

REDD+

India's Policy towards REDD+: Dense Forest Ahead!

(Text of ppt by Sharachandra Lele, Senior Fellow, Centre for Environment & Development, ATREE for the INECC Consultation, 13th, 14th, 15th November, 2011)

India's official attraction to REDD+

- REDD+ will be a just reward for India's forest conservation efforts that benefit the globe
- REDD+ will generate large economic benefits (3 billion USD over 3 decades)
- These benefits will be passed on to forest protecting communities (leading to poverty alleviation)

How should we evaluate REDD+?

- Climate effectiveness
- Poverty alleviation
- Benefits must exceed opportunity costs
- Fairness (international, internal)
- Biodiversity conservation
- Impact on democratic processes

Should we engage with REDD+ at all?

- REDD+ in the absence of a global climate agreement only makes sense if it is based on 'free' funds, not on selling CERs.
- But only pilot phase funding is coming from public funds, rest from the carbon market
- Carbon market can only emerge post-agreement
- In any likely agreement, India will need forest carbon to offset its own emissions!

Climate effectiveness

- Climate can be saved without REDD+
- Large uncertainties about below ground biomass, about rates of regrowth in natural forest, about baselines (additionality)
- Overestimated potential:
 - "wastelands" of 75 Mha are "available" (for CDM)
 - "degraded" forests are "available" at no opportunity cost
- Leakage:
 - Allocating net national gain/loss to a location
 - Cross-sectoral leakage (LPG replacing fuelwood)

Poverty alleviation requirements: non-market scenario

- Gross returns must be high
- Opportunity costs must be low
- Transaction costs must be low
- Returns must go preferentially into the hands of the poor

Gross poverty alleviation

- Quantum of returns from reforestation (not counting transaction costs or opportunity costs):
 - \$5/tC amounts to only Rs 6000-Rs12000/ha over 25 yrs!
- Transaction costs will be high: more than 50% by any estimate

Opportunity costs

- “Degraded” forest lands are under heavy use
 - CPRs contributing ~30% of livelihoods in dryland regions (FES, 2011)
 - large fraction from grazing & firewood collection
- “Reforestation” involves substantial opportunity costs for local users
- Indiscriminate “reforestation” can also impose environmental opportunity costs (hydrology, biodiversity)

Conditions for “To the hands of the poor”

- Villagers must control forest carbon resource and its marketing
- Marginalised groups must have strong say within village
- Poor must have capacity to make long-term investments, absorb opp.costs, engage with technicalities
- CDM on private lands must not swamp REDD+ on community lands

Indian situation

- Rights of village community not legally defined/granted (vis-à-vis state, vis-à-vis neighbouring community)
 - JFM does not provide for autonomous decision-making
- Elite capture is a very real, exacerbated by JFM
- Paternalistic state control => no local capacity (e.g., NTFP)
- Rich farmers will always out-compete through CDM (e.g., biofuels)

Democratic governance

- Current state of forest governance highly undemocratic
- only strengthens State-managed (non-market) REDD+ centralisation
- Market-based REDD+, in absence of community-level autonomy, does not work
- Either way: governance reform is strong pre-condition

Recommendations

- Enormous caution required
- Engagement in REDD+ itself is questionable
- Forest rights and governance reform should be absolute pre-condition (for non-market or market-based)
- Local capacities for democratic decision-making and market engagement need strengthening first

Forests constitute an integral part of social life of tribals and others living in and around forest areas and contribute substantially to the food supply of tribal populations. Tribal communities living in close proximity with biodiversity rich landscapes have evolved location specific and innovative livelihood strategies based on their traditional knowledge. Non-timber forest products are affected by the decrease in its quantity as a consequence of climate change. Dwindling availability of forest-produce- food, fuel, medicinal herbs, etc. has deprived the rural poor from a supplementary source of both income and food. Non-timber forest products are likely to be more vulnerable to changes in the climate system than timber production. These products have indirect and incremental impacts on local economies, food security and health. (http://iopp.fileburst.com/ees/ees9_6_382011.pdf)

The Joint Forest Management of Government of India is not an effective tool for improving the well-being of the poor people who are depending on NTFPs. Even under JFM the existing policies render the co-managers as mere labourers on JFM lands. Community Forests Management(CFM) has brought some change but there is still a lot to be desired. CFM can reflect and address the needs and priorities of the forest dependent communities only when there is not just a shift in who is managing forests but in how forests are viewed and managed. A community based rights regime with built in

safeguards for access and livelihood of forests-dependent people could proved a solution to problems of sustainable forest management as well as sustainable local livelihoods.

Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Bill, 2006 (FRA). For the first time, the law recognized the “primary role” of forest communities in forest management. Among other things it asserted the rights of communities to protect, conserve, regenerate or manage any forest or community forest resource that has been traditionally protected.

The FRA(Forest Rights Act) however does not provide a clear road-map for institutionalizing a democratic forest management system. The legal status of committees and the powers of its member on right to stop felling etc needs to be made explicit. (says, Sharachchandra Lele, ATREE http://www.currentconservation.org/issues/cc_2-4-3.pdf).

If livelihoods are to be maintained or improved, it is important to enhance indigenous ecological knowledge and improving marketing structures for forest-based communities. NTFP harvesting must be accompanied by appropriate incentives to minimised ecological impacts, even as we seek long-term livelihood alternatives.

Forests can greatly assist vulnerable communities adapt to the impact of climate change, if managed properly. If they are not managed sustainably, forests will exacerbate these impacts. Similarly, because of their ability to take CO₂ out of the atmosphere, forests have the potential to offer solutions to climate change. However, if forests are destroyed, the increasing amount of carbon in the atmosphere could lead to the destruction of what remains. The Director General of CIFOR Frances Seymour says "The imperative to assist forests and forest communities to adapt to climate change has been poorly addressed in national policies and international negotiations. The adaptation challenge is being treated as secondary to mitigation, and yet the two are inextricably linked”.

Some potential measures that can be taken up to protect forests are promoting natural forest regeneration; strengthening legislation for forest conservation; adopting sustainable timber extraction practices; prevention of forest fragmentation etc.

Adaptation is possible by preserving/protecting bio-diversity, forests, using agricultural waste for bio-fuels and through livestock improvement, organic farming, better governance of electric power production and distribution, undertaking renewable de-centralised energy options such as micro or 'nano' hydro, photovoltaic solar based home lighting systems and biomass based initiative.

Further Readings

1. Climate Change and forest communities with special reference to Orissa in Towards Sustainable Communities by Ranjan Panda, INECC, 2009
2. Guide on Climate Change & Indigenous Peoples, Tebtebba Foundation, Philippines.pp96. 2008[R.E31d.63]
3. Forests and climate change after Copenhagen - An Asia-Pacific perspective. Centre for People and Forests, Thailand. 23 pp.May- 2010 [R.E31d.101]
4. Is India ready to implement REDD Plus? A preliminary assessment. The Energy and Resources Institute, New Delhi.13 pp. 2009. [R.E31d.103]
5. Realising rights, protecting forest: An Alternative Vision for Reducing Deforestation - Case studies from the Accra Caucus. United and Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,Ghana.23 pp. June- 2010. [R.E31d.102]
6. Missing the Community for the woods: Forest, Communities and Climate Change In India (English and Kannada) - A Climate Education Booklet By CED, INECC, ODAF