

Policy pointers

REDD+ policies and strategies should recognise the three dimensions of equity — recognition, procedure and the distribution of costs and benefits — as crucial and inter-dependent.

Under each 'dimension', policies and strategies should prioritise the equity 'principles' most appropriate to the country's context.

REDD+ benefit and cost distribution should address possible trade-offs (especially between mitigating climate change and reducing poverty) by engaging key stakeholders.

Secure land tenure is important for equitable REDD+ but where this is not possible in the foreseeable future equitable outcomes may still be achieved.

Women's and youth's interests and rights should be integral to REDD+, not an add-on or separate agenda.

Applying three dimensions of equity to REDD+

REDD+ strives to be equitable, but often focuses on only part of the picture, so that even apparently-strong strategies (for example those with strong provisions on benefit sharing and tenure), may be less equitable on closer inspection. Yet people's perceptions and many national policies reveal more nuanced thinking on equity. Achieving greater equity in REDD+ needs attention to three dimensions: recognition (of rights, knowledge and institutions), procedure (inclusive decision-making) and distribution (of benefits and costs). The right choices will be context specific and the process of making these choices should engage key stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, local communities, women, elders and youth.

Equity in REDD+¹ has often been taken to mean that local people should have secure forest rights and/or that benefits from REDD+ financing should be equitably shared with local communities. However, associating equity only with these two issues is insufficient. The success of REDD+ programmes and projects rests on many more aspects of equity. Based on action research in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico and San Martin, Peru (see Box 1), this Briefing explores different understandings of equitable REDD+, where and how the different pieces fit together, and where, in some cases, there may be significant trade-offs. Although this briefing focuses on REDD+, the concepts and policy implications are relevant to other sectors of natural resource management, conservation and climate change mitigation.

An equity framework for REDD+

To understand and enhance equity, two major aspects must be considered: what should be taken into account, and who should be taken into account.²

The "what should be taken into account" aspect can be understood in terms of three dimensions of

equity — distribution, procedure and recognition. Under each dimension the critical issues to consider can be expressed as principles.

Recognition

- Recognition and respect of rights
- Respect for knowledge and institutions

Procedure

- Effective participation
- Access to information and capacity building
- Access to justice

Distribution

- Benefits allocated equally
- Benefits allocated according to contribution to climate change mitigation
- Benefits allocated to reflect costs incurred
- Benefits allocated according to rights
- Benefits allocated according to basic needs

The "who should be taken into account" aspect should consider:

People without formal tenure rights must be factored into benefit-sharing arrangements

The spatial scale. Is the intention to look at equity issues within just one site, a larger landscape, a whole country and/or between countries?

The temporal scale for achieving equity. Is the intention to look at equity issues within the current adult population, all living generations or also between current and future generations?

Key stakeholders and rights-holders within these spatial and temporal boundaries.

Whether equity is considered 'relative' or 'absolute'? ie, is equity judged in terms of one stakeholders' situation versus another's, or pre-defined standards?

REDD+ in Mexico and Peru

Both Mexico and Peru address equity in national policies and in their REDD+ related strategies, considering it a crucial issue in sustainable development, conservation and forest use. National environmental laws and strategies in both countries include equity as an overarching principle and also recognise more specific principles such as participation, access to information and capacity building, recognition of land tenure rights and recognition and respect of indigenous peoples' rights.

Mexico and Peru's definitions of equity are complex and multidimensional (Box 2 summarises similarities and differences). This is not surprising, as both countries have complex

legal frameworks, enormous culturally diversity, strong academic institutions and a well organised civil society. Also, government and civil society have a long history of working with social and equity issues at different levels. Social movements, particularly of indigenous peoples in Peru and feminists and women's groups in Mexico, have had, and continue to have, a pronounced impact on how equity is perceived and given legal recognition. In other words, equity in REDD+ is seen as more than simply a matter of 'benefit sharing' or rights, both in people's perceptions and in policy and law.

Box 1. Equity and REDD+ action research in Mexico and Peru

Action research in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico (2014)³ and San Martin, Peru (2015)⁴ — a joint initiative of IUCN and IIED in collaboration with CONAFOR, CONABIO and CI-Peru - generated national and regional equity analyses for REDD+ by asking:

- What does equity mean and how does it relate to REDD+?
- How is equity addressed in REDD+ processes?
- How can equity be strengthened in REDD+ processes nationally and regionally?

Answering these questions involved: a review of national and international policies and strategies to understand how equity is defined legally; interviews with key stakeholders to understand their perspectives and recommendations; and participatory workshops that explored how activities could reduce deforestation and degradation while promoting the three dimensions of equity.

Equity dimensions are interlinked

The three dimensions of equity are strongly linked. For example, when developing 'theories of change' to guide REDD+ actions in Mexico and Peru, the links became very clear — theories of change started with recognition for stakeholders and their rights and forest activities with social benefits, and then proposed equitable procedures in order to ensure social and environmental benefits are distributed equitably (Figure 1). However, although recognition and procedures are prerequisites for equitable distribution of benefits, they are also outcomes in their own right (and should not just be regarded as a means to an end).

Our study, which is one of the first to address all three dimensions of equity when developing theories of change, demonstrated that most aspects of REDD+, including benefit-sharing mechanisms, need to include specific actions to promote equity in all three dimensions. Many participants in the research recognised the added value of our equity analysis, which included identifying the key equity principles that apply in their particular context, and wanted this approach to be applied not only to forest activities but also to other sustainable development activities.

Forest tenure and equity

There is growing recognition that secure land tenure is important for equitable REDD+. Already, REDD+ has triggered discussion and some action on land rights in Mexico and Peru. However, conservation at the community level may involve, and even rely on, stakeholders who have no foreseeable prospect of tenure rights. For example, in rural Mexico, collective land, known as *ejidos*, may be home to recognised land dwellers with no tenure rights (*avecindados*) who have a key role to play in REDD+ alongside those with land rights (*ejidatarios*). Also, the right-holders are usually restricted to a narrow segment of society, and very few women own land titles. So people without formal rights must be factored into benefit sharing arrangements and other equity measures.

Gender and generations

Gender and generational issues are integral to making REDD+ equitable. They cut across all the equity 'dimensions' and 'principles', yet tend to be overlooked or addressed only as 'add-ons' when programmes and projects are planned and implemented. That in itself reinforces the exclusion and inequalities experienced by women, youth and elders.

Participants in our research in both Mexico and Peru recognised that while intergenerational and gender equity is usually addressed in policies, in reality inequalities are still prevalent. One example

is women's limited land rights in Mexico's *ejidos*. But participation and access to information is also important. Women, youths and elders may not be informed of meetings, and their planning may not take into account their other commitments. Even if they attend, women and youths rarely get involved in discussions, or their ideas and opinions are discounted. And because of social/cultural mindsets, women's and youths' contributions to forest conservation and management tend to be overlooked and not rewarded. Even when their contributions are recognised, their needs and preferences may not be acknowledged.

Addressing these challenges requires: a) analysing equity issues from everyone's view point, b) involving experts in project planning and implementation and c) implementing specific measures and actions that address inequalities.

Also focus on contribution

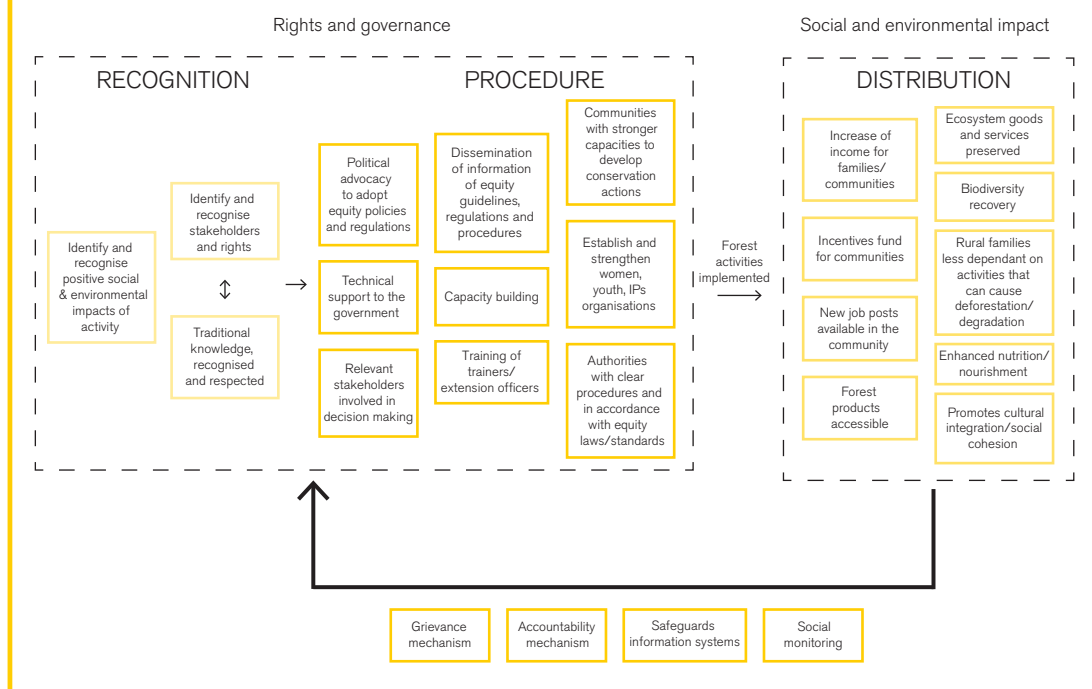
Equitable REDD+ initiatives should consider the entire forest conservation process and who is involved in guaranteeing its success. In Peru, for example, research participants said that if (and only if) the government provides communities with appropriate information and capacity building, the benefits could be allocated based on contributions to conservation and sustainable management of forests. This approach might require recognition for non-formal community structures that have great social capital and contribute to conservation. Countries may need to propose joint management/governance arrangements in nationally-owned land so that communities get a fair reward for their contribution to conservation.

What looks equitable may not be

Certainly, equitably distributing the benefits and costs of REDD+ relies on recognising who should be involved and on good procedures. However, we have seen many situations that look good in terms of recognition and procedure but where the distribution of benefits and costs is actually far from equitable. How could this be?

Even legal frameworks with strong language on equity may not be enough to transform inequalities at the local level. Our research participants told us

Figure 1. An example of how the three dimensions of equity interconnect based on a Theory of Change developed during action research in the Yucatan Peninsula (Mexico) and San Martin (Peru).



that while equity issues may be taken into account in policies, these are not always well implemented, and local communities still experience real inequalities. For example, much of the benefits may be captured by a local 'elite'. Other social/cultural mindsets or 'norms' may prevent equitable strategies being implemented as intended. For example, in Peru some stakeholders told us that distributing benefits based on an individual's contributions to climate change mitigation is not compatible with the indigenous peoples' 'cosmovision' or ethos, in which people strive for the collective, rather than individual, good.

And even when participatory processes are in place, these may require local people to spend a lot of their time in meetings. This unrecognised 'time cost' in effect reduces the overall benefit they receive.

Tough tradeoffs

Clearly, the distributive dimension of equity — how benefits are shared — is fundamental to successful REDD+ projects and their contribution to reducing poverty. As outlined, there are at least five ways to distribute benefits. Prioritising one does not exclude the others, and in most cases REDD+ policy and strategy emphasises several distributive equity principles.

Our action research suggests that the distribution of benefits should be based on a combination of contribution to climate change mitigation (often called a merit-based approach), needs and rights.

Box 2. Equity perceptions: similarities and differences in Mexico and Peru

Similarities

- Perceptions of what is equitable vary depending on the stakeholders and the initiatives.
- Definitions and perceptions of equity are related to recognition, procedure and distribution.
- Equity as a concept is associated with justice, wellbeing/adequate social conditions and addressing inequalities.
- National policies and strategies guarantee to take equity into account and explicitly reference forest governance.
- Policies and strategies include guidelines on participation/inclusion, access to information, capacity building, free prior and informed consent, consultations and benefit sharing.

Differences

- In Peru, equity discussions focused on happiness, saying that when equity is achieved there would be happy women and men as equity is a feeling produced when stakeholders have adequate social conditions.
- Mexico defines an equitable and inclusive society as having social cohesion and substantive equality. The definition of substantive equality is unique and included in their legislation.

However, there are potential 'trade-offs' between these, for example poorer, more vulnerable people may have little influence over causes of deforestation. Focusing benefits on these vulnerable groups (needs-based) will often reduce the benefits available to provide incentives for good forest management. Conversely, focusing only on the large-scale drivers of deforestation will often exclude rural forest-dependent communities who are in great need of development support. The right balance will be context specific and should be defined through stakeholder engagement processes that explore different interests and rights and, where necessary, negotiate potential tradeoffs.

Ten building blocks

Our action research has identified ten 'equity building blocks' some of which have long been recognised:

- Recognising stakeholder groups, and their different characteristics.
- Recognising and protecting stakeholders' rights (including informing them about their rights).
- Recognising which REDD+ activities could make important contributions to social wellbeing, and/or present potential risks to well-being.
- Ensuring effective participation, access to

information/capacity building and involvement in decision-making.

- Sharing information effectively using a well-defined, gender sensitive and culturally appropriate communication strategy.
- Carefully considering distributive equity principles, including benefit sharing criteria, to balance people's rights, contributions, and needs equitably in the specific context.
- Proposing actions to ensure that marginalised groups such as women, youth and elders are included, and that benefits they receive remain under their control.
- Designing and implementing mechanisms that involve communities (including women, youth and elders) in monitoring social and environmental improvements.
- Designing and implementing accountability mechanisms so that information on results is appropriately shared with all stakeholders.
- Ensuring people affected by the scheme have access to justice through an effective grievance mechanism.

Andrea Quesada-Aguilar and Phil Franks

Andrea Quesada-Aguilar is a consultant to IIED. Phil Franks is a senior researcher in IIED's Natural Resources Group.



Knowledge Products

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Contact

Phil Franks
phil.franks@iied.org

80–86 Gray's Inn Road
London, WC1X 8NH
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
Fax: +44 (0)20 3514 9055
www.iied.org

IIED welcomes feedback via: [@IIED](https://twitter.com/IIED) and www.facebook.com/theiied

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based on a decision of the German Bundestag

Notes

¹ Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation (REDD) attempts to create a financial value for the carbon stored in forests as an incentive for developing countries to reduce emissions from forested lands and to invest in low-carbon sustainable development pathways. REDD+ also includes conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks. See www.un-redd.org/aboutredd / ²Franks, P and Quesada-Aguilar A (2014) Equitable REDD+ Exploring concepts and strategies. IIED Discussion paper pubs.iied.org/pdfs/13575IIED.pdf / ³Quesada, A and Ludlow L. In press. Equity, REDD+ and Benefit Sharing in Mexico. IIED and IUCN / ⁴Quesada, A, Podvin, K and Rodriguez, S. In press. Equity, REDD+ and Benefit Sharing in Peru. IIED and IUCN