

Review of: "“Saving the Forest” with a REDD+ Project: Socio-Ecological Repercussions on Indigenous People in Cambodia"

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The manuscript deals with a very important topic across the world, which is, so far, one of the most important tools to reduce deforestation in countries with important areas of forest like Cambodia. The mechanism isn't a perfect one. There is a bundle of mismatches related to the justifications, aims, and results of the mechanism between donor and beneficiary countries. However, it has been demonstrated that it has great potential to curb deforestation and draw benefits and sustainable development for many poor and developing countries. The idea of any research in general, and about REDD+ in particular, should be to contribute with knowledge from particular social contexts in order to improve the implementation of the mechanism.

In the case of the present manuscript, there are strong arguments against REDD+ in Cambodia suggesting that the implementation of the mechanism is negatively impacting indigenous human rights and sovereignty. However, this should be very well supported in the introduction section based on references from other research that deals with this topic in particular and shows consistent results with what is the main hypothesis of the present manuscript. Through a rapid search on the internet, I found several insights about violations of indigenous rights in Cambodia by REDD+ project implementation, and also some other insights of the same kind in other countries. These should be the background and support of the main hypothesis of the present manuscript with more citations as a support of the topic; currently, there are a few citations. As it is right now, the introduction section does not support consistently the main findings of the author and makes the proposed journal article look like a newspaper article denouncing abuses.

About the methodology used by the author, he highlights that the aim of his research is to examine the implications of REDD+ on indigenous people's quality of life, and the author adds "sovereignty and rights". In general terms, quality of life can include personal health (physical, mental, and spiritual), relationships, education status, work environment, social status, wealth, a sense of security and safety, freedom, autonomy in decision-making, social belonging, and their physical surroundings. While sovereignty is a more complex topic that deals with the inherent rights and jurisdiction of indigenous people over their communities that exist regardless of the nation state's say-so and without interference by settler governments. Sovereignty is linked to other important movements around the world, as, for instance, environmental justice, restoration of lands, and rights of Mother Earth. However, essentially, quality of life and sovereignty deal with different contexts, which can barely be seen throughout the results of the author, and are not well structured in the methodology section. The author should clarify in a better way what indicators he is using to cluster their data and what

kind of analyzing method he applied.

In the findings and discussion section, the way in which the results are presented is quite confusing because it is hard to recognize when results are coming from the community sample or when a current process is affecting the country or the region in general. In other words, it is barely possible to see the contribution of the research to the hypotheses proposed by the author because there is no data supporting the arguments. It is not enough to argue that “Power struggles often involve forest-dependent Bunong rural communities pitted against companies colluding with the central government and foreign investors”; the author must provide some other data to support this; otherwise, it is pure speculation. On the other hand, due to a lack of methodological structure and clear indicators, the results are not closely related to quality of life or sovereignty. There are various elements linked to indigenous rights, but the support presented by the author is not strong and consistent. Finally, there are very sensitive arguments that the author must be cautious about how he writes. For instance, **“A part of the protected area, formerly characterized as a 'paper' park and under the jurisdiction of WCS, was granted by the government a decade ago to some Vietnamese companies. The absence of any reaction from WCS against this “official” land grabbing reveals, at least for the affected villagers, a patent contradiction between the ideology and practice of the conservation NGO”**. These kinds of assertions do not characterize a journal article. There are ethical rules to refer to this kind of sensitive data without incurring in direct accusations, as it sounds right now.

It is recommended that the author consider the following suggestions to improve this manuscript:

1. It is needed a better introduction to support the main hypothesis, and it is important to define research questions that will be answered by the data collected and analyzed.
2. A better methodological approach is needed. The lack of clear indicators, coding, and analyzing methods makes the results section quite inconsistent.
3. It is important to include a map indicating the location of the communities studied, the location of the protected area, and the REDD+ project. This kind of information helps readers to understand the complexity of land scarcity and other important elements of the research.
4. It will be better if the author includes a discussion section to better highlight the main findings of the research.
5. Finally, the conclusion section says little about the contribution of the research findings. The conclusion section as it is right now looks like visceral arguments from someone with a lot of rage.