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

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The article, 'Saving the Forest" with a REDD+ Project: Socio-Ecological Repercussions on Indigenous People in Cambodia' addresses the important issue of Indigenous rights in REDD+ conservation programs with a case study of the Bunong ethnic group in the Keo Seima Wildlife Sanctuary in Cambodia. The strength of this paper is that it is based on an extensive ethnography involving a range of actors across scales. Key findings include the occurrence of social injustices, including intimidation, procedural injustices, and a lack of due diligence regarding Free, Prior, and Informed Consent.

In light of the many strengths and the importance of this article, I would like to offer these comments/suggestions for consideration that may help strengthen the article:

Abstract:

- The abstract frames the article well. However, more specific details regarding methods and key results would serve the abstract's purpose of summarizing the article.

Language:

- Some grammatical errors with incorrect syntax.
- Run-on sentences reduce clarity and language accessibility.
- Recommendation to avoid vague and sensationalistic language, such as "ecological threat looming over the world." Better to specify which ecological threat (biodiversity loss, climate change, etc.) and avoid words like 'looming.' Discreet and objective language is usually preferred.
- Recommendation to avoid emotive language, such as "gloomy."

Background Information:

- An introduction to the Bunong ethnic group would provide important context to readers unfamiliar with the ethnic group. A brief summary paragraph on the history of migration, dispossession and/or resistance/persistence, livelihoods, and sociocultural change would be helpful.
- More background on the history of the REDD+ program and the KSWS protected area in the study area would be helpful. The KSWS protected area acronym should be spelled out the first time it is used (i.e., Keo Seima Wildlife

Sanctuary).

- A study area and/or background section would be a great addition to fill in these gaps.

Theoretical Foundation:

- This article engages with themes central to political ecology: global versus local actors, and power disparities across scales. Not making explicit links to theory, such as political ecology or a similar field, is a missed opportunity to both draw from and contribute to theory. Explicit links to theory could enhance the analysis of results, as well as the value and reach of this article.

Methods:

- A core strength of this paper is the ethnographic methods, including around 100 interviews (precise number needed). However, more details on the interview methods are needed. For instance, what type of interview techniques were used? What type of questions were asked and to whom? Where were the interviews conducted? How long were the average interviews? How was interview data recorded (audio recording with transcription and translation or with interview notes)? How many interviews were with NGO representatives, and how many were with villagers? What are the demographics of interviewees (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity)? The latter could be presented as summary statistics in a table.
- More detailed information on the participant observation methods is needed. For instance, for how many weeks or months was the participant observation in peoples' homes conducted? Were any community, NGO, or official meetings attended? How was participant observation data collected (e.g., field notes, photographs, etc.)?
- The results section mentions a systematic review, which is not outlined in the methods. If a systematic review was conducted, it should be included in the methods, preferably with a list of key search terms.

Analysis:

- The findings and results sections mention that the data have been "clustered, described, structured, and compartment with the following themes," but not *how* they were grouped thematically. Was a qualitative coding software used, or was qualitative coding done manually in a 'cut and paste' manner? Specifying the analysis tools and techniques would strengthen this section of the paper.
- In addition, citing relevant literature for the qualitative methods and coding, such as Saldaña, 2009, 'The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers,' (if such methods were used), would ground the methods and analysis in existing literature.

Results:

- The findings are powerful and highlight numerous social justice issues in the implementation of REDD+ programs in the study area. However, the impact of the findings is hampered by the structure and presentation of the results. The current structure of presenting results by theme mixes results from primary (interview and participant observation) with secondary (literature review) data. This makes it difficult for the reader to discern which type of data the findings are

derived from. A clearer results structure that links each finding to specific methods and types of data would strengthen this section.

Conclusion:

- The conclusion introduces new information, rather than simply summarizes the article.

This article addresses core themes central to Indigenous rights in Southeast Asia and in conservation programs. With hundreds of interviews to draw from, there is rich data to confirm the occurrence of procedural injustices in the REDD+ conservation program in the study area. Lacking, however, are clear recommendations for pathways forward: can REDD+ be improved, or should it be simply abandoned? What are local visions for the future?

Given the strengths of this article with an extensive ethnography on critical social justice issues, this paper has the potential to become a gold-rated publication in successive rounds of review and future draft submissions (5/5 rating). Given its current weaknesses (mostly in the methods and results sections), I rate this paper 3/5.