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Information Note

Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Organizations' Role in REDD+

Introduction

One of the seven safeguards adopted by the UNFCCC (the “Cancun Safeguards”) is the “*full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular indigenous peoples and local communities*”. As a part of its assistance to countries, the UN-REDD Programme has supported national partner governments as well as civil society organization (CSO) and indigenous peoples (IP) representatives to develop a common understanding of what “full and effective participation” constitutes and how it can be realised.

Initially, the Programme developed global-level guidance materials such as the Joint UN-REDD/FCPF Guidelines on Stakeholder Engagement and the UN-REDD Guidelines on free, prior and informed consent (FPIC), which further elaborate the components of full and effective participation in the context of REDD+ and align these concepts with key international principles and norms. Subsequently, the UN-REDD Programme’s core work has been to aid countries to interpret and apply principles of full and effective participation practically at the country level.

The Asia-Pacific region has made progress in these efforts, with several partner countries pioneering inclusive processes in collaboration with IP and civil society. This has included the development of self-selection processes for national and local IP and CSO representatives for national UN-REDD Programme Executive Boards (PEB), the inclusion of IP and CSO representatives on REDD+ working groups, and the development of national FPIC processes in a few countries. Facilitated dialogues between government and previously marginalized stakeholder groups have also been important in opening spaces for more authentic and effective participation.



In order to enable IP, CSO and government representatives from the region to share their experiences in approaches to support the full and effective participation of indigenous and civil society stakeholders in REDD+, the Programme organized a Regional Exchange during 7-8 May 2015 in Bangkok, with the participation of 16 IP and CSO representatives from seven countries and government representatives from two countries. The main objectives of the Exchange were to:

1. Facilitate the interactive exchange of best practices and lessons learnt on stakeholder engagement and the participation of IP and CSO constituencies in national REDD+ processes; and
2. Develop regional approaches and collaborative arrangements for IP and CSO engagement in REDD+ processes.

The Exchange used a mix of approaches to explore these issues: presentations framed the international REDD+ context; a variety of country presentations outlined national approaches and experiences; plenary discussions allowed participants to explore emerging themes and share experiences; and two group sessions looked at (1) Positive impacts and challenges in representing IP and CSO constituencies at the national level; and (2) IP and CSO stakeholders' potential role in shaping policies and measures to address drivers of deforestation. (All presentations and outputs of the event can be accessed [here](#).)

Information on the four main learning elements is provided below:



1. REDD+ contributes to improved stakeholder relationships and participation

Participants noted improvements in the culture of engagement between IP and CSO stakeholders and government representatives, as well as the creation of new mechanisms and opportunities for participation. Some of these advances are directly attributable to national REDD+ processes.

Key Lessons:

- Participants from Cambodia, Myanmar and Sri Lanka are seeing better working relationships between the government and IP and CSO representatives. The latter two countries, in particular, have improved

working relationships with forestry department officials. In Sri Lanka, for instance, it includes better awareness and recognition of IP and CSO stakeholders' roles in forest stewardship.

⇒ REDD+ can catalyze building trust among governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, and raise the profile of the importance and value of IP and CSOs in forest management.

- Channels of communication that either did not exist before or were very weak, are being opened between government representatives and IP stakeholders in Bangladesh, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam (See Box 1).
 - ⇒ Supporting dialogues and relationship building between government and IP and CSO representatives, which includes tackling previous patterns of poor communication between these stakeholders, is crucial for REDD+. These advances should move beyond single government ministries/departments, usually those dealing with forests. The cross-cutting nature of REDD+ requires inter-ministerial coordination and this is essential for improving the engagement of IP and CSO stakeholders with government as a whole.
- There is now representation of IP and CSO stakeholders at national level in official committees or working groups, in some instances for the very first time in Cambodia, Sri Lanka and Viet Nam. Discussions with government representatives on critical issues such as FPIC are happening for the first time in Myanmar and there is progress in developing national FPIC processes in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Viet Nam.
 - ⇒ IP and CSO representation in policy dialogue and decision making can be achieved and should be supported by governments, donors and partners. Seemingly difficult conversations on complicated issues such as indigenous peoples' rights, FPIC are possible, necessary and can be carried out successfully in collaboration.

Box 1: Building Bridges Between Governments and Indigenous Peoples

From May to June 2014, the UN-REDD Programme supported the Asia Indigenous Peoples Pact (AIPP) to promote closer collaboration and cooperation between IP, the UN-REDD Programme and government agencies working on REDD+ in Bangladesh, Myanmar and Viet Nam. Through partnerships with national IP organizations in these countries, preparatory meetings helped develop a common understanding of indigenous issues and challenges related to REDD+, while mutually determining recommendations for further collaboration with government agencies. The recommendations were presented at national dialogues that followed immediately after the preparatory meetings. (The reports of these preparatory meetings and dialogues can be accessed [here](#)).

Since then, the Forest Department (FD) in Myanmar has invited IP representatives to discuss issues such as FPIC, and explored options for collaboration, for example, training to FD on IP issues. Similarly, in Bangladesh, communications between the FD and IP are slowly improving, since an initial meeting between both parties to discuss forest law and policy.

2. Engagement needs to move from consultation to full and effective participation

Though IP and CSO participants appreciate the progress achieved, there is a further need to support meaningful participation in decision-making processes. If processes exist to allow CSO and IP groups the opportunity to participate in and influence national REDD+ processes, national REDD+ programmes will be stronger and more sustainable since they will enjoy broader "ownership". Effective and efficient reductions of emissions from forests cannot realistically be achieved without such ownership. Confusion



and consultation fatigue are possible problems if there is no clarity to why and when different stakeholders should be involved. It is important to develop a shared understanding of what level of engagement is most useful and appropriate at different points in the REDD+ process. This also leads to greater trust in the process and a more mature culture of engagement.

Key Lessons:

- More support and political space is needed for IP and CSOs to effectively contribute to decision making through key REDD+ bodies (e.g., Programme Executive Boards, Consultation Group and Technical Teams in Cambodia are limited). For example, capacity to understand and contribute to the issues being discussed in the given timeframe may be different, and IP and CSOs may find it difficult to speak out in environments dominated by government officials and other stakeholders. Additionally, language can be a barrier as discussions may take place in English or the majority ethnic language.
 - ⇒ The effectiveness of IP and CSO representatives to contribute to decision making via these REDD+ bodies needs to be periodically reviewed and strengthened. IP and CSO stakeholders may require a different level of support to engage in high-level decision making, for example, more time and assistance to consider what is being discussed; special support during meetings to ensure they have the space to raise their voice with confidence. There should be provision for regular analysis and feedback on how IP and CSO input is being integrated directly into decision making.
 - ⇒ Language needs of IP and CSO representatives to decision-making bodies should be assessed and provisions put in place to address these needs, for instance, through providing a dedicated translator rather than a volunteer translator, and information material in local languages before the meetings.
- The involvement of stakeholders in key processes and activities is not always satisfactory or consistent. For the work on drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, in Cambodia and Viet Nam, IP and CSO stakeholders were limited to providing information, while in Sri Lanka, CSOs were able to influence the analysis and recommendations. Some drivers can sometimes only be recognized at field level, making insights provided by IP and CSOs necessary to strengthen REDD+ effectiveness.



Lack of dedicated funds for CSO and IP involvement poses a challenge for greater engagement in national REDD+ processes, particularly in Sri Lanka and Viet Nam.

- ⇒ Some policies and measures (PAMs) to address priority drivers/barriers can only be implemented with the participation and cooperation of CSOs and IP. Therefore, these groups should be engaged at an early stage to identify feasible PAMs and facilitate their participation in the reform and creation of PAMs.
 - ⇒ IP and CSO stakeholders need to be involved directly in REDD+ Readiness implementation and funds need to be made available to support their involvement.
 - ⇒ Activities supporting collaboration between government officials and IP and CSO stakeholders should be promoted by all parties.
- In some instances public policies may limit participation. For example, in some countries CSOs may be discouraged or blocked from working directly with communities.
 - ⇒ CSO and IP organizations need to be able to consult freely with each other and with communities on the ground. Informal and formal policies that are preventing them from doing so effectively need to be addressed.

3. Supporting self-organization is critical for full and effective participation

In order for IP and CSO organizations and representatives to represent the views of their constituencies effectively, self-organization of these stakeholders is essential, to ensure they have the capacity and institutional mechanisms to coordinate and engage. Participants shared how they were approaching these challenges on the ground.

Key Lessons:

- IP and CSOs are using their existing networks and organizations to engage in REDD+ by developing dedicated platforms and groups, sometimes as part of existing networks, including climate change or forest related platforms and sometimes as stand-alone initiatives (See box 3).
 - ⇒ Support to the self-organization of IP and CSO constituencies to engage in REDD+ should be explicitly supported by governments, donors and other partners.
- One of the most difficult challenges is to ensure that all relevant stakeholders, some of whom are located in remote areas with little communication infrastructure, have an opportunity to participate in discussions relating to REDD+.
 - ⇒ Developing appropriate participatory processes and mechanisms at the local level, after identifying who and when they need to be engaged are crucial, and can be done with proper investment.
 - ⇒ It is probably not feasible to imagine a single network accessing all stakeholders – instead it may be necessary to rely on a “network of networks”.
- Regional and global representation of CSO and IP issues are important and require good networking and representative processes and platforms at the regional level. The IP constituencies currently have a good mechanism through existing regional IP caucuses; these have been effectively leveraged to support IP networking on REDD+ issues. CSOs, given the wide variety and disparity between different countries regarding voice, influence and importance of CSOs, and thus the difficulty of a single representative, have no such comparable mechanism, and need to strengthen both regional networks and the self-selection process for regional representatives to the Policy Board.



- National CSO representatives should work together with the regional CSO representative to the Policy Board to improve representative functions, including communication and feedback networks and future self-selection processes (a summary is available [here](#)).
- Women's inclusion from IP and CSO constituencies is still very weak in most of the countries. For instance very few indigenous women in Viet Nam are elected at the grassroots level to represent IP issues on REDD+.
 - ⇒ Support for women's inclusion from IP and CSO constituencies needs to be addressed systematically, and there are some promising approaches that have been piloted in the region (See box 2). Government, donors and partners' support and facilitation for this is necessary.

Box 2: Tackling gender and REDD+ in Asia-Pacific

A Joint Regional Initiative by the UN-REDD Programme, the USAID-funded Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forests (LEAF) and Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN) started in 2013 to enhance greater women's inclusion in REDD+. A regional scoping dialogue to identify key barriers to women's inclusion in the forest sector was followed by national-level studies and dialogues in Cambodia, the Philippines and Sri Lanka to identify practical entry points.

Primary barriers include ideological and cultural norms, lack of financial commitments by the states, as well as lack of women's representation. Corresponding recommendations were promoting more active participation of and capacity building for women's groups, and conducting gender analysis and planning. The initiative culminated in a regional expert dialogue where government representatives from the 3 countries described plans to integrate recommendations to strengthen gender perspectives and promote women's inclusion into REDD+. All documents of this initiative are available [here](#).



Box 3. Current Experiences in Self-organization in Asia-Pacific

REDD+ Consultation Group and IP representation, Cambodia: An 18-member Consultation Group (CG) aims to strengthen the influence of civil society, local communities, IP, academic and private sector on national REDD+ policy. Two representatives from nine categories of non-governmental stakeholders were elected by their respective constituencies in August 2013. Since then, the CG has been providing feedback on various elements of the national REDD+ strategy to the REDD+ Taskforce, whose members are representatives of key ministries. A selection process for IP representatives was carried out through 15 provincial elections, with recognition from local authorities, resulting in the selection of provincial representatives and two national representatives in the CG. CSOs and IP are also members of various REDD+ Technical Teams, which ensures quality technical inputs to policy development.

CSO networks, PNG: CSOs are an integral part of the REDD+ process and play a key role both at the policy and implementation levels in PNG. CSOs are a major part of different Technical Working Groups, such as REDD+ and social and environmental safeguards, contributing to both technical and policy discussions on REDD+, in addition to their role in monitoring the national REDD+ process. There is effective networking among CSO partners, including churches, that work with local communities in rural areas and hence are able to represent their views in the REDD+ process. For example, national FPIC Guidelines have been completed with full CSO, and local community input, and there has been participation in the development of social and environmental safeguards. There are however, challenges to women's inclusion at the community level as most local cultures do not include women in traditional decision making.

CSO REDD+ Platform and IP Forum, Sri Lanka: In Sri Lanka, civil society set up a REDD+ platform in December 2013 and has been valuable to CSO organizations working on forests and REDD+. There is also an existing, independent IP Forum, which is recognised as representing most of the IP constituencies. Both the CSO Platform and the IP Forum have held awareness-raising workshops to educate less informed stakeholders. The CSO Platform has also been asked by the government to assist in raising awareness of Forest Officers in some districts. CSO and IP groups have been able to influence a number of activities, such as the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation study, the institutional analysis, and the private sector engagement study. Participating CSO members want to expand CSO Platform beyond REDD+ to ensure that it adds value to other issues. The platform members are planning to register as an official organization so that CSO members can access opportunities to implement REDD+ and other activities directly. Women's full participation still remains a challenge for both the CSO and IP bodies.

CSO and Ethnic Minority networks, Viet Nam: Building on experiences from other natural resources initiatives, the CSO representative to the UN-REDD Programme Executive Board (PEB) also chairs the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (VNGO-FLEGT) network. By tapping into an existing body of expertise, CSOs are able to create synergies and facilitate learning across two related areas of work. In the mean time, the IP representative to the PEB has established an Ethnic Minority Network, comprising 24 members: four members from two communes from each of the six pilot provinces under UN-REDD Viet Nam Phase II Programme.



4. Building Capacity

IP and CSOs clearly need to have sufficient capacity to understand REDD+ and associated national processes in order to be able to participate meaningfully. The sequencing and level at which this capacity needs to be provided is often poorly understood. This creates unclear expectations on what “full” capacity is, what types of capacity and engagement are needed at national and subnational levels, and at different phases of the REDD+ process.

Key lessons:

- The capacity of IP and CSO representatives at the national level to understand and engage in REDD+ is frequently not at the same level as other stakeholders such as government officials and academics, putting Cambodian and Sri Lankan representatives at a disadvantage.
 - ⇒ Government officials, donors and partners should consider giving dedicated capacity support to IP and CSO groups. For instance, in Cambodia, separate training workshops are planned for the IP, so that the pace and content of training can be tailored to their levels of understanding.
- Capacity of CSO and IP representatives at provincial and local levels is weak. Information is usually not available in local languages, making it difficult for them to benefit from most capacity-raising materials.
 - ⇒ There is a need to define, in collaboration with IP and CSO stakeholders, and in light of the national context, progress of REDD+ in the country, and the different types of community stakeholder, whether indigenous or migrants, what level of capacity building is needed at different levels, be it national, provincial or local. This will result in a common understanding of what “sufficient” capacity is and what level of capacity is necessary at which phases of REDD+. Government officials, donors and partners need to address this issue and ensure that agreed upon capacity levels are identified and achieved.
 - ⇒ Language needs should be carefully assessed and catered for as part of any stakeholder consultation and engagement process. In Bangladesh, key materials were translated into local languages following dialogues with government officials.



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