

Executive summary



Landscape view at SNV site, Cat Tien, Lam Dong Province, Vietnam.

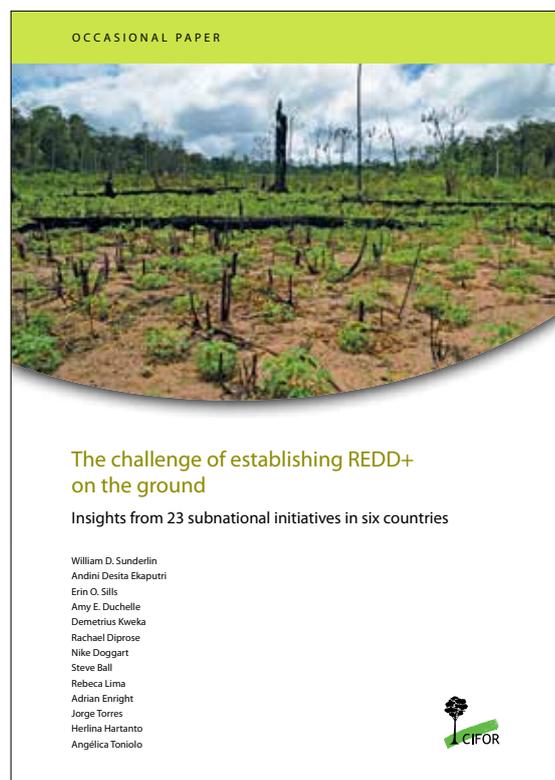
Photo by Thu Ba Huynh

The challenge of establishing REDD+ on the ground

Insights from 23 subnational initiatives in six countries

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Since 2007, there have been high hopes that REDD+ would deliver on the 3E+ criteria (effectiveness, efficiency, equity, social and environmental co-benefits) for strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The original concept was to offer performance-based conditional incentives for forest conservation, thereby reducing deforestation and forest degradation. The expectation was that those incentives would eventually be funded largely through a robust international market in forest carbon offsets generated through verified emissions reductions. Since 2007, hundreds of subnational REDD+ initiatives have been initiated, mainly in tropical developing countries. These initiatives include subnational jurisdictional approaches (i.e. led by states/provinces or municipalities/districts), as well as site-specific REDD+ projects. Despite significant advances, the early enthusiasm for REDD+ has dissipated among some stakeholders, largely because of the failure to attain an international climate change agreement. Prior to the 2013 COP in Warsaw, proponents of many subnational REDD+ initiatives were expressing concern about whether their years of effort to get REDD+ off the ground had been worth it.



Full version of this paper is available at cifor.org/Establishing_REDD_on_ground



Participatory workshop to build REDD+ concepts, Jari/Amapá REDD+ Project, Amapá, Brazil.

Photo by Robson Silva

The ‘Warsaw Agreement on REDD+,’ produced by the COP, provides procedural guidance for countries to align REDD+ strategies with drivers of deforestation and degradation, establish national reference levels, and implement MRV (measuring, reporting, verification) and safeguard information systems, but the concerns about uncertain funding remain.

It was in this context that CIFOR’s Global Comparative Study on REDD+ (GCS) conducted a survey of 23 subnational REDD+ initiatives in six countries from December 2012 to June 2013 to examine their strategies and approaches, the nature of the challenges they faced, and how they intended to overcome them.

The study found that the 23 initiatives were persisting in their efforts to reduce local deforestation and forest degradation, as well as deliver on a wide range of goals. However, there are questions about whether and how the REDD+ concept will persist and evolve, based on the following evidence:

- Eighteen of 23 proponents already have or will implement conditional incentives (originally viewed as key to REDD+), but only nine viewed these as the single most important intervention for reducing forest carbon emissions at their site. This could be a function of timing, with multiple factors leading to a delay in the effective implementation of conditional incentives. Proponents have focused on other interventions while waiting for the political, economic and technological foundations for REDD+ to be laid. Relatedly, some proponents have hesitated to promise conditional livelihood support to local stakeholders to avoid raising expectations that they may not be able to meet, if funding does not become available. Adding to the need

for caution is the fact that conditional incentives at the site level are still experimental. For example, rather than cash payments, some proponents are planning to offer a variety of goods and services intended to enhance local livelihoods as conditional incentives. Importantly, conditionality can be applied at multiple scales, and at some sites there has been a shift from project to jurisdictional approach, accompanied by abandonment of the initial REDD+ idea of conditional incentives for individual land-use agents in favor of broader low emissions development models. These explanations notwithstanding, the fact that most proponents do not identify conditionality, the mechanism at the core of REDD+, as the most important intervention suggests some possible doubt about its centrality.

- When asked the percentage chance that their initiative will continue to function as a REDD+ initiative in 2015, 11 respondents said 90–100%, five said 50–70%, three said 0% (because responsibility for the site would soon be transferred to another organization) and four already viewed themselves as not being ‘REDD+.’ This suggests divergence among the initiatives initially launched under the REDD+ umbrella, with nearly half firmly committed to maintaining the REDD+ label and about a third contemplating abandonment of the concept or already having done so.
- Most of the 23 initiatives include interventions that are characteristic of integrated conservation and development projects (ICDPs), an approach to tropical forest protection that precedes REDD+ and is commonly viewed to have failed. This hybridization of ICDP and REDD+ is logical (half of the initiatives were ICDPs prior to REDD+) and could be useful if ICDP interventions serve as a functional complement to conditional incentives and enable proponents to engage with the community while waiting for the



Villagers in livelihoods planning discussion, Petak Puti village, KFCP site, Central Kalimantan.

Photo by James Maiden/IAFCP

economics of REDD+ to be more favorable. However, high dependence on the ICDP approach could also be a barrier to adopting the performance-based measures that were expected to make REDD+ more effective than previous interventions.

- Proponents identified unclear and unstable tenure and the disadvantageous economics of REDD+ as the biggest challenges faced in moving forward with REDD+. These challenges can only be addressed with structural changes in national and international political systems. For instance, ‘business-as-usual’ interests tend to dominate the political economy of land-use decisions, REDD+ often cannot compete with non-forest land uses and forest carbon markets are weak and unstable. Thus, the future of REDD+ depends on actors and actions outside the domain of REDD+. In this context, most subnational initiatives are finding it difficult to meet the 3E+ goals of REDD+, but are engaged in creative attempts to meet these goals.

Most REDD+ proponents are satisfied with their performance yet have doubts about their prospects for ultimate success. In order for REDD+ to succeed on the ground, it is understood that transformational change is needed away from the policies and interests that support deforestation and degradation, as well as those that support continued dependence on fossil fuels. Relatedly, there must be an acceleration of efforts toward achieving a global climate change agreement, because such an agreement could be key to motivating resolution of tenure problems at the national level and to creating robust, stable, long-term funding streams to support REDD+.

Beyond this, national and subnational policy changes are needed in the two realms identified by the respondents: tenure and the economics of REDD+.

In order for REDD+ proponents to realize the goal of stable and secure tenure for local stakeholders at their sites, interventions such as the following are needed in most contexts:

- Direct linkage of forest tenure reform with targeted environmental outcomes as has been attempted in Brazil through the *Terra Legal* program and accompanying Rural Environmental Registry (CAR).
- Integration of national forest land-use planning among all ministries and sectors and alignment with REDD+ goals as has been attempted in Indonesia through their ‘One Map’ policy.
- Incorporation of participatory tenure mapping into national tenure institutions and processes.
- Resolution of contestation between statutory and customary claims on forest lands.



Two people doing GPS reading, SNV site, Lam Dong, Vietnam.

Photo by Thu Ba Huynh



Field visit during the annual meeting of the Governors’ Climate and Forests Task Force, BAM site, Madre de Dios, Peru.

Photo by Marco Villegas

- Enforcement of existing rights of exclusion for local stakeholders.
- Clarification of forest carbon tenure rights.
- Enabling of REDD+ collaboration between proponent organizations and government institutions in resolving tenure issues, as is the case in Brazil.

In order to attain a viable economic foundation for REDD+, robust funding streams could be complemented by national policies and actions such as the following:

- Decouple agricultural growth from agricultural area expansion (i.e. pursuing ‘land-sparing’ approaches).
- Develop sustainable agricultural supply chains that correspond to REDD+ goals.



Focus group meeting during CIFOR data collection at Mount Cameroon site, Likombe, Cameroon.

Photo by Abdon Awono

- Reduce demand for wood fuels in urban centers.
- Improve forest land-use decision-making through attention to governance and notably reduction of corruption and cronyism.
- Enforce laws against illegal logging and other illicit activities that lead to forest land conversion (e.g. through FLEGT).

Importantly, policy actions on tenure and economics are mutually reinforcing. Clear forest tenure elevates the competitive advantage of REDD+, while reducing the

financial appeal of 'business-as-usual' activities relative to REDD+. If REDD+ captures a larger funding stream, it can motivate state interest toward further tenure clarification.

While a binding global climate change agreement would be a big step forward for REDD+, in lieu of such an agreement, there are important opportunities for strong action on national and subnational policy fronts to assure that advances in forest-based mitigation on the ground have not been in vain.



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