



REFORESTATION AND FOREST RESTORATION UNDER REDD+: AVOIDING THE MISTAKES OF THE PAST

If the history of reforestation and forest restoration provides any indication of their future, then the outlook of enhancing forest carbon stocks under REDD+ in Asia and the Pacific is quite gloomy. That's in a nutshell the conclusion that Barr and Sayer draw in a recent article on [*The Political Economy of Reforestation and Forest Restoration in Asia-Pacific: Critical Issues for REDD+*](#). According to their review, past reforestation and restoration have:

- “Consolidated the control of state agencies and corporate actors over ‘degraded’ forest landscapes, often resulting in the displacement of rural communities;
- Exacerbated economic disparities by channeling large capital subsidies and resource rents to companies with close ties to state elites;
- Facilitated corruption and financial fraud, in some cases on a grand scale;
- Accelerated biodiversity loss by creating perverse incentives for the conversion of ‘degraded’ secondary forests; and
- Generated mixed results for rural small-holders, at times locking them in inequitable agreements with plantation companies, and in other cases, offering enhanced tenure security.”

Many of the above issues have been raised before. Nevertheless, the reminder is timely, as countries are slowly moving from getting ready for REDD+ towards implementation.

In general, the provision of appropriate financial incentives and/or other benefits, such as stronger use and management rights, to encourage reforestation and the restoration of forests has much to offer. Many countries have vast degraded forest areas and “wasteland” that in theory at least, are instantly available for treatment. REDD+'s unique source of financing could transform these areas into revenue-generating carbon sinks. Beyond carbon they could generate other environmental and social benefits, for example to hundreds of thousands local communities managing degraded forest areas. In practice, as the two authors emphasize, more harm might be done than good. To avoid historical pitfalls they recommend:

- Rights-based spatial planning, including a commitment to the principles of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC);
- The equitable distribution of monetary and non-monetary benefits;
- Improved financial governance to prevent corruption and fraud;
- Policies that dramatically restrict the conversion of (often degraded) natural forests; and
- Initiatives that particularly benefits the livelihoods of rural smallholders.

Don't be surprised, if the five recommendations look somewhat familiar. The similarity with the safeguards in the Cancun Agreements is striking. They should therefore be taken seriously.

It is reassuring that many current initiatives in support of REDD+ are tackling issues to ensure that the future will not look like the past. And then we have a growing number of watchdogs that ring alarm bells on a regular basis. So perhaps the outlook is not so gloomy after all.

Go-REDD+ is an e-mail listserv managed by the UN-REDD Programme team in Asia-Pacific, based in Bangkok. The main objective of **Go-REDD+** is to distribute information, synopses of research results and activities related to REDD+ in Asia-Pacific, to assist countries in their REDD+ readiness efforts. Old messages will be archived on the [Regional Activities pages](#) of the UN-REDD Programme website. Discussion forum on **Go-REDD+** is available through UN-REDD Programme's online knowledge sharing platform, www.unredd.net. Please note that you must be a member to join the Discussion Forum. To request membership, please contact admin@unredd.net with your name and affiliation. The **Go-REDD+** team welcomes feedback, suggestions or inquiries to goredd.th@undp.org.