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Rearticulating governance through carbon in the Lao PDR?

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Abstract. Interventions to 'improve' the human condition through democratic and capitalist ideals increasingly draw on capital and markets to influence governance in line with Western mandates of state building. As a major recent example, Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation 'plus' (REDD+) develops new market regimes to govern, finance, and trade carbon in line with donor discourses of civil liberties, market expansion, and, more broadly, state building. Emerging REDD+ networks that aim to finance and trade carbon now align with the conditionality and ideals of democratic governance, transparency, and accountability through processes of institution building (for state stability). This paper examines the connection between REDD+ projects and state-making ideals in policy and practice as bilaterals and NGOs fuse the conditions and governance of one with the other. In the Lao PDR we argue that the governance machinery and interventions associated with REDD+ facilitate governance agendas to manage people, goods, and carbon in line with Western narratives of robust governance, free markets, and integrity. We contend that the adoption of REDD+ will nudge local markets and governance in this postsocialist bureaucracy toward such principles, but in ways that partly reinforce the state's longer term political and economic objectives. We conclude that, rather than conserve carbon per se, REDD+ governance reflects a tempered, less absolute 'extraterritoriality', where its transnational influence is differentiated depending on how assumptions and ideals align with state motives in the context of forest governance, democratic reform, and rural development.

Keywords: climate governance, REDD+ policy, market-based mechanisms, agrarian change, Laos PDR

Introduction

The global expansion of carbon financing has rekindled older ideas of how best to govern forests and forest users through market-based solutions (Grindle, 2004). International organizations, governments, and the private sector have created carbon financing and governance regimes that offer support, solutions, and rules to poorer, 'weaker' states according to 'strong' (Western) state ideals of good governance, property rights, and markets. As older governance binaries permeate global policy agendas for climate change mitigation, state control and management over resources and territory is often supplemented and shaped by global governance institutions (Boege et al, 2009; Weiss, 2000). These create the ‘rules of the game’ for carbon conservation—a form of ‘extraterritorial’ carbon governance (Vandergeest and Unno, 2012, page 359).[1] In this context the extraterritorial dimensions of carbon governance arise from the role of transnational, nonstate actors whose rules, ideals, and assumptions about how best to govern forest carbon and forest users overlap with national mandates and ideals of state building, where the complexity of the former can complicate and redirect the latter (Boege et al, 2009). Though many studies have examined the origins and implications of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation ‘plus’ (REDD+)—particularly from a monitoring, verification, and safeguarding perspective (Grainger and Obersteiner, 2011; Visseren-Hamakers et al, 2012)—few have considered how its governance reach conveys assumptions and ideals about how rural people, forests, and landscapes should become aligned with market-based governance agendas in contrasting political economies. We do so by offering new empirical insights into how (REDD+) governance articulates with national efforts of ordering people and landscapes under the banner of ‘carbon conservation’.

In establishing global carbon governance across scale, international actors have drawn on established policy narratives. Broadly, these narratives cite the need for state agencies to embrace and achieve good governance through locally efficient and effective management of forest carbon and forest peoples. However, critical authors note that imposing such universal governance agendas may not only be misaligned and unrealistic vis-à-vis state political economy, but also poorly sequenced, interventionist, and limiting to state sovereignty (Vandergeest and Unno, 2012). Moreover, the extraterritorial reach and impact of carbon governance can be partial and incomplete, with potential to reinvest in the authority and control of a host nation’s political economy in unanticipated ways (Springer, 2009). Thus, transnational carbon governance may involve a dynamic but poorly understood interplay of external influence on the host country’s policies as well as reinforcement of the state’s own political economic interests.

We examine how REDD+ projects and state-making ideals become associated in policy and practice as bilaterals and NGOs fuse the conditions and governance of one with the other. While REDD+ governance aims to facilitate the enhancement of carbon stocks in forests, its discursive reach influences the policies and practices of many things related to, and associated with, carbon in rural settings, particularly by trying to instill transparency, stronger markets, and sustainability. REDD+ ostensibly finances poorer countries to address the drivers of deforestation and forest degradation. However, achieving these goals requires them to overcome the assumed institutional fragility of ‘weak states’ through Weberian notions of good governance to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of carbon governance. The relevance of REDD+ governance and market dynamics in strengthening national and local institutions thus aligns with Western constructs of the ‘ideal state’ as compared with the complex, ambiguous nature of the Lao state (Bhabba, 2004).

Global governance and financing of carbon conservation now draws legitimacy from REDD+ as the most recent market-based mechanism. Endorsed by the United Nations in 2009, REDD+ has become the most internationally significant mechanism to finance and govern carbon conservation in the forests of the developing world (Cronin and Santoso, 2010).

[1] Building on Vandergeest and Unno (2012), we understand extraterritorial governance to involve the discursive reach and influence of policy, ideas, and beliefs that aim to define the parameters and actions of scaled interventions concerning forest carbon. It is *not* a definitive legal and policy process with clearly marked boundaries but rather an amalgam of ideals and actions aligned for specific governance purposes.

Under the rubric of REDD+, donors have introduced policies, ideals, and incentives to influence state actors and forest users to invest in forest and land management that conserves carbon and drives resource commodity trading in rural frontiers. In time, REDD+ governance tries to nudge state policies and practices towards those deemed necessary for successful carbon trading and conservation; namely, (1) that carbon is first rendered an 'ownable', controllable commodity; and (2) that the conditions exist to support local property rights and civil liberties to enhance the potential of carbon markets. Such conditions are promoted by carbon financiers and institutions through new techniques to monitor and evaluate carbon stocks for potential trade, and safeguards that are designed to manage risks and create 'enabling environments' for local forest users to adopt low-carbon, market-based activities. In this way, nascent neoliberalism and carbon conservation can fuse in policy and practice through devolved, 'democratic' governance, where faith in flexible markets and civil society becomes mutually supportive of the supplies and demands of carbon governance (McCarthy, 2005).

South East Asia has recently experienced its own carbon finance boom, with more than US$1 billion pledged for REDD+ in the region so far (FCPF, 2011a; FIP, 2011).[2] Since 2010, Laos has received more than US$90 million for REDD+ programs (DOF, 2011). Long considered an autocratic, corrupt, and 'weak' postsocialist state (Stuart-Fox, 1997), donors, NGOs, and others have historically invested in capacity building, sectoral coordination, and accountability, and now continue such investments in REDD+ in Laos (page 1). Here, too, the rapid influx of carbon financing and governance promotes familiar discourses of civil liberties, individual property rights, and market expansion (Ishay, 2004). In practice, the discourse of REDD+ governance in Laos has supported notions of good governance and market expansion across scale, but usually as (re)interpreted through the Lao state's own political culture. Rather than deal explicitly with carbon per se, state-level REDD+ governance is steering, rearticulating, and sustaining rural development policies and interventions that support 'agrarian modernization', ostensibly in line with donor and state development agendas. We consider whether this process reflects REDD+ governance as 'extraterritoriality', where policy designs and interventions aim to integrate an architecture that reflects Western ideals of governmental control and management. We ask: how might NGO and donor carbon financing and governance influence state forest policy and governance in terms of rural markets, people, and land uses? And, by extension, how might REDD+ governance articulate with the state political economy of forests, people, and land in the context of carbon conservation and social development?

We answer these questions by examining the ideals and assumptions of two main proponents in Laos involved in governing carbon, forests, and people—foreign donors and international NGOs–in terms of three emerging frames: *marketization*, *good governance*, and *sustainability*. We analyze policy documents and interviews with these actors to understand the nature and rationale of related discourses, which discourses dominate, and how these frame governance agendas and interventions of REDD+, accordingly. This analysis is juxtaposed against Lao state policy and practice over time. Finally, we consider how these REDD+ governance frames may conflict with local and national realities, and what lessons can be drawn about REDD+ governance influence in developing countries.

Approach and methods

We follow a discursive framing approach to delineate and interpret how key assumptions, beliefs, and actions associated with REDD+ governance may influence Lao state policy and practice. This broader approach allows us to analyze, organize, and foreground the main assumptions, ideals, and beliefs (from the policy text and interviews) of donors and

[2] Approved amounts are considerably lower (see subsequent sections).

NGOs behind REDD+, and how these may influence state efforts of ordering rural people and landscapes through REDD+ and national motives. In this sense, then, framing is a the social process by which individuals (and groups) come to locate, identify, and label certain themes, issues, and situations they regularly encounter (Goffman, 1974, page 21). It involves "principles of selection, emphasis and presentation composed of certain … [ideas and beliefs] about what exists, what happens, and what matters in policy interventions" (Gitlin, 1980, page 6). Depending on how actors invest in them to influence policy design and outcomes, frames may gain coherence and political traction over time.

Frames arise from broader discourses through the selection of certain aspects of:

> "a perceived reality [that are] made more salient in a communicating text, in such a way so as to promote problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations and/or treatment recommendations" (Entman, 1993, page 52).

The process of framing defines problems in terms of costs and benefits in line with common cultural values; diagnoses causes in terms of drivers and outcomes; and suggests remedies in line with treatments that have a strong moral evaluative structure (page 52). The political framing of REDD+ governance involves a similar process of design, delivery, and management.

In policy decision making, actors who govern will make 'framing judgments' in deciding what to write and do in line with certain 'schemata' that structure meanings and beliefs. Key transnational decision makers will draw on and invest in frames through text and language that contains (and produces) keywords, stock phrases, information, and images that "provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts [for policy] judgments" (Entman, 1993, page 52). These frames may influence and reveal actor thinking and conclusions. The 'stock of frames' used most consistently can reflect dominant policy discourse that is fairly representative of actors' key motives, objectives, and interests. Social frames structure issues, change policy, legitimize perspectives, and mobilize people toward an ideal (Dewulf et al, 2009). Actors in REDD+ governance may align with and exploit frames to gain political agency, motivating others within and beyond their organization to achieve strategic policy goals and interests. In REDD+ governance key policy discourses have emerged as dominant frames with coherence and meaning in policy and practice. These systems of meaning—or *discursive frames*—can have strong transformative potential through REDD+ governance.

From August to September 2012 we identified and interviewed seventeen actors in Thailand and Laos who were leading the financing and design of REDD+ in Laos (see appendix). These included key officials from international institutions (UN-REDD); multilateral donors [World Bank, Forest Investment Program (FIP)]; bilateral donors [USAID–LEAF (Lowering Emissions from Asia's Forests), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit–Climate Protection through Avoided Deforestation (GIZ–CliPAD), Sustainable Forestry and Rural Development Project (FINNIDA–SUFORD), and Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)]; private sector actors (Verified Carbon Standard); and NGOs [Forest Carbon Asia, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), and WWF].

These actors have facilitated the Laos state's involvement in the UN-REDD scheme, supporting REDD+ policy and financing, integrating forest governance in line with REDD+, and developing community-based programs for local involvement in pilot programs. Semistructured interviews investigated broad program mandates in REDD+, carbon financing, and community-level 'preparedness'. We also examined sixteen regional and country-level policy documents identified as being important by our respondents.

Interviews and policy documents were then coded and analyzed by defining broad categories of repeated themes related to carbon finance and governance. These were elaborated into subthemes for more detailed textual analysis. We examined language patterns to cluster consistently related vocabulary and information for insights into the central beliefs and assumptions embedded in carbon financing and governance (Paltridge, 2012). By examining recurring language and information patterns, we could interpret their associations in terms of framed meanings and beliefs about REDD+ financing and governance in Laos. We show how key frames work together to create a broader narrative that attempts to align, but also sits awkwardly, within the postsocialist Lao state.

Neoliberalism, market-based conservation, and REDD+

Considerable research has documented how neoliberalism and environmental governance converge to reconfigure central state control of forests and land towards more efficient and effective decentralized (state) management through nonstate actors (Büscher et al, 2014; Heynen et al, 2007; McCarthy, 2006). Itself a form of governance, the rise of neoliberalism has reflected an ideology and logic of less state oversight over social, political, and economic affairs. The 'free' market and civil society are used to more efficiently allocate resources across social landscapes (Büscher et al, 2014), while simultaneously involving state 'support and withdrawal' for its expansion. Neoliberalism has involved the privatization and marketization of more and more public goods and services to facilitate the faster financial exchange and accumulation of profits by removing social, economic, and environmental barriers (Fletcher, 2010).

Yet neoliberalization of policy and governance is less a monolithic and identifiable event than it is an uneven, dynamic, and socially contingent process influenced by the context in which it unfolds (Dressler and Roth, 2011). The processes by which neoliberalism emerges are thus not along vertical and hierarchical scales, but through the convergence of discursive thoughts and actions within and between scales (Springer, 2012); in time, such processes and outcomes involve and produce discursive frames that mark, or render coherent, aspects of neoliberal governance. Neoliberalism emerges through, and is reinvested in, hybridized processes and structures that are shaped by historical changes, contemporary realities, and landscape specificities. In terms of REDD+ governance, we observe a discursively produced neoliberalism with sociomaterial impacts emerging through frames that mark its relative 'coherence' (Springer, 2012). Notwithstanding debates over REDD+ architecture, a broadly consistent neoliberal framing is central to REDD+ discourse.

In much of South East Asia neoliberalism has intersected and influenced forest governance and conservation towards decentralization, public–private partnerships, cost–benefit analysis, and property rights schemes that align with market-based solutions (Springer, 2012). The assumption is that, when neoliberal ideals fuse with governance, both governance and forests will improve in quality as markets price ecological goods and services adequately; when the 'price is right', incentives will keep people in line, or pay for regulation and conservation. How this process unfolds, of course, depends upon how states mediate governance and economic reforms. The postsocialist, market-oriented state of Laos, for instance, is steering processes of neoliberalization according to its existing political economy. Here, REDD+ becomes 'market-based forest conservation'—a less intense, diffuse avatar of neoliberal governance—where the ideals of devolution, social democracy, clear property rights, and markets interact variously with postsocialist marketization (Springer, 2012).

Carbon trading, REDD+, and related governance structures have emerged from the broader process of neoliberalizing nature (Lohman, 2012). In 1997 the Kyoto Protocol first enabled a global framework for the supply and purchase of carbon offsets [ie, through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)]. The aim was to facilitate the trade of carbon credits between the more industrialized (carbon-dependent) North and the increasingly industrialized (soon equally carbon-dependent) South (Böhm et al, 2012). More than a decade later, Voluntary Offset Markets bypassed the CDM to generate a multimillion-dollar carbon industry. The 2009 Copenhagen Accord amongst parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate

Change (UNFCCC) saw developed countries promise US $30 billion in climate finance from 2010 to 2012, and upwards of US $100 billion per year by 2020 (Caravani et al, 2012, page 1). As of 2011, *global climate finance* was estimated at US $97 billion per year—a figure that pools private, public, and domestic support for low-carbon, climate-resilient activities. Of this amount, private sector finance (via global capital markets, private–voluntary offset markets) represents an estimated US $54.6 billion, and public finance from development banks, bilateral, and multilateral agencies comprises US $20 billion (Buchner et al, 2011). Although premised on respect for national sovereignty, financial institutions have forged a global REDD+ governance regime that aims to conserve forest carbon through hybridizing financial incentives and social safeguards that champion Western ideals of free markets and good governance (Lohmann, 2009).

REDD+ carbon finance and governance

Significant levels of multilateral and bilateral REDD+ financing are now concentrated in particularly denuded and/or forested developing countries. Compared with climate financing, *carbon finance* for REDD+ remains low, but is on the rise (Buchner et al, 2011). While estimates vary, almost US $3 billion has been *pledged* for REDD+ programs and readiness activities between 2007 and 2011, with major donors being Norway, the UK, Australia, and the USA (Schalatek et al, 2012). Larger multilateral programs of the UN-REDD and Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), and bilateral initiatives, have provided more than 80% of the approved financing needs and support. As of 2011, more than US $1.12 billion had been *approved* for REDD+ implementation, with the total being higher today (Shalatek et al, 2012). This dramatic rise in REDD+ financing has produced various market-based governance conditions that national and subnational actors are expected to adopt and implement in line with existing political and economic structures, including rural development strategies.

Furthermore, as part of the REDD+ Readiness phase, the UNFCCC, multilateral, and bilateral donors have adopted policy conditions based on assumptions and beliefs about what will generate fair, equitable, and transparent market governance at the subnational level. In particular, a burgeoning normative literature embraces the so-called 'bottom line' of REDD+ governance: social safeguards and cobenefits (Visseren-Hamakers et al, 2012) founded upon faith in open, accessible, and accountable governance; deliberative engagement; social equity; and market-based solutions (Melo et al, 2014). Globally, UNFCCC (2011) has responded with social safeguards that walk a tightrope between "actions [that] complement or are consistent with the objectives of national forest programmes" (page 26); locally and financially "incentiviz[ing] the protection and conservation of natural forests and their ecosystem services" (pages 26–27); "transparent and effective national forest governance structures, taking into account national legislation and sovereignty" (page 26); and respect for "the knowledge and rights of indigenous people and members of local communities" (page 26). If social safeguards are properly designed and implemented, then a suite of financial cobenefits, multiplier effects, and incentives will supposedly improve local livelihoods.

Although other multilateral agencies supporting REDD+ (the World Bank's FIP and FCPF) have their own 'social safeguards', these are broadly in line with the above governance conditions. For example, FIP (2011) investment criteria require projects to have clear benefit-sharing mechanisms, and to address participation and equity under the rubric of sustainable development. Moreover, national governments need to reflect the FCPF's (2011b, page 5) 'Common Approach' to social and environmental safeguards in their REDD plans, including respect for human rights, indigenous knowledge, and forestlands. These provisions are the "core determinants of the quality of governance" for REDD+ investments in the Readiness phase (Fosci, 2013, page 177).

REDD+ and carbon finance in Laos: extraterritorial governance and/or social development?

The changing frames of governance ‘reform’ in Laos

The dawn of REDD+ governance and conditionality in Laos follows its historical political economy and recent trajectory of donor-supported forest policies. Notions of sustainable forestry, participatory land-use plans, and, now, carbon governance have historically held little significance for the Lao central government. When the communist party—*Pathet Lao*—secured control of the country in 1975, it concerned itself with categorizing land and people (Lund, 2011), while its rendition of Marxist ideology and revolution expunged Western donor influence (eg, ousting USAID) (Stuart-Fox, 1997). The government’s initial concerns were to control people, forests, and land according to defined and settled territories, to monitor movements, and to censor expression so as to maintain state authority.

In the late 1970s attempts to maintain an orthodox communist state were reflected in the Country’s single-party command-and-control economic policies that sought to nationalize industry and collectivize rural production. However, rural resistance to collectivization, declines in rural productivity, and rise in inflation soon led to the suspension of collectivization and attempts at free-market reform in agriculture (Evans, 2002).

With the Soviet Union’s collapse, the decline in ‘socialist’ development aid to Laos, and with other socialist states (eg, Vietnam) tinkering with free market reform, the Lao government endorsed the ‘New Economic Mechanism’ in 1985 (Evans, 2002). Since then, central bureaucratic control (ostensibly) waned and free market reforms waxed, but is now under the tutelage of Western development banks and bilateral donors. The Lao government took economic advice and loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, and capitalist countries such as Australia and Japan (Stuart-Fox, 1997). As the country opened up to Western development assistance in the late 1980s, a new governance discourse about how best to manage forests, peoples, and lands articulated with the state’s political culture (Lund, 2011). The 1990s saw the height of conservation interventions through the sustained support from bilaterals and international NGOs (Singh, 2008). Yet, in the years following an increase in donor aid and development fueled a culture of corruption among senior and lower level officials, and, in turn, donor calls for governance transparency and accountability with a stronger market focus (Stuart-Fox, 1997). In time, such attempts at governance reforms would further fuel the flow of capital into the country. Usually, this was via international development assistance, ostensibly targeting the poor and ‘emerging’ middle class, instead supporting the emerging wealth of the political class in the country (Rueschemeyer et al, 1992; Stuart-Fox, 1997).

As Laos integrated economically with its neighbors, international investors and donors advocated stronger trade linkages (Stuart-Fox, 1997). In recent decades regional processes of cross-border trade and market integration with China, Vietnam, and Thailand accelerated timber harvesting, commercial rubber plantations, large-scale mining, and the construction of megadams (Barney, 2009; Dwyer, 2013). With Laos open for business, regional market integration intensified even further, but with increasingly adverse consequences for people and forests (Barney, 2009). Against this backdrop, development banks, donors, and investors advocated expanded trade and good governance in a country deemed central to the resource supply of the Greater Mekong Subregion (Sturgeon, 2013)—part of the justification behind REDD+ in Laos.

Under donor influence, the Lao state introduced governance and policy mandates to manage and modernize rural people and landscapes. With the Lao frontier subject to extractive enclosures and industries—partly fuelled by donor projects themselves (Baird and Shoemaker, 2007)—donor aid conditions, policy designs, and planning support spawned a new era of ‘governance reform’ and ‘sustainable development’ along socially and economically rational lines (Goldman, 2001). In the 1990s the World Bank, Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), and the WCS, among others, embarked on an ambitious campaign to develop conservation policy and protected areas as 'safety valves' for further market expansion and economic integration of the country (Duckworth et al, 1999). These governance interventions would at once present potential solutions to complex processes of resource overexploitation, and offer further opportunities for market expansion in rural areas.

Furthering this agenda, international donors worked with national agencies, such as the Ministry of Forestry, to promote policies that governed forests, lands, and livelihoods according to the converging ideals of free markets, property rights, and conservation. In the process these actors reproduced the dominant frames of 'eradicating swidden', 'intensifying commercial farming', 'capturing value' of forests and rural labor, and 'modernizing' the uplands through market expansion. In the late 1990s the Focal Site Strategy attempted to concentrate upland ethnic minorities in lowland villages in order to eliminate swidden, alleviate poverty, sedentarize agriculture, enhance food security, and expand commodity production (Baird and Shoemaker, 2007). The Land and Forest Allocation (LFA) Programme facilitated its implementation by delineating village boundaries, distinguishing between forest and nonforest lands, and 'devolving' [via participatory land-use planning (PLUP)] resource management guidelines to village committees. Swidden was constrained spatially and restricted to three-year fallows: by curbing forest access and use, malnutrition rose. By 1998, the policy attempted to resettle close to 450 000 uplanders into lowland villages, with the aim of making livelihoods 'sustainable', in line with policy rhetoric (Evrard and Goundineau, 2004). Several international agencies, bilateral donors, and NGOs (eg, UNDP, Food and Agriculture Organization, ADB, World Bank, WCS) influenced and funded more than 80% of the Focal Site Strategy, and the LFA and PLUP structure upon which the strategy depended (Baird and Shoemaker, 2007).

Within the prevailing political culture, a donor-influenced 'green' bureaucracy thickened in order to underwrite the state's financial needs and progress new governmental solutions for 'sustainable development', whether through PLUP, customary rights, or sustainable livelihoods. As Goldman (2001) writes, the Lao state progressively embraced green, market-oriented solutions, through the state's evolving environmental governance regime, policy design, and local interventions in the rural uplands. He suggests that:

> "'green' practices were emerging to more effectively control (and increase the market value of) environments, natural resources, and resource dependent populations" (page 500),

which, according to some, had less do to with 'green ideals' than with the Lao state's need to adopt such policies in order to secure domestic legitimacy, or at least demonstrate its potential to do so by redistributing benefit and gain (Singh, 2012). The neoliberal processes and bureaucratic deepening of such frames shaped policies and impacts on the ground.

Yet the process by which transnational donors and civil society inform such green bureaucratic reform and governance is complex. As Singh (in press) notes, rather than emerging from a well-defined, modern environmental state and donor community, eco-governance policies and practices are rearticulated in line with the state's political economy—particularly in ways that support the political networks of forum shopping and patron–client relations. In this sense, the use of and reinvestment in green policies further facilitated the flow of power, finance, and gain amongst party officials and associated private sector. The same complexity applies to 'outlier' donor and NGO perspectives: several aid agencies refused to support 'development' interventions and livelihood 'support' programs for fear that they would create adverse cultural and livelihood impacts (Baird and Shoemaker, 2007). This was evident between the SIDA and Lao government over the former's concern about abetting human rights violations by resettling swidden farmers to focal sites in the early 2000s (GHD, 2011). The debate eventually subsided with Lao agencies giving an 'ear' to human rights discussions.

However, many of the same agencies and NGOs have drawn on similar discourse in REDD+ design from the national to local level in Laos. The forest and land-use policies of prior decades have been invoked to support REDD+ implementation, repeating similar governance frames and aims today in the hope of reinforcing existing pressures to intensify and invest in rural markets, while maintaining a strong state role in the process (Springer, 2012).

REDD+ and carbon governance in Laos

In 2010 the UN-REDD (2010) Programme commenced in the Asia-Pacific (Cambodia, Solomon Islands, and the Philippines), reinforcing the governance and market ideals of previous initiatives. Alongside UN-REDD, the Word Bank's FCPF (2012) soon ran similar REDD+ preparation activities in Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Laos.(3)

Since then, REDD+ financing has grown considerably in Laos, with funding for national programs estimated at US $88 million from multilateral and bilateral donors (DOF, 2011, page 1). Bilateral assistance from GIZ, JICA, and the Government of Finland has spurred on significant REDD+ activity in the country, with more than US $55 million invested in REDD+ Readiness activities. In contrast, since 2010 multilateral funding from the World Bank's FCPF, the ADB, and the International Financial Corporation amounted to just more than US $33 million. Much of the latter rise in revenue stems from Laos's acceptance into the FCPF with its Readiness Preparation Proposal (of 2010) and FIP approval in 2011 (DOF, 2011). As before, the government has established new bureaucracies and is ostensibly realigning forest policies and strategies (eg, Forestry Law of Lao PDR) to support REDD+ with parallel governance structures for market expansion with social safeguards.

Multilateral and bilateral carbon finance and policy in Laos takes on different shapes and forms as it moves through the national and provincial government with new REDD+ governance structures. Nationally, under the National Environment Council's policy guidance, a multisectoral REDD+ Taskforce under the Department of Forestry (DOF) coordinates REDD+ Readiness activities with support from a REDD+ Office in technical governance matters (Laos RPP, 2011). A subordinate provincial structure mirrors the national architecture with a Provincial Environment Council, Task Force, and Office. Crucially, the governance ideals from REDD+ donors and the government are mediated at the taskforce level through 'multistakeholder' representation, where administration and governance is supported by the Cooperation and Investment Unit, DoF, and an Advisory Group composed of expatriate staff from bilateral donors (eg, GIZ-CliPAD). The Task Force meets these advisors and other actors—including NGOs (eg, the WCS), multilateral and bilateral representatives (eg, the World Bank), private sector, and consultants—to share strategic advice on policy design and program implementation (Laos RPP, 2011). The REDD+ Office executes Task Force recommendations on implementing and monitoring REDD+ Readiness activities with the assistance of Technical Working Groups. The result of sustained donor engagement with REDD+ and bureaucratic overburdening is the renewed attention to institutional restructuring so as to enhance management capacity and coordination—for example, to reduce duplication between the DOF and the new Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE) who each host REDD+ Offices with overlapping roles and responsibilities.

During meetings, foreign donors promote and government agencies interpret certain ideals and assumptions of how best to govern forests, forest carbon, and forest users. These are reflected in the discourses and frames that inform consultations, policy redesign, and

(3) The FCPF (2012) uses the Readiness and Carbon Fund to give financial and technical assistance, build capacity, and provide incentives for REDD+.

interventions as well as key actor interactions and knowledge negotiations. As REDD+ governance unfolds, such discursive frames will gradually articulate with national and local forest governance, land management, tenure, and livelihoods, which aligns well with policy trajectories reinforcing sedentary, commercial agriculture, connected to regional markets. The two arms of Finnish and German bilateral aid, SUFORD and CliPAD, demonstrate how REDD+ financing and governance carry over explicit and implicit promarket assumptions regarding forest governance, carbon conservation, and forest user behavior from earlier governance mandates.

Since 2003 the governments of Laos and Finland have implemented the SUFORD (2012) project. This US $22 million project works through the DOF and National Agricultural and Forest Extension Service, and provincial and district forest offices as well as village units (page 12). As a pillar of the World Bank's FIP in Laos, SUFORD operates in nine provinces with the mandate of facilitating 'Participatory Sustainable Forest Management' (PSFM) through 'community-based sustainable forestry' and 'viable' livelihood systems in support of REDD+. The SUFORD program remains ambitious, with the objective of developing PSFM and improving the livelihoods of thousands of villagers through 'sustainable forestry' and low-carbon-livelihood activities that are connected with domestic timber markets (in production forest). However, in the process of supporting community forestry and propping up local timber markets, ascertaining forest cover and carbon stocks remains an acknowledged challenge (SUFORD, 2012).

The aim of GIZ's CliPAD is to develop policies through 'Suitable Framework Conditions' that support forest conservation for REDD+. The program aims to "initiate national REDD+ dialogue and the development of a REDD+ regulatory framework" (CliPAD, 2010, pages 9–10). In contrast to SUFORD, CliPAD has worked with the Lao government to determine whether National Protected Areas might serve as suitable sites for REDD+ activities. Working in the Nam Phui National Protected Area, initial attempts by CliPAD staff to undergo a feasibility study centered on: (1) engaging villagers with Free Prior Informed Consent to facilitate local capacity for and awareness of carbon trading; and (2) designing sustainable agricultural extension that promotes sedentary cultivation over swidden agriculture (see JICA, 2010)—again, these build upon the earlier PLUP process (CliPAD, 2011). Achieving these aims involved establishing farmer learning groups to receive training on improved agricultural methods, for which the group members would become 'champions' (page 76). In supporting livelihood 'productivity', these governance interventions sought to draw local users from forest extraction (swidden) into more intensive agricultural practices within demarcated zones. The end goal was to enhance forest cover and biomass for greater carbon stocks for potential trading.

Regionally, CliPAD also partly contributed to the proposed revisions of national law and policies, particularly the Forestry Law of Lao PDR, to include REDD+, Payment for Ecosystem Services, and community forestry provisions. Working with MONRE and the Department of Forest Resource Management, CliPAD agents designed a steering committee and workshops to define further how best to incorporate REDD+ into forest governance by (again) clarifying village tenure rights, providing incentives for forest management, and greater village decision making in PLUP processes. These actions sought to clarify local rights to carbon and support benefit distribution (CliPAD, 2012). In this way, SUFORD and CliPAD are revising and refining older policies and practices to implement REDD+ through market-based principles of clear property rights, financial benefit distribution, and low-carbon-livelihood activities. The deliberate effort of such policy interventions to target state and nonstate actors across scale to build livelihood and governance capacities has by *default* or design (re)opened access and ownership opportunities for new information, knowledge, and assets related to REDD+. In the process, outcomes may facilitate rural development and modernization.

Discursive frames informing REDD+ actions

Our analysis of interviews and policy documents suggests similarly dominant frames exist amongst donor organizations and international NGOs who liaise with state agencies, the REDD+ Task Force, provincial implementors, and local actors. The most prominent REDD+ frames relate to, and are consistent with, the recent evolution of conservation and development discourse in Laos: good governance, marketization, and sustainability.

Good governance

In our analysis of interviews and sixteen policy reports, most responses and content about 'governance' repeatedly referred to 'individual and collective capacity building', 'institutional strengthening', and 'incentive frameworks' for REDD+ implementation. Nationally, governance discourse tended to be paired with the success of bilateral assistance to develop REDD+ readiness frameworks, to strengthen legal governance frameworks for forest management, and to build the capacity of national and provincial forest managers. As one bilateral donor mentioned,

> "it's the decentralization of REDD basically—a decentralization of the national system into its parts because there is not enough capacity … to coordinate that degree of complexity… frankly speaking most REDD programs in Laos were backed into [due to] political connections" (8 August 2012).

The respondent adds that enhancing institutional capacity is: "a catch 22 a little bit, as a part of it is about capacity building and the other part of it is producing results for performance and thus financing."

In parallel, most bilateral policy documents equated 'good' governance with 'political will', 'awareness raising', and 'capacity building' of 'weak' Lao institutions, which needed to 'catch up' in terms of accountable and transparent governance—that is, to be rid of corruption and nepotism which is a barrier to REDD+. In particular, the potential of Laos to implement and govern REDD+ and manage carbon stores in the context of existing forest laws was considered limited due to weak 'internal capacity', thereby requiring outside assistance. As one multilateral donor representative noted:

> "it is true, in Laos, that ministries tend to be silos and very often it is hard to communicate at the technical level and without going all the way" (14 August 2012).

These statements infer that donor governance perspectives offer the necessary corrective reforms to achieve the end goal of 'good governance', which, in theory, would clear a path for the redistribution of income, assets, and wealth across societal sectors, particularly (trickling down to) the local level (Iversen, 2005).

At the subnational level, policy documents suggest that local institutional frameworks, financial incentives, and participatory land-use processes need to be improved and better aligned across provincial and district levels. Participatory governance structures and learning groups were linked to tenurial mechanisms, such as the communal titling of village forest, as the basis for strengthening local institutions, resource use zones, and livelihoods. Across all agency documents, the use of the PLUP program remained the main strategy by which to strengthen local institutions, tenure rights, and livelihood security. Mentioned repeatedly was the importance of clear national regulations that are connected to well-defined property rights to land, forest, and carbon, thereby ensuring equitable carbon 'ownership', taxation, financial, and credit revenue distribution.

Fearing that extensive agriculture (ie, swidden) might override REDD+ objectives, most agencies supported PLUP as the means of 'fast tracking' the transition from sedentary to commercial agriculture, proposing this was best achieved by establishing 'village development funds' with carbon financing (CliPAD, 2012). The ultimate goal was to ensure sedentary agriculture so that other (swidden) farming would not encroach upon valuable carbon stocks in mature forests. Ownership and allocation of land was considered a crucial vehicle for intensification in line with investing in and expanding forests and carbon markets. As with earlier narratives of rural development, donors and NGOs often conceived of REDD+ as a means to guide government agencies and forest users toward the ideal of productive, modern, and sustainable actors investing in rural productivity.

Marketization

In the interviews and policy documents governance was tied to the recurring subthemes of market incentives, private sector investments, benefit distribution mechanisms, and added value, among others. As clusters, these themes point toward the broader frame of marketization—a frame that suggests REDD+ governance facilitates the marketization of forests, carbon, and livelihoods. A multilateral representative's statement reinforces the above, by saying:

> "Yes … we need more private investments because of low carbon funds, and current projects are just moving forward to satisfy the interim …. Most of the things you need to do have credits that require improved financial management [which is dependent upon] greater clarity of tenure, a larger role for communities … and will be beneficial for quite some time, beneficial to the country itself … once carbon markets do recover" (14 August 2012).

Echoing the above statement, policy documents directly linked REDD+ with national and local investments, in order to enhance the state's technical capacity, and to attract more (private sector) financial incentives for and from carbon trading to 'improve' rural livelihoods. As a broader frame, the ultimate goal was to enhance financial incentives from carbon trading to fund the protection of forests from people and companies as well as investments to "protect ... biodiversity and forest ecosystem services" (FIP, 2011, page 19). A major recurring theme was the need for such incentives and investments to be 'compliance based' in the context of robust 'regulatory frameworks'. By extension, the notion of local 'distributive' or 'benefit-sharing' mechanisms arose repeatedly, referring to the financial linkages that ensured participation in fledgling markets to distribute benefits of commercial value at the local level.

A larger assumption was that communities would participate, invest in, and change their resource-use behavior in line with REDD+ market incentives—the access to which would be mediated and enhanced by Free Prior Informed Consent. Donor representatives linked broader and local levels by stressing that REDD+ readiness will work only by supporting local tenure security and low-carbon livelihoods through enhancing regional and local institutional capacity. The same multilateral representative notes that major funds will go to:

> "communal land titling, alternative [low carbon] livelihoods, looking at ways to increase income from forest and nontimber forest products [NTFPs] … adding value to NTFPs, bamboo, rattan, and perhaps opportunities to build the supply chain with companies like IKEA" (15 August 2012).

Similarly, a bilateral donor respondent states that:

> "The third result area is around policy and building up capacity for practice around … market mechanism entry points that will … support forest and land use policies … [at the regional and local level]. Collaborating with …, we aim to develop provincial reference levels and livelihood issues [that center on PLUP and lowering emissions]" (16 August 2012).

Several documents also contained the related thread of using tenure regimes such as PLUP to define the extent and improve the productivity of subsistence agriculture, and to facilitate the transition to sedentary commercial agriculture with secure property rights. With ‘land-sparing’ agriculture in place, donors believed that forests would take on new added value (via carbon markets), which users might internalize and realize as ‘forest stewards’.

Sustainability

The broader frame of market-based governance supports the oft-repeated notion of ‘sustainable’ forest management as the prerequisite for successful REDD+ in Laos. As part of this frame, the overarching beliefs and assumptions are that only market-based governance can realize efficient, effective, and sustainable forest management, and that ‘ethical’ REDD+ carbon trading (with social safeguards) can add the necessary value to forests (and enhance technical capacities) to achieve ‘sustainability’. As one member of an NGO noted:

> “[We have] been involved with REDD+ and see it as an opportunity to help finance … protected areas. So carbon markets and REDD+ are seen as a financing opportunity especially since a lot of the work we are doing revolves around habitat protection, which essentially means avoiding deforestation and degradation …. The demonstration site … [will] hopefully become its own autonomous, sustainable unit too” (18 August 2012).

Other bilateral project managers proposed enhancing the revenue and carbon sequestration potential of REDD+ through sustainable forest management in production forests—highlighting how REDD+ governance might enhance forest-based commodity production and carbon sequestration. The representative suggests that:

> “investments will go to sustainable production forest areas … and timber benefit sharing to enhance stocks for added carbon money into the communities. But since the carbon market is too weak, there’s hope for new funding from bilaterals based on market performance. We will use the CCBA [Climate, Community and Biodiversity Alliance] framework, verification from the … and the Voluntary Carbon Standard (VCS) to generate greater value for sustainable carbon credits” (19 August 2012).

Many SUFORD and FIP policy documents framed ‘sustainability’ in terms of the ‘sustainable financing’ of forest governance and local interventions, such that financing mechanisms could support the technical expertise, organization, education, and infrastructure necessary for value-added production. In the policy text the prefix of ‘sustainable’ to REDD-related activities implied that governance, investments, and outcomes required an imputed economic value and financial gain in the end—one that was transferable to the particular REDD+ activity and/or forest commodity.

In the context of REDD+ in Laos, then, achieving sustainability has driven efforts to reinforce the social, economic, and ecological order of rural people, their livelihoods, and their forest landscapes to align with the production of capital through market-friendly state policies and practices. For instance, the donor mantra of sustained yields and clarifying property rights has historically facilitated control over the production and exchange of commodities. This is now becoming evident in the case of forest carbon, the objects in which it is embedded, and the value it produces through governance. Indeed, while donor-driven REDD+ is contributing to a mix of good governance, marketization, and sustainability, the latter two have dominated the more sensitive process of governance reform in Laos, particularly in terms of human rights. In many cases, REDD+ policy aims to enhance state and local capacities to conserve carbon through cash crop production and timber extraction above and beyond engaging with civil liberties so as not to disrupt market expansion (Springer, 2012). The assumptions behind REDD+ have thus influenced broader discourses toward conserving carbon through the development of rural peoples and landscapes according to modern ideals.

Discussion and conclusion

REDD+ policies have been enthusiastically embraced for the prospect of achieving broad solutions for climate change mitigation, poverty reduction, and biodiversity conservation, with faith in the mutually beneficial interaction of market-based solutions, democratic reform, and ecological integrity (see Visseren-Hamakers et al, 2012). Rather than support carbon conservation per se, however, we have shown how REDD+ governance can reflect a mediated and tempered 'extraterritoriality', where its governance conveys assumptions and ideals that may reinforce national efforts of ordering rural people and landscapes according to state aspirations of modernity.

In answering our initial question, we have shown in Laos how donors and civil society reproduce discursively and in practice, the modern ideals and assumptions that good governance and markets remain central to the interrelated success of conserving carbon, mitigating climate change, and promoting rural development. Our discursive framing approach has shown how donors and NGOs are working through and beyond the Lao state's policies and programs to invest in carbon financing and governance with sociopolitical motives, technical solutions, and local interventions. The outcomes, we argue, support the mutually reinforcing process of market expansion for viable REDD+ programs and local development for rural, agrarian modernization—the presumed governance basis for strong, 'stable' states.

We have shown how various transnational actors consistently reproduce historically significant ideals and assumptions as dominant frames in REDD+ discourse. These frames may subtly influence state understandings and local negotiations of the problems, solutions, and outcomes concerning the management of forest carbon, forest uses, and livelihood sustainability. The dominant frames are almost always in line with market-based, democratic conditions, weaving together notions of good governance, marketization, and sustainability. These inform the logic of REDD+ design and delivery across scale—from state ministries to local farmers—as a tool for social and ecological ordering.

In answering our second question, however, we argue that the processes by which REDD+ governance influences bureaucratic and policy reform involves complex negotiations and interpretations, which reshape emerging frames according to the state political economy at national and subnational levels. In particular, market-oriented frames have been more easily absorbed than the social safeguards (consistent with Western civil liberties) that accompany them. Like the Lao state, donors and NGOs have contrasting approaches to influencing national REDD+ governance over time. All the same, extraterritorial (carbon) governance ideals and interventions, though quite fettered, combine with and influence state interventions in the 'roll-out' of REDD+.

Donors consistently framed the success of REDD+ Readiness in terms of strengthening legal frameworks for forest governance and management, as well as building the capacity of officials and managers to ensure efficient and effective forest and land uses. Such framing privileged the language and ideals of individual and collective capacity building, institutional strengthening, and incentive frameworks for REDD+ implementation that enhanced the capacity of a 'weak' Lao state towards an ideal of the 'strong', modern state, with 'political will', 'accountability', and 'transparency'. Moreover, such donor and NGO governance perspectives transcended and extended state influence to the local level; the 'low-carbon' strictures placed upon local farmers involved in REDD+ echoed the state's own 'livelihood-improvement' schemes from earlier decades. Subnational actors advocated activities that devolved and supported stronger institutional frameworks, financial incentives, PLUP, village-based tenure mechanisms, resource-use planning, and livelihood support. The anticipated material impacts of such framing is seen in the policy end goal of

REDD+ governance and government policies: progressing livelihoods toward low-carbon alternatives, through intensified commercial agriculture, enhanced timber harvesting, and fuller market participation and integration. Overall, this reflects discursive governance with material impacts that fall well within the ambit of an enduring neoliberalization to which REDD+ belongs (Springer, 2012).

Strong democratic governance ideals and reforms have not necessarily been fully imposed in the context of REDD+ conditionalities, however. Rather, a low-intensity democratic process that involves hollow, less disruptive forms of local democratic engagement have been advocated to maintain positive state–donor–NGO relations in support of REDD+ pilot projects, market expansion, and development in rural areas (Springer, 2009). This was, for example, partly illustrated with CLiPAD progressing FPIC in terms of an 'acceptable' level of 'democratic governance' without challenging the state's legitimacy. In contrast, the 2012 expulsion of Helvetas 'Laos's Country Director' by the Laos Ministry of Foreign Affairs after explicitly challenging state authority (eg, freedom of expression) is an example of what happens when transnational actors test the state's governance authority. Transnational REDD+ policies of good governance, market expansion, and sustainability thus reflect a tempered process of extraterritorialization. The goals of carbon conservation and financial flows are steered by a minority to facilitate a hybridized system of political and economic recentralization through REDD+—seemingly going against, while working through, principles of democratic governance and market expansion.

In the donor community there was a broad hope that achieving marketization and sustainability in REDD+ roll-out might facilitate good governance. In market parlance, effective, transparent, and accountable governance is central to the individual and collective freedoms necessary to engage markets with flexibility and fewer political impediments (eg, corruption), conditions deemed necessary for market expansion and carbon trading (McCarthy, 2005). Good governance was integral to enabling market incentives, private sector investments, benefit distribution, and value adding to forests and carbon at the national and subnational level. While the volatility of carbon prices and markets were seen as potential threats to the viability of REDD+, faith in the flexibility of markets, private investments, and fund-based mechanisms were upheld as effective solutions when good governance and incentive schemes worked together.

Rather than tempering markets, good governance with social safeguards is heralded as prerequisite for successful REDD+ in rural Laos. While not all donors adopted the same frame, in practice the mutually reinforcing nature of good governance, safeguards, and financing were deemed crucial for 'sustainable' pilot sites with carbon-smart resource users who, it was hoped, would eventually rationalize their livelihoods in terms of sustainability through consultations, meetings, and workshops; that is, they will shift from extensive, subsistence agriculture to intensified, commercial agriculture that spares forests. As such, we see how carbon conservation and marketization have merged in policy and practice through governance initiatives that promote free market and civil society ideals to national and local actors to conserve carbon, while intensifying production to generate new surplus value, particularly for livelihoods (McCarthy, 2005).

Whether REDD+ governance will influence national policies and practice towards definitive and lasting change in how the Lao state governs forests and people is less certain, even when external actors try to influence farmers to see the 'carbon from the trees'. In terms of extraterritoriality, this suggests that REDD+ governance works with parallel, partial effect: (1) limited policy changes in line with transnational ideals of good governance and market penetration for REDD+, while (2) sustaining and likely reinforcing forest governance outcomes that align with the Laos government's political economy. As Singh (2012) notes, the Lao state has seldom fully adopted and enacted transnational policies when 'imposed' or 'foisted' upon its agencies from foreign donors and NGOs. Rather, the state has often adopted governance protocols when domestic and foreign pressures to do so are low (Singh, 2008).

Our findings suggest that, despite the millions of dollars being spent on REDD+ in line with transnational rules, ideals, and authority about how to govern forests, carbon, and livelihoods, the extent to which REDD+ governance influences the Lao state is partial and differentiated. This was seen in the government's strong public response to donor criticism of governance credibility, and the diverse responses to dominant development frames across state and donor communities over time. REDD+ will at least partly reinforce the state's own mandate of timber production, sedentarizing agriculture, and enhancing cash crop production, resulting in awkward governance and financial frameworks for carbon conservation. As REDD+ initiatives aim to nudge national policy toward free market ideals, the state's drive for commodity production and rural resource control may be reinforced, but with notional transgressions toward good governance and sustainability in line with markets.

Our conclusions suggest that policy makers and practitioners could discard normative assumptions about how REDD+ governance ought to deliver outcomes in line with dominant policy narratives—whether market incentives or safeguards—and further scrutinize how the project's social and material impacts become manifest in, and rearticulated through, complex, changing political economies. Rather than REDD+ agendas being set according to the desired trajectory of strong, stable states, renewed emphasis must be on 'deterritorializing' its governance so as to better contend with hybrid political orders. In 'transitional' state contexts, REDD+ donors and planners must temper ideals of good governance and market incentives for carbon conservation in countries with complex political cultures and economic motives. Future research on REDD+ is thus not simply about 'getting the policy right', but about critically questioning the ideals and assumptions embedded in carbon governance in the 'Global South'.

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Appendix

Agencies interviewed

(1) Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammerenarbeit, and Climate Protection through Avoided Deforestation Program.
(2) World Bank, Forest Investment Program.
(3) Regional Environment Office, US Agency for International Development (USAID).
(4) USAID Grantee, Lowering Emissions in Asia's Forests.
(5) Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), Forestry Sector Capacity Development Project (FSCAP).
(6) Forest Carbon Asia and Government of Laos.
(7) United Nations Environment Program, REDD Southeast Asia.
(8) The Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC).
(9) Verified Carbon Standard, a global benchmark for carbon.
(10) World Wildlife Fund (WWF).
(11) Carbon and Biodiversity Project, World Wildlife Fund (WWF).
(12) Wildlife Conservation Society.
(13) JICA, Participatory Land and Forest Management Project for Reducing Deforestation in Lao PDR.
(14) Land Issues Working Group.
(15) RECOFTC.
(16) Sustainable Forestry and Rural Development Project, Government of Finland.
(17) Lao Biodiversity Association.