



Forests, climate change, and equity in Viet Nam

REDD+ equity challenges and solutions according to national stakeholders

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Overview

- Equity has featured prominently in international climate change discussions 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 a focal point of global debate 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 an essential part of accessing REDD+ payments and financing in the future.
- At the national level, Viet Nam 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 stakeholders in Viet Nam, 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.
- The priority equity issues identified in Viet Nam include: tenure and resource rights, access to information, and benefit sharing.

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 Viet Nam

In order to understand the development of REDD+ in Viet Nam and related equity concerns, it is important to understand the context of the nation's forest sector. Due to concerted efforts on the part of the national government, between 1990 and 2013 forest cover in Viet Nam increased from 27.2% to 41%, and is estimated to reach 45% by 2020 (Lutz and Minh 2015). However, despite these efforts, a number of concerns remain regarding the forestry sector nationally. According to Pham (2013), over two-thirds of the natural forests in the country are considered "poor or regenerating," and "rich natural forests" decreased by 10.2% between 1999 and 2005. These changes are driven by the conversion of forests for industrial agriculture, illegal logging, and infrastructure development, as well as due to forest fires.

REDD+ is central to Viet Nam’s overall climate change mitigation efforts, and a number of activities have been undertaken to advance its implementation at national, provincial and local levels. In 2008 Viet Nam enacted policies that supported the creation of payments for forest environmental services (PFES) pilot projects in Lam Dong and Son La provinces. Since 2011, PFES -- which recognizes carbon sequestration as an environmental service -- has been implemented nationwide. Viet Nam was one of the earliest REDD+ countries to join the UN-REDD program in 2009. In 2013, Viet Nam became the first country globally to launch a national Phase 2 UN-REDD Programme.



Figure 1. The RECOFTC Equity Framework

REDD+ equity challenges and solutions in Viet Nam: 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). Despite the potential for REDD+ to positively contribute to strengthening equity in forest governance, observers in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond have 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 Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), Viet Nam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST) and the REDD+ Office, hosted a dialogue on “Forests, Climate Change, and Equity ahead of COP21” in Viet Nam. The one-day discussion was framed around the eight forest governance equity elements in the RECOFTC Equity Framework (see Figure 1 and Table 1). During the session, national policymakers and representatives from non-governmental organizations identified priority national-level REDD+ and forest governance equity elements based on the framework. These stakeholders then identified challenges related to their identified priority elements, and proposed solutions to address those challenges. Notably, the most critical REDD+ equity elements prioritized by stakeholders in Viet Nam were: tenure and resource rights, access to information, and benefit sharing. Key findings from the dialogue are presented below:

Table 2. Challenges and solutions: tenure and resource rights

Challenges: tenure and resource rights	Proposed solutions
People, especially those living in the uplands and ethnic minority areas, are often unaware of their officially recognized tenure and resource rights	Improve dissemination of information on regulations specific to tenure and resource rights and conduct trainings to enhance the capacity of both communities and the government staff implementing regulations and conducting resource assessments in these areas
A number of conflicting and overlapping policies govern tenure and resource rights, which makes implementation difficult, confusing and in some cases inequitable	Revise, streamline, and integrate conflicting and overlapping policy frameworks
Community titles over forest land are not seen as being of the same status as those of private or state companies	Assess existing legal frameworks and practical implementation of land titling provisions and processes with a view to strengthening consistency and equity
Lack of coherence between legal provisions and implementation/enforcement	Develop systems for the proper monitoring and assessment of policy implementation and enforcement at local levels
Red Books, or land use certificates, for (community) forest land are not accepted as collateral	Assess existing legal framework to make specific recommendations that would allow for the right to use land as collateral
Unclear forest and land classification systems	Review and revise the classification of forest land Consider a single institution or unit for developing and ensuring harmonization of cross-sectoral policies. Currently there are few mechanisms for coordination between sectors.

Table 3. Challenges and solutions: access to information

Challenges: access to information	Proposed solutions
People are not fully aware of policies and/or information relevant to REDD+, community forestry and forest governance generally, particularly recent policy revisions and updates	Assess and improve communication systems and mechanisms for timely information dissemination, especially to marginalized rural and upland communities
When information is disseminated to local communities it is often not clear, due to inappropriate presentation methods, and the use of overly complex and technical language	Capacity development for government extension officers on approaches to communication, outreach and facilitation
Limited knowledge and capacity of officials to conduct effective outreach on new policies and regulations	Training and other forms of capacity development for government extension officers on latest developments in policy related to forest governance and REDD+
Insufficient infrastructure and channels for effective communication, and insufficient outreach strategy implementation	Incorporate communication into national policy development budgets and ensure that funds are made available with priority to local levels Increase financial support to improve infrastructure for consultation, communication and information dissemination

Table 4. Challenges and solutions: benefit sharing

Challenges: benefit sharing	Proposed solutions
Difficult to utilize existing benefit sharing mechanism (BSM) at the local level, due in part to poor availability of information needed to quantify costs and benefits	Develop policies and regulations to allow for local level implementation and adaptation of BSMs, appropriate monitoring and evaluation, and implementation checks and balances
Different understandings, expectations and interpretations of equity in benefit sharing (BS) by different stakeholder groups (especially in relation to PFES)	Budgeting for communication/awareness raising related to BS approaches and implementation must be allocated Develop transparent systems for information dissemination and feedback
Payments are low and often vary or appear unsubstantiated; the rationale for valuing certain factors within the BSM formula is unclear and/or not widely accepted	Assess and revise income measurements and the BSM formula to fit local contexts, specifically as they relate to PFES

In the application of the current national PFES BSM there is little flexibility for adaptation at the local level – particularly as it relates to equity	National BSMs should allow for adaptability at the local level
Balancing different components of the BSM formula is difficult, e.g. quantifying the value provided downstream, labor inputs, total forest area, poverty alleviation goals, etc.	Increased knowledge sharing and support from national and international experts on the development of BSM modalities and sharing of experiences from a range of pilot initiatives

Capacity development for equity in REDD+: some targeted recommendations for Viet Nam

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 Viet Nam. The following recommendations for targeted capacity development efforts related to strengthening equity in REDD+ and forest governance draw on the results from the national pre-COP21 workshop.

Recommendations to address tenure and resource rights:

- Capacity development related to outreach and information dissemination on tenure and the resource rights of local communities.
- Training and other capacity development interventions to support institutional development and capacities for the formulation of policy and regulations (specifically related to streamlining and harmonizing legal frameworks that impact forest lands and forest communities).
- Training on REDD+ topics for effective, evidence-based policy development.
- Capacity development regarding participatory, community-based consultation and facilitation techniques.

Recommendations to enhance access to information:

- Training for government extension officials on interactive and participatory communication methodologies.
- Support for capacity development of communication personnel and civil society on policy formation processes and entry points for inputs.
- Capacity development for government, civil society and local communities on information technologies such as effective internet use, and emerging information dissemination technologies, including social media platforms.

Recommendations for improved benefit sharing:

- Activities to increase subnational level officials' understanding of the theory behind benefit sharing and equity in benefit sharing.
- Development of the skills necessary for effective community consultation and outreach.
- Strengthen knowledge and expertise at the national level in order to increase the effectiveness and adaptability of adopted BSMS.
- The development of capacities among local level officials, NGOs and local communities is required to allow for practical and simple benefit and opportunity cost evaluation. Additionally, simple tools are needed for use at the local level, along with training on communicating and applying the results that these tools provide.

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RECOFTC's mission is to enhance capacities for stronger rights, improved governance and fairer benefits for local people in sustainable forested landscapes in the Asia and the Pacific region.

RECOFTC holds a unique and important place in the world of forestry. It is the only international not-for-profit organization that specializes in capacity development for community forestry. RECOFTC engages in strategic networks and effective partnerships with governments, nongovernmental organizations, civil society, the private sector, local people and research and educational institutes throughout the Asia-Pacific region and beyond. With over 25 years of international experience and a dynamic approach to capacity development – involving research and analysis, demonstration sites and training products – RECOFTC delivers innovative solutions for people and forests.

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