Using environmental justice lens to understand dynamics of conflict & cooperation over REDD+: Emerging insights from case studies in Mexico, Nepal & Vietnam

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Research questions

(1) How do changes in local forest governance due to REDD+ actions affect local-level dynamics of conflict & cooperation in two pilot sites of Mexico, Nepal & Vietnam each?

(2) How do changes in national forest governance due to REDD+ influence national-level dynamics of conflict & cooperation in Mexico, Nepal & Vietnam?

(3) How do local & national dynamics of conflict & cooperation over REDD+ influence each other across scales in Mexico, Nepal & Vietnam?

(4) How do particular political economies condition differences in cross-scale dynamics of conflict & cooperation over REDD+ between Mexico, Nepal & Vietnam?
Based on our framework, conflict arises when:

- actors have competing claims with regard to forest access or control
- do not agree on the applicable forums for dealing with competing claims
- or assert incompatible notions of justice.

insights from theories of environmental justice & conflict transformation

Figure 1: CoCooR conceptual framework
Case Study: Mexico

- REDD+ projects are built on *Ejido* (restitution of collectively owned land to landless peasants) & *comunidad* (recognition of previous collective possession over land); high involvement of local communities & indigenous peoples.

- **National level:**
  - State & regional REDD+ programs coordinated under ENAREDD+ (National REDD+ Framework & Strategy)
  - CTC (Technical Committee for REDD+), Alianza REDD (Mexico REDD+ Alliance), CICC (Inter-secretarial Committee on Climate Change), Grupo de Trabajo REDD+ (REDD+ Working Group), CONAFOR (National Forestry Commission)

- **Local sites:**
  - **Yucatan:** three state governments (Quintana Roo, Yucatan, Campeche) developing REDD+ plan; involvement of Mayan communities; tourism as a key economic driver
  - **Oaxaca:** state-level CTC & Alianza initiatives; political disputes, less integration & government/NGO involvement
Case study: Nepal

- REDD+ projects supported through Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF) & UN-REDD

- Three pilot projects: ICIMOD/Norad, NEFIN (indigenous people) & Terai (World Bank)

- REDD+ strategy & implementation framework focused on: Measurement, Reporting & Verification; Forest Reference Emission Level; social & environmental safeguards; capacity building & awareness raising; background studies

- National level: REDD+ policy development (REDD+ Cell at the Ministry of Forest & Soil Conservation; REDD+ Working Group)

- Local sites:
  - Lamjung: Khasur forest user group (mostly indigenous Gurung community), partnership of NEFIN (Nepalese Federation of Indigenous Nationalities) with international networks, focus on indigenous rights to REED+, forest conservation, eco-tourism
  - Chitwan: Janapragati & Chelibeti (women only) forest user groups in Kayerkhola watershed, socially & ethnically diverse forest-dependent groups, watershed & district level REDD+ network
Case study: Vietnam

- REDD+ projects supported under UN-REDD program
- National level: Vietnam National REDD+ Office, Sub-Technical Working Group on Social Safeguards (STWG-SG)
  - Officially established 2012 as a multi-stakeholder platform
  - Road-map for Vietnam’s future REDD+ safeguards system
  - Co-chaired by VNFOREST & SNV
  - Attempts to ensure effectiveness, efficiency & equity of REDD+
  - 7 meetings with the final draft of roadmap for social safeguards
- Local case study: REDD+ projects in Lam Dong province
  - R’teng 2 village (Phu Son commune, Lam Ha district)
  - One of the most advanced REDD+ projects in Vietnam
  - Multi-ethnic: majority of Kinh ethnic & indigenous groups (K’ho & Ma) plus recent migrant ethnic minorities; coffee cultivation as major source of income
  - Before 2000, forests were customarily owned by the community (K’ho); in 2005, NBFE (Nam Bang Forest Enterprise) was established & forests belong to the state
  - REDD+ focuses on training activities but no payment yet
Emerging insights: Mexico

• REDD+ in Mexico has taken an ‘integrated landscape approach’ to respect indigenous & agrarian rights, & to address the root causes of deforestation.

• It attempts to bring together actors from civil society, government & academics. However, there is lack of appropriate forums to have a dialogue between them.

• Very centralized policy making: meetings take place in a very technical manner; there is lack of communication and consultation; patron-client relationship between state & people.

• Lack of reliable, unbiased information on REDD+: e.g. CONAFOR presents a clear bias towards approval of REDD+ in public consultations & many communities receive mixed messages about it.

• REDD+ has not been fully integrated in Mexican public policies. REDD+ strategy yet remains ‘silo-ed’ in the environmental sector, instead of mainstreaming into federal policies.
Emerging insights: Mexico

- CONAFOR’s contradictory policies: over-regulation in the rural sector (e.g. timber extraction), while illegal logging & industrial agriculture go on.

- REDD+ does not address existing tension between PES & community forestry (active & passive forest management) and is at the risk of REDD+ being ‘just another program’.

- Unclear land tenure and benefit distribution; limited availability of REDD+ funds; limited scope and impact; question of additionality.

- Oaxaca: conflict between state & civil society actors & community forest groups (e.g. on who is legally mandated to define REDD+ policy); benefit distribution: only a portion of official ejidatarios stand to receive benefits from REDD+, issue of gender equity.

- In Yucatan, the primary source of conflict is the lack of articulation between public policies & contradictory incentives to rural communities (e.g. pressures from industrial agriculture); contradiction between environmental & agrarian policies.
Emerging insights: Nepal

• REDD+ related conflicts likely during implementation phase: lack of effective participation of women, Dalits and indigenous peoples in national policy process; unclear legal & institutional arrangement; lack of transparency & accountability. Success of REDD+ hinges on its ability to address existing challenges, including clarification of land tenure & rights. Questions on ownership of trees, soil, carbon & decision-making power.

• Questions on forest management & REDD+ implementation in the new political context, particularly in the Terai; how the customary rights of indigenous people will be recognized in state restructuring process to mainstream in the REDD+ mechanism. Indigenous groups’ demands on resource draws on international conventions, & mediated by discourses of local/national politics, with their local understandings of what constitutes rights.

• Policy void in Nepal’s forestry sector (outdated Master Plan for Forestry Sector 1989 although the 1993 Forest Act still provides guidance; policy first or strategy first debate

• REDD+ is not yet owned by the state, it is driven by few civil society organisations & government officials, unlike community forestry. Divided civil society & political parties, often taking opposed & polarising positions. Considerable trust benefit between government agencies, donor-funded projects, local NGOs, political parties; insufficient coordination between different line agencies.
Emerging insights: Nepal

- Multi-stakeholder processes: the government is largely open to discussion/consultation, however ‘ritualistic’ participation; REDD policy process is more neatly fixed (through consultants) that depoliticizes the process of negotiation; stakeholders themselves are ‘exclusionary’, discursive representation.

- Different standards, languages, & templates for rights & entitlements in REDD+ safeguard processes, creating different expectations & claims of justice & injustice (e.g. between ‘local’ & indigenous groups, government officials & civil society). Compartmentalization of safeguards principles to specific projects, contestation over forest tenure & other aspects of forest rights. Indigenous demands on community forestry focus on Free, Prior Informed Consent & special rights to indigenous groups, as opposed to local community forest user group.

- Benefit distribution mechanism: question on who manages the fund (national fund, nested approach or project-based funding) & setting reference levels for carbon credit.

- Local level: REDD+ projects have contributed to increase in overall awareness & uplifting of livelihoods but there is lack of clear concept at users level (misunderstandings & difficulties in REDD & MRV terminologies); mechanism for equitable distribution (actors differentiated by multiple dimensions class, caste, ethnicity, gender etc.); confusion in REDD+ piloting & high-expectation (‘the pilot has come but when would the plane come?’)
Emerging insights: Vietnam

- STWG established in response to UNFCC Cancun safeguards serves as a negotiating forum for different stakeholders.

- While the global REDD+ safeguards calls for respect of the knowledge & rights of indigenous peoples & local communities, Vietnam rules out recognition of ethnic people’s collective identities as indigenous peoples.

- During the 7 meetings organised by STWG, most discussions relating to safeguards were about the vague definition of the term ‘ethnic minority’ in Vietnamese legal framework & how this vagueness might lead to the non-compliance with global safeguards & result in unintended implications for the rights of the minority people in REDD+ implementation.

- REDD+ project develops within broader contestations over authority between the nation-state & global norms. Strong influence of national law tends to reassert the dominance of the nation-state that creates tension between state & local communities (ethnic minorities).
Emerging insights: Vietnam

- Vietnam has equal citizenship provisions but ethnicity is individual, which is in contradiction to REDD+ safeguards provisions for indigenous people.

- At the local site, there are conflicts between ethnic majority & ethnic minorities, ‘indigenous’ & migrants, & between local people & state agencies. REDD+ projects should have given priority to ethnic minority communities but they face dilemma over who to invite among immigrant Kinh, ethnic minorities (K’ho & Ma) & recent arrivals so they include all households. Conflict also exists over use of forestland for coffee plantation by ethnic minority people and state agencies promoting REDD+.

- NBFE has supreme authority to decide on who is included & impose restriction on use of forestland and forest products; many indigenous people & newly married couples are excluded from patrol groups while more Kinh people are recruited. Concerns raised that REDD+ is ‘only about trees, not about people’.

- In practice, participation means a simple decision to join management teams or not; no issue of recognition or collective representation; ethnic minority people are more concerned over equitable distribution and the focus is more on getting payment by participating in patrol groups.

- Hence there are contestations over the meaning of justice among the actors; all households are considered subjects of justice, with focus on distributive matters; authority stays contested with extension of state.
Early conclusion

• Our cross-country analysis shows that environmental justice is a useful lens to understand dynamics of conflict & cooperation over REDD+. Different actors have a variety of claims of justice & injustice which they raise at available & appropriate forums at different levels.

• The three countries are encountering different forms of conflict & cooperation as they embark on REDD+ within different political economies.

• The complexity of REDD+ panorama, with different actors, social sectors, historical processes of land tenure, legal frameworks, & socio-cultural contexts lead to various forms of conflict & cooperation.

• REDD+ is a challenge, but also opportunity in terms of how it is designed & implemented, addressing issues related to, for example, tenure security, benefit-sharing & conflict management/transformation.

• Our ongoing work will focus on enriching further understanding of cross-scale dynamics of conflict & cooperation.
Thank you

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