



TENURE, RIGHTS, AND NETWORKS: KEY ISSUE FOR REDD+ TO BE VIABLE

The influence of land tenure on the management of land and forests is much discussed. Two assumptions are often made in such discussions, namely that security of tenure is essential for REDD+ to be effective, and that security of tenure will lead to better forest management, more effective forest conservation, and improved livelihoods for local stakeholders.

If land tenure reform is to be a central element of policies and measures to implement REDD+, then it is essential to consider whether these assumptions are always valid, or to identify those conditions under which the assumptions are valid. [A new Analytical Paper from the Global Canopy Programme](#), authored by Anna Bolin, Leonie Lawrence, and Matt Leggett, takes an objective look at these issues.

The authors start by reviewing the situation in two sharply contrasting countries in Asia/Pacific, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and Nepal. In PNG there are extremely clear and strong tenure rights on paper, with 97% of the land area falling under customary ownership. However, in practice several factors undermine this apparently positive scenario, including unsurveyed boundaries, unregistered title, and arrangements for leasing customary land that pave the way for elite capture. In contrast, Nepal has relatively weak tenure rights, with District Forest Officers empowered to reject elements of Forest Management Plans for areas that are nominally under community management, and even to reclaim these areas from communities, if their management practices are deemed harmful to the environment. In practice, however, DFOs rarely use these powers, and forest users' groups have substantial autonomy in forest management decisions. Community forest groups also wield substantial policy and legislative influence at local and national levels, largely through the power and authority of the Federation of Community Forest Users Nepal (FECOFUN). Stronger tenure rights are not among their lobbying priorities. Thus, security of tenure is clearly not always as crucial to forest-dependent communities as is often assumed and seemingly strong rights can easily be undermined.

However, the authors also review recent literature to point out that while increased levels of local control of forests generally result in improved forest conditions, the same is certainly not true for livelihoods. Furthermore, even where tenure reforms are enacted, the *de jure* strengthened rights are not always reflected in *de facto* changes, due to unequal social structures and power relations. Finally, it needs to be recognized that designing and implementing tenure reforms is an extremely lengthy process, which is unlikely to result in significant changes before REDD+ implementation starts.

The Analytical Paper concludes that land tenure reform without effective enforcement is likely to significantly hinder effective future REDD+ implementation, and can also result in inequitable distribution of benefits. Therefore, short-term actions that can result in positive results include:

- Mapping the landscape of national and sub-national laws and policies across sectors (agriculture, mining, forestry, and the environment) to ensure policy consistency, identify perverse incentives, legal loopholes and conflicting priorities that may combine to exacerbate the drivers of deforestation and/or jeopardise community rights.
- Engagement with strong networks of civil society organizations. In the Nepal case study, such a network was of community forest user groups; however, other networks of organizations having an interest in forest management would be equally viable. The role of the networks can include promoting the recognition and enforcement of community *de facto* land rights, and encouraging the devolution of forestry resource management responsibility to the local level.

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](#). The Go-REDD+ team welcomes feedback, suggestions or inquiries to gored.th@undp.org.