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**Participatory Governance Assessments for REDD+**

**Why citizens, national ownership and accountability matter**

**A Discussion Note**

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**Introduction**

Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations, progress has been made on the issue of reducing greenhouse gas emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks, referred to as “REDD+”.

Payments under a REDD+ mechanism for these emission mitigation measures will offer the first opportunity to launch countries onto low-carbon, climate-resilient development pathways. These payments can translate into incentives for changes in land use and better stewardship of forest resources. This, however, can only be achieved if the socio-economic drivers of deforestation and forest degradation are addressed and current forest resource users have sufficient confidence in the REDD+ mechanism to change the way they use forest resources. This will not be easy, as current emission-intensive uses of forest resources are often an important source of foreign exchange, energy, food security, new settlements or employment. In this context, **good and efficient governance** of forest resources and of the distribution of benefits will be central to the success of REDD+ policies and measures. Good governance will enable an environment conducive to the predictable and lasting delivery of emission reductions, ensure that REDD+ policies provide sufficient incentives and minimize negative social impacts, and promote structures of service delivery and payments geared towards sustainable development and poverty reduction outcomes.

By contrast, if the allocation of carbon rights is opaque and uncertain, if the distribution of benefits is unpredictable, untimely or captured by a few, if lack of enforcement allows free riders to exploit the system, or if perceived or experience corruption is high, stakeholders will not take the risk of forgoing the income they derive from their current uses of forest resources. Conversely, when the rights of forest dependent communities are violated or communities are marginalized, investors, weary of insecure business environments and unpredictable emission reductions, are deterred.

International discussions on a REDD+ mechanism have gained momentum, and close to 5 billion have already been pledged until 2012 for REDD+ activities.[[1]](#endnote-2) Meanwhile, bilateral and multilateral initiatives such as the UN-REDD Programme are working in place to support countries in building their capacity and be “REDD-ready”, including their governance systems for REDD+.

UNDP understands and promotes governance as “comprising the mechanism, process and institutions that determine how power is exercised, how decisions are made on issues of public concern and how citizens articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligation and mediate their differences.” UNDP’s democratic governance approach is based on fostering inclusive participation, strengthening accountable and responsive governing capacity and grounding governance in international principles.

A comprehensive governance and development approach must address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, mitigates the risks associated to new REDD+ incentives and enhances livelihoods. This will not be easy, as REDD+ will take place in forest governance contexts that have often been characterized by illegal logging, corruption, corporate and elite capture of forest lands, mining, displacement of forest communities and undue exploitation of natural resources. In many countries the lack of appropriate policies on forest management, weak law enforcement, ambiguous land tenure as well as poor regulation on the use of forest have contributed to deforestation and forest degradation. The general absence of effective public accountability and subsequent rampant corruption has often exacerbated the vulnerability of forests and their communities.

**Understanding the democratic governance approach to REDD+**

It is widely agrees that effective, accountable and transparent governance is an important prerequisite for a positive REDD+ outcome. To achieve this outcome it is essential to understand the following aspects of governance for REDD+:

* **Forest governance is a component of the larger governance framework of a country**. An effective governance for REDD+ framework will have to address three key challenges: forest governance, the governance system of the country and the issues of poverty and livelihood. The quality of governance for REDD+ in a country will depend on a robust legal and policy framework, the capacity of the institutional system to implement and enforce, the ability to raise and manage resources, transparent and accountable decision-making systems[[2]](#endnote-3), and above all more empowered and educated citizens.
* **Citizens and forest communities play a crucial role in strengthening forest governance agenda.**. In forest-rich countries such as India, Brazil, Indonesia or Nepal, national media, citizens and community-based organization have played a pivotal role in strengthening the quality of governance and forest governance in particular, leading to positive environmental outcomes.
* **Active participation of citizens and the capacity of the government to deliver are keys to the success of REDD+**. There is wide recognition that REDD will succeed only with the full participation and ownership of Indigenous Peoples and other forest-dependent communities. This is especially relevant at the local level, where land and other natural resource management decisions are ultimately made. Through the activities of the UN-REDD Programme, UNDP has been working since 2008 on building government and civil society capacity to engage in national REDD+ processes.
* **National and local ownership of governance for REDD+ is a condition of viability and success of REDD+ initiatives.** Unless and until REDD+ governance initiatives are nationally owned by national stakeholders, particularly forest-dependent communities and the government of a country, there is little chance to sustain the agenda. There is ample evidence from around the world that improving governance cannot be an externally driven technical fix.[[3]](#endnote-4) Governance is deeply political, and improving it requires capabilities of citizens to demand accountability and capacity of the state to be responsive – both of which depend on ownership.
* **Assessing governance needs and priorities to make REDD+ work efficiently, equitably and effectively is a first step towards sustained governance policies.**  The active participation of all stakeholders in assessment and monitoring processes will increase the demand for accountability and state responsiveness.  **and**

**Governance assessments for REDD+**

Participatory governance assessments are undertaken by a partnership between government and civil society and help point to particular institutions or institutional arrangements as the cause of governance challenges. As such they help identify appropriate operational solutions and performance improvement processes. When conducted successfully, such assessment serves to strengthen democratic governance at the country level, and provides a critical accountability mechanism for government and for citizens to engage on governance issues and voice their opinions. Data produced by such assessments reflect and addresses citizens’ concerns. It may also offer a superior evidence base for national decision-making. Benchmarking progress provides a record of reference for planning, monitoring and evaluation.

However, these multi-stakeholder approaches do not prescribe a one-size-fits-all tool or method. Countries’ contexts vary significantly, hence the importance of having a diversity of methods, tools and strategies which can be adapted to a specific situation when such a governance assessment process is initiated. For countries in transition or conflict contexts the nature and characteristics of the stakeholders may be different and specially designed tools to ensure participation and effectiveness of the process may be needed.[[4]](#endnote-5)

Governance assessments and monitoring need not only be objective; they must strengthen the capacity of the forest-dependent communities to monitor, and build the foundations for sustainable governance reform. Such approach will create enabling and sustainable conditions on the ground among various stakeholders which will ensure that REDD+ benefits are distributed in an effective, transparent and accountable way; that rights are not violated; and that long term reform is sustained. The key to the sustainability of this process is capacity development – including institutional capacity – for all relevant stakeholders.

**Key principles**

Participatory governance assessments are based on four key principles:

1. **Accountability**: An assessment acts as a critical accountability mechanism for local communities and stakeholders with regards to the government’s performance. It helps to build the capacity of local communities and civil society organisations to monitor governance far beyond the scope of one project or programme.
2. **Participation:** The participation of a broad range of representatives from various arenas of society gives a more accurate perspective and important inputs based on the real situation on the ground. It also helps to build the national ownership that is needed to sustain the capacity and local pressure to monitor governance beyond a single project. In the case of REDD+, the participation of the forest communities in the process is a condition of the success of REDD+ in the long term.
3. **Transparency:** National actors should have unbiased access to information on the assessment process, and the results of the assessment should be made available to the public as a public good.
4. **Legitimacy**: The national actors agree that the assessment process and its results are legitimate and should be followed up in an effective manner on the ground.

**The comparative advantage of PGAs for REDD+**

UNDP’s approach for the UN-REDD Programme is nationally-owned governance assessments with multi-stakeholder participation and a focus on building local and national capacity.

* **Participatory governance assessments stress “agency” and “ownership” of the process at the country level**. The country-led aspect of participatory governance assessments is an affirmation of the “agency” of the people, institutions and decision makers at the national level. A sense of agency and ownership enable people and countries to innovate as well as impact change in relation to REDD+.

**Operational features of PGA for REDD+**

Participatory governance assessments for REDD+ need to include the following operational features:

1. **Assessment is aligned to national political priorities and processes**
2. **Assessment is country contextualized**
3. **Methodology is rigorous**
4. **Selection of indicators is transparent and participatory**
5. **Indicators are pro-poor and gender-sensitive**
6. **Capacity of national stakeholders is developed**
7. **Assessment is cost-effective and timely**
8. **Results are stored in a public national database**
9. **Results are widely communicated**
10. **Assessment is repeated and the institutions and outputs can serve as basis for monitoring**

* **Participatory Governance Assessments can help build the national and local capacity of the government and local communities.** A nationally owned, multi-stakeholder and participatory approach to governance assessments with a stress on local and national capacity development can strengthen local capacity to monitor governance and make a sustainable impact on the ground.
* **A participatory governance assessment is a *practical approach.*** Its relevance is largely that it is an *applied field of knowledge* that can make the State and institutions of governance *inclusive, responsive and capable*. It is also an important means to *generate knowledge* about the *what,* *how* and *why* of governance in diverse contexts. A country-led governance assessment can give important practical and theoretical insights about what works and what does not work in a certain context. It can also generate knowledge about why some aspects of governance or institutions work in some contexts and not in others. Thus its significance is due to its *applied* as well as *generative* character in terms of **bridging knowledge and action**. This assessment approach is a means to make accountability work – with evidence as well as comparison. Governance assessments can expose the bottle-necks, system inertia, corruption instances and political subversions that stand between the promises and the materialization of the REDD+ initiative.
* **A participatory governance assessment does not necessarily mean that the assessment is led by the government**. It means an assessment owned by the key stakeholders and citizens of a given country. Such an approach thus seeks to go beyond the government to ensure accountability, participation and operational autonomy. Stakeholders can include both external and external actors, provided that the process is led by national actors, and that there is a clear emphasis on ownership of multiple actors in a given country and on building the local capacity to monitor and assess governance.

**Case study: Guyana**

In 2008 a group of donors in Guyana commissioned a report on Democratic Governance and Institutional Assessment.1 The report was rejected by the government of Guyana as well as several civil society organisations who refused to endorse an external or so called independent third party assessment in this case conducted by consultants from New Zealand. Despite a comprehensive two volume report with unprecedented data generation and governance evidence on Guyana, there was hardly any inclination from the government or civil society to implement the recommendations. This a good illustration of how a technically solid and objective report, if produced by a third party, can be outright rejected due to the lack of buy-in, legitimacy and failure to ensure the participation of multiple stakeholders within a country. There are numerous other examples of how the lack of legitimacy and ownership within a country can make excellent assessments or monitoring reports redundant and irrelevant to the policy process.

1 The 2008 report on Democratic Governance and Institutional Assessment was commissioned by the Inter-American Development Bank, DFID, CIDA and UNDP to a private consulting firm (Bradford & Associates, New Zealand/UK).

For instance, a nationally owned multi-stakeholder approach to forest governance would involve key stakeholders such as national civil society organizations, forest-dependent communities, the media, REDD+ donor countries, the government and academia. REDD+ systems are an area where a number of stakeholders with competing interests may sit around the same table. The very process of the assessment needs to be designed in a way to get the desired inputs and support from all local stakeholders.

* **Externally-driven assessments have limited validity and less impact.** Evidence shows that while externally driven governance assessments may have some validity in terms of obtaining information and indicators for effective decision-making among donors, they rarely bring sustainable and long-term change on the ground beyond a project cycle. There is more resistance and less ownership for externally driven third party governance assessments or monitoring.In most countries, both civil society and the government challenge externally driven assessments when done by technical experts, consulting organisations or international NGOs. In spite of the technical expertise, there is scant evidence that such assessments brought about any long term policy change or positive outcomes.
* **PGAs-REDD+ place participation of civil society at the centre, rather than the periphery, of governance assessments.** In a PGA, the process is not designed and conducted by external technical consultants – with whom the participation of civil society is sometimes more of instrumental value rather than transformative value.
* **The PGA for REDD+ approach is cost effective and efficient.** An assessment designed on inputs from people with significant local experience and expertise is effective. A multi-stakeholder consultation and development of relevant governance indicators can be relatively fast: by using local resources and expertise, high transaction costs and long gestation periods can be avoided. With more local and national ownership, it will also be faster to eventually implement the recommendations from the assessment

In short, **participatory governance assessments for REDD+ are a practical and political approach with an ethical and normative underpinning, which may involve the use of several and varied tools and methods of assessment adapted to different contexts.**

1. **End notes**

   Source: [www.ecosystemsclimate.org](http://www.ecosystemsclimate.org) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. UN-REDD / Chatham House : report of the Expert Workshop on monitoring governance safeguards for REDD+, 2010 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. See William Easterly, *The White Man’s Burden* (2006) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. For more information on governance assessments as well as examples of countries undergoing a nationally-led governance assessment see [www.gaportal.org](http://www.gaportal.org). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)