

Second Norwich Declaration on **Environmental Justice**

**From safeguarding to mainstreaming local rights:
democratic forest governance as pre-requisite
for a just and effective REDD+**



We, an international group of activists, academics and researchers, observe that entrenched injustices continue to characterize forest governance in the global south.

REDD+ safeguard processes initiated under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are offering new possibilities for addressing some of these injustices.

However, most safeguard processes have failed to engage indigenous peoples and local communities in a meaningful way due to lack of transparency and an overly technocratic approach.

We believe that a just and effective REDD+ can only be brought about through a shift from top-down and standardised safeguard procedures to active processes of strengthening local governance of forest landscapes.

Stressing that

REDD+ cannot be a mechanism for industrialized countries to shift responsibility for mitigating climate change to developing countries, and that the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities necessitates a shift to low-carbon technologies and development paths in the global North;

Recognising that

past and contemporary management of forests in the Global South has dispossessed indigenous peoples and local communities from forest land and resources, excluded them from collective decision-making over forests and marginalized their cultural identities;

Acknowledging that

the exclusion of indigenous peoples and local communities has been a primary cause of conflict over forests as governments have generally not heeded affected people's demands for the recognition of their economic, political and cultural rights;

Considering that

government ownership and development policies have been key underlying drivers of deforestation, forest degradation and unsustainable forest management;

Concerned about

a global tendency of large-scale privatisation of natural resources and about the possibility that REDD+ can feed this tendency and thereby impose further restrictions on local forest stewardship;

Asserting that

forest justice entails righting past wrongs and preventing further wrongs through recognising and strengthening indigenous peoples and local communities' rights, knowledge and governance systems;

Recognising that

the recognition of indigenous peoples and local communities' rights has made significant progress over the past two decades, in particular through the recognition of their territorial rights and customary law;

Considering the potential impacts

of REDD+ on indigenous peoples and local communities as well as the possibility for REDD+ actions to help transform conflicts over forests and serve the development of a more just forest governance;

Concerned by the fact that

current REDD+ safeguard processes remain weakly integrated with the design and implementation of REDD+ actions, and fail to address the non-local drivers of deforestation;

Troubled by the fact that

current statutory and voluntary approaches to REDD+ safeguards privilege technocratic approaches, thereby undermining their transparency and effectively limiting many stakeholders' abilities to equitably engage with REDD+;



Photography by: Poshendra Satyal

We argue that these plural, contextual notions of rights are insufficiently dealt with in current REDD+ safeguard processes at global and national levels.



Photography by: David Mwayalu

We assert

that indigenous peoples and local communities' demands for forest justice and rights are multi-dimensional and context-specific, concerned not solely with equity in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities, but also with recognition of cultural identity and diversity of peoples, and local visions and experiences of forest management, as well as participation in democratic forest governance processes;

We argue

that these plural, contextual notions of rights are insufficiently dealt with in current REDD+ safeguard processes at global and national levels. Current safeguard processes provide important attention to transparent forest governance, respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities, and the participation of relevant stakeholders in REDD+ actions.

However, we identify the following reasons why current processes fall short of redressing historical injustices and serving forest justice:

- (1) Current safeguard processes fail to highlight the primary importance of recognising indigenous peoples and local communities' territorial rights and customary law, including their implications for forest tenure rights and decentralized governance of forests and forest land.
- (2) Current safeguard processes fall short of enabling indigenous peoples and local communities' engagement with REDD+ due to their lack of clarity, the dominance of overly technocratic approaches, the lack of grievance mechanisms and the absence of accompanying empowerment measures.
- (3) Safeguard information systems and indicators are only helpful if they enable indigenous and local communities to engage more actively with REDD+.
- (4) This requires a shift in emphasis, from top-down safeguards to strengthening local governance, supported through measures that help to revitalise and recognise cultural values, identity and customary law and institutions for local forest and natural resource management, and measures that enhance the transparency of safeguard processes and offer accessible mechanisms to voice and address grievances.



We therefore assert

that strengthening local governance systems, including recognition of territorial rights and customary law, is an essential precondition for developing a just and effective REDD+.

Express our solidarity

with global movements of forest justice and the struggles of indigenous peoples and local communities to secure justice;

Request that the UNFCCC

takes proactive steps to communicate key contents of national communications to a wider audience, facilitates independent monitoring of national communications and establishes a grievance mechanism on REDD+ to deal with complaints that are not adequately received and dealt with in member states' complaint mechanisms;

Demand that governments

initiate multi-stakeholder platforms to work to strengthen local governance including representatives from civil society, indigenous peoples and local communities, develop REDD+ grievance mechanisms and actively disseminate information on REDD+ in a manner appropriate for all stakeholders;

Support forest rights movements and activists'

demands for the recognition of territorial rights and customary law as well as their efforts to represent indigenous peoples and local communities in national and global safeguard processes;

Call upon civil society organisations

to work to strengthen local governance, undertake independent monitoring of national communications to the UNFCCC, monitor the practices of international donors and multilateral initiatives and develop networks and linkages between organisations active in the Global South and North;

Request international donors

to respect and support the role of multi-stakeholder platforms in the design and implementation of REDD+, fund required capacity-building measures for indigenous peoples and local communities' representatives and provide technical and financial support for strengthening local governance systems, including through recognition of territorial rights and customary law;

Demand that multilateral REDD+ initiatives

such as the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility and UN-REDD Programme, support equitable participation for indigenous peoples and local communities' representatives and civil society organisations, the establishment of grievance mechanisms at local, national and global levels and the design and implementation of programmes recognizing indigenous peoples and local communities' territorial rights and customary law.

SIGNATORIES:

Horacio Almanza Alcalde

Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico

Hari Dhungana

Southasia Institute of Advanced Studies, Nepal

David Gritten

Researcher

Nicole Gross-Camp

University of East Anglia, UK

Esteban Gutierrez

Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas, Venezuela

Mirna Inturia

Nur University, Bolivia

Cam Hoang

Institute of Cultural Studies, Vietnam

Adrian Martin

University of East Anglia, UK

Glory Massao

Mpingo Conservation and Development Initiative, Tanzania

David Mwayafu

Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development, Uganda

Hao Phan

University of East Anglia, UK

Iokíñe Rodríguez

Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas, Venezuela

Madhu Sarin

Independent Analyst, India

Poshendra Satyal

University of East Anglia, UK

Heike Schroeder

University of East Anglia, UK

Thomas Sikor

University of East Anglia, UK

Oliver Springgate-Baginski

University of East Anglia, UK