Playing games to select REDD+ benefits

Key lessons learned in Viet Nam

- Groups tended to prioritize payments for forest patrols, cash payments to households, and agricultural inputs in kind. The large majority of groups did not select infrastructure investments as this was seen as a role for local authorities.

- Priorities differed between groups depending on their social composition (i.e. gender, ethnicity, wealth)

- Virtually all groups reacted to the conditionality of REDD+. Most groups changed the kinds and timing of benefits, for example by postponing cash payments to the final year. A few groups also reacted in surprising ways, challenging key premises of REDD+ BDS considered unjust.

- Some groups wanted to be involved in the assessment of performance for fairness and transparency reasons (i.e. participatory based monitoring).

Helping local people to make informed choices for performance-based REDD+ benefits

Consulting local people about their preferences for REDD+ benefits is not an easy task. Most forest people are not used to being asked what benefits they would like to get in return for participating in forest management, and when they would like to receive such rewards. Even if they have been asked before, they will most likely struggle to comprehend a key feature of REDD+: that they will only receive the agreed benefits if they produce a certain performance.

Local people's participation in the selection of benefits is a critical precondition for effective, efficient and equitable REDD+ Benefit Distribution Systems (BDS). Only if local people participate actively in choosing the kinds and timing of benefits will those take on the incentive function required for performance-based REDD+. Only if REDD+ practitioners apply suitable procedures for facilitating such participation will REDD+ provide inclusive opportunities for all local stakeholders.

The activity

The UN-REDD Programme in Viet Nam commissioned SNV to develop suitable procedures for participatory selection of REDD+ benefits. The SNV team conducted a total of fifteen pilots in seven villages chosen to represent a variety of conditions characteristic of forest communities in Lam Dong province, Viet Nam.

The team developed the REDD+ game as an innovative approach for participatory selection of REDD+ benefits (see Textbox). The REDD+ game provides a simple procedure to communicate key parameters of REDD+ to local people and to facilitate collective choices about the kinds and timing of benefits. It highlights trade-offs between different kinds of benefits and different disbursement schedules.

The pilots in Viet Nam demonstrated the REDD+ game can help local people make suitable choices about REDD+ benefits. All groups came to collective decisions on the kinds and timing of benefits.

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Next steps & implications for REDD+

- UN-REDD is preparing models of BDS for implementation under Phase 2 of the programme

- The SNV team is looking to further develop the REDD+ game in order to serve the implementation of REDD+ actions in and beyond activities in Viet Nam.

The full report can be found at:
www.snvworld.org/redd
www.un-redd.org

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The REDD+ BDS game

The REDD+ game presents groups of around ten people with a hypothetical village, forest, and REDD+ contract: villagers receive a certain total amount of REDD+ benefits over five years if they achieve the contracted performance. The decision over benefit types and timing is up to villagers.

Groups are made aware that the actual level of overall REDD+ benefits depends on performance, which is known only at the end of the five-year period. Each group plays the REDD+ game in several steps:

- Groups identify possible kinds of benefits

- Groups play scenario 1: where actual performance meets the contracted performance, villagers receive the contracted benefits

- Groups play scenario 2: where actual performance was less than contracted performance due to events beyond villagers' control (e.g. a large forest fire), villagers and the REDD+ Program would share liability equally and villagers would get half of the contracted benefits

- Groups play scenario 3: where performance was impacted by villagers' negligence (e.g. clearing forest for agriculture) then no benefits would be received in year 5, and any benefits in years 1-4 are repaid

- Groups confirm most desirable kinds and disbursement schedule of benefits

More broadly, the REDD+ game can generate empirical insights on the design of REDD+ BDS to complement theoretical analyses. REDD+ actions, after all, will only work if they respond to local people's particular needs, aspirations and understandings in concrete settings and reflect the conditionality of benefits upon performance.

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