



ENSURING RURAL COMMUNITIES' BENEFITS IN REDD+

Debate about REDD+ is polarized. On the one hand, there are those who observe that rural poor (including Indigenous Peoples) have historically been marginalized, with benefits from forests largely accruing to the influential and wealthy. They are convinced that giving value to forest carbon is merely one more incentive to discriminate against the poor. REDD+ advocates, on the other hand, argue that the international visibility that REDD+ provides will be a catalyst for dramatically improved forest governance (with major benefits flowing to the poor), overseen by an international legal framework.

[A recent paper by Jess Ribot \(University of Illinois\) and Anne Larson \(CIFOR\)](#) outlines the challenges faced in ensuring that the more optimistic of the two scenarios described above wins out. The authors emphasize that while recognition of the rights of the rural poor is essential, it is not a sufficient condition to ensure they can benefit from REDD+. Using a case study of charcoal production and marketing in Senegal, they describe how, despite the passing of a recent progressive law providing strong rights to rural communities, they are prevented from gaining access to charcoal markets by a quota system managed by the national forest service and strongly influenced by powerful individuals. Consequently, rural communities are pressured to enter into marketing agreements that limit their benefits, even when they have made a decision not to exploit their forests.

Drawing lessons from this case study, the authors note that safeguards such as those negotiated in Cancun will not be effective as long as their implementation is not mandatory, and is overseen by those who have vested interests in abrogating them. In other words, a rights-based approach is not sufficient – measures also need to be taken to ensure that rural communities have access to the potential benefits of REDD+. They conclude that REDD+ does indeed have an opportunity to be “emancipatory” in ensuring that rural communities have both rights to resources and access to benefits, but to succeed, safeguards (including FPIC) need to be mandatory and rigorously imposed.

The authors acknowledge that policy development is not static, but evolves over time, and that policies in many countries, including Senegal, are much better now than 20 years ago. Therefore, while it may not be realistic to be truly emancipatory overnight, it is important for REDD+ policy makers who truly have the rights of rural communities and Indigenous Peoples at heart to ensure that safeguards at the national level go beyond the voluntary measures established at Cancun.

The article has its faults, most notably in the first paragraph, which assumes that REDD+ will be a market-based mechanism, and then cites the UN-REDD Programme as being “the framers” of REDD+. It would have been useful to have included a case study of rural communities’ rights and access to benefits under a non-market system, as this might have influenced discussions among the real “REDD+ framers” who are currently meeting in Doha. Nevertheless, the central message, that in developing their national REDD+ strategies and programmes, countries need to consider how to ensure that safeguards are applied effectively, is a valuable message irrespective of the nature of REDD+ financing mechanisms.

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 website. 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.