

Indigenous communities make a list of “do’s and don’ts” for forest conservation schemes



Customary land rights in Zambia are recognized through the power of chiefs to make decisions on land transfer. Photo by Jeff Walker/CIFOR

BOGOR, Indonesia (20 January, 2012)_Indigenous and community groups have made a wish-list detailing how schemes that aim to reduce deforestation and forest degradation should work for those living in and amongst the forest.

The recommendations, formulated at a meeting on the sidelines of recent the UN climate talks in Durban are timely in the light of the [watering down of social safeguards](#) in the REDD+ text decided upon at the summit.

“The main message of the debate was the rejection of top-down policies that undermine community governance and community values,” said Simone Lovera, Executive Director of the Global Forest Coalition, a worldwide network of more than 50 non-governmental organisations and Indigenous Peoples’ Organisations.

“This is particularly relevant for the payments for environmental services schemes that are currently elaborated as part of REDD – these schemes were not (seen) as a form of positive support, but rather, several indigenous peoples pointed out they had undermined their community governance and value systems by introducing the notion that forests only have to be conserved when you are paid for it.”

Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) is an effort to create a financial value for the carbon stored in forests, offering incentives for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands and invest in low-carbon paths to sustainable development.

While support for the scheme has been strong amongst conservation groups and international institutions, many social movements argue that could be used as a way for rich countries to avoid cutting their own emissions by paying poorer countries to preserve their rainforest.

The UNFCCC's scientific sub-committee SBSTA proposed a "very weak" text on safeguards to protect local communities, indigenous peoples and biodiversity at COP17, said CIFOR scientist Louis Verchot. The text initially had strong requirements for collecting data and measuring impacts of REDD+ but had been softened to merely ensure developers report on how they are implementing safeguard measures.

While this may significantly lighten the load for developing countries to meet safeguards standards, "there's still a need to ensure that local communities are not being harmed", said Verchot.

The wish list addressed ongoing land-tenure issues, false and misleading claims that removed the rights of communities, empowerment and gender concerns. Some of the main outcomes are listed below.

Do recognise and effectively support indigenous land rights

Uncertainty over land rights is a common factor underlying deforestation and conflict in many developing countries. [In a speech last year](#), Kuntoro Mangkusubroto, the head of the Presidential REDD+ taskforce in Indonesia spoke of the ongoing issues of land tenure being faced by indigenous people living in the province of Riau in Sumatera.

"The Pangean community and an oil palm plantation group have had a conflict over a 583-hectare area since 1999, and mediation is still in progress," Mangkusubroto said in his address to the International Conference on Forest Tenure, Governance and Enterprise.

Since 1986, the area has undergone no less than 65 land re-allocations, often displacing and marginalising the people who depend on the forests for their livelihoods. Though community rights to customary land are becoming increasingly recognised through community-based participatory mapping, resolving these complex issues of land tenure will be vital if Indonesia is to sustainably manage its resources and keep people out of poverty.

Don't convince communities to sign false or unfair Payment for Ecosystem Services agreements as part of REDD+ schemes

In a [recent study](#) of the 10 worst REDD-type projects of all time, an indigenous leader was criminalised for defending his people and territory from a carbon cowboy who duped a community in the Peruvian Amazon into signing a REDD-type contract. Written in English, the contract granted the carbon trader total control the Matsés people's land, way of life, intellectual property, forests and carbon and threatened to sue anyone who denounced the scam.

“That is why many indigenous communities use the term ‘survival’, which seems a strong term, but some communities do face cultural extinction due to these new commercial schemes, even when they do not directly threaten their lives,” Lovera said.

Do support campaigns against destructive forest projects

[According to Elinor Ostrom in a recent paper](#): “Global solutions’ negotiated at a global level, if not backed up by a variety of efforts at national, regional, and local levels, are not guaranteed to work well.” The need for involvement of local actors in forest governance at multiple levels is becoming apparent as schemes like REDD+ are being rolled out across the world.

[A 2010 special governance issue of *Forests*](#) edited by CIFOR scientists argues that REDD+ must learn to integrate multi-level governance institutions such as government authorities, local community governance regimes e.g. customary land use rights, and civil society in order to represent the interests and needs of people at the local level.

One way of engaging in forest governance processes is through [raising public awareness](#) through, for example, public hearings and demonstrations, compiling relevant informational databases, educating local and mass media to present objective and unbiased articles related to forestry, and developing plans for community forest management. According to Lovera, this is one of the most important premises for the successful development of the forest sector in the future.

Don’t involve private sector companies in REDD who were the ones that caused the environmental destruction in the first place

The workshop also found that indigenous groups often objected to REDD+ projects and policies funded through offsets from private sector companies who were also involved in projects that exploited their area’s natural resources.

“There is often a lack of trust between these communities and the private sector so there is an opinion that conservation projects funded by these same organisations may have an ulterior motive,” Lovera said.

Don’t use top down forms of support – especially those that ignore women’s rights

Women are more dependent on forest resources for the majority of their food, fuel and livelihoods, and are therefore more likely to take an active role in the protection of forests.

“Studies are increasingly showing that when women are included in forest management, they have had a positive effect on the sustainable management of forests,” said Esther Mwangi, CIFOR scientist and gender specialist.

“It makes sense that if they are involved in making decisions on REDD+, including in a share of the REDD+ benefits, they will feel incentivised to protect forest resources.”

A comprehensive report with the findings of the workshop will be published by the [Global Forest Coalition](#) in March 2012.

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