

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

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Cambodia prioritizes greenhouse gas reduction through REDD+ programs--“reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries”--combined with sustainable forest management. These REDD+ projects propose compensation to prevent deforestation, aligning with global climate change mitigation efforts. Green rhetoric dominates Cambodia's strategy, portraying it as a champion of forest preservation. Cambodia aims to restore its ecological image and align with green economy principles.

Transnational conservation organizations, including WCS, are crucial in implementing carbon offset projects. Focusing on carbon offsetting involves selling stored carbon on the international market, a lucrative opportunity.

As the article shows, REDD+ programs are characterized by partial justifications, emphasizing carbon emissions reduction but overlooking potential rights to pollute, so the author successfully identifies a lack of attention to the impact of REDD+ projects on indigenous populations that potentially leads to violations of human rights and cultural sovereignty. The article highlights skepticism and challenges associated with top-down conservation practices, corporate nature, and collaboration.

The article's methodology involves a case study of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) in Cambodia's Monduliri province, which assesses socio-economic and ecological impacts. Through ethnographic surveys, interviews, and observations conducted between November 2022 and April 2023, focusing on the Bunong people, the author raises the historical failures in sustainable forest management and economic land concessions that led to skepticism about new conservation directives. The ongoing deforestation crisis, institutional consensus, corporate nature, and power struggles are all identified, revealing how top-down conservation practices disregard indigenous knowledge, leading to a paternalistic approach and restrictions on subsistence practices.

Three noteworthy themes are emerging from the article's findings that may be of interest to critical environmental analyses as there is a disreputable legacy of forest protection, the current deforestation crisis, and institutional collaboration laid bare in the study. Resource management is a power struggle, with top-down conservation practices enabling limited participation. Compensation, rather than rights, yields limited development autonomy for villages and restricted forest access.

The research posits valuable insights into human rights and cultural sovereignty in Cambodia that apply to other case

studies around the Global South. Villagers face restrictions on traditional livelihoods, human rights violations, and legal challenges. Indigenous knowledge is disregarded, and a condescending attitude prevails in assimilating indigenous populations.

The article's conclusion is essential to sociologists of development and political ecologists. The author questions the overall success of REDD+ projects, highlighting concerns about carbon markets benefiting extractive industries. Carbon credits are criticized for diverting local populations from traditional resource management without considering their effectiveness. The author concludes that the Cambodian government's policy perpetuates green colonialism by restricting access to ancestral lands for indigenous people.