



WILL REDD+ LEAD TO WEAKER OR STRONGER ACCESS RIGHTS IN CAMBODIA?

A recent report by the Rights and Resources Initiative¹ provides a very positive picture of forest trends by announcing that several tropical countries that were once forest destroyers have turned themselves into reforesters, i.e. Brazil, China, Costa Rica, India, the Republic of Korea, and Viet Nam. A key reason for this miracle to happen, the report continues, were in most cases land tenure reforms that benefit poor forest-dwellers, although some countries have also been able to shift domestic timber production beyond their borders, which has helped, without doubt.

In many Asian countries forest rights of local communities and indigenous peoples have been strengthened over the last three decades. Unfortunately, most forests that have “handed over” by government agencies to local people for their management can only be described as quite degraded. In order to benefit from “their” new forests local people therefore have to shift into rehabilitation mode first, which provides few short-term benefits. REDD+ may provide help in this endeavor, if forest carbon stock enhancements can be verified and provide REDD+ revenues. However, there is also a concern that an increase in the monetary value of forests might encourage governments to recentralize forest management. This is apparently not the case in Cambodia as a recently published case study shows.

The Royal Government of Cambodia has shown increasing interest in REDD since about 2007. Several REDD+ pilot projects were initiated in 2008, the Seima Protection Forest (SPF) being one. It is implemented by the Forest Administration and the Wildlife Conservation Society. Realizing the importance of clear rights, the two partners identify legitimate traditional users in accordance with the Forestry Law and ensure they receive identity cards. People without cards can then be excluded. All communities in or near the SPF project site who have retained concepts of collective land ownership and other traditional practices are also eligible to apply for indigenous communal land titles. Most communities have done so and have experienced that their ability to deal external threats to their lands has increased. The authors of the case study are fairly confident that the SPF project will further strengthen than undermine local forest access and agricultural land tenure. As this is extremely important to the resident population, the SPF project focuses on enhancing resource security as a more dependable benefit than financial incentives. Target communities appear to be satisfied with this approach, at least for the time being.

Overall, this is very good news for REDD+ and local people. There are two small caveats. First, each village signs a “Community Agreement” that clarifies carbon ownership, confirms community consent for the project and ensures that the voluntary, revocable nature of the agreement is clear. This means that communities have the right to terminate the agreement without liabilities, placing them in a position to demand equitable treatment at each stage of project implementation. In the first instance this looks laudable, but the implications regarding permanence are far from clear. Second, agreeing on land claims, physical demarcation and formal registration by the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction (MLMUPC) can take many years, which can be rather discouraging. However, overall Evans, Arpels and Clements, the three authors of the study, provide an encouraging picture.

You can find their work and various other case studies that take you as far away as Africa and Latin America at <http://rportal.net/library/content/translinks/2011/land-tenure-center/ltfc-mgmt-workshop/lessons-on-land-tenure-forest-governance-and-redd> (page 73 to 82).

¹ Turning point: What future for forest peoples and resources in the emerging world order?
(http://www.rightsandresources.org/documents/files/doc_4701.pdf)

Go-REDD+ is an e-mail listserv managed by the UN-REDD Programme team in Asia-Pacific, based in Bangkok. The main objective of Go-REDD+ is to distribute information, synopses of research results and activities related to REDD+ in Asia-Pacific, to assist countries in their REDD+ readiness efforts. Old messages will be archived on the [Regional Activities pages](#) of the UN-REDD Programme web-site. Discussion forum on Go-REDD+ is available through UN-REDD Programme's online knowledge sharing platform, www.unredd.net. Please note that you must be a member to join the Discussion Forum. To request membership, please contact admin@unredd.net with your name and affiliation. The Go-REDD+ team welcomes feedback, suggestions or inquiries to goredd.th@undp.org.