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Transforming Justice in REDD+ through a Politics of Difference Approach

Kimberly R. Marion Suiseeya

Department of Political Science, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL 60208, USA;
kimberly.suiseeya@northwestern.edu; Tel.: +1-847-491-8985

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Abstract: Since Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation “Plus” (REDD+) starting gaining traction in the UN climate negotiations in 2007, its architects and scholars have grappled with its community-level justice implications. On the one hand, supporters argue that REDD+ will help the environment and forest-dependent communities by generating payments for forest carbon services from industrialized countries seeking lower cost emissions reductions. Critics, by contrast, increasingly argue that REDD+ is a new form of colonization through capitalism, producing injustice by stripping forest communities of their rights, denying them capabilities for wellbeing, and rendering forest peoples voiceless in forest governance. This paper argues that current REDD+ debates are too focused on relatively simple visions of either distributive or procedural justice, and pay too little attention to the core recognitional justice concerns of REDD+ critics, namely questions of what values, worldviews, rights, and identities are privileged or displaced in the emergence, design, and implementation of REDD+ and with what effects. This paper examines the tensions that emerge when designing institutions to promote multi-scalar, multivalent justice in REDD+ to ask: what are the justice demands that REDD+ architects face when designing REDD+ institutions? Complexifying the concepts of justice as deployed in the debates on REDD+ can illuminate the possibilities for a diversity of alternative perspectives to generate new institutional design ideas for REDD+.

Keywords: REDD+; justice; institutions; forest peoples

1. Introduction

Climate change scientists and policy makers have discussed the significance of forest loss and degradation as a source of carbon emissions for decades. Recent studies estimate that forest loss and degradation contribute approximately 10% of global carbon emissions—a significant contributor to climate change [1]. In 2007, at the 13th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bali, Indonesia, policy makers formally introduced an approach to address forests as an emissions source. The mechanism, REDD—Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation—sought to harness the power of markets to keep carbon in forests and trees by paying forest owners (mostly in developing countries) to reduce forest loss and degradation. Shortly after its introduction, REDD evolved into REDD+ to recognize the importance of enhancing carbon stocks [2]. Debates regarding REDD+'s potential impacts on forest communities were immediately contentious. On the one hand, REDD+ proponents argue it is a win-win solution that can help the environment, forest-dependent communities, and developed countries seeking lower cost emissions reductions [2,3]. Critics, by contrast, argue that REDD+ is a new form of colonization that strengthens state control over forests and produces injustice by stripping forest communities of their rights, denying them capabilities for wellbeing, and rendering forest peoples voiceless in forest governance [4,5]. While debates over approaches to forest governance are common and often productive, this contentious debate between REDD+ proponents and critics has persisted with little progress towards resolution, despite efforts

on both sides. The growing urgency to conserve forests for people, nature, as well as climate change mitigation, requires that these conflicts over REDD+ are transformed into more productive engagement before the collective opportunities to conserve forests are lost.

In this article I offer an alternative approach to understanding the justice concerns of forest peoples (forest peoples are “peoples who live in and have customary rights to their forests, and have developed ways of life and traditional knowledge that are attuned to their forest environments. Forest peoples depend primarily and directly on the forest both for subsistence and trade in the form of fishing, hunting, shifting agriculture, the gathering of wild forest products and other activities” [6]). I argue that the current REDD+ debate as articulated by REDD+ proponents is too focused on relatively simple visions of either distributive or procedural justice, and pays too little attention to the related but distinct idea of recognitional justice. When addressing social impacts, REDD+ architects—those actors designing REDD+ frameworks, mechanisms, and interventions—emphasize questions of distributive and procedural justice such as: how will the costs and benefits of REDD+ be distributed, who decides who are the winners and losers, and to what extent can REDD+ interventions minimize or mitigate potential negative social impacts [7,8]? Although these are important considerations for REDD+ design, they neglect the core recognitional justice concerns of REDD+ critics: what values, worldviews, rights, and identities are privileged or displaced in the emergence, design, and implementation of REDD+ and with what effects (e.g., [9])? By embracing a politics of difference approach to examine current REDD+ debates, this paper complexifies the concepts of justice deployed in REDD+ and illuminates the possibilities for a diversity of alternative perspectives that can help generate new institutional design ideas for REDD+.

To reframe the existing justice debates in REDD+, I draw from two distinct bodies of literature. Section 2 begins with a justice primer that draws from the growing body of scholarship on environmental justice to outline this paper’s approach to justice. Through this review, I develop a politics of difference analytical lens that facilitates exposure of dominant norms of justice that constrain how policy makers and practitioners think about justice [10]. In Section 3, I review the scholarly literature on REDD+ to identify four main themes or contentious points in ongoing REDD+ debates. I then apply the politics of difference lens to these common justice concerns to highlight the nested and correlational nature of those concerns and demonstrate how REDD+ architects narrowly scope the debate to focus solutions on a predefined understanding of the problem of forest loss and degradation and advance technocratic, state-centered solutions. I conclude with a discussion that encourages policy architects to attend to the politics of difference when designing REDD+.

I begin the paper with a final introductory note. Policy makers, practitioners, and scholars searching for specific solutions to REDD+ justice problems in this paper will likely be disappointed. Central to this paper’s approach is the implicit understanding that justice in REDD+ demands a rejection of prescriptive approaches to justice. There is no singular institutional design that will lead to more just forest carbon interventions. Instead, the approach offered in this paper provides an analytical lens through which to bring to light new insights in the REDD+ justice debates. My aim is to highlight how approaching REDD+ through an explicit politics of difference lens can both illuminate critical recognitional concerns that are embedded in REDD+ institutions while simultaneously uncovering their relationships with distributive and procedural injustices. By exploring and understanding justice claims through a lens of difference rather than through a lens of distribution [11], I aim to offer REDD+ constituencies a more productive avenue for engaging in REDD+ debates. Through this recognitional lens, policy makers and scholars can envision new, and perhaps more effective, possibilities for alternative institutional designs to address some of those criticisms and move the debates on REDD+ past their current polarized form.

2. The Multiple Dimensions and Meanings of Justice

Environmental justice scholars and practitioners have difficulty pinpointing a universal definition of justice. Instead, the meaning of environmental justice is primarily known through injustices that

emerge [12]. In the 1980s, environmental justice cases in the United States began to garner public attention [13]. Researchers focused on the disproportionate negative environmental health impacts that communities of color experienced related to toxic dumping [14] and siting of noxious facilities such as landfills and factories [15]. Similarly, early political ecologists emphasized the unfair cost burdens that resource-dependent communities shouldered related to natural resource conservation projects, such as forest preservation [16] and wildlife conservation [17], resulting in reduced access to traditional livelihood and cultural resources. These early examples of environmental injustice emphasize the distributive dimensions of justice, where distributive justice refers to an equitable distribution of costs and benefits, harms, and goods related to environmental governance [18].

Beginning in the late 1980s and early 1990s, scholars expanded research on environmental justice to highlight the procedural aspects of environmental injustices, much as early environmental justice activists had stressed from the outset of the movement [19]. This line of research documented how communities were not only denied access to resources or disproportionately exposed to environmental harms, but also excluded from decision-making processes that impact how they interact with their environment (e.g., [20–22]). Procedural justice refers to the ability of all individuals impacted by a decision to meaningfully participate in the decision-making process and therewith shape the potential outcomes of the process [23–25]. Procedural justice has long been a focus of environmental policy especially in the United States and Europe where public input in decision-making processes is formally facilitated by various government agencies through open comment periods and grievance mechanisms (e.g., the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Aarhus Convention are two examples of legal instruments that facilitate procedural justice in environmental policy-making in the US and Europe, respectively).

In more recent years, scholars aiming to effectively analyze environmental justice have emphasized the need to move beyond primarily distributive and procedural understandings of justice. Building upon global justice theorists such as Nancy Fraser, Iris Young, and others, and through an empirical examination of environmental justice cases, David Schlosberg [18] explicitly draws attention to the multidimensional nature of environmental justice, first through three main dimensions—distributive, procedural, and recognitional. These dimensions capture the multiple avenues through which justice can be produced. The third dimension, recognitional, refers to the ability to participate in and benefit from environmental governance without being required to assimilate to dominant cultural norms [26]. In other words, recognitional justice, or justice as recognition, requires that difference in cultures, lifeways, and ways of knowing are recognized, respected, and appropriately incorporated in environmental policy processes from conception to design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. Where distributive and procedural justice and injustice are often readily and somewhat objectively observed, for example, through an examination of the actual distribution of benefits and costs related to a project or documentation of a consultation process, respectively, recognitional justice requires scholars and policy makers to identify and confront the ways in and pathways through which cultural norms infuse and shape environmental institutions to perpetuate the dominance of these norms.

Schlosberg [25] later added a fourth dimension, capabilities, reflecting influences from Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, to identify the importance of possessing the freedoms to realize one's aspirations [27]. Thus, even in cases where distributive, procedural, and recognitional justice concerns are attended to, if the subjects of justice—the rights-holders—do not have the capabilities to benefit from or participate in environmental governance initiatives, then injustices may persist. A related body of literature that examines equity similarly advances a multi-dimensional framework that includes distributive and procedural equity as well as contextual equity to captures both the recognitional and capabilities dimensions articulated by Schlosberg [28]. This broad consensus on the multidimensional nature of justice leads to the first consideration that scholars examining the justice effects of REDD+ should make explicit: to fully assess and understand environmental justice and more accurately identify the mechanisms of injustice, scholars have to consider the multiple dimensions of justice [12].

Three additional considerations should inform how scholars analyze environmental justice. First, scholars interested in analyzing environmental justice should attend to the nested nature of the multiple dimensions of justice. For example, studies on environmental justice in water governance in Australia demonstrate that efforts to promote distributive justice are more likely to succeed when procedural justice is also facilitated [29]. Other studies demonstrate that any positive benefits from more just distributive outcomes could be diminished if procedural injustice exists [30,31]. Policy designs that include Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC), for example, seek to ensure that communities are consulted in the design and implementation of projects in order to promote procedural justice and ensure that communities can more effectively understand the costs and benefits of these projects [32]. The idea is that projects require community buy-in and input in order to most effectively design the processes and structures for just distribution of costs and benefits related to the project.

Second, scholars should attend to the multivalent nature of justice [33]. This means that environmental justice scholarship needs to consider the multiple ways that individuals and communities experience, understand, and conceptualize justice and injustice [9,34]. In other words, what is just for one individual or community may not be just for another. Although there are multiple justice principles and theories, often international environmental policy approaches tend to draw on more liberal notions of justice. Programs and projects that assume universal acceptance of particular justice principles threaten to undermine the pursuit of justice. Schroeder and Pogge [35], for example, point out that the Convention on Biological Diversity advances a concept of *justice-in-exchange* for managing genetic resources, which may not reflect the conceptualization of justice held by the custodians of genetic resources (e.g., see [24]). Alternative conceptions of justice may invoke diverse principles of justice, for example, *justice-as-needs*, *egalitarian*, or *equality* or *equity* [36], all conceptions that draw on different allocation rules (see also [37]). Attending to the multivalent nature of justice is difficult both for scholars and policy makers: it suggests that there may be no clear path towards justice. However, to ignore the multiple meanings of justice is to ensure the perpetuation of injustice for some.

Third, analyses of environmental justice should consider how jurisdictional, geographic, and temporal scales interact with justice concerns [33,38]. While many REDD+ proponents engage in debates oriented towards both *interstate* and *intergenerational* justice concerns (i.e., questions related to rights to pollute and rights to develop and questions on impacts on future generations), many REDD+ critics are concerned with *intrastate* justice concerns that emerge from a *transnational* context (and include both *inter-* and *intragenerational* concerns). This means that while these justice concerns center on the relationships between communities and the state within which a community is located (*intrastate*), they emerge from a transnational context in which states opt into interstate arrangements to govern intrastate affairs. Examining these justice tensions within and across scales is important for identifying the scales at which and by whom justice concerns emerge and need to be addressed. While it may seem simple to suggest that concerns between states and their communities should be dealt with domestically, as sometimes asserted by REDD+ proponents, such an approach ultimately ignores the role that an initiative like REDD+ plays in generating or exacerbating these justice concerns.

To summarize, uncovering the mechanisms that lead to injustice requires studies of environmental justice to consider: (1) its multiple dimensions (distributive, procedural, and recognitional); (2) the nested nature of these multiple dimensions; (3) the multivalent nature of justice; and (4) the scalar interactions of justice concerns. In this paper, I direct attention to justice concerns that manifest at the community or individual level (*intrastate*), rather than at the state level, but are transnational in nature. I also assume that justice requires all three dimensions of justice (distributive, procedural, recognitional) with the explicit acknowledgement that efforts towards procedural and distributive justice can be undermined if recognitional dimensions are not first addressed [10]. Similarly, efforts to improve recognitional justice can also have positive procedural or distributive justice outcomes. As I argue in the next sections of this paper, more explicit attention to recognitional justice in particular can facilitate and streamline such examinations and help identify opportunities for facilitating justice [39]. This is particularly important in the context of REDD+, which has been a focal point for justice-based

critiques of environmental governance from global to local scales. In the next sections of this paper I demonstrate how explicit attention to the recognitional justice dimensions of the most common social justice critiques of REDD+ can provide pathways for effectively analyzing the multidimensional, nested, multivalent, and scalar nature of justice in REDD+, thereby providing a useful tool for analyzing potential policy options and institutional designs for a more just REDD+.

3. Results: Examining REDD+ Through a Politics of Difference Lens

While there is an emerging body of scholarship calling for more explicit consideration of the recognitional dimensions of justice in environmental governance [27,40], much of the current literature on justice and REDD+ focuses primarily on distributive and procedural justice [41–51]. Additionally, there is limited (although growing) engagement among scholars and practitioners on how to practically engage recognitional justice in institutional designs [52,53]. In what follows, I introduce four common justice concerns that emerge in popular and scholarly debates on REDD+ (notably, although this paper focuses on REDD+, the primary themes that emerged from the literature largely reflect the justice concerns in broader global forest governance efforts [34], with some exceptions noted). These are drawn from an in-depth review of the literature from 2007 to 2015. In the presentation of these issues, I aim to elucidate the core justice concerns related to REDD+ beyond the dominant soundbites on burden-sharing and rights to develop and pollute. I discuss these issues through a politics of difference lens that parses out concerns related to three primary dimensions of justice: distributive, procedural, and recognitional. Table 1 details such an approach to REDD+ justice critiques. This lens facilitates a deeper understanding of the complex nature of justice by emphasizing that justice is not simply a question of the distribution of costs and benefits (distributive justice) or access to decision-making processes (procedural justice), but also about the extent to which *difference* is recognized, respected, and included in institutions such that cultural assimilation is not a precondition for participation in and receiving benefits from REDD+ initiatives (e.g., an operational definition of recognitional justice). This recognitional dimension of REDD+ has been largely absent from the justice debates on REDD+ in the scholarly literature. Through this discussion I aim to demonstrate how these concerns are often discussed through distributive and/or procedural lenses, as introduced above, but are fundamentally recognitional in nature. In other words, I argue here that attention to recognitional justice in the design of REDD+ could alleviate or mitigate many of these concerns. At a minimum, the recognitional lens offers new insights into the following four justice critiques of REDD+.

3.1. *As Currently Implemented, REDD+ Places Authority for Forest Governance in the Hands of the State and, to a Lesser Extent, Markets*

The main objective of REDD+ is to reduce *global* carbon emissions, and while the climate benefits of reduced emissions are accrued globally, the costs of doing so are highly localized: the price of reducing one ton of carbon in Indonesia may significantly diverge from the costs of the same ton of carbon in Brazil, but the climate benefits are equal. A market-oriented approach could promote efficiency by incentivizing emissions reductions in the places where it is the most cost efficient to do so. Although its underlying principles seem straightforward, policymakers and REDD+ architects identified five core technical challenges that could undermine its effectiveness: measurement, reporting, verification, permanence, and leakage [54]. Effective REDD+ initiatives need to credibly ensure that the emissions reductions are accurately measured and verified in order to be sold as carbon credits, that these reductions are permanent, and do not simply displace emissions to another forest. To meet these demands, programmatic requirements are highly technical and complex, and generally not amenable to purely local or community administration. Instead, some form of coordination with governments is required. To support the development of the institutional infrastructures and capacity required for REDD+, multilateral and bilateral donors have invested millions of dollars in “REDD+ Readiness” activities for target participating countries. Thus, as currently implemented, REDD+ operates more like traditional overseas development assistance than the market-based approach initially envisioned and centers states as the core actors for enacting REDD+.

Table 1. Applying a politics of difference lens to analyze Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation “Plus” (REDD+) justice critiques.

	Distributive	Procedural	Recognitional
State-centered	<p>Who has authority to determine allocations of costs/efforts and benefits from REDD+ activities? <i>Concern: states will capture the benefits and communities will bear the costs.</i></p>	<p>What is the process by which allocation decisions are made and who has the authority to make decisions? <i>Concern: states will make decisions about how to allocate costs and benefits and fail to incorporate community concerns and ideas.</i></p>	<p>Who do states represent and how inclusive and legitimate are states’ claims of representation? <i>Concern: representation by states requires assimilation and secession of some self-determination rights.</i></p>
Property Rights	<p>Who should receive payments for reduced emissions? <i>Concern: weak tenure arrangements will prevent some rights-holders from receiving benefits.</i></p>	<p>What is the process by which resource tenure rights are allocated and enforced? <i>Concern: in contexts where formal resource tenure rights are absent or incomplete, some rights-holders will be excluded.</i></p>	<p>Who has access and rights to claim allocations? What are other ways of thinking about ownership? Who has authority /delegates authority /recognizes authority? <i>Concern: recognition of customary and/or traditional resource rights that are not codified or recognized by state legal authorities.</i></p>
Values	<p>What ecological and environmental values should be conserved and compensated for? <i>Concern: compensation and/or benefits may not be adequate in both aggregate and distributive terms.</i></p>	<p>What is the process by which decisions regarding prioritization of values and determination of worth are made? <i>Concern: compensation and/or benefits may not reach the appropriate beneficiaries or may be viewed as insufficient in return for effort.</i></p>	<p>To what extent and how are diverse values of forests understood, articulated, and integrated into forest governance approaches? By whom? <i>Concern: narrow understandings of forests can lead to reductionist valuations of forests, exclude diverse values, and render forest peoples invisible.</i></p>
Decision-making	<p>How many seats need to be at the decision-making table? <i>Concern: compensation and/or benefits may not reach the appropriate beneficiaries or may be viewed as insufficient in return for effort.</i></p>	<p>Do stakeholders have a seat at the table? <i>Concern: compensation and/or benefits may not reach the appropriate beneficiaries.</i></p>	<p>What does the decision-making table look like, whose values and cultural norms are reflected in the design of the process, and to what extent is the process inclusive in its structure and implementation? <i>Concern: pre-determined agendas and structures for engagement and decision-making may render some forest peoples invisible or exclude them from meaningful engagement.</i></p>

The REDD+ literature most frequently discusses the justice concerns that result from a (re)concentration of state power and authority over forest governance in terms of rent-seeking and democratic deficits (distributive and procedural dimensions of justice). In other words, risks of injustice emerge through two pathways: (1) if states capture the bulk of the payments from REDD+ activities [55]; and (2) if states do not meaningfully facilitate and integrate community concerns and ideas [45].

When viewed through a politics of difference lens, however, the recognitional dimensions of forest peoples' justice concerns emerge. By placing states at the center of REDD+ decision-making, REDD+ activities may serve to legitimize state claims of authority over forests and REDD+ activities and recentralize forest governance, therewith diminishing the power and agency of local communities to determine their fates and lifeways [5]. The concerns herein are threefold: first, while governments in many developing countries legally (by statute) own the vast majority of forests (for example, in Indonesia, the government owns 100% of forests, in Brazil 77%: "extrapolated to the global forest estate of 3.9 billion hectares, these data suggest that approximately 77 percent of the world's forest is—according to national laws—owned and administered by governments, at least 4 percent is reserved for communities, at least 7 percent is owned by local communities, and approximately 12 percent is owned by individuals" [56], (p. 6)), nearly 1.6 billion people worldwide are dependent on these forests [6]. In many cases, these forest communities are the de facto managers of these resources, albeit sometimes with limited to no authority to develop and/or enforce regulations. Indigenous Peoples, whose population is estimated at up to 550 million globally, govern 65% of the world's land, yet only 10% of this authority over land is recognized by states [57]. Thus, the critical question for understanding justice concerns around state centralization is about who states do and do not represent and how inclusive and legitimate states' claims of representation of diverse peoples are.

Second, access to REDD+ benefits mediated by states may exclude populations whose citizenship and/or territories are not formally recognized by states, therewith promoting continued subordination of marginalized groups to state dominance and authority. Under such circumstances, while the impacts may include distributive injustices, they emerge from a recognitional injustice, namely a lack of recognition of their claims to forestlands by the state.

Third, and related to the second concern, in some cases non- or under-recognized groups may not seek or desire state recognition because they are ultimately pursuing self-determination and sovereignty and resist state authority over their communities and territories. Formal state recognition could require some forms of assimilation as well as require these groups to submit to state authority, in direct contradiction to their self-determination objectives.

3.2. Related to the First Concern, as Currently Implemented, REDD+ Architects Embrace a Narrow and Formal Understanding of State-Sanctioned and Largely Unrestricted Resource and Land Tenure Rights

Numerous scholars and policy makers have called for stronger property rights (e.g., transferrable and legally enforceable) as a prerequisite for REDD+ success [58]. Conventionally, scholars and policy makers who discuss concerns related to strong, neoliberal private property rights and market transactions frame them in terms of distributive justice. By creating powerful market incentives, REDD+ could incentivize unfettered market transactions that economically displace forest peoples and other resource-dependent communities from their traditional livelihood sources while more politically and economically powerful capture the financial rewards of REDD+. In the most basic terms, REDD+ proponents frame the underlying justice concern as distributive in nature: those without secure property rights would lose their forests and benefits to market forces, bearing the costs of REDD+ without receiving an equitable share of the benefits [59].

To address these concerns, REDD+ architects have promoted the establishment of secure, transferable, and legally enforceable property rights to forest resources. In practice, because tenure arrangements in many REDD+ countries are often informal and property rights systems non-existent or weak, this has largely translated into supporting the development of individual property rights

systems [60]. Although stronger property rights can be an important precondition for poverty alleviation [56], and most forest peoples welcome, if not demand, strong and enforceable recognition of their traditional land and resource rights, the current emphasis on individual, neoliberal property rights raises important recognitional justice concerns.

First, because most forests in most REDD+ countries are “owned” by governments [56], states can further legitimize claims for authority over REDD+ forestlands. This failure to recognize traditional, community, and/or non-state governance results in displacement of these “informal” institutions and ultimately confers primary beneficiary status to states. When benefits are distributed based on rights and not responsibilities, communities that have traditionally governed certain forest areas may experience distributive injustices.

Second, as noted above, forest peoples and communities support strong tenure arrangements, although, as related to concerns in Section 3.1, this does not necessarily require state recognition of rights. Tenure systems take a variety of forms that may be individual, collective, or hybrid. For example, among the Makgong people, an ethnic minority in Laos who practice shifting cultivation as part of their forest-based livelihoods, families rotate among plots based upon length of the required fallow period for the plot and what crops need to be planted that season [34]. By requiring communities with traditionally collective or flexible forms of ownership and governance to transition to individual property, policy makers are redefining peoples’ relationships with land and resources, as well as how communities organize themselves to meet their needs. Moreover, individual property rights privilege transferability functions of rights over access functions, the latter being critical for forest peoples’ identities and lifeways.

3.3. As currently Implemented, REDD+ Artificially Narrows the Definition, and Therewith Value, of Forests by Prioritizing One Service (Carbon Sequestration) over other Values, Uses, and Ways of Understanding Forests

In recent years, international attention to climate change mitigation has transformed discussions on global forest governance to focus on the carbon sequestration services of forests, a value previously absent from global forest debates. Critics of REDD+ argue that the overemphasis on carbon services instrumentalizes forests and reduces them to carbon sinks—resources that capture and store carbon—therewith potentially displacing other values [61–63]. In other words, although managing forests for carbon does not necessarily require displacing other values, the functional value of forests embraced in REDD+ becomes reliant upon the capacity and rate with which trees uptake carbon. Plantation forests become more valuable than old growth forests. Although REDD+ proponents argue that assigning an economic value for the carbon in forests provides a funding lifeline for forest conservation characterized by precipitous declines over the last 15 years, and that safeguards can prevent loss of other important ecosystem services from protected forests, REDD+ critics fear that the reductionist pressures of REDD+’ underlying market logics displace, devalue, and exclude forests—and their peoples—beyond carbon [64] (the importance of moving beyond carbon in REDD+ was the central theme of a 2012 conference organized by scholars at Oxford [65]).

The justice concerns that emerge from the ongoing struggles to define forests are nested and three-fold: first, the process of narrowing the definition of forests to forests-as-carbon has taken place in venues and by actors distant from these forests. The embedded exclusion in such processes is not simply a form of procedural injustice, whereby those communities (e.g., forest peoples) most impacted by policy decisions are absent in decision-making processes, but is both rooted in and exacerbates recognitional injustices. The scope of engagement is predetermined and narrow, thereby silencing alternative visions and understandings of forests.

Second, because REDD+ prioritizes the carbon values of forests over other values, forest peoples who do engage in REDD+ programs and projects must assent to the vision of forests embedded in those processes. In other words, these processes presume that the carbon services of forests hold universal value. To engage in these processes requires that participants accept these hegemonic presumptions in order to engage in and benefit from REDD+ interventions—the very definition of recognitional injustice.

Third, once crystallized, forests-as-carbon forms the foundation of REDD+ benefits-sharing systems. Forest values are transformed into payments for ecosystem services (here, carbon) and distributed to recognized beneficiaries. While the resulting justice concerns are difficult to separate, the potential distributive injustices include insufficient replacement value of forests (i.e., the costs outweigh the benefits), unfair and/or inequitable distribution of benefits among beneficiaries, and insufficient protection of other ecosystem services and values provided by forests for local communities.

3.4. Current REDD+ Modes of Engagement Are not Aligned with Diverse Models of Decision-Making and May Exclude a Variety of Voices and Interests

Stakeholder engagement, participation, and community-centered approaches have been staples in environmental governance initiatives for nearly thirty years. Community engagement has been mainstreamed to the point where virtually all forest governance initiatives in REDD+ countries require some degree of participation from local communities. REDD+ has similarly emphasized community engagement: initiatives funded by the United Nations REDD+ (UN-REDD) program (one of the largest REDD+ programs), for example, require that impacted communities provide their free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). FPIC is an approach increasingly used by development agencies, donors, and governments to ensure that communities only engage in projects they consent to freely and before projects have launched. FPIC is intended to protect communities from bearing the costs of projects they have little or no interest in or that they view as harmful to their communities [66,67]. Under current REDD+ initiatives, project proponents implement FPIC processes in areas they have identified as feasible for REDD+. This usually entails a series of meetings and information sessions informing a community of what REDD+ is followed by a request for consent by individuals and/or households within the community.

While in principle FPIC could promote both procedural and recognitional justice, current practices raise concerns. Although UN-REDD specifies that each country should design contextually relevant ways of adhering to their safeguards, in practice many REDD+ proponents have adopted a blueprint approach to FPIC [68]. The process is often highly formalized and dominated by western modes of engagement that may be unfamiliar, inaccessible, or uncomfortable for different communities [69]. In these cases, the process of community engagement may not facilitate effective voice of diverse stakeholders. Alternatively, in some contexts free consent is practically infeasible. For example, reports across Cambodia and Laos suggest that consent may be coerced: attendance at village meetings is often mandatory, yet attendance conveys consent [70]. Under such circumstances FPIC is impossible. In this sense, REDD+ may require that communities engage in a prescribed way that may not be comfortable or appropriate and thus there is actually some harm done or, at a minimum, no real change in voice in these communities. Whereas procedural justice lets us see the importance of including impacted communities in decision-making processes, recognitional justice lets us see that the modes of engagement are critical for communities to have a voice and perhaps even influence these decision-making processes.

3.5. Summary

To summarize, there are four important types of justice challenges in the design of REDD+ that emerge from discussions of recognitional justice principles. First is an overly *narrow conception of property rights* as the fundamental institutions in the design and implementation of REDD+ policies. This tendency to emphasize strong, freely transferable, and relatively unqualified ownership rights over stored carbon risks promoting idealized (and unrealistic) visions of unfettered carbon markets that may favor wealthy, high emitting nations as well as national governments and elites in developing countries (e.g., [53,71]). This raises the second major concern: that REDD+ gives *too much authority to the nation state*, thereby failing to recognize the views and interests of local groups or individuals who may not be well-represented by their national governments [31,72–74]. More attention to recognitional justice ideas should suggest alternative arrangements giving more autonomy to local communities in

REDD+ programs to create enabling environments by helping them to work directly with civil society groups or international actors. Third, attention to recognitional justice highlights how REDD+ risks overlooking the *diversity of values provided by forests* (and indeed the diversity of definitions of forests) beyond carbon storage. In this sense, recognizing the legitimacy of other uses and values of forests by using a recognitional justice lens should help limit the risk of privileging carbon storage over all other forest values and services. Finally, recognitional justice ideas illustrate the inadequacy of *current modes of engagement with local communities in REDD+ programs*, relying on relatively rigid and formalized meetings and information sessions with local groups that fail to recognize and solicit the full range of voices and perspectives in a local community.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis herein highlights the nested and correlational nature of justice concerns and demonstrates how REDD+ architects narrowly scope the debate to focus solutions on a predefined understanding of the problem and advance technocratic, state-centered solutions. These solutions fail to account for the complex and nuanced nature of justice and injustice as experienced, envisioned, or anticipated by forest peoples across the globe. Similarly, global forest loss and degradation has serious, compound justice implications that are not fully captured in REDD+ debates. There is a risk that, unless the current REDD+ conflicts are transformed into more productive debates that capture the multi-scalar, multivalent nature of justice, it will be difficult to channel resources and energy towards addressing the broader issues in forest loss and degradation [27].

In this paper I have sought to challenge scholars and policymakers engaged in REDD+ debates to move beyond the dominant sound bites on burden-sharing and rights to develop and pollute. Instead I argue that the justice implications of REDD+ as currently implemented are much more nuanced and complex than the current neoliberal framing of the debates suggests. This analysis demonstrates that, when viewed through a recognitional lens, the justice concerns related to REDD+ are not simply its distributive and procedural impacts—problems often readily tackled through technocratic solutions. Instead, the challenges REDD+ faces are centered on the extent to which REDD+ initiatives can account for, accommodate, and embrace difference. In other words, the central justice questions that REDD+ architects should consider are recognitional in nature: what values, identities, lifeways, and voices are displaced and what are the most appropriate ways of engaging and preserving these to advance a global common goal of reduced forest loss and degradation? By shifting the focus to recognitional justice, this paper opens up new spaces for innovating policy solutions. In particular, I suggest that by attending to one of more of the criteria outlined in Section 2 of this paper (multidimensional justice, nested justice, multivalent justice, and scalar dynamics of justice) that policy makers and practitioners can begin to see why their attempts to address tenure security and participation through dominant neoliberal frameworks are met with resistance. Despite the best intentions of some REDD+ proponents, when property rights and participation are approached through a narrowly scoped set of values and rights, many forest peoples may be further marginalized or rendered invisible. Once these complexities are illuminated, forest governance actors can begin to work towards solutions that attend to the recognitional justice concerns that must be addressed in order to move REDD+, or any other forest governance initiative, forward.

Many of the recognitional justice concerns discussed above emerge, in part, because of the weak institutional contexts of REDD+ participating countries. While REDD+ proponents view its objectives as primarily a mitigation scheme, REDD+ critics see REDD+ as a state-building enterprise and the strengthening of the state is a threat to the lifeways and wellbeing of many forest and Indigenous Peoples. Thus, the challenge for policy makers concerned about the climate implications of forest loss and degradation is to first address the recognitional concerns of forest peoples before addressing both procedural and distributive justice concerns. In doing so, special attention must be directed to the challenges of the relationship between REDD+ and the possibilities for rights and representation in the political economic context of target communities.

In closing, for those interested in advancing justice in REDD+, future research should consider the question of voice and choice in REDD+. Greater attention to the interlinked visions of justice, including recognitional justice, is a useful way to widen the range of possible policy options and principles to incorporate exciting new developments in other areas of climate change policy (including emissions trading policy designs) where new limits on private property rights, national government's discretion, and protections for local communities and all resource users are being debated and developed. For example, policy reforms grounded in principles found in the Public Trust Doctrine, a centuries-old common law limitation on the power of governments and private individuals to limit public uses of or benefits from many natural resources [75]. Emerging initiatives to advance deliberative democracy in environmental governance also offer some potential new avenues for recognitional justice in REDD+. One core feature of deliberative democracy is that decisions are reason-based, which is to say that demands and views need to be responded to and not simply tabled or ignored [76,77]. Although there are limited examples of deliberative democracy in practice in global environmental governance, new initiatives in biodiversity conservation are emerging that provide opportunities for rethinking institutions. Bio-cultural Community Protocols, for example, are an experimental approach used to govern access and benefits sharing for genetic resources that seek to strengthen the capacity and agency of local communities to implement international and national laws [78,79]. They allow communities to "provide clear terms and conditions to regulate access to their knowledge and resources" [80]. Such innovations provide alternative ways of understanding how REDD+ decisions unfold and the extent to which institutional designs can be more inclusive and facilitate effective voice and representation of the diversity within and between forest communities.

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