mitigation and deliver benefits to managers who are already performing well.
- Local people's access, use, and management rights must not only be protected but need to be strengthened. This is essential for sustainable forest management and thus for REDD or REDD+. The rights, roles, and contributions of vulnerable groups – including indigenous peoples, the poor, women, and children – need to be recognized.
- Carbon-financing benefits for local people must be additional. They must expand, not replace, existing benefits. Adequate safeguards for transparent, equitable, and accountable benefit sharing are essential to minimize negative social impacts and enhance REDD's contribution to poverty reduction.
- Meaningful participation of local and indigenous peoples is vital. Free, prior, and informed consent; shared decision making; and proper transparency and accountability must be the minimum standard. This requires the strengthening of currently weak governance systems, building trust amongst partners, and a commitment, especially by the more powerful players, to listen and learn. Without this, conflicts are likely.
- Effective institutions, knowledgeable decision makers, and skilled forest managers are essential. These require capacity building at all levels, particularly at the grassroots.

In other countries too, local and indigenous communities effectively manage forests, not only using forest products but also ensuring plentiful resources for future generations. The benefits have been important globally too, such as increased biodiversity and carbon sequestration. Thus we need local and indigenous knowledge and skills in REDD. In fact, their proven ability to restore forests is of even greater importance in REDD+, which includes enhancement of carbon stocks.

REDD will rely on information, particularly on how much carbon is locked up in forests and how this changes over time. Sophisticated technologies such as remote sensing are essential, but inadequate without complementary ground-based surveys. Twenty-five years of community forestry proves that local people have the knowledge and skills to regularly deliver cost-effective forest inventories, including monitoring of carbon stocks.

Local people's skills in forest management and in monitoring forest conditions make them indispensable partners in REDD. They clearly hold the key.

In recent decades, local livelihoods, particularly those of indigenous peoples, have been severely affected by unsustainable forest management and the destruction of millions of hectares of natural forests. They have often been the victims of development strategies in which they had no say. Today, the global community is paying the price for its excessive behavior. It is time for change. National and international forestry initiatives must recognize what local and indigenous peoples can offer.

While not all forest-dependent people view forests as their universe, they do hold a key to sustainable forest management and thus to forest-based climate change mitigation. Any form of REDD mechanism must recognize this simple fact, or REDD will fail.



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.



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