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Participatory landscape planning and impact assessment for natural resource management and governance

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Participatory landscape planning and impact assessment is a generic approach to planning and ex-ante analysis of social and environment impacts based on 'theory of change' analysis. Several versions of it have been developed and used over 2010-2015 in a range of natural resource management and governance contexts in at least 15 countries including:

- Social and biodiversity impact assessment (SBIA) used by REDD+ projects to meet the Climate, Community and Biodiversity (CCB) Standards;
- Livelihood impact assessment (LIA) used to meet social safeguards and promote civil society participation in the negotiation of Voluntary Partnership Agreements (VPAs) under the EU Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Initiative;
- Participatory landscape planning (PLP) used for sub-national REDD+ programme planning and meeting Safeguards;
- Social impact assessment of watershed management projects in Latin America.

Participatory theory of change analysis is undertaken in multi-stakeholder workshops in which the participants, including local user or forest-dependent stakeholders, prioritise critical problems, develop cause and effect based problem trees, and identify strategic responses to them in the form of results chains. For example, in the context of sub-national REDD+ planning, the problem trees are of drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, and the results chains identify potential REDD+ interventions. The latter are then subjected to feasibility analysis and social and environmental risks analysis that identifies potential risk reduction and mitigation measures, as well as social and environmental benefit enhancement measures.

This is not however an alternative approach to using technical or analytical tools – rather it is essential to combine methods. In Nepal and Vietnam, UN-REDD and national partners are integrating spatial planning into PLP. The LIA workshops in Vietnam, Indonesia and Honduras have been combined with stakeholder analysis, institutional analysis and 'transmission channels analysis' from the World Bank Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) approach.

This approach responds to the problem of weak stakeholder participation in design as a major cause of project/programme failure. It is innovative in how it combines participatory and technical tools using a holistic theory of change framework that ensures strong stakeholder participation and ownership. This has proved accessible to indigenous peoples as, for example, shown by spontaneous application of it by the Confederation of Autochthonous Peoples of Honduras (CONPAH) for defining their VPA negotiation position.