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Challenges in fulfilling REDD+ social safeguards: Local evidence from 6 countries
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Reducing carbon emissions through avoided deforestation and forest degradation and enhancement of carbon stocks (REDD+) has been proposed as a win-win tool for mitigating global climate change and improving local livelihoods. REDD+ social safeguards strive to protect and enhance local governance and wellbeing, ensure local participation and appropriate consent, and secure local rights to land and resources. To be eligible for results-based compensation through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, REDD+ countries must develop national-level Safeguard Information Systems (SIS) to monitor and regularly report on the social and environmental impacts of REDD+. While safeguards represent a key step for promoting social and environmental integrity in REDD+, the major challenge is operationalization and monitoring. Given limited financial support for SIS, safeguards monitoring will rely on leveraging and improving upon ongoing data collection efforts, with performance indicators carefully chosen to reflect national and subnational conditions. Through the Center for International Forestry Research (CIFOR) Global Comparative Study on REDD+, we measured social safeguard indicators at 22 subnational REDD+ initiative sites in Brazil, Peru, Cameroon, Tanzania, Indonesia and Vietnam. We carried out village and household-level surveys in 150 villages and nearly 4,000 households in 2010-2012 (pre-intervention) and 2013-2014 (post-intervention) to assess local participation in REDD+ and evaluate the impacts of REDD+ interventions on local livelihoods (e.g. tenure security, income, assets). In addition to data collected pre-and post-intervention, our study includes a control group. Overall, we find a dominance of positive incentives applied at REDD+ sites, such as livelihood enhancements, in relation to other intervention types (e.g. punitive regulatory measures). There was significant improvement in household income and perceived wellbeing at the aggregate level, yet we find high variability between countries and study sites. At six sites, increases in income were significantly higher in treatment versus control villages, but attribution to REDD+ remains unproven. Additionally, despite a focus on land tenure regularization as a key readiness activity, we show minimal improvement in tenure security at the local level. Finally, there were very low levels of local participation in REDD+, with women less informed and involved in REDD+ activities than men. Our results reflect the persistent challenge of promoting full and effective participation of local people in conservation and development initiatives (Pimbert & Pretty 1995), with REDD+ being no different. They also highlight the challenge of linking local land tenure regularization to national-level processes for more effective tenure security outcomes (Sunderlin et al 2014). Finally, they underscore the need for ground-truthing REDD+ social impacts, particularly those related to local rights and participation, for which data may be limited in national and subnational surveys (Jagger & Rana 2014). As many countries struggle to design and implement their safeguard information systems, our findings will be useful to policy makers, practitioners and researchers interested in monitoring and supporting REDD+ safeguards in the post-2020 climate regime.

Keywords: climate change mitigation, non-carbon benefits, social monitoring, deforestation, forest degradation