

Equitable REDD+

Exploring concepts and strategies

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Discussion Paper

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Forests

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Equity means different things to different people – a reflection of different principles, frames of reference and scales. Equity is important for both moral and instrumental reasons and while there is no one right way to understand equity it is important both in terms of social and environmental objectives that there is a common understanding of equity in a particular context.

This discussion paper presents and explores a framework for understanding equity in REDD+, and for strengthening the different approaches that are being used to enhance equity in REDD+. The framework may also be used as the basis for assessing equity in REDD+ as part of a process of assessing the social impacts of REDD+, although further work is needed on practical assessment methods.

There is little new in this discussion paper – it is simply an attempt at a synthesis of recent work on this issue in relation to the current discourse on social equity in the design and implementation of REDD+ strategies and social safeguards. This effort to clarify our understanding of equity in REDD+ is a work in progress and this discussion paper aims to stimulate a discussion that should be very much part of this process.

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Summary

The justification for giving attention to equity is usually framed as a combination of moral and instrumental considerations. REDD+ has the potential to contribute to poverty reduction, and is, to varying degrees, crucial to the success of other efforts to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty. On the other hand, if poorly designed, REDD+ might reinforce existing inequalities and rights violations, and might exacerbate poverty and exclusion of some social groups.

From an instrumental perspective, OECD has made the case that “high and rising levels of inequality in society can reduce the political stability and social cohesion needed for sustainable growth” (OECD, 2006). If focused on REDD+ rather than economic growth in general we have a statement about distributive equity in REDD+ that many REDD+ policy-makers and practitioners would probably accept. Recognition and procedural equity are also key considerations, not just for more equitable decision-making processes, but also for the social and political legitimacy of REDD+ itself.

Drawing on both the REDD+ literature and the wider Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES) literature, we propose a conceptual framework for equity in REDD+ that enables us to better understand different interpretations of equity and different approaches to enhancing equity. This conceptual framework is based on four key parameters – dimensions, principles, reference and scale.

Most frameworks for understanding equity recognise three key dimensions of equity – recognition, procedure and distribution. Each of these dimensions can be characterised in terms of a set of equity principles. There is no one equity principle but rather a set of principles that different individuals and organisations apply in various combinations according to their particular interpretation of equity.

While there is broad consensus on which principles of recognition and procedure should be applied to REDD+ there is little consensus over the principles of distribution. We identify six basic principles relating to how people benefit from REDD+:

- Equal benefit.
- Benefit according to contribution to the goals
- Benefit according to effort
- Benefit according to costs incurred
- Benefit according to rights.
- Benefit according to needs.

Distributive equity is understood as a combination of these principles. That said, it is often not clear which of these principles are being used and what weighting is being given to each. This can result in confusion over what equity actually means with consequences including weak strategies, weak social safeguards, a lack of accountability in implementing strategies and safeguards and/or poor mitigation outcomes.

Just as with poverty where we recognise “absolute poverty” as being defined with respect to a specific national or international poverty line (e.g. \$1.25/day), and relative poverty as being based on the level of inequality in poverty levels within population, the frame of reference for understanding, applying and assessing equity may be defined in absolute or in relative terms.

For both absolute and relative frames of reference we have an issue of scale. With an absolute frame of reference this is about whose equity is the focus of our concern. With a relative frame of reference this is also about who is being compared with whom.

Spatial scales range from individual level to global level. At all scales particular attention must be paid to the situation of specific social groups who may be particularly vulnerable to negative impacts and/or unable to influence decision-making due to social inequalities that exclude them or place them in a marginalised position. Differences have been categorized based on gender, age, race, culture, economic status, among others. A socially differentiated understanding of outcomes is crucial across all three dimensions of equity and their respective equity principles.

Equity in REDD+ may be enhanced through a combination of strengthening REDD+ strategies and their implementation, and strengthening social safeguards and associated safeguard information systems.

REDD+ strategies typically combine a wide range of interventions with a wide range of impacts in terms of distributive equity, procedural equity and/or recognition. Some of these REDD+ interventions may fall outside the scope of discussions on benefit sharing, in which case benefit sharing is best seen as part of a larger equity equation.

Social safeguards also have an important role to play in enhancing equity in REDD+. Safeguards should be developed alongside, and as an integral part of, REDD+ strategy development, and information generated on

how safeguards are being addressed and respected should be used to improve equity over time through adaptive management. Safeguards for distributive equity in REDD+ are less well developed and experience shows that an assumption that procedural equity will deliver distributive equity can be problematic. Therefore it is important to have safeguards for distributive equity alongside procedural equity safeguards.

Growing concerns about inequality in society globally and in particular countries is leading to growing political support for more equitable approaches to development in general, and specific initiatives such as REDD+. These concerns reflect not only moral concerns, but also, and increasingly, concerns relating to the effectiveness and sustainability of REDD+.

Acronyms

CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
FPIC	Free, prior and informed consent
ICD	Integrated conservation and development
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PES	Payments for Ecosystem Services
PFM	Participatory forest management
SIS	Safeguard information systems
SLM	Sustainable land management
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development

What is equity?

This section explores the basic concept of equity, which aspects of REDD+ might be viewed with an equity lens and the relationship of equity to the concepts of justice and inclusion.

1

Equity means fairness and equitable means fair. What is considered fair depends on the type of issues that are being considered (i.e. what counts as a matter of equity), and who is involved in the comparison (i.e. who counts as a subject of equity).

“What counts” is commonly understood as being about recognition of key stakeholders and rights-holders, processes to make decisions and resolve disputes, and the distribution of benefits, costs and risks¹. Recognition, procedure and distribution are often described as the key “dimensions of equity”. In addition some authors propose a fourth dimension called contextual equity which is about underlying social conditions that enable or constrain recognition, procedural equity, and distributive equity.

A second key aspect of “what counts” is the field of view of our equity lens – are we looking at equity in relation to development/economic growth in general, or are we focused on positive or negative outcomes of a particular initiative. This paper focuses on the latter, and specifically *reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries; and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries* (REDD+).

Our focus is REDD+ at national and jurisdictional (e.g. province, state, district) levels, although some of the ideas and learning will be applicable to policy at higher levels (i.e. international policy), and actions at lower levels (i.e. site-based projects). Our work will apply to the realities of REDD+ in different countries with the aim of helping policy makers and practitioners identify options to enhance equity in REDD+ through strengthening:

- a) Policies, laws and regulations (PLRs) relevant to REDD+,
- b) REDD+ strategies and actions (i.e. implementation), and
- c) REDD+ monitoring and evaluation.

Within REDD+ we will need to clarify the scope of REDD+ interventions on which we focus our equity lens (see Table 1). This is complicated by the fact that REDD+ is increasingly integrated into broader initiatives on sustainable land management (SLM). For the purposes of this paper we define the scope of REDD+ as the range of interventions that are wholly or partially funded by finance that has climate change mitigation through REDD+ as its primary goal.

This paper is framed in terms of social equity. Much of the relevant literature has an equity framing (Pascual et al, in prep, McDermott et al, 2013, and Luttrell et al, 2013), but there is also a substantial body of relevant literature on the related concepts and principles of justice (Sikor et al, 2013) and inclusion (Porres and Blackmore, 2013). Some organisations use these three concepts almost interchangeably, but others make clear distinctions based on a combination of technical and socio-political considerations. An in depth analysis of similarities and differences in these concepts is beyond the scope of this paper.²

This paper attempts some integration of the equity/justice/inclusion discourse in drawing on discussion on equity, justice and inclusion in REDD+ and REDD+ benefit sharing that is taking place within academia, REDD+ policy development and REDD+ communities of practice. Secondly, this paper aims to link discussions on equity, justice and inclusion in REDD+ with similar discussions in relation to biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, and payments for ecosystem services (PES). Much of this is relevant to REDD+ although in many countries the way in which REDD+ is now being conceived and operationalised is quite different from a classical PES concept.

The overall framing of this paper is one of social equity quite simply because, at the present time, this framing is more common in the context of REDD+ and in the broader discourse around sustainable development and green economy. In other words, in the context of REDD+, there appears to be more political traction for engaging on equity than around comparable notions of justice and inclusion. That said, the public discourse on equity in REDD+ at both national and international levels includes very different understandings of the concept (Di Gregorio et al, 2013).

Questions

How are equity, justice and inclusion in REDD+ understood? What are the similarities and differences from technical, legal and political perspectives?

Do you agree that equity has more political traction (than justice and inclusion) at this time?

¹ In this paper we use the terms benefits and costs in the broadest sense of the full range on potential positive social impacts and negative social impacts, including both tangible impacts that may be easily valued and intangible impacts that may be impossible to value. The term “social impacts” is used to refer to benefits and costs collectively.

² For a review of similarities and differences between equity, justice and inclusion framings in broader discourse on economic and sustainable development, see Greig-Gran, in prep.

Table 1: Forest related interventions with potential positive or negative social impacts

INTERVENTION	REDD+	SLM	ICD/ PFM
ENABLING			
• Broader good governance	X	X	
• Land and forest tenure	X	X	X
• Spatial planning	X	X	
• Voluntary codes/standards	X	X	
• Environmental valuation/natural capital accounting	X	X	X
FOREST LAW ENFORCEMENT AND GOVERNANCE			
• Law enforcement	X		X
• Sustainable forest management	X	X	X
• Forest restoration/reforestation	X	X	X
• Forest governance, including shared governance and indigenous and community governance	X	X	X
• Chain of custody	X		
ADDING VALUE TO FORESTS PRODUCTS/LAND			
• Payments for ecosystem services (PES)	X	X	
• Sustainable forest-based enterprise	X	X	X
• Ecotourism	X	X	X
REDUCING DEMAND FOR FORESTS PRODUCTS/LAND			
• Agricultural intensification (zero to high external input)	X	X	X
• Energy efficiency and alternatives to forest products	X	X	X
• Alternatives sources of forest products, including afforestation, agroforestry	X	X	X
• Alternative sources of income (non-forest dependent)	X	X	X
OTHER (sometimes funded by PES)			
• Health services	X		X
• Education	X	X	X
• Other infrastructure development	X	X	X

SLM = sustainable land management/use

ICD = integrated conservation and development

PFM = participatory forest management/community forestry

Benefit sharing

Benefit sharing is central to a discussion of equitable REDD+ but the scope of benefits (and costs) that are considered in benefit sharing discourse varies greatly from country to country.



The concept of “benefit sharing” is central to any discussion on equitable REDD+ but it predates REDD+ by many years, notably in the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) where equitable benefit sharing was defined as one of three central pillars at the inception of the Convention in 1992.³ Initially the scope of the benefit sharing discourse in CBD was limited to utilisation of genetic resources but this has since broadened out to embrace many aspects of the Convention. CBD frames benefit sharing as being about rewarding stewards of biodiversity for their positive contribution to humanity, and it now defines the notion of benefits very broadly to include intangible benefits as well as more tangible benefits.

Over the last 10 years the discourse on benefit-sharing in CBD has also expanded to address the potential negative social impacts (costs) of conservation, notably in the CBD Programme of Work on Protected Areas where the target for equity and benefit sharing is framed as *establish mechanisms for the equitable sharing of both costs and benefits arising from the establishment and management of protected areas*.

In contrast to CBD, UNFCCC decisions on REDD+ make little explicit reference to benefit sharing, let alone equitable benefit sharing. However benefit sharing has become a strong theme in REDD+ policy and practice in certain countries, no doubt in part reflecting the fact that many REDD+ practitioners and policy makers have come from the world of forest management and conservation in which benefit sharing has been a core issue for over 20 years.

A benefit sharing mechanism is understood to include the full set of institutional means, government structures and instruments that distribute finance and benefits of REDD+. (Luttrell et al, 2013)

However different countries have different understandings of REDD+ benefit sharing. Is this just about benefits or does this also take account of the costs of REDD+ to some stakeholders (e.g. reduced or lost access to resources)? Where the focus of discussion is a *benefit sharing mechanism* what about the benefits (and costs) from interventions listed in Table 1 that lie beyond the scope of the mechanism?

At the other end of the spectrum, a benefit sharing strategy may address the full range of benefits and costs of REDD+. As we shall see, analysis of equity in REDD+ based on just a partial picture of the benefits delivered by a benefit sharing mechanism can only deliver conclusions if equity is narrowly defined. A comprehensive understanding and analysis of equity in REDD+ requires looking at all three dimensions of equity – recognition, procedure and distribution of benefits and costs.

Questions

Should REDD+ benefit sharing strategies embrace all REDD+ interventions that have social and environmental benefits or focus on a sub-set?

To what extent should REDD+ benefit sharing strategies recognise and address costs as well as benefits?

³ See Morgera et al, 2014 for a comprehensive review of equity and benefit sharing in international policy and law

The importance of equity

Both in the broad context of sustainable development, and the specific context of REDD+, the justification for giving attention to equity is usually framed as a combination of moral and instrumental considerations.



From the moral perspective there have long been commitments to eradicate poverty as morally unacceptable and, more recently, growing concerns over inequality in society. REDD+ has the potential to contribute to poverty reduction, and is, to varying degrees, crucial to the success of other efforts to reduce and eventually eradicate poverty. On the other hand, if poorly designed, REDD+ might reinforce existing inequalities and rights violations, and might exacerbate poverty and exclusion of some social groups.

From an instrumental perspective, OECD has made the case that “high and rising levels of inequality in society can reduce the political stability and social cohesion needed for sustainable growth” (OECD, 2006). If focused on REDD+ rather than economic growth in general we have a statement about distributive equity in REDD+ that many REDD+ policy-makers and practitioners would probably accept. Recognition and procedural equity are also key considerations, not just for more equitable decision-making processes, but also for the social and political legitimacy of REDD+ itself. This issue of political legitimacy applies at all levels from individuals and communities engaged in REDD+ interventions to global policy processes where fears over the potential negative impacts of REDD+, notably from Indigenous Peoples, could have blocked international agreement on REDD+. Both at international level and in a number of countries it has been the development of credible equity/justice safeguards that has arguably saved REDD+.

Equity is critical to the success of REDD+ (and PES more generally), but there may be significant, and at times substantial, trade-offs between achieving mitigation goals (*effectiveness*), *efficiency* in achieving these goals, and social *equity* (Pascual et al, 2014). The degree to which these trade-offs are significant,

and the strategy to manage them, fundamentally depends on what we mean by equity. For example, in situations where poorer people have little influence over the causes of deforestation and forest degradation, an approach that targets resources at poorer people will reduce resources available to incentivise forest conservation and thus deliver on climate change mitigation goals. That said, the way in which the goal of REDD+ is framed is changing with the growing emphasis on “non-carbon benefits” that in some countries is placing the social goals of REDD+ at least on a par with the environmental goals, if not higher.

- **effectiveness** refers to the extent of emission reductions achieved by REDD+ actions;
- **efficiency** refers to the actual costs of such reductions;
- **equity** refers to the distributional aspects of the associated costs and benefits, procedural aspects of participatory decision-making and the specific contexts that shape stakeholders' perceptions of equity.

Angleesen et al, 2009

Questions

In what ways is equity important to the success of REDD?

What are the equity, efficiency and effectiveness trade-offs and how significant are they likely to be in different contexts?

An equity framework

Equity, and approaches to enhance equity in REDD+, are understood in a variety of different ways. This section presents a framework to help understand key concepts, similarities and differences.



Drawing on both the REDD+ literature and the wider PES literature, we are proposing a conceptual framework for equity in REDD+ that enables us both to better understand different interpretations of equity, and different approaches to enhancing equity. This conceptual framework is based on four key parameters – dimensions, principles, reference and scale (see Table 2). For each of these parameters there are a range of options which are not mutually exclusive, i.e. many/most will apply in a given situation (see Table 3).

The following four sections (4.1–4.4) discuss each of the four key equity parameters in turn.

4.1 Equity dimensions

Most frameworks for understanding equity recognise three key dimensions of equity – *recognition*, *procedure* and *distribution*. As shown in Figure 1, these three equity dimensions should be seen within a broader *context* takes into account the uneven playing field created by the pre-existing political, economic and

social conditions under which people engage in, and benefit from, resource distributions, and which limit, or enable, their capacity to engage. The equity framework that is further elaborated in the following sections does not refer explicitly to contextual issues for the practical reason that such issues are largely beyond the reach of REDD+ strategies, and interventions.

4.2 Equity principles

Equity principles are fundamental statements of how we understand equity and seek to promote more equitable approaches. There is no one equity principle but rather a set of principles that different individuals and organisations apply in various combinations according to their particular interpretation of equity. Furthermore, the interpretation of equity may vary according to the context or specific issue – for example a person may believe that voting rights should be *equal* while access to health-care should be based on *need*, and salaries should be based (at least in part) on *merit*. Each of the

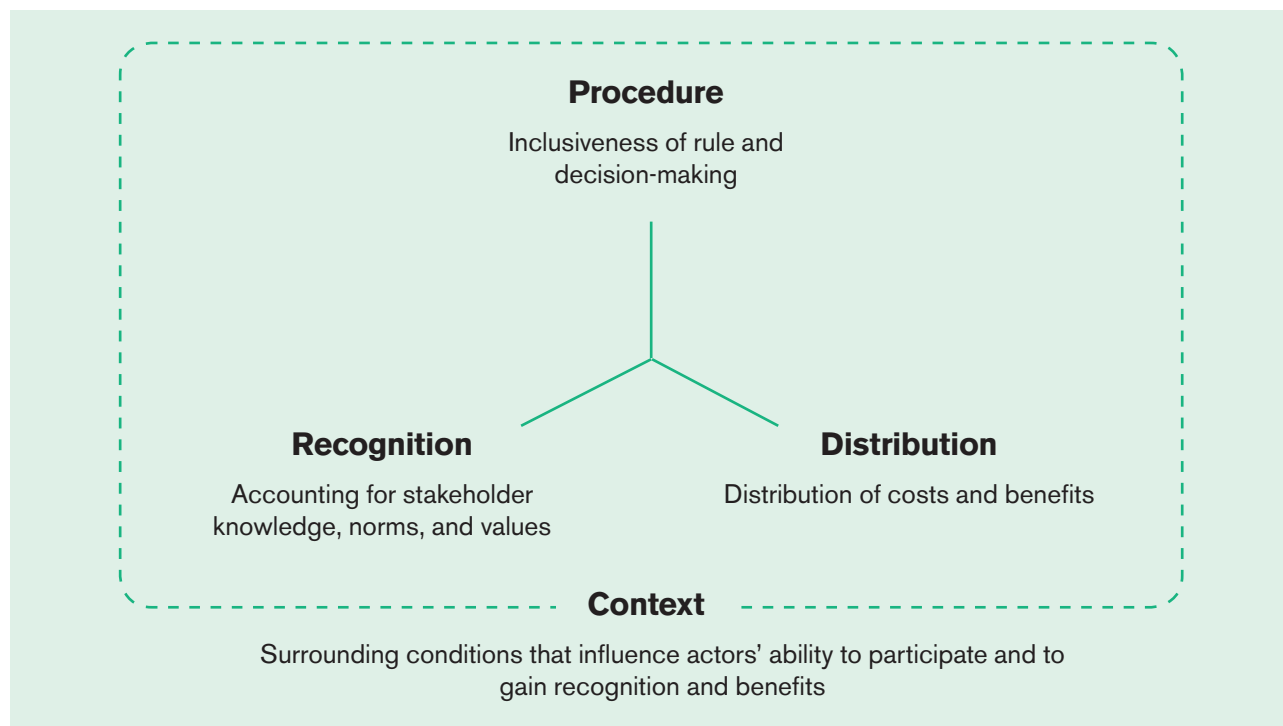
Table 2: Key equity parameters

• Dimensions	} Equitable in terms of what?
• Principles	
• Reference	Frame of reference for assessing equity.
• Scale	Scale(s) at which, and between which, comparisons are made.

Table 3: A framework for understanding equity in REDD+

DIMENSION	PRINCIPLES	REFERENCE	SCALE
Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition and respect of rights • Respect for knowledge and institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absolute – assess equity versus specific safeguards or standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Individual – Household
Procedure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective participation • Access to appropriate information • Access to justice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relative – assess equity in terms of one situation versus another. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Group – Community
Distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Equal benefit • Benefit according to goals • Benefit according to effort • Benefit according to costs • Benefit according to rights • Benefit according to needs 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sub-national: district, state province – National – Global • Intergenerational

Figure 1. Dimensions of equity (from Pasual et al, 2014)



three dimensions of equity has a set of equity principles, as outlined in Table 3 and detailed in the following three sections.

Recognition principles

Recognition is about societal structures that lead to injustices/inequities in the form of lack of respect, discrimination and domination. Inequities in procedure and distribution of costs and benefits often have their roots in inequities in recognition which is why it is important to give recognition a prominent place in an equity framework (Martin et al, 2013). In other words, recognition of key stakeholders and their perspectives, interests and rights is pre-requisite for procedural and distributive equity.

In broad terms there are two key equity principles for recognition:

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

In the context of REDD+, the scope of rights includes rights to lands territories and resources alongside human rights. Knowledge includes both traditional and other knowledge and institutions are understood to include decision making structures and processes, social and cultural values and norms.

Procedure principles

Work on procedural equity in relation to environmental change has generally focused on three major issues – participation in decision-making, access to information and access to redress/justice. The clearest example of this in a policy framework is the Aarhus convention on procedural environment rights which has been ratified by many European countries.

Based on this interpretation of procedural equity we identify three procedural equity principles for REDD+:

- Effective participation
- Access to appropriate information
- Access to justice

In this paper we do not attempt to further unpack these principles but this is clearly necessary for effective application of the principles. For example effective participation involves issues of representation, equitable decision-making structures and equitable decision-making processes.

Implicit within these three procedural principles is a principle of access to adequate resources to meet the expected standards of procedural equity. However, as discussed in section 5, significant barriers and other issues may still prevent procedural equity delivering the expected gains in distributive equity.

Distribution principles

Distributive equity is about the distribution of the benefits and costs of REDD+. The range and type of social impacts to be considered depends on the framing of poverty or human well-being that is being used which may vary from a narrow framing focused on economic poverty to a holistic framing of human well-being that includes relational and subjective as well as material domains of well-being (see Box 1).

BOX 1: DOMAINS OF HUMAN WELL-BEING

Material: physical requirements of life, such as income, wealth, assets, or physical health, and the ecosystem services provided by the physical environment.

Relational: social interactions, collective actions, and the relationships involved in the generation and maintenance of social, political, and cultural identities.

Subjective: cultural values, norms, and belief systems, notions of self; individual and shared hopes, fears, and aspirations; expressed levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction; trust; and confidence.

Adapted from White, S, 2009

In the context of REDD+ we can identify four overall distributive equity principles:

- **Equal** benefit.
- Benefit according to **merit**. Merit in this context means according to what a person deserves, and this can further sub-divided into:
 - Benefit according to contribution to the goals (i.e. reduction in carbon emissions)
 - Benefit according to effort (i.e. contribution⁴ to activities designed to achieve the goals)
 - Benefit according to costs incurred which may include costs associated with activities, and/or opportunity costs

- Benefit according to **rights**. Right-based approaches vary greatly according to the rights regimes to which they refer which may include:
 - Universal human rights
 - Rights enshrined in national policy and legislation
 - Rights to specific lands, territories and resources
 - Carbon rights (specific to REDD+)
- Benefit according to **needs**. Needs-based approaches should be further specified in terms of whose needs are to be prioritised:
 - Relative poor (e.g. in the lower quartile of a wellbeing ranking)
 - Absolute poor (e.g. below the relevant national poverty line)
 - Poorest of the poor – a sub-set of the above who are in extreme poverty

Distributive equity is understood as a combination of these principles. That said, it is often not clear which of these principles are being used and what weighting is being given to each. This results in confusion over what equity actually means with consequences including weak strategies, weak social safeguards, a lack of accountability in implementing strategies and safeguards and/or poor mitigation outcomes.

4.3 Reference

Just as with poverty where we recognise “absolute poverty” as being defined with respect to a specific national or international poverty line (e.g. \$1.25/day), and relative poverty as being based on the level of inequality in poverty levels within population, equity may be assessed in absolute or in relative terms:

- Absolute – assess equity versus specific safeguards or standards
- Relative – assess equity in terms of one situation versus another.

With an absolute perspective, equity (at individual or group level) can be assessed without reference to the situation of other individuals or groups (e.g. communities) in the same population or higher levels. Many REDD+ safeguards are framed in this way. With a relative perspective, equity is assessed through comparing the situation of one individual, or stakeholder group, versus another.

⁴Including facilitation of processes as well as activities directly contributing to goals.

Table 4. Some examples of indicators for assessing equity in absolute and relative terms

EQUITY PRINCIPLE	ABSOLUTE	RELATIVE
• Rights:	% of rights-holders securing benefits in line with their rights	
• Effort:		Reward per unit of effort
• Costs incurred:	% of households experiencing net cost (harm)	Net benefit/net cost
• Needs:	% of benefits going to house-holds below the poverty line	
• Access to information	% of stakeholders receiving information in culturally appropriate forms	
• Effective participation	% of people who feel they have some influence over decision-making processes	Level of representation of different stakeholder groups in a decision-making process
• Recognition of rights	FPIC process properly conducted	

This notion of absolute or relative equity can be applied to any equity principle including principles of recognition and procedure as well as distribution (see Table 4). Note that with quantitative indicators of relative equity there are analysis techniques that can actually generate an equity index (e.g. the Gini Coefficient). Alternatively, simpler ways of describing the spread of values might be used (e.g. % of population in predefined categories).

Universal Human Rights, are, by definition, absolute not relative. That said, competition and conflict between right-holders in relation to the recognition and fulfilment of certain types of rights is increasingly common. In such circumstances, even if the reference is absolute, efforts to secure and fulfil the rights of one particular stakeholder group may have to be balanced against efforts on behalf of other groups at different scales, and thus the reference may, in reality, prove to be more relative than absolute.

4.4 Scale

For both absolute and relative frames of reference we have an issue of scale. With an absolute frame of reference this is about whose equity is the focus of our concern. With a relative frame of reference this is also about who is being compared with whom. There are two dimensions of scale – spatial and temporal.

Spatial scales range from individual level to global level.⁵ With a relative frame of reference, comparisons are made both within levels – horizontal equity – and between levels – vertical equity. With ecosystem

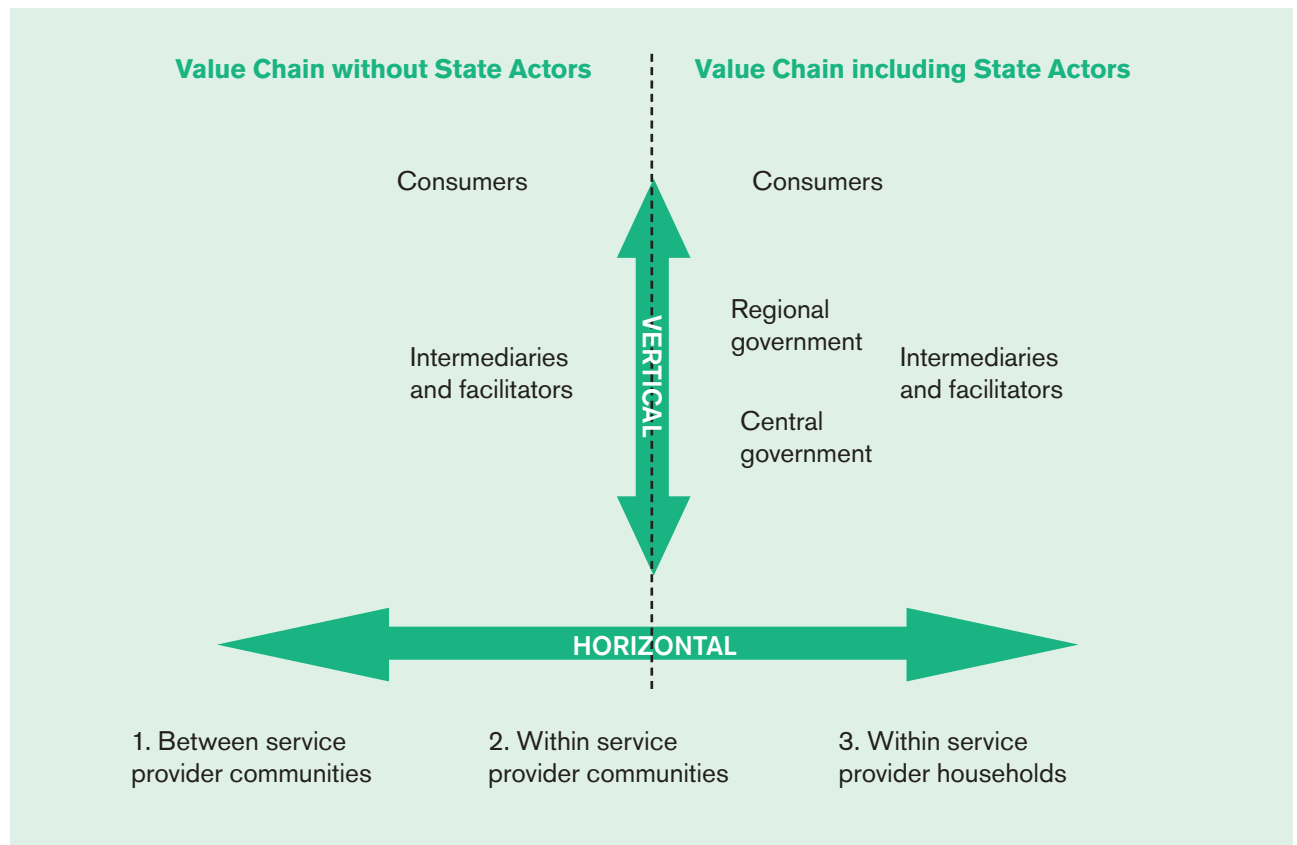
services, vertical equity is a particularly important issue as benefits and costs usually accrue to stakeholders at different levels – very clear in the case of REDD+ which involves stakeholders from local to global levels. In PES this relationship is often perceived as a type of value chain – see Figure 2.

At all scales particular attention must be paid to the situation of specific social groups who may be particularly vulnerable to negative impacts and/or unable to influence decision-making due to social inequalities that exclude them or place them in a marginalised position. These socially differentiated outcomes are rooted in the unequal circumstances created by established power relationships. Differences have been categorized based on gender, age, race, culture, economic status, among others. Specific terms that reflect these socially differentiated dimensions of equity have been developed, particularly when discussing gender. For example, gender equity has been defined by the United Nations as fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men, while gender equality has been defined as equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities for women and men and girls and boys (UN, 1995). A socially differentiated understanding of outcomes is crucial across all three dimensions of equity and their respective equity principles.

Equity in a temporal dimension – intergenerational equity – is a central issue in the definition of sustainable development – “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of

⁵ See McDermott et al, 2013 for discussion of methodological and political consequences of considering equity at different scales

Figure 2. Horizontal and vertical equity in a PES value chain (from Ellis-Jones and Franks (2010))



future generations to meet their own needs" (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). It may be argued that intergenerational equity is implicit in the notion of REDD+. While this may be the case in terms of mitigation and forest conservation, this is not necessarily the case with measures to address the drivers of deforestation. In this particular discussion paper we flag the importance of the temporal dimension of equity but will leave further analysis of this complex issue to a following paper.

Questions

To what extent/in what ways does this framework help to clarify an understanding of equity in the context of REDD+?

How might the framework be improved?

Enhancing equity in REDD+

Equity in REDD+ may be enhanced through a combination of strengthening REDD+ strategies and their implementation, and strengthening social safeguards and associated safeguard information systems.



5.1 Strengthening strategies

As illustrated in Table 1, REDD+ may comprise a wide range of interventions, and many of these can be found in other approaches to sustainable natural resource management that may not have REDD+ financing such as sustainable land management (SLM), participatory forest management (PFM), and integrated conservation and development (ICD). Although REDD+ remains, by definition, a payments for ecosystem services mechanism at the international level, it increasingly takes a non-PES form at lower levels as national and local governments understandably seek to embed REDD+ within broader approaches to sustainable land management and forest conservation.

Experience from PES, SLM, PFM and ICD tells us that almost of the interventions listed in Table 1 can have impacts in terms of distributive equity, procedural equity and/or recognition – positive and negative. This is why enhancing equity in REDD+ is more than an issue of benefit sharing mechanisms. That said, benefit sharing is a crucial tool in promoting more effective and equitable REDD+, but it should be seen as part of a larger equity equation.

The starting point for enhancing equity in REDD+ should be recognition of key stakeholders, and building equity considerations into benefit sharing and other REDD+ interventions during the process of developing strategies and interventions. While equity

considerations may vary from one intervention to another, it is usually the case that an overall approach to equity will be defined that then shapes most of the REDD+ interventions. This overall approach is generally defined in terms of distributive equity. Table 5 below gives some examples of terms that are commonly used to describe an overall approach to equity in forest management and conservation which are now being applied to REDD+. In this table we attempt to characterise these approaches in terms of the dominant equity principle that typically shapes the approach, although in reality the underlying equity principles are often unclear to participants in the programme.

In the context of REDD+ benefit sharing, examples of each of the approaches described above, and analysis of underlying equity principles/discourses and associated risks, are provided in recent research conducted by CIFOR (Pham Thu Thuy et al, 2013, Luttrell et al, 2013). There is some lack of clarity over which benefit and costs of REDD+ lie within the scope of benefit sharing discourse, but in principle the equity framework that CIFOR uses, and the similar framework presented in this paper, can be applied to the full range of benefits and costs of REDD+ as well as related issues of procedure and recognition.

Different approaches may be interpreted somewhat differently in different contexts. This is most obvious in the case with the “pro-poor” approach which in some cases is understood to mean explicitly targeting a

Table 5. Equity approaches in REDD+

APPROACH TO EQUITY IN REDD+	DOMINANT EQUITY PRINCIPLE(S)		
	RECOGNITION	PROCEDURE	DISTRIBUTION
Performance-based/ results-based ⁶			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit according to goals AND/OR • Benefit according to effort
Net positive impact and at least do no harm ⁷			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit according to costs
Pro-poor			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit according to needs
Rights-based ⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition and respect of rights 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit according to rights

⁶Classic payments for ecosystem services where equity is interpreted in terms of maximising effectiveness and efficiency

⁷Climate Community and Biodiversity Standards version 3 promotes this approach at the general level while the Gold Level explicitly promotes a pro-poor approach

⁸Usually understood to include “do no harm” in terms of rights

substantial portion benefits on the poorest people, while in other cases simply means equitable/fair in a generic sense (i.e. is rather meaningless). Pro-poor terminology has also been widely used in forest management and conservation before and beyond REDD+, and it is important to recall that there are many examples of merit-based and rights-based approaches that have failed to deliver for the poorest, and indeed some that have made things worse for the poorest.

5.2 Social safeguards

Social safeguards also have an important role to play in enhancing equity in REDD+ but they should not be used to retrofit equity into a pre-designed REDD+ initiative. Safeguards should be developed alongside, and as an integral part of, REDD+ strategy development, and information generated on how safeguards are being addressed and respected should be used to improve equity over time through adaptive management. This section provides an overview of recent progress in developing effective safeguards for distributive, procedural and recognition dimensions of equity.

At national or sub-national (jurisdictional) level, effective REDD+ safeguards require action in three areas:

- Policies, laws and regulations institutionalising safeguards

- Feedback, grievance and redress mechanism
- Safeguard information system (SIS) – a type of M&E system

A lot of attention has been focused on safeguards for procedure and recognition and in many countries these are now well rooted in national policy (e.g. relating to participation in decision-making) although information systems to report on application of these safeguards tend to be less well developed.

At the international level there is a broad agreement, formalised in the “Cancun Safeguards”, on some key safeguards for procedure and recognition (see Box 2). UNFCCC decisions also provide a basic framework for reporting on the extent to which these safeguards are addressed and respected through SIS, and many countries are in the process of institutionalising the Cancun safeguards and SIS.

Safeguards for distributive equity in REDD+ (and forest conservation more generally) are less well developed. Furthermore, experience shows that an assumption that procedural equity will deliver distributive equity can be problematic (see Box 3) and therefore it is important to have some safeguards for distributive equity alongside procedural equity safeguards.

BOX 2: CANCUN SAFEGUARDS

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>(a) That actions complement or are consistent with the objectives of national forest programmes and relevant international conventions and agreements;</p> <p>(b) Transparent and effective national forest governance structures, taking into account national legislation and sovereignty;</p> <p>(c) Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities, by taking into account relevant international obligations, national circumstances and laws, and noting that the United Nations General Assembly has adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;</p> | <p>(d) The full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities, in the actions referred to in paragraphs 70 and 72 of this decision;</p> <p>(e) Actions are consistent with the conservation of natural forests and biological diversity, ensuring that actions referred to in paragraph 70 of this decision are not used for the conversion of natural forests, but are instead used to incentivize the protection and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services, and to enhance other social and environmental benefits;</p> <p>(f) Actions to address the risks of reversals</p> <p>(g) Actions to reduce displacement of emissions</p> |
|---|---|

BOX 3: SOME REASONS WHY PROCEDURAL EQUITY MAY NOT DELIVER GAINS IN DISTRIBUTIVE EQUITY

- High transaction costs of participatory and consultative processes
- Social, cultural and/or economic barriers that prevent decisions that appear equitable from being equitably implemented
- Governance problems leading to elite capture, especially problems within stakeholder groups which may be hard to identify (e.g. marginalisation by gender, ethnicity, class)
- Different understanding of equity, and disconnects between how equity is understood at recognition, procedural and distributive levels

Specific safeguards for promoting distributive equity in REDD+ are difficult to formulate. Cancun safeguards provide almost nothing on distributive

equity other than the reference in the first safeguard to consistency with international conventions and treaties. Safeguard (e) mentions enhancing social benefits but in the absence of any mention of costs this says little about distributive equity. However this gap (and other gaps in the Cancun Safeguards) may be addressed as countries develop their country safeguards approach. In terms of providing useful guidance in this area the REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards have gone further than most in defining distributive equity principles, notably relating to equitable benefit sharing and the contribution of REDD+ to human well-being.

Questions

How can benefit sharing mechanisms better reflect equity considerations without complexity undermining transparency and accountability?

Is it necessary to strengthen the distributive dimension of REDD+ safeguards and if so how?

Ambition

As with equity in other contexts, the extent to which REDD+ strategies and safeguards address equity goals can be characterised on a continuum from harmful to transformative.



The extent to which an initiative addresses equity in recognition, process and distribution of costs and benefits can be characterised on a continuum from harmful to transformative. The example shown in Figure 3 has been developed specifically for gender equity but may be more broadly applied to efforts to promote equity in all its dimensions. This notion of equity ambition is not a specific parameter in our equity framework. Rather it helps us understand in very broad terms how ambitious a particular approach (strategies and safeguards) seeks to be in enhancing equity in REDD+. In more specific terms this should be evident from the targets in the monitoring framework, including targets in the safeguards information system.

The following definitions are drawn from recent work on gender equity and REDD+ (Quesada-Aguilar et al, 2013):

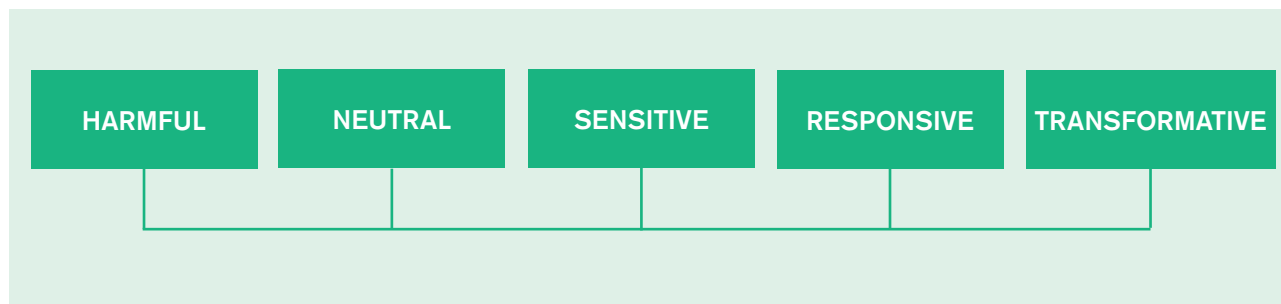
- **Harmful/neutral:** Design and implementation of initiatives does not recognize equity principles or incorporate measures to promote equity. Such approaches may reinforce or create inequitable gender and other stereotypes, or prove dis-empowering certain people in the process of achieving program goals.
- **Sensitive:** Design and implementation of initiatives will recognize and incorporate equity principles and

acknowledge the need for measures to promote more equitable processes and outcomes.

- **Responsive:** Design and implementation of initiatives will include measures to ensure processes apply selected equity principles and address prevalent socially differentiated inequalities.
- **Transformative:** Design and implementation of initiatives will include specific measures not only to promote equity in procedure and distribution of benefits and costs but also to address underlying causes of inequity related to recognition and in the realm of contextual equity.

The process to develop an equity transformative initiative will define the equity principles it will focus on and incorporate throughout its design and implementation, and recognize and challenge socially differentiated inequalities. Once inequalities and principles are identified, the initiative must establish information baselines on these issues. The next step will be to propose equitable measures based on the needs, preferences and expected outcomes of the different relevant stakeholders, paying special attention to women, marginalized, vulnerable groups. Finally, the initiative should use the safeguards information system to assess compliance with principles and changes in equity.

Figure 3. A gender equity continuum (from CARE, 2012)



Concluding remarks

There is no simple definition of equity in REDD+ and no simple recipe for enhancing equity in REDD+. Getting to grips with equity in REDD+ may seem like a challenging prospect but it becomes easier if approached in a logical order:

- What counts:
 - what we mean by equity
 - which REDD+ interventions have equity implications.
- Who counts:
 - what is our frame of reference (absolute or relative)
 - what are the scales/levels at which, and between which, comparisons are made

As we know from other experiences before and beyond REDD+, many REDD+ interventions have potential for negative as well as positive social impacts. Benefit sharing is an important part of the equity equation but only part.

The extent to which REDD+ can contribute to poverty reduction depends on the approach to equity. An emphasis on cost-based equity (do no harm) will minimise risks of exacerbating poverty. Going beyond this, a strong emphasis on the needs-based equity principle will enhance the impact in terms of poverty reduction, but there may well be trade-offs with efficiency that lead to lower emissions reductions than with a less pro-poor approach.

Equity is a moving target as it is inherently relative. Even if our frame of reference is absolute, people with growing access to information in an increasingly connected world will increasingly compare their situation with that of others.

Growing concerns about inequality in society globally and in particular countries is leading to growing political support for more equitable approaches to development in general, and specific initiatives such as REDD+. These concerns reflect not only moral concerns, but also, and increasingly, concerns relating to the effectiveness and sustainability of REDD+.

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Equity means different things to different people – a reflection of different principles, frames of reference and scales. Equity is important for both moral and instrumental reasons and while there is no one right way to understand equity it is important both in terms of social and environmental objectives that there is a common understanding of equity in a particular context.

This discussion paper presents and explores a framework for understanding equity in REDD+, and for strengthening the different approaches that are being used to enhance equity in REDD+. The framework may also be used as the basis for assessing equity in REDD+ as part of a process of assessing the social impacts of REDD+, although further work is needed on practical assessment methods.

There is little new in this discussion paper – it is simply an attempt at a synthesis of recent work on this issue in relation to the current discourse on social equity in the design and implementation of REDD+ strategies and social safeguards. This effort to clarify our understanding of equity in REDD+ is a work in progress and this discussion paper aims to stimulate a discussion that should be very much part of this process.

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