



## Redeeming REDD. Policies, incentives and social feasibility for avoided deforestation

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does not say so, the conversations and collaborations that once made the ethno-contemporary possible have long been relegated by a Hindu majoritarian postcolonial state to the dustbin of history. We are left, therefore, with divided ethnic minorities and a strategic turn to violence as a last resort to negotiate modern state power from below.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize the richness and depth of Middleton's ethnography of recent Gorkha ethnopolitics. Such careful, sympathetic assessments of subaltern politics are rare in India, though elite posturing in the name of the subaltern abounds. In making the case for a 'deeper, more historical reading of the ethno-contemporary', Middleton and I share much common ground. Reappraisals of the colonial past, I believe, are vital to recover alternative forms of political praxis in contemporary India and beyond. The role of anthropology and history in this process of recovery, however, remains unclear. Should anthropologists and historians simply protect and endorse their activist informants? Or can they become willing collaborators in producing new forms of activist knowledge? Middleton's ethnography points, above all, to the limits of demanding recognition as 'tribes' today. Other ways of negotiating a Hindu majoritarian state, whether violent or peaceful, may prove more effective. In India today, we thus find some ethnic minorities taking up arms, whether as Gorkha, Maoist or Naga rebels, even as others in western and central India seek recognition and social mobility within the Hindu majoritarian fold. The Indian experience may, accordingly, point to the real limits of 'indigeneity' and 'late liberalism' as global analytics. As long as the nation-state remains the only or primary game in town, subaltern politics has little choice except to negotiate it on its own ethno-turf.

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**Redeeming REDD. Policies, incentives and social feasibility for avoided deforestation,** by Michael I. Brown, London and New York, Routledge, 2013, ix + 330 pp., US\$30 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-415-51786-7

Since 2005, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has worked to establish a cooperation agenda where the Convention's Annex I parties

can incentivize the reduction of land-use related emissions in sub-tropical and tropical countries. Many viewed the original vision to Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD), and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks (REDD+), as a market-based policy framework through which developing countries would be paid for measurable and verified land-use emission reductions, thus up-scaling former project-based approaches that prevailed under the Clean Development Mechanism.

However, the design of the international, national and sub-national institutions that could guarantee the feasibility and political buy-in of such an approach has proven challenging and, as a result, the finally agreed framework has resulted in a hybrid mechanism that encourages parties to pursue REDD+ activities using both market and non-market based approaches. A number of political decisions made over this period provide guidance on how countries should develop land-use emissions reference levels, quantify and monitor progress in emission reductions, involve communities and Indigenous Peoples in the implementation of land-use policies, and find meaningful and politically acceptable means to finance such activities and policies<sup>1</sup>.

Michael Brown's *Redeeming REDD. Policies, incentives and social feasibility for avoided deforestation* is a broad, encompassing book that provides valuable history, insights and analysis for those interested in the role that REDD+ may play in re-framing land-use governance in the global South. In the book's first three chapters, including the Introduction, Brown presents his argument, covers the early years of negotiation, and reviews the distinct arguments that were mobilized by different parties – including Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), governments and Indigenous Peoples – to either support or confront REDD+. While Brown considers REDD+ a good idea in general, he is explicit in his belief that 'the strategies employed are inappropriate and unfeasible' and that 'the front line communities who will make or break sustainable forest use that REDD is predicated upon, remain marginalized players in setting policy, identifying practical approaches, and receiving commensurate benefits given the risk they bear' (9). In a nutshell, the book's core argument or narrative is that the rural poor can potentially use REDD+ to help save forests *if* they are recognized as key stewards, allowed to participate fully in policy design and implementation, and provided with the necessary political, technical and financial capacities to do so. But for this to happen, according to Brown, REDD+ would require 'a new social contract' (6).

Chapters 4–10 are developed to make the case for his argument, although chapters like 'Science and policy' (chapter 5) or 'Financing issues' (chapter 9) could well be read as stand-alone contextual information. In chapter 4, Brown draws on some of his early work experience with the Pygmies in Africa in order to illustrate the challenges that REDD+ faces in realizing informed consent and providing the necessary capacities to local people so that they can equitably negotiate their terms of participation. He argues that REDD+, as it stands, pays little attention to how different countries will deal with these issues, and how such efforts should be mainstreamed and funded. I could not agree more. Chapter 5 is dedicated to relating REDD+ to other development or mitigation initiatives, such as the Millennium Development Goals and joint implementation, and to problematizing the foundations upon which some early REDD+ initiatives were built (i.e. the theory of change), the safeguards and the issues surrounding transaction costs. Brown

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<sup>1</sup>The UNFCCC provides a useful series of documents in this regard; see: [http://unfccc.int/land\\_use\\_and\\_climate\\_change/lulucf/items/6917.php](http://unfccc.int/land_use_and_climate_change/lulucf/items/6917.php)

maintains that the theories of change that can be used in ongoing and future REDD+ projects run the risk of simplifying the environmental, economic and social complexities of a given territory. He also suggests that transaction costs calculations disregard the costs of building local capacities, while safeguards do not guarantee the right of many communities who might prefer other development and conservation options than REDD+.

In chapter 6, Brown develops the perspectives of most REDD+ stakeholders, including large and national NGOs, project standard setters, peasant organizations, rural communities and Indigenous Peoples. Brown uses key documents and reports to present these views, without developing an exhaustive analysis covering specific organizations or countries, or examining the views of commercial actors such as timber industries, agribusiness, infrastructure developers and the like. Nevertheless, the chapter still serves its central purpose which is to demonstrate that the interests in REDD+ vary within and across groups. Among Indigenous Peoples, for example, Brown notes that there have been groups that consider REDD+ ‘a possible solution’ to ameliorate climate impacts, while others have manifestly opposed its development at national or local levels (182), in line with his view that if REDD+ is transparently developed and provides the necessary capacities to local people, it would not be surprising if ‘a good number of IPs [indigenous peoples] at the end of the day may actually opt for REDD as a best option for the present and future’ (185).

In chapters 7 and 8, dedicated to social feasibility and capacity building in REDD+, Brown begins to distil the foundations of his suggested ‘social contract’. The first pillar of this contract, he argues, should be the recognition that REDD+ design and implementation must treat rural communities and Indigenous Peoples as equals, which means that ‘planners must get past the simplistic logic of needs assessments and treat communities with the same respect they would demand for their own community’s present and future’ (187). In chapter 7, Brown draws a concrete proposal for how this desirable objective should and can be pursued, comparing what he labels a ‘social feasibility’ approach with the REDD+ social safeguards. Here, he stresses the importance of involving communities in developing their own assessments of capacities, equitable benefit-sharing, monitoring abilities and so on, before any consent to REDD+ development is even considered (189–92). He uses an example from Cambodia to illustrate the risks involved in pursuing a project informed only by social safeguards, and contrasts such an experience with a social feasibility approach developed in the context of a biodiversity conservation initiative in Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo (201–02). A second pillar of the new ‘social contract’, according to Brown, is the need to mainstream capacity-building efforts. Drawing mostly on his professional experience, Brown explains why building capacity among government, NGOs and local communities is necessary to guarantee the future effectiveness and social success of any REDD+ actions, whatever the scale of implementation. In his view, many development and conservation projects have failed in the past because the capacities for project implementation among involved stakeholders were not properly assessed and addressed prior to implementation.

Chapter 9 provides an overview of all the possible options that REDD+ might have available in terms of funding, from the yet-inexistent markets following the Clean Development Mechanism approach to one based on climate aid or national systems of payments for ecosystem services. In this regard, Brown argues that a hybrid financing platform, made up of development aid and carbon markets, is ‘inevitable’ (222). Events since the book was written have not proven him wrong, as subsequent relevant REDD+ decisions at the UNFCCC level acknowledge that parties should be able to access financing from markets, governments or other mechanisms based on their results (i.e. the amount of

carbon emissions avoided or reduced through REDD+ actions), as well as being able to receive financial support from the same or other sources to support the development of joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests, regardless of the level of emissions reduced. In chapter 10, Brown provides a very balanced synthesis of all the risks involved in REDD+, including the potential perils of: misconduct in carbon accounting and monitoring; simplifying deforestation and forest degradation narratives; and developing poorly designed policy and project approaches that would ultimately impact local livelihoods and the political, economic and social rights of rural communities. At the same time, he also warns against ill-founded critiques of REDD+ on behalf of web-based NGOs, or the strategic politicizing and simplification of the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples.

In chapter 11, Brown concludes the book and returns to his vision of a new 'social contract' in REDD+. For REDD+ to be redeemed, rather than discarded on the grounds of its top-down and technocratic character, he argues that first and foremost it needs to develop new mechanisms for recognition *and* participation across governance levels, from international to local scales, which effectively and equally involve rural communities and Indigenous Peoples in decision-making. In the design phase, this means deploying sufficient resources to build capacities across all parties, and during implementation it means internalizing the high costs of effective land-use emission reductions, which will necessarily involve compensation for local people. REDD+ should account for the costs of developing grounded social feasibility assessments so that, for example, it does not become a means to encroach upon peoples' land and other rights. Finally, REDD+ initiatives need to avoid oversimplifying local contexts and mobilizing excessive resources to clarify tenure regimes, and should instead recognize social-ecological complexity, the existence of legal pluralism, and messy tenure arrangements, which in turn translates to a range of plausible implementation outcomes – both positive and negative.

Overall, Brown's book is a very useful guide to the early years of REDD+ formation and implementation, the social and environmental risks it entails, and ideas about how it can work better in the future. There are, however, a few weaknesses in the book that concern me. First, I think that Brown often mistakenly refers to a REDD+ framework that has barely existed until very recently – i.e. a REDD+ based on tradable carbon offsets – when in reality most of the pilots in place at the time the book was written were conservation and development projects that were, at best, trying to generate carbon credits for the voluntary market. Second, while I agree that REDD+ has been excessively technocratic and top-down, it is also true that many have warned against its blueprint character and host countries have often been quite supportive of bottom-up or sub-national REDD+ activities that have tried to accommodate local realities, though success in doing so has been highly variable. Third, I would argue that the book fails to maintain its argument consistently throughout. This might be because it employs too many sections that can easily distract the reader, including (as indicated earlier) chapters that could have been considered contextual information, as well as the extensive discussion in the central and final sections that develops the new 'social contract'. Finally, and most problematically, I found scant evidence about the role that large-scale and commercial actors driving deforestation and forest degradation have played in REDD+ developments or, more critically, how to account for them in such a proposed 'social contract'. These actors are the missing piece in the REDD+ puzzle, and I would argue that it is impossible to fully redeem REDD+ until this piece is found and placed as a central part of the overall picture. Communities and Indigenous Peoples, whether they are involved in REDD+ or not, cannot alone save the remaining tropical forests: in order to do this, they would also

need a firm international and national commitment against the expansion of large-scale agriculture and timber operations, as well as profound changes in the global political economy of natural resource extraction and consumption.

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**The global land grab: beyond the hype**, edited by Mayke Kaag and Annelies Zoomers, London, Zed Books, 2014, viii + 264 pp., £20.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-1-55266-666-1

In the introduction to *The global land grab*, Mayke Kaag and Annelies Zoomers argue that the current attention to large-scale land acquisitions in the South constitutes a ‘hype’, since it distracts from the central issues and prevents a critical debate of the issues. They define hype as ‘buzzwords and concepts that become very popular in development circles’, and which contribute to fashions and ‘magic bullets’ that promise ‘one-for-all’ solutions to development problems (6). The hype creates enthusiasm and expectations, and when these are not met they are quickly replaced by another hype. Kaag and Zoomers argue that the land-grabbing hype that took off in 2008 was created by the complex interactions of a number of factors, including: soaring prices for agricultural commodities; the search for new fields of investment by financial capital, particularly in relation to bio-energy; African governments publicising the availability of land for foreign investors; and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) amplifying land grabs through publications as a means of strengthening and justifying their role in governance (in a period in which funding for NGOs was declining), with reports then taken up by segments of the international media. The hype connects previously unrelated actors, including financial investors, NGOs looking for new fields for advocacy, farmer groups, consumers and academics, who are all brought together by conflicting interests to magnify the land rush. In short, the editors suggest that the hype surrounding land grabbing contributed to the favourable conditions for the lease of millions of hectares of land in several African countries, although many of these deals failed to materialise.

A central aim of this collection is to problematise this hype, by exploring the inter-relationship between investments in land and coverage in the media, policy documents and academic research. In this, it seeks to go beyond the documentation of numbers of hectares alienated to understand the processes of land grabbing, the actors involved, the rhetoric deployed, and the consequences of successful and unsuccessful investments, as well as extending the focus of land grabbing beyond Africa to examine other instances of large-scale investments in land in Latin America and Asia. While the majority of chapters align with the framework on ‘land-grabbing hype’ set out in the introduction, several chapters examine investments in land and natural resources within a slightly different framework. This results in an unresolved tension within the book between documenting the specific processes that result in the ‘land-grabbing hype’ and finding policy solutions for more equitable land administration on the one hand, and developing a more analytic framework in which to place land grabbing on the other, which involves comparing different patterns of land acquisitions within a longer term historical framework.