

REDD+ in indigenous territories in Latin America Opportunity or threat?

Introduction

An important proportion of Latin America's forests are in indigenous territories. Many of these are subject to threats from colonists, illegal loggers, extractive companies and others, whose practices endanger not only the forests but also indigenous people's territory as a whole – hence the importance, *a priori*, of indigenous territories for REDD+ and REDD+ for indigenous peoples.

Indigenous territories constitute a new spatial reality that is quantitatively and qualitatively different from the community emphasis of the past. To what extent will REDD+ interventions take into account this new territorial configuration? What challenges does REDD+ face? How can REDD+ address both this new spatial scale and the great heterogeneity amongst indigenous territories?

From community to territory

The demarcation and titling of indigenous territories in Latin America has constituted the most significant shift in the land ownership structure of the region since the agrarian reforms across the continent in the mid-20th century. Today, 375 indigenous groups hold 25.3% of the Amazon. Combined with protected areas – many of which are also home to indigenous people – these areas comprise a total of 41.2% of the total area (Benavides 2009; see Table 1). Indigenous people formally own or manage a total of 160 million hectares in Latin America. That most of these areas have very low population densities represents an additional challenge for REDD+.

Table 1. Indigenous territories in the Amazon

Country	% of the country's Amazon
Bolivia	25.7
Brazil	21.7
Colombia	56.0
Ecuador	64.8
French Guyana	7.3
Peru	16.7
Venezuela	67.4
Guyana and Suriname	no data
Amazon Overall	25.3

Source: Benavides 2009

Indigenous people's right to territory is embedded in a series of other collective rights such as the right to autonomy or self-government, to natural resource management and to free prior informed consent (FPIC). The territory, however, represents a scale at which most indigenous communities did not previously have governance institutions. Furthermore, territories include a variety of communities and ethnic groups. This new scale of operation therefore requires new approaches and presents important challenges. In addition, the vast diversity among territories (Box 1) suggests a need for different approaches in different contexts.

REDD+ offers an opportunity not only for increasing the value of forests but also for supporting the constitution of these territories, as political, social and economic entities. In particular, drawing on the lessons of community forest management (CFM; see Box 2), REDD+ can support a shift to territorial forest management; such management

Box 1. Territorial diversity

The following factors are important for understanding the dynamics of any particular territory:

- size, fragmentation and connectivity or accessibility between communities
- multiethnic character, number of communities and location within the territory
- above-soil and sub-soil natural resource endowments
- existing and latent threats by other actors
- partial or total overlap with protected areas, border conflicts with neighbours and legal security over the territory
- relevance of traditional or customary forms of organisation, administration of justice, knowledge and practices
- market ties, as well as ties to other external institutions
- migration patterns, influence of urban-based indigenous families and presence of non-indigenous actors
- existence of land use plans, life plans or any other planning document from a territorial perspective
- political, legal and economic frameworks of each country, which shape legal security and economic conditions

Box 2. Community forest management and REDD+

REDD+ and community forest management (CFM) have a number of similarities. Their successful implementation requires new capacities and organisational structures, intercommunity accords, a territorial plan, transparent and participatory management and decisions regarding the use of income generated. Lessons from CFM initiatives in indigenous communities have demonstrated the limitations of a weak understanding of local culture, homogeneous externally imposed models and a focus on the community scale.

should be compatible with local traditions, ensure territorial integrity and generate economic benefits.

Central issues in REDD+ implementation

1. Will REDD+ benefit indigenous territories?

Where tenure rights are secure, the presence of four factors suggests REDD+ will benefit indigenous territories:

- a. all key international REDD+ proposals and pilot funds emphasise the importance of indigenous people for REDD+;
- b. indigenous people hold title over extensive forest areas;
- c. baseline measurements include future scenarios since several studies indicate that deforestation in indigenous territories is likely to increase substantially; or
- d. indigenous territories function as important buffers to agricultural frontier expansion (Ricketts *et al.* 2010).

Questions remain, however. How should people in indigenous territories participate in the design of REDD+ projects? How will they be compensated? Do communities with forest tenure rights also have rights to the carbon? How will compensation be managed and distributed within territories, to guarantee accountability and equity?

Where indigenous rights to territory have not been formally recognised, or where demarcation is still underway, more powerful actors might compete for these forests because of their new value as carbon reservoirs. It is important to find ways to prevent this.

2. Increasing the value of forests

That REDD+ provides a new source of value to forests is both an opportunity and a threat to indigenous territories. Large new sources of income could encourage governments to recentralise forest governance, make new demands on forest-based peoples and even call for their expulsion from the forest if they fail to follow rules (Phelps *et al.* 2010). In turn, indigenous peoples could use mapping technology to acquire greater negotiating power regarding their rights and benefits.

3. Legal commitments

Indigenous communities face difficulties complying with strict contracts, particularly if they have poor negotiating capacity or are relatively isolated with little market experience. An externally imposed contract can be very restrictive. Given the heterogeneity of territories and their recent configuration, REDD+ contracts should be built around the local institutions and practices of each territory. Contracts should be realistic and transparent, and they should incorporate the flexibility of adaptive learning processes.

4. Internal governance of territories

Strengthening tenure rights has not necessarily led to a decrease in poverty. Collective governance of income requires a certain level of administrative and organisational capacity. This will vary by territory. In many cases, important investments should accompany REDD+ to build financial management capacity, equity and transparency in the context of indigenous self-government. Emphasis should be on building sustainable institutional structures for the long term, based, where possible, on traditional forms of representation and decision making.

Policy recommendations for REDD+ implementation in indigenous territories

- Actors involved in REDD+ projects in indigenous territories should accept already recognised indigenous people's rights to territory, self-government and FPIC.
- Indigenous people will be more willing to engage with REDD+ initiatives, and not to oppose them, if:
 - they participate in all aspects of REDD+ design and implementation;
 - indigenous people are granted rights to the carbon in their forests; and
 - REDD+ does not permit more powerful competitors to threaten indigenous people who do not have secure rights to their territory.
- To ensure more effective and sustainable outcomes in indigenous territories, REDD+ should be implemented through adaptive and flexible models, based on the specific characteristics of each territory, and should promote capacity building and accompaniment for long-term self-government.

- To avoid conflict and to promote economic, social and cultural sustainability, REDD+ should grant new value to forests. However, this should not be at the expense of traditional livelihood practices or the multifaceted meaning of forests for indigenous peoples. Such value should contribute to building capacity for the collective management of indigenous territories, finding a balance between the reproduction of traditional lifestyles and the possibilities of market articulation.

References

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