Project Summary: REDD+ in mainland Southeast Asia

The Australian National University (Sango Mahanty, Phuc Xuan To, Peter Kanowski, Luca Tacconi & Sarah Milne) and University of Queensland (Wolfram Dressler)

The climate change impacts of tropical deforestation have led key international organisations, governments, and the private sector to adopt market-based mechanisms to arrest forest loss and conserve carbon. REDD+ (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation) is the most significant international mechanism to finance forest carbon conservation in the developing world. REDD+ promises financial benefits to forest users and owners if they change their land-use practices, demonstrate measurable forest carbon conservation and sell forest carbon as a new, tradable commodity. However, little is known about the local responses to this new market for forest carbon, and the implications for livelihoods and landscapes. This study will provide new knowledge for equitable, viable and sustainable international policy on climate change mitigation.

Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam have become the regional focus for REDD+ because of their extensive and valuable forests. Here, REDD+ unfolds at multiple levels: regionally, influenced by cross-border trade in forest products; nationally, alongside timber extraction, agriculture and plantation development; and locally, through social relations, livelihoods and land use. The relationships and transactions that link local forest carbon production and conservation with international forest carbon markets comprise a newly evolving ‘carbon commodity chain.’ Such commodity chains mediate the distribution of benefits and risks, and connect local livelihoods to national policies, regulations and regional trade.

Research overview

This study aims to understand the carbon commodity chain at the local, national and regional levels, and the key contextual factors that influence its sustainability, equity and effectiveness. In doing so, the research will contribute to (i) global debate on the sustainability and impacts of REDD+, and (ii) knowledge about the social effects of REDD+ at the local level. In Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam, pilot REDD+ schemes will be studied to analyse:

(i) how forest carbon production and conservation interacts with local livelihoods and land use;
(ii) how networks of actors (local, government, non-government and international) engage in the forest carbon commodity chain, the agreements and actions involved in trading forest carbon, and how resources flow along this chain; and
(iii) how national policies and regulations (e.g. for land, forests and REDD+) influence the distribution of benefits and risks, with a particular focus on emerging rights to forest carbon, and existing forest property rights and claims (e.g. to land, timber and non-timber forest products).

In addition, the study will investigate efforts at regional governance of REDD+, and how it fits within regional trade in forest-based commodities and efforts to regulate those. This will indicate the potential for displacement of deforestation and forest degradation (leakage) at the regional level. A conceptual map of these components is shown in Figure 1.

1 Supported by the Australian Research Council
Research process

The study will be undertaken in partnership with key national organisations in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. Team members will also coordinate closely with major regional and international bodies engaged in REDD+ and forest governance as well as other research projects working on this topic. It will run from March 2012 – March 2015 under the coordination of The Australian National University. Field research at the REDD+ sites will involve livelihoods analysis and household-level interviews while research in the ‘policy realm’ will be based on interviews with key actors, analysis of written material, and participation in relevant national and regional meetings.

Communication of results

In addition to a range of research and policy-oriented publications, the project will support two national workshops (Cambodia, Lao PDR) during 2013 to facilitate dialogue among government, civil society and communities. One regional workshop will be held in Vietnam in 2014 to foster dialogue and ongoing collaboration among national policy-makers on questions of regional REDD+ leakage.

For further information and expressions of interest in collaboration please contact:

Dr Sango Mahanty (Project Coordinator)
College of Asia and the Pacific
Australian National University
sango.mahanty@anu.edu.au
Ph: +612 61258058