

FAUNA & FLORA INTERNATIONAL


REDD+ POLICY BRIEF


#002

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Key Lessons Learned

 **#1 Consulting communities is a process, not an activity!** 'Consultation' should in reality be an on-going, participatory decision-making and awareness raising process, regarding all issues relating to risks, rights, obligations, responsibilities and benefits (including sharing of benefits) for forest dependent peoples and/or local communities.

 **#2 Who should be consulted, is not an easy question...** Choosing the wrong stakeholders may have negative impacts on the effectiveness of a project's design and implementation processes; and so it is essential to: (i) carry out scoping work, as

part of feasibility assessments; (ii) ask socio-economic advisors and local stakeholders for advice; and (iii) undertake detailed stakeholder analyses, once a site has been chosen.

 **#3 Genuine community engagement is not (and must not become) propaganda!** To mobilize, explain and involve can and should lead to no more than a tentative 'agreement to proceed', rather than an outright pledge to full-scale, long-term REDD+ implementation. Genuine engagement should be continuous, step-by-step and guided by the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC).

Background

For the past three years, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) has engaged communities and the local government in Kon Tum Province for the development of a project aimed at Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+). REDD+ is a global mechanism to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases (GHG) from forests and land use change in developing countries. Today, to achieve permanent GHG emission reductions at scale, it is generally accepted that REDD+ will need to provide a range of social, environmental, and governance “co-benefits”. The importance of these “non-carbon benefits” is highlighted by the UNFCCC with parties believing that they are important to the sustainability of REDD+, but disagreeing on the need for guidance to incentivize these benefits.¹

REDD+ can bring benefits to local communities living inside and around the forest (project) area, but also presents risks, such as food insecurity if, for example, communities are no longer able to conduct shifting cultivation. Due to the potential impacts of REDD+, projects are developed using the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC): a key requirement in international law and jurisprudence related to indigenous people. FPIC enshrines communities’ right to give or withhold consent to proposed projects that may affect the lands they customarily own, occupy or otherwise use. As such, communities should be empowered to make informed decisions as to whether they want to take part in REDD+ projects or not. To respect the rights of the communities in the Hieu Commune, FFI carried out community consultations following the principle of FPIC to enable local people to have an idea of possible implications of the project to their livelihoods, and to decide whether (or not) they would want the project to go ahead.

FFI’s REDD+ project is situated in the Hieu commune (Kon Plong District, Kon Tum Province) in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, in a remote area and isolated from large urban centers. It is estimated that 96.4% of the population belong to ethnic minorities (M’Nam, Ca Dong and H’Re) whose livelihoods mainly rely on subsistence farming. Fixed and shifting cultivation is common with traditional crops such as rice, cassava, maize and vegetables; as well as husbandry, collection of non-timber forest products and hunting. There is a high degree of poverty and 75% of households have monthly incomes lower than VND 400,000 (US\$ 17.80) per head. The literacy rate amongst adults is low at 39%; with many ethnic minority community members communicating mainly in local dialects and many do not speak Vietnamese. Customary law, based on traditional forest management practices had historically been applied over the whole forest area (of the project site) which is now legally managed by the state, via Mang La Forest Enterprise, Thach Nham Protection Forest Management Board and Hieu Commune People’s Committee(s).

Within this context, and specifically for the development of any long term forest conservation scheme, including a REDD+ project, it requires an appropriate community consultation scheme, with locally appropriate and clear consultation guidelines. This policy briefing summarises and shares the consultation methodology applied and its achievements; and lessons learned for replication for similar project/programmes and especially support to the development of national ‘FPIC-based’ community consultation guidelines (already underway with UN-REDD support).

Project Achievements

During the project design phase, preliminary community consultations were carried out with 660 households in the project area², the 207 households surrounding the project area³, 60 teachers and 139 boarding school students. This consultation process focused on raising awareness of REDD+ and especially, common activities, existing and

1. Issued from the 40th session of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

possible restrictions, benefits and risks associated with REDD+ projects. As a result, 92.9% of the total surveyed households in the project area agreed to be involved with the project, 4.2% disagreed and 2.9% refused to vote. Those who disagreed or refused to vote were mainly ethnic Kinh Vietnamese who were businessmen or service providers, as well as a small number of older people who themselves felt unable to partake in REDD+ activities.

The following issues were discussed with, and agreed (by the majority; see above) by, the 11 project communities:

- Forest land boundaries, based on customary law, are expected to be allocated for the entire community, not households, for stable and long term use (Forest Land Allocation of Red Books).
- As a result of village-level land-use planning (Box 2), forestland demarcation has been clearly made, along with other land use types, primarily fixed cultivation land and residential land; this is the basis for community-based natural resource management practices.
- For forest utilization (Box 1), an agreement was made on moving from unsustainable, conventional timber harvesting practices to sustainable forest management, via zoning (the forest into management 'blocks'), low impact timber harvesting and replanting or restoration.
- Village forest regulations were developed, for the above and as supportive tools for community-based forest patrol and carbon & biodiversity monitoring.

Box 1: Are local people allowed to harvest forest products if participating in REDD+?

Local people at the project site are completely dependent on forest resources i.e. timber for building houses, storehouses, fences, animal facilities and so on. On average, 56 homes and 242 animal facilities are newly built and repaired for the whole project area, per year. The estimated amount of carbon stock emitted per year is 1,383.4 tC. The climate in Kon Plong (in the highlands of Vietnam) is harsh with at least 7 cold and rainy months a year. Fire wood volume, with 18,810 m³/year consumed, is the main source for cooking and heating. NTFPs are collected daily; mainly honey, Kim Cuong tree (or Gam orchid – *Anoecilus roxburghii*), bamboo shoots and forest herbs.

For these reasons and following community consultations, the local people agreed on quotas, sustainability safeguards and a monitoring framework, for the harvesting of forest products – in line with REDD+ project development.

Box 2: Should fallow land be cultivated or sidelined for forest restoration/carbon stock enhancement?

For example, Dak Xô village, forest block “Đăk B’lũa” had been the slash and burn area for some households (A Đư, A Phong, A Vinh, A Nát, A Giã, Y Ngút and A Xang) and has now been abandoned for several years. According to customary law, this land area still belongs to the above households. However, in a village meeting, an agreement was made that this forest area should be allocated to the entire community, in terms of land tenure, and taken into forest restoration as opposed to restarting household owned slash and burn cultivation.

Another example comes from the Tu Can village, where the A GLinh household from Vi Choong - a neighbouring village - illegally encroached on land of the forest block “Ngoc Dak Leang” for cultivation. Tu Can villagers came up with an agreement that illegal action needed to be stopped right after the existing crop finished. The land would then be strictly protected for forest restoration.

2. The 'Project Area' is defined as the land area in which project activities aim to generate net climate benefits.

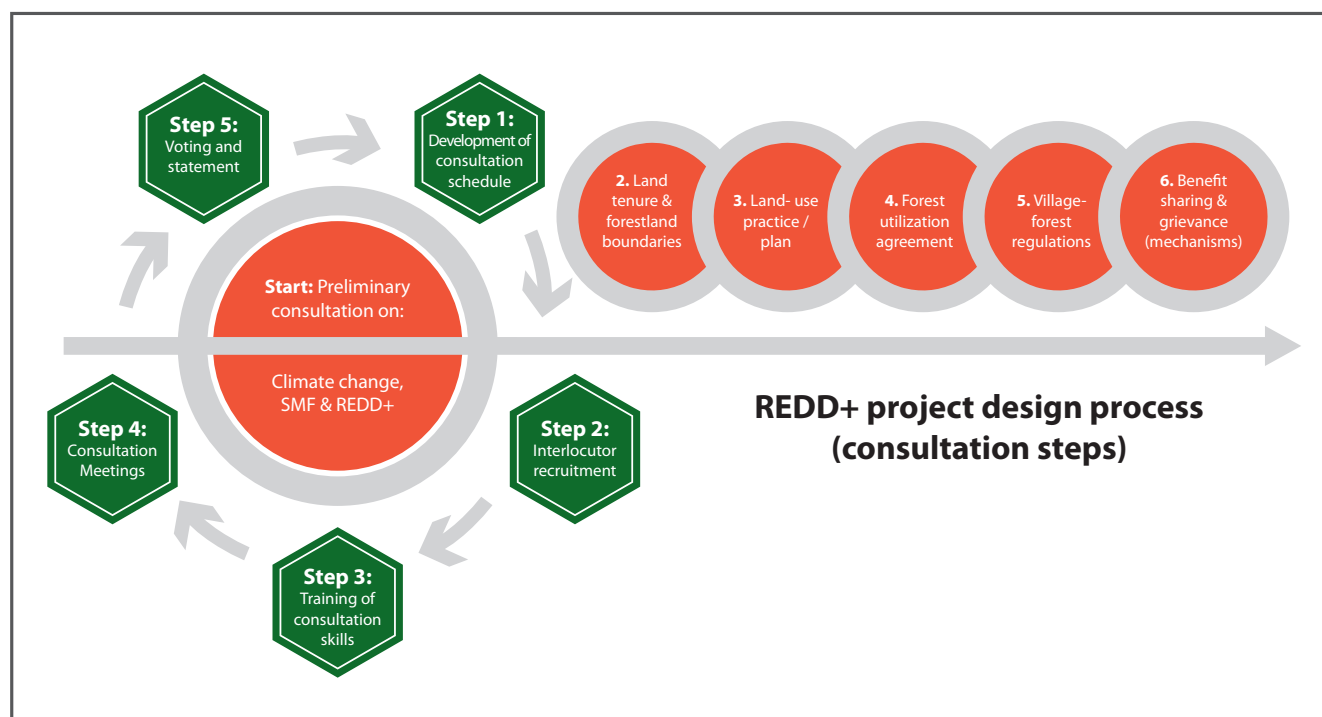
3. 'Project Zone' is defined as the area encompassing the Project Area in which project activities that directly affect land and associated resources, including activities such as those related to provision of alternative livelihoods and community development, are implemented. If using a programmatic approach, the Project Zone also includes all potential Project Areas (i.e. all potential new land areas in which project activities that aim to generate net climate benefits may be implemented in the future after the initial validation).

Consulting Communities is a Process

One of the principles of FPIC is to provide sufficient information to local people for them to be able to make decisions and voice their opinions on developments (e.g. REDD+ projects) that would affect their rights and livelihoods. This means that the given information provided is not only passively brought to local people, but that interactive dialogues are established to ensure that they understand how the REDD+ project could impact on them, and capture their needs, plans, concerns and hopes, moving forward. The REDD+ concept is new, and REDD+ project development tackles a series of issues for local people such as: land use and rights, ownership, livelihoods, welfare/wellbeing, identity and culture; that all needs to be consulted upon during the project design phase. Approaches to explaining climate change and REDD+ were guided by lessons learned from FPIC for REDD+ in Asia-Pacific⁴. In the case of the Hieu Commune REDD+ project local people were consulted on six key issues (below) as described in the FPIC-based community consultation process diagram, which follows:

- Making the link: Climate change, sustainable forest management and the REDD+ concept (project)
- Land use rights, forestland boundaries, linked also to forest land allocation
- Land use practice and participatory land use planning
- Forest utilization and agreements on species, forest blocking, seasons and quotas
- Forest protection regulations and enforcement
- Benefit sharing and grievance mechanisms for carbon, forest and forest ecosystem service benefits

Diagram 1: FPIC based community consultation process for REDD+ Kon Tum



4. UN-REDD Programme (August 2012), FPIC for REDD+ in the Asia Pacific region: Lessons learned, challenges and recommendations.

The first topic(s), for preliminary consultation are the key concepts of the REDD+ project, and this must be carried out at the beginning of the project design phase. This is an essential requirement that has a significant effect on all project activities, later on. Local people should be consulted and informed on: What is climate change? What is the role of forests in reducing climate change? What is REDD+ and its financial mechanism? What are the local benefits if the community participates in REDD+? What do they have to do to be involved? What would they not be allowed to do? What risks might they be faced with, and how could these be avoided or mitigated? It must be stressed that while continued conversion (destruction) of forests cannot be permitted if REDD+ is going to be implemented, the detailing of actions (prescribed practices) and regulations (practices no longer allowed) must be developed collaboratively, and on an ongoing basis, using PRA and theory of change tools.

The following topics, starting with land tenure and boundaries, (see diagram above) will be spread out in consultations throughout the design phase. Community engagement should be considered a process, and communities should be consulted with regularly throughout the lifetime of the project, as well as having a channel to raise grievances. Consultations during the design phase of the project are especially important, as communities will be encouraged to input into the choice of proposed project activities, and establish the most realistic and efficient way to develop the project. Once a theoretical project design has been developed by the communities, several interactive community consultations are essential over time to ensure an homogenous understanding of the commitments and, if the communities vote to proceed with the development of a REDD+ project, to ensure the consensus among community members is robust and consistent. This is especially crucial when engaging with ethnic minorities who are marginalised, suffer high rates of poverty and will almost certainly be unaware of REDD+ concepts.

Who needs to be consulted?

REDD+ projects and policies can bring about benefits but also costs and risks to local communities, especially forest dependent people. Therefore, any local stakeholders who may be negatively or positively affected should be consulted with: which is why stakeholder analysis and risk assessments are so critical. In the case of the Hieu Commune REDD+ Project, all local stakeholder groups within the project zone were included, namely: rice growers, upland farming cultivators, NTFPs collectors and wild animal hunters, primarily. In these communities, such as M'Nam, men are socially conditioned to be responsible for very physical work such as clearing forest for cultivation, timber harvesting or hunting, while women and children are responsible for collection of fresh water, firewood and NTFPs. What is critical here is that different groups, with different livelihood activities, may be affected in different ways, and that they should be differentiated into (stakeholder) groups during the consultation process. These also include Kinh household groups who are immigrants, doing business in the project area, but who also purchase and use timber and firewood, especially NTFPs and wild animals. It is also the Kinh 'business stakeholder group' who are "giving loans and then buying high productivity cassava", according to local community members, that indirectly encourages local people to convert forestland into cassava farm land. Another important group may include the boarding school teachers and students who frequently cut saplings or collect dry firewood for cooking. Unlike the UN-REDD recommendations from applying FPIC in Vietnam, we established that only



Interlocutors explaining to local people how to vote, as part of FPIC

interviewing a small number of households selected by the village head would be biased and not reflect the whole community, as friends, family or more educated households would likely be selected. In order to not raise attention to this fact and maintain relations with the village heads, we decided to interview all households, one by one. This personal time with all households proved invaluable as it allowed them to ask questions that would not have been asked in a group context, and explore any aspects of the project that they had not understood. It also created a personal link between the communities and the facilitators.⁵

Consultation is not propaganda

Community consultations for REDD+ should be different from propaganda, where prestigious and/or powerful people mobilize, persuade and embroil others to follow or participate in an activity (e.g. a project or programme). The REDD+ consultation process will facilitate people to make decision(s) based on their understanding. In the case of the Hieu Commune REDD+ project, the core concept of consultation is that local people would be empowered to decide and be responsible for their decisions.

FFI's community consultation approach was developed to minimize external influences on the community's decision-making process and/or the domination of powerful individuals (within the community) over the decision of all community members. To achieve this, the first step was to recruit interlocutors from the outside of the project area. Ethnic minority university/college students were chosen, rather than local governmental officers of mass organizations, who would likely be familiar with propaganda methods. Secondly, consultation meetings at community level were held separately for different stakeholders (i.e. female/male and old/young). Thirdly, voting was carried out at family/household level, with the aim of ensuring consensus among family members and to avoid external influence on the family – and primarily to avoid individuals be strongly affected by fear or the “group or mob mentality”.

Policy recommendations

FPIC-based community consultation is necessary not only for REDD+, but also VPA/FLEGT and PFES projects, and all Natural Resource Management projects where communities are involved as stakeholders. At the project level, REDD+ project proponents must develop a context specific consultation schemes and respective implementation guidelines for each project site. The project level consultation implementation guidelines are used for interlocutors who can be community facilitators (ideally), governmental officers or university/college students.

An overarching and prescriptive FPIC-based community consultation guide, to be applied for all REDD+ projects nationwide, would not be advisable, as all project situations are likely to be different. However, national guidelines need to be agreed and made available that provide overarching principles and best practices on methods, pitfalls to avoid, guidance on how to build a consultation schedule and respective consultation implementation.

5. UN-REDD Programme Vietnam (August 2010) Applying the Principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent in the UN-REDD Programme in Vietnam.

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Our vision

A sustainable future for the planet, where biodiversity is effectively conserved by the people who live closest to it, supported by the global community.

Our mission

To act to conserve threatened species and ecosystems worldwide, choosing solutions that are sustainable, based on sound science and take into account human needs.

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Background and Disclaimer

FFI have developed five policy briefs that analyse experiences and present lessons learnt and from implementing their Community Carbon Pools REDD+ pilot project in Kon Tum province, and from other sub-national REDD+ initiatives in Vietnam. The 5 REDD+ briefings are on:

- Forest land allocation (FLA) and tenure
- FPIC based community consultation
- REDD+ piloting, scaling up and nesting within national implementation
- Beyond carbon: REDD+ as innovative finance within sustainable landscapes
- Carbon accounting: Measuring forest cover and change

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