

Policy brief



Forests, climate change, and equity in Lao PDR

REDD+ equity challenges and solutions according to
national stakeholders



Norad



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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 central in global conversations 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 essential for accessing REDD+ financing in the future.
- Lao PDR 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 Lao PDR 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 equity issues identified in Lao PDR include: benefit sharing, participation and decision making, and livelihoods.

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 Lao PDR

In order to understand the development of REDD+ in Lao PDR and related equity concerns, it is important to understand the context of the nation's forest sector. Lao PDR experienced annual forest cover losses of 134,000 ha from 1992 to 2002. However, while national forest cover was reduced to about 40% in 2010, the Government ambitiously aims to achieve 70% forest cover by 2020 (UN-REDD Programme 2015). To provide the financial and technical support to achieve these afforestation and reforestation objectives, Lao PDR has moved quickly to engage in a number of REDD+ activities since the mechanism emerged on its national agenda in 2007 (Lestrelin et al. 2013). Lao PDR submitted its Readiness Programme Idea Note (R-PIN) for REDD+ to the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) in 2008, established a cross-sectoral REDD+ Task Force, and had its REDD+ Readiness Preparation Proposal (R-PP) to the FCPF approved in 2012. Lao PDR was selected as a pilot country by the World Bank's Forest Investment Programme (FIP) and joined the UN-REDD Programme in October 2012.

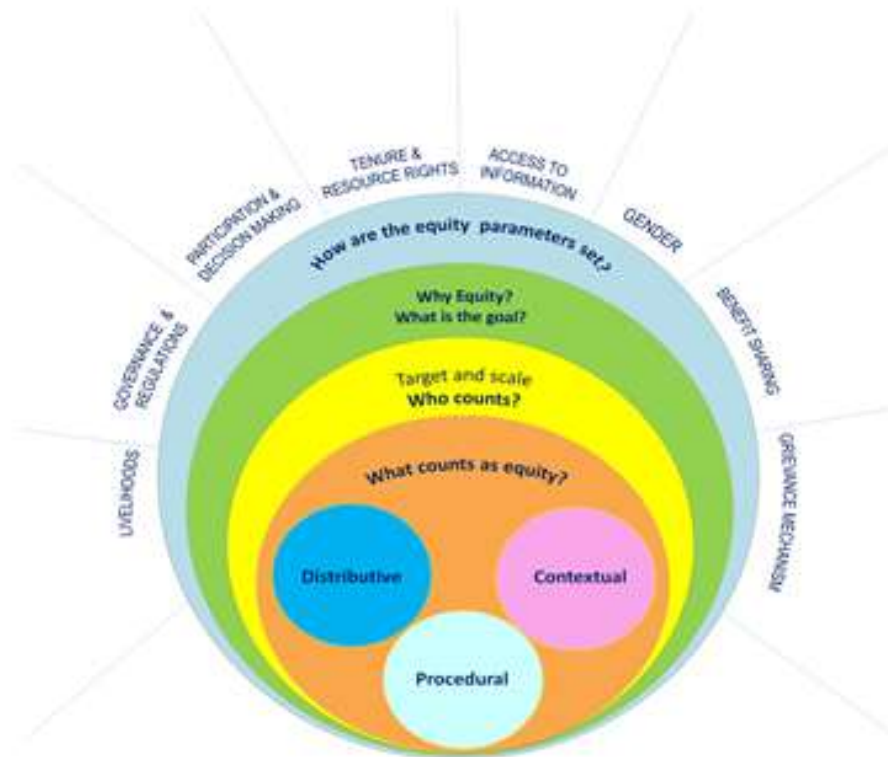


Figure 1. The RECOFTC Equity Framework (Amended from McDermott et al., 2013)

REDD+ equity challenges and solutions in Lao PDR: 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 hope for REDD+ to positively contribute to strengthening equity in forest governance, observers in the Asia-Pacific region have recently noted the potential for REDD+ to 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

To address these concerns, RECOFTC - The Center for People and Forests, in partnership with the Department of Forest Resource Management (DFRM), hosted a dialogue on “Forests, Climate Change, and Equity ahead of COP21” in which national policymakers from the REDD+ Taskforce, the DFRM, and the Department of Disaster Management and Climate Change, as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations, identified priority REDD+ and forest governance equity elements in Lao PDR. The discussion was framed around the eight forest governance equity elements outlined in the RECOFTC equity framework (see Table 1 and Figure 1). The national stakeholders identified specific challenges related to those priority elements, and the proposed solutions to address those challenges, drawing on their practical experience with REDD+ policy and pilot activities such as the SUFORD and CliPAD projects. The key forest governance and REDD+ equity elements identified by stakeholders were: benefit sharing, participation and decision-making, and livelihoods (which is understood to be related to drivers of deforestation). Specific findings from the dialogue are presented below:

Table 2. Challenges and solutions: benefit sharing

Challenges: benefit sharing	Solutions	Notes
<p>Guidance, policies, and regulations for equitable benefit sharing are insufficient</p>	<p>Develop guidance and regulations on equitable benefit sharing related to forest-based products and services where needed and improve existing policies where no longer sufficient. Principles for strengthening equity in benefit sharing include: (1) regulations should be based, at least in part, on inputs and contributions; (2) regulations should be developed for compensation in cases of loss/damage; (3) and regulations should be strengthened to prevent unfair treatment and/or discrimination.</p>	<p>While policy provisions and regulations related to benefit sharing do exist, these mechanisms have not been equitably or consistently implemented, and related information dissemination and enforcement has limited coverage throughout the country</p>
<p>Implementation of existing benefit sharing regulations has not been effective or satisfactory at local levels</p>	<p>Newly developed and existing regulations need to be more effectively and broadly communicated, particularly in remote communities</p> <p>Cultural norms and existing communications techniques/pathways should be built upon. Namely, awareness raising should be based on established Buddhist approaches such as “moral education”</p> <p>Increase the accountability of relevant government authorities to ensure the effective implementation of policies and regulations</p>	<p>“Immoral practices” (such as corruption) have been noted related to benefit distribution and rule compliance (e.g. local elites have in some cases taken part in illegal logging or have been associated with suspected village fund embezzlement)</p>

Table 3. Challenges and solutions: participation and decision-making

Challenges: participation and decision-making	Solutions	Notes
Power dynamics, particularly as they relate to different ethnic groups and genders, inhibit equitable participation	Awareness raising to encourage a shift in the mindsets of both local-level officers and communities on the value and importance of equitable participation	Ingrained gender norms that discourage the participation and involvement of women are prevalent in some areas and among some ethnic groups
At community levels REDD+ and forest governance awareness, knowledge, and education is limited	Capacity development on participatory community outreach and engagement skills for local level officers and authorities	Participation varies based on education and awareness within and between communities
Some communities or groups are not able to comfortably communicate in the national language and/or live in remote and inaccessible locations	Improve the coordination and dissemination of information sharing strategies. Increase investment and develop strategies to improve communication with ethnic minorities and those living in geographically remote areas	Logistical challenges, particularly during the rainy season, can significantly reduce participation. Language comprehension is also an issue when village members are unable to communicate effectively in the national language
Consultations and meetings often conflict with seasonal farming obligations and other livelihood-related commitments	Establish programs aimed directly at promoting gender equity and empowerment	Scheduling meetings during particular times of the year (e.g. the rainy season, which coincides with rice planting) may limit participation and/or place an additional burden on community members
Poor information dissemination related to policies, regulations and other relevant developments		People are often unaware of their rights and civic responsibilities to participate and contribute to decision making processes
Communities lack the skills and capacities necessary to actively participate in standard outreach approaches	Invest in capacity development activities to train local (especially ethnic minority) community members to work as facilitators	This is closely related to the capacity development of local level outreach officers

<p>Few perceived incentives for community participation</p>	<p>Awareness raising on participatory processes and the benefits of active engagement in consultations and other activities to the community</p> <p>Demonstrate that inputs from the community are genuinely considered and incorporated in decision making</p>	<p>A lack of clarity on objectives and expectations, as well as the value of engagement, limits the attractiveness of participation</p>
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Table 4. Challenges and solutions: livelihoods

Challenges: livelihoods	Solutions	Notes
<p>Climate change impacts negatively affect livelihoods</p>	<p>Introduce new agricultural practices/technologies, such as high yield seeds, in order to raise agricultural productivity</p> <p>Raise awareness and provide trainings on updated agricultural techniques</p>	<p>Increasing unpredictability of rainfall and other climatic conditions are negatively impacting agricultural production, contributing indirectly to deforestation and natural resource over-exploitation</p>
<p>Previously employed agricultural practices are not suited to the current environmental and socio-economic context</p>	<p>Build the capacities of extension workers through, for example, the formation of cross-sectoral technical extension teams</p>	<p>Low yields and productivity are at least partially related to poor agricultural technologies and practices</p>
<p>Low productivity of traditional seeds and crops</p>	<p>Stabilize the prices of agricultural products and improve access to markets</p>	<p>Low productivity of traditional crops, combined with a rising cost of living and population growth, is contributing to the expansion of agricultural production into forest areas</p>
<p>Insufficient market information, agricultural extension programs, and market access</p>		<p>Linked to problems of accessibility and poor road infrastructure</p>
<p>Lack of access to modes of transportation and/or poor transportation</p>	<p>Prioritize investment in infrastructure to support local livelihoods and market access</p>	<p>The relationship between transportation infrastructure development and deforestation is</p>

infrastructure limits market access and livelihood productivity		complex. Deforestation often accompanies road construction, which some see as critical to livelihood equity and relieving pressures on natural resources. Infrastructure development must be accompanied with strong policies and enforcement to prevent illegal logging
Farmers do not have sufficient access to capital to invest in livelihood related activities	Prioritize the development of fair credit and microcredit schemes in rural and forest adjacent areas	Not provided
Land use classification and planning processes are incomplete	Urgently proceed with and complete cadastral processes and land use planning throughout the country, especially in remote areas and/or those vulnerable to deforestation	Not provided

Capacity development for equity in REDD+: some targeted recommendations for Lao PDR

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 Lao PDR. The following recommendations draw on the results of the Lao PDR pre-COP21 workshop and are intended to support more targeted and effective capacity development related to strengthening equity in REDD+ and forest governance.

Capacity development recommendations to support equitable benefit sharing:

- Technical and financial support for the further development of policies and regulations on benefit sharing, and monitoring and evaluation systems required to track benefit sharing impacts.
- Capacity development for current and future generations of relevant government actors on equity and benefit (and cost) sharing.

Capacity development recommendations to support meaningful participation and decision-making:

- Training and awareness raising activities for more effective and equitable information dissemination related to REDD+ and forest governance. This requires the sensitization of outreach officers on gender mainstreaming practices, approaches appropriate for working with

ethnic minority groups, and the use of local facilitators as liaisons between governmental bodies and communities.

- Develop systems to increase community incentives to engage in forest monitoring processes, management and protection.
- Awareness raising at the community level on benefits as well as strategies for engagement and participation in land use management and planning processes.

Capacity development recommendations for enhancing livelihoods:

- Given that much of Lao PDR's population is dependent on agriculture and forest resources for both income and subsistence, national policymakers and stakeholders recognized increasing agricultural productivity and natural resource-based product development at the community level as critical for the success of REDD+.
- Capacity development and support is needed for the development of alternative livelihoods that are not dependent on natural resources. This will require improvements to infrastructure, market accessibility and educational opportunities in remote, resource-dependent communities.

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