

Defining equity in the context of ecosystem service markets

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Introduction

This 2.5 year project involved an interdisciplinary and international group of collaborators:

- Dr Kate Schreckenberg, Ms Pam Gregory (University of Southampton)
- Dr Connie McDermott, Dr Lauren Coad (Oxford University)
- Mr Leo Peskett, Ms Kristy Graham, Ms Emily Brickell (Overseas Development Institute)
- Dr Melanie McDermott, Prof Trevor Birkenholtz (Rutgers University)
- Dr Sango Mahanty (Australian National University)
- Dr Mario Piedra (Earth University)
- Mr Bernhard Mohns, Mr Ben Vickers (RECOFTC)
- Mr David Mwayafu, Mr Richard Kimbowa (Uganda Coalition for Sustainable Development)
- Dr Jesse Ribot (University of Illinois)
- Dr Denise Humphreys Bebbington (Clark University)

Methods

The first phase of the project developed a conceptual framework to provide a rigorous definition of the different dimensions and types of equity in the context of ecosystem services. The framework was built on experience documented in a number of background papers dealing with:

- How equity is defined in the philosophy and justice literature;
- How equity has been dealt with for a range of provisioning ecosystem services: natural gas extraction in Bolivia (Humphreys Bebbington, 2012), payments for watershed services in India, bushmeat hunting, community forestry);
- Processes for managing ecosystem service markets: timber certification (McDermott, 2012), Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES), Free and Prior Informed Consent, and Access and Benefit-Sharing (Ituarte-Lima and Subramanian, in press).

The second phase of the project saw the framework trialled at four case study sites to assess equity concerns:

- India – Sirsa small-scale cooperative AR-CDM project, Haryana
- Cambodia – Seima commercial community forestry project
- Bolivia – COMSERBO, Pando state
- Uganda – Trees for Global Benefit, Rubirizi and Mitooma districts

References

Humphreys Bebbington, D. 2012. Extraction, inequality and indigenous peoples: Insights from Bolivia. *Environ. Sci. Policy*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2012.07.027>

Ituarte-Lima, C. and Subramanian, S. (in press) 'Retreading negotiations on equity in environmental governance: case studies contrasting the evolution of ABS and REDD+' in Maes, F (ed), *Linkages between Climate Change and Biodiversity*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Surrey and Northampton.

McDermott, C. 2012. Applying an "equity framework" to compare certification schemes across product sectors and scales. *Environ. Sci. Policy*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2012.06.008>

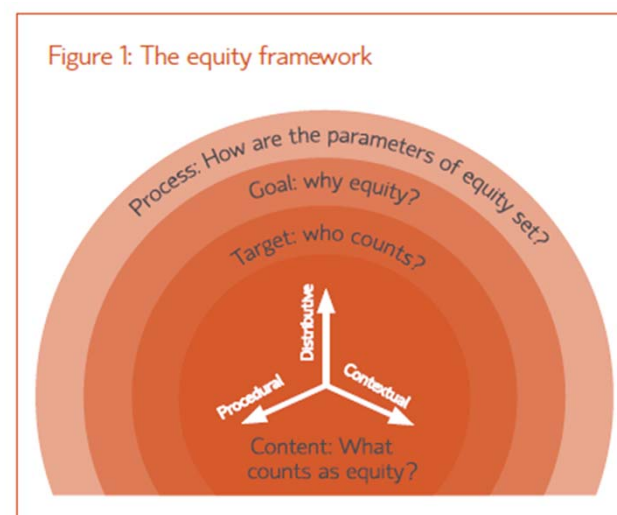
McDermott, M.H., Mahanty, S. and Schreckenberg, K. 2012. Examining Equity: a multidimensional framework for assessing equity in payments for ecosystem services. *Environ. Sci. Policy*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.envsci.2012.10.006>

Results

The equity framework we developed (Fig. 1) outlines a number of different aspects of equity which deserve separate consideration when planning or assessing ecosystem service market initiatives (McDermott et al., 2012). The central **content** of equity comprises three interlinked dimensions:

- Distributive equity highlights the need to consider not just the allocation of benefits, but also of costs and risks. Decisions about distribution can be justified on the basis of equality, social welfare, merit or need.
- Procedural equity encompasses fairness in political processes and participation in decision-making.
- Contextual equity recognises the fact that the playing field is never level, but that people's capabilities and their access to resources and power determine the extent to which they are able to utilise procedural equity to determine the best distributive outcome for themselves.

Figure 1: The equity framework



The **spatial and temporal scale** at which equity is assessed is critically important:

- Regional, national or global-level?
- Which community and which households or individuals within it?
- Who along the value chain?
- Current or future generations?

Initiatives need to be clear about their **equity goals**. Are these to maximise equity, advance equity (c.f. fair trade), do no harm (c.f. national REDD+ programmes) or are equity impacts not under consideration? Where poverty alleviation is the goal, it should be clear that equity and poverty do not necessarily co-vary.

Underpinning all other decisions is the process of **how the parameters of equity are set**. How are the goals, target and content of the initiative decided? Who is included/excluded in the process?

Key Findings

- We present a systematic framework to assess the multiple dimensions of equity.
- Equity has distributive, procedural and contextual dimensions.
- How decisions are taken about framing the content, target and aims of equity is key.
- Intervention outcomes may be equitable at some scales yet inequitable at others.
- By setting out guiding questions rather than specifying universal standards, this equity framework can be employed to design or assess policies and initiatives transforming the value of ecosystem services. It can form the basis of an inclusive process in which participants at all levels have a say in determining a context-specific definition of equity in the interventions shaping their lives.