

Yellow light for forest-saving programme in Indonesia

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A logged tree in Bahanei territory—Credit: Rini Astuti

Dr Andrew McGregor, from Victoria's School of Geography, Environment and Earth Sciences, has been working with a team of international experts examining the societal impacts of the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation (REDD+) programme, developed through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and voluntary carbon markets.

REDD+ aims to reduce carbon emissions from deforestation globally

and promote [sustainable forest management](#) through financial incentives.

Over 50 countries are piloting REDD+ around the world with some, including Indonesia, actively generating carbon credits for voluntary markets. It is hoped that polluting countries will eventually be able to buy REDD+ carbon credits to offset their emissions.

Dr McGregor's three-year Marsden funded study of REDD+ efforts in Indonesia, which has one of the highest deforestation rates in the world, found the initiative has led to some positive improvements but encountered many complications.

"When REDD+ was first conceived it was thought to be a quick and cheap way to mitigate climate change," says Dr McGregor, "but this research shows mitigation is difficult, uncertain and expensive."

Dr McGregor says the key difficulty in Indonesia came from an existing political economy based on forest destruction.

"For example, the payments businesses get for not cutting down trees don't match the payments they could get for selling oil palm. There are very powerful players who will lose out if they move to a REDD+ system and this has slowed programme implementation."

The programme had an impact on both indigenous and non-indigenous groups. Some indigenous groups living in their traditional areas have received greater recognition of their rights and support for their customary claims to forest and land. In contrast, communities that have migrated from other places in Indonesia may not receive the same opportunities as [indigenous groups](#).

"Even at the community scale we observed exclusions where existing

power structures restricted who could access the benefits from some of these projects. The whole idea of equal benefit sharing, while laudable, is very fraught and difficult to achieve," says Dr McGregor.

Among the positive outcomes of REDD+ in Indonesia are increased transparency, enhanced recognition of indigenous land rights, a national freeze on new logging licences and greater awareness of forest conservation.

"Forests are now more centre stage across the nation—people are more aware of [forest destruction](#) taking place, and a number of initiatives have been implemented to prevent deforestation," says Dr McGregor.

But the future of these initiatives is uncertain due to Indonesia's recent change in government, says Dr McGregor. "It's early stages to tell what's happening with the new government but there are risks that some of the structures that have been set up are now vulnerable."

The study demonstrates that REDD+ has improved forest governance, but should not distract from other local efforts to pursue climate mitigation.

"At the same time we have to be improving our own societies to make them carbon neutral, because REDD+ will never offset all our emissions nor provide a quick or easy solution to [climate change](#)."

Provided by Victoria University

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