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Using environmental justice lens to understand dynamics of conflict and cooperation over REDD+: emerging insights from case studies in Mexico, Nepal and Vietnam

Co-authors: Horacio Almanza Alcade, Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico; Hari Dhungana, Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies, Nepal; Cam Hoang, Institute of Cultural Studies, Vietnam; Thomas Sikor, University of East Anglia, UK

This paper discusses how an environmental justice lens can be used to understand dynamics of conflict and cooperation over REDD+ (Reducing Emission from Deforestation and Forest Degradation). REDD+ may aggravate protracted conflicts characterising forestry in the Global South or cause new ones in the absence of a conflict-sensitive approach. Yet, the changes in cross-scale governance brought about by REDD+ may also provide unprecedented opportunities for transforming existing conflicts and promoting cooperation. The paper discusses theoretical and empirical understandings of conflict and cooperation from a justice lens by looking into different types of actors, their claims of justice and injustice, the forums they use to make such claims, and the diverse notions of justice they have. In our theorising, conflict arises when actors make competing claims with regard to forest access or control, do not agree on the applicable forums for dealing with competing claims, or assert incompatible notions of justice. Vice versa, cooperation comes about where actors share claims on forest access or control, agree on the forums relevant for dealing with competing claims or assert notions of justice that are sufficiently similar or compatible with each other. The paper is based on emerging insights from our ongoing research in three countries (Mexico, Nepal and Vietnam) for which we have taken a case study approach at the national and local levels in understanding implications of REDD+ and combined a number of methodological approaches for data collection and analysis. With an in-depth empirical research in these three case-study focal countries combined with theoretical insights from key literature on environmental justice and conflicts, we show how instances of conflict and cooperation develop at different contexts of REDD+ implementation. Our initial results show that the three countries are encountering different forms of conflict and cooperation as they embark on REDD+ within different political economies. With ongoing research and analysis, we hope to enrich further understanding of cross-scale dynamics of conflict and cooperation.