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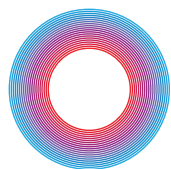
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Cambodian definitions of effective, efficient and equitable REDD+

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As a concept, policy to reduce emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD+) has been a success at the international stage in terms of turning the focus of high-level negotiations – such as those of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – on forest governance tied to climate change and sustainable development in developing countries.

In 2013, seven decisions on REDD+ were adopted by the UNFCCC, which together constitute the Warsaw Framework for REDD+. The adoption of this Framework means that the international community has now established all the necessary building blocks for participating countries to implement REDD+ activities. Much of the academic and policy-oriented literature on REDD+ has focused on the social and/or environmental factors that would enable or hinder decisions on, and implementation of, effective, efficient and equitable REDD+ (the 3Es). However, one might ask how stakeholders in participating countries assess REDD+ in terms of the 3Es.

This article presents findings on the criteria that REDD+ stakeholders in Cambodia have been used to assess the 3Es. This article is based on the hypothesis that socio-economic understanding of effective policy response and behaviour and indeed of transformative response to REDD+ at the national level of policy and programming cannot be built without prior understanding of differences in perceptions of the 3Es. Methodologically, the study is based on qualitative data collected through archival research and semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from academia, government, private sector, non-governmental organisations (international, national, and community-based), local communities and indigenous peoples. In total 40 interviews were conducted between July 2013 and February 2014.

Data from this study indicates that involvement of stakeholders from the private sector has been limited in Cambodia because they are not fully convinced that REDD+ is the most effective and cost-efficient way for Cambodia to sustainably manage its forests. However, the two main reasons for the private sector to stay informed about REDD+ activities are: 1) to seek new business opportunities, which according to informants do not yet exist yet, and 2) to understand the potential costs that REDD+ implementation might lead to in their areas of operations.

Apart from the private sector, there are two aspects that all groups of stakeholders in Cambodia mentioned as criteria



photo: Deforestation in Phnom Prich Community Forest, Mondulkiri, Cambodia. By Global Water Forum

for assessing the effectiveness of REDD+: 1) addressing the underlying drivers of deforestation and degradation, and 2) improving livelihoods of local communities and indigenous peoples living in and around intervention sites. Only the government, international NGOs and academic groups emphasised the effectiveness of REDD+ in terms of verifiable emissions reductions. This is attributable to the fact that they have been at the forefront of international negotiations on result-based payments from REDD+ activities.

In terms of efficiency, government officials are very mindful of the different costs of developing and implementing REDD+ activities in Cambodia. In particular, they have been conducting various consultations and feasibility studies to clearly and comprehensively understand the opportunity costs for REDD+ in comparison to other land-use types, given that Cambodia is pursuing economic development policies that are primarily linked with the forestry and agricultural sectors. For groups such as national and international NGOs, conversations on efficiency have been about how to involve local communities and indigenous peoples in order to reduce transaction costs.

Finally, for equity, the Cambodian government has been paying particular attention on how the costs and benefits from REDD+ should be fairly distributed amongst those who have contributed to the development and implementation of REDD+ activities. However, other groups of stakeholders suggested that equity should be assessed by having a transparent, accountable governance system to ensure that corruption and elite capture are minimised, if not avoided ■

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pheakkdey Nguon is a PhD candidate at the Graduate School of Geography, Clark University; and a lecturer at the Department of International Studies, Royal University of Phnom Penh. This research has been funded by the Fulbright Fellowship and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change/ Cuomo Foundation Scholarship Programme.