



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Forest Policy and Economics

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/forpol

Delivering community benefits through REDD +: Lessons from Joint Forest Management in Zambia

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 13 March 2013

Received in revised form 7 March 2014

Accepted 21 March 2014

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Community-based natural resource

management (CBNRM)

Climate change

Safeguards

Mitigation

Adaptation

Katanino

ABSTRACT

In implementing reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD), significant attention is being paid to ensuring that communities stand to benefit. Safeguards to protect local people's rights and interests have been formulated in response concerns over the potential negative impact on communities of forest preservation. To fulfil safeguards, many sub-Saharan African countries are looking to community-based natural resource management (CBNRM). Current critiques of CBNRM projects outline the importance of project design and policy context in shaping whether or not communities actually stand to benefit. This paper explores these aspects in a case study of Joint Forest Management (JFM) in Zambia, and examines the role of Zambia's REDD preparedness programme in shaping them. The case study was evaluated using stakeholder and policy document analyses, informed by interviews, and tied into the broader forest governance network. The findings highlight the way in which the politics and policies of forest governance in Zambia shape the on-the-ground JFM project and influence community benefits. In the case studied, even with careful local-level project design, JFM would be hindered in its delivery of REDD safeguards. Therefore, for REDD to deliver community safeguards, it must be considered as a broader process of political and governance change.

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1. Introduction and Background

The implementation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) Cancun Agreements on reducing emissions from deforestation and degradation (REDD) demands consideration of the ways in which local communities benefit from REDD (UNFCCC, 2010). While REDD is primarily intended to prevent forest loss, therefore reducing emissions through land use change, the UNFCCC has incorporated safeguards to ensure that communities are not negatively affected, and can benefit from, REDD measures. This is known as REDD +. These safeguards include requirements for full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, including communities, and for measures to incentivize protection and conservation while enhancing social and environmental benefits (UNFCCC, 2010). Such safeguards are intended to ensure that REDD + can deliver win–win scenarios, whereby forests (including their biodiversity and ecosystem services) are conserved alongside community development (Harvey et al., 2010; Kelly, 2010). However, some authors suggest that these safeguards may continue to place community benefits at the periphery of REDD + initiatives, thereby becoming less meaningful and little more than a by-product (Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2012). Others raise concerns that there will be a return to centralised forest management (Phelps et al., 2010) or

“fortress conservation” (Beymer-Farris and Bassett, 2012) that results in injustice and harm (McDermott et al., 2012). The aim of this paper is to evaluate these concerns over safeguards in Zambia, by analysing the barriers and opportunities for providing community benefits through REDD + initiatives.

The aim is explored through a study of Joint Forest Management (JFM) in Zambia. JFM is a form of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), which represents a shift towards considering conservation within an inhabited landscape to deliver conservation in tandem with development (for an overview, see Hutton et al., 2005). In 2000, the Zambian Forest Department initiated a range of individual JFM pilot projects across Zambia, intended to allow the “Forest Department, Non-Governmental Organisations and businesses [to] get together to manage forest resources” (Forest Department (Zambia), 2005). As part of their participation in the UN REDD programme, Zambia has identified JFM as a foundation for implementing REDD + (UNDP et al., 2010). The UN REDD programme aims to assist countries in preparing for REDD + implementation (REDD readiness) by facilitating capacity building and assisting in outlining a National REDD + strategy and Zambia has been a partner country since 2010. Alongside UN REDD, there are currently two significant REDD + pilot/demonstration projects: (1) a USAID/CIFOR project in Eastern Province and (2) the BioCarbon Partners in Central Province. Both of these projects aim to demonstrate reduced deforestation and degradation based around elements of JFM and community resource management. Zambia is therefore aligned with most other countries participating in the UN REDD programme

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who have adopted CBNRM as a strategy for implementing REDD + in accordance with safeguards (Blom et al., 2010; Phelps et al., 2010).

The paper's objectives are informed by the literature on CBNRM. Barriers and opportunities in delivering community benefits through CBNRM have been identified, which relate to the match between CBNRM design and community perceptions and the factors influencing this match. Within the community participating in CBNRM, there will be multiple groups and opinions based around how people use the resource (Blaikie, 2006; Kumar, 2007). These uses and perceptions lead to variations in rationale for involvement in a CBNRM initiative and therefore multiple perceptions of benefit (Kumar, 2007; Matta and Alavalapati, 2006). However, project design may not reflect all or any of the community's resource uses and benefit perceptions. In addition, it has been recognised that it is often local elites who are best able to access participation opportunities and therefore shape project design (Balooni et al., 2010; Shackleton et al., 2002) or external implementation bodies with greater influence (see e.g. Adger et al., 2001). If such benefits are to reach the community, clear rules must be in place (Dolsak and Ostrom, 2003; Dougill et al., 2012) and must be adhered to by all participants (Nkhata and Breen, 2010). The broader macro-scale context, including policy and legal frameworks, is also important in shaping the benefits that are available through JFM, and the opportunity costs that it must address (Reynolds, 2012). Therefore, the objectives of this paper are as follows:

1. to examine the policy context within which JFM operates,
2. to assess how the findings from objective 1 shape JFM design and delivery at a local level,
3. to explore how delivered JFM matches the community uses of the forest and
4. to evaluate the impact of Zambian REDD + readiness in influencing these broader factors.

This paper is pertinent because as yet, there has been no comprehensive and publically available evaluation of JFM in Zambia, or consideration of its prospects under REDD +. From a biophysical perspective, some regeneration of tree species has been observed in Zambian JFM forests (Kalaba et al., 2012; Phiri et al., 2012; Syampungani et al., 2009). However, illegal harvesting of forest products continues (Umar and Vedeld, 2012). Existing explanations for this weakness point to the current Forest Act in Zambia, which has been in force since 1973, but does not allow for communities to manage or benefit from high-value forest products, such as timber (Moombe, 2004; Phiri et al., 2012). In many instances of CBNRM, financial reward is neither possible nor desirable, and instead, community benefits could include empowerment, stewardship and improved skills to increase productivity of food and non-food products (Murphree, 2009). Indeed in Zambian forests, many subsistence communities rely on the forest for a range of non-timber forest products and services, to provide both livelihood safety nets and financial income (Shackleton et al., 2011; Syampungani et al., 2009). For example, the forest provides edible products (e.g. caterpillars, mushrooms, honey) (Chidumayo and Mbata, 2002; Jumbe et al., 2008), fuel in the form of firewood or charcoal and health services through medicinal plants (Chirwa et al., 2008; Syampungani et al., 2009). There is therefore a need to extend current studies to consider the broad range of potential benefits, and the way they are targeted, delivered and received.

This paper extends existing critiques of benefit distribution under CBNRM by providing a holistic overview, tied into policy structures, of the creation and distribution of benefits through JFM-based REDD + projects. Largely, CBNRM critiques focus on community level processes and impacts. This is particularly so in the case of Zambian JFM (see, e.g., Phiri, 2009; Phiri et al., 2012). However, producing meaningful community benefit through CBNRM is a question of contextual dimensions, including the pre-existing conditions that influence the abilities of communities to participate and benefit; of procedural dimensions, including who sets the parameters of social benefit and who benefits; and of

distributive dimensions, including the mechanisms for benefit sharing (Reynolds, 2012; Visseren-Hamakers et al., 2012). Therefore, in this paper, attention is placed on the role that the broader policy context has played in shaping JFM project design, facilitating access to a variety of benefits, and in influencing JFM implementation (objective 1). The benefits that JFM targets are examined (objective 2) and compared to those expected by the community (objective 3). In addition, changes to the policy context under Zambia's REDD + participation are considered in order to highlight the anticipated impact of REDD + (objective 4). Following presentation of the methodology and results for each objective, the discussion section of this paper considers the implications from this Zambian study for harnessing safeguards through CBNRM. To this end, policy-focussed recommendations are made.

2. Research design and methodology

The Katanino JFM area was chosen as a case study because it represents a hot-spot in terms of the barriers and opportunities for benefit sharing. Katanino JFM area is located in Masaiti District, Copperbelt Province. It was established as a pilot JFM area under the Provincial Forestry Action Programme (PFAP, 1995–2006), which ran in Copperbelt, Central, Luapula and Southern Provinces. Katanino JFM was a joint initiative between the Zambian Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (FINNIDA). Since its inception, activities in the Katanino JFM area have been undermined by a lack of mechanisms to allow communities to benefit financially from timber forest products (Axberg et al., 2012; Umar and Vedeld, 2012). A recent review of FINNIDA's forestry activities (commissioned by FINNIDA) suggests that there are a range of policy drivers for this breakdown, including the Forest Act and the processes of engagement between forest officers and communities (Axberg et al., 2012). Katanino is therefore being used as a hot-spot case study, whereby it presents a richness of complex data for exploration (Yin, 2003). Although findings may not be generalisable to all Zambian JFM projects, they will highlight the kinds of barriers and opportunities that need to be considered in each context (ibid.).

Data collection was conducted in April and June 2012 through an iterative snowball sample of policy documentation and interviews with key stakeholders¹ (see Reed et al., 2009). Initially, an Internet search of policies and actors related to forest management, JFM and REDD + readiness in Zambia was conducted. Policies and background documentation from all levels of governance were collected, and a list of actors named or involved in policy implementation was compiled. These actors were contacted, interviewed and asked for reference to further actors and policy documentation, with the aim of identifying the whole policy implementation network engaged around JFM in Zambia (cf. Teye, 2013). This snowball sampling approach continued until no further actors or policies were identified. The limitation of our snowball sample is that REDD + actors or activities that are not connected to the main UN REDD programme activities or actors will be excluded and therefore not considered in the analysis. However, because the UN REDD programme is the primary mechanism for REDD + readiness, it is unlikely that activities have been missed. Furthermore, the sample was triangulated against the REDD desk report² for Zambia. All policies and actors were categorised according to whether they were related to REDD +, JFM or forest policy context, and some actors were assigned to multiple categories where their roles overlapped, as shown in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

¹ For the purposes of this research, stakeholders were considered to be anyone who can influence or be influenced by, forest policy, JFM and/or REDD.

² The REDD desk (www.redddesk.org) is an NGO-led, collaborative online platform for information sharing on REDD. They publish comprehensive overview reports on REDD activities in UN REDD partner countries.

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