

Is the Geographies of Evasion hypothesis useful for explaining and predicting the fate of external interventions? The case of REDD in Cambodia

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Abstract

It has proved much easier to observe the stark divide between the ‘professional optimists’ in the development industry and the ‘professional pessimists’ in academic development studies than it has to disrupt these roles or to explain them in ways that prevent them remaining entrenched. This paper will present and discuss the “Geographies of Evasion” hypothesis which claims to explain how and why rights-based development interventions in particular fail.

The key question addressed by the paper is whether the ‘Geographies of Evasion hypothesis’ provides a worthwhile theoretical contribution to overcoming this practitioner-academic impasse.

The Geography of Evasion concept was first coined in a study of property rights interventions in Cambodia (Biddulph, 2010) and first articulated as a hypothesis as follows:

If the development industry attempts to extend rights which host nation governments are not prepared to enforce, the result will not be a rejection of the industry’s programmes. Rather they will be welcomed, but channelled to places where those rights do not make a difference. This ‘geography of evasion’ will be concealed by policy facades which measure success according to outputs and do not acknowledge the process of spatial marginalisation” (Biddulph, 2011 forthcoming)

This paper will present early results of the application of the ‘Geography of Evasion’ hypothesis to the case of REDD (Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Degradation). It first analyses the global climate negotiation and the implementation discourse parallel to the negotiations, and explains how this discourse invites geographies of evasion. It then presents fieldwork from a REDD pilot activity Cambodia where existing community forestry initiatives are being linked to the voluntary carbon market as a means to pilot REDD.

The case of the REDD pilot northwest Cambodia provides early evidence of how deforestation is being prevented in places where the major drivers are least present suggesting that Geographies of Evasion might indeed have predictive power in explaining how REDD might fail. However, more evidence than this is required to make a convincing case for REDD as an evasive/evaded intervention internationally. Geographies of Evasion will gain more purchase in development theory-practice dialogues if it is tested in other contexts than that of rural Cambodia. However, by presenting clear, simple questions to relatively accessible data it promises to be of readier practical import than many currently prominent theorizations of development practice.

(382 words)

Keywords:

development theory, development practice, climate change, Cambodia, geography of evasion

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Introduction – research problem and theoretical context

Development studies literature has long dwelled on the tension between forward-looking ‘professional optimists’ employed in development practice and backward-looking ‘professional pessimists’ employed in development studies (Chambers, 1983; Lund, 2010; Närman, 1997). Many attempts have been made to try and explain why development policy appears to promise much more than it performs. From the fields of geography and anthropology these have included a critique of ‘control orientation’ (Porter, Allen, & Thompson, 1991), analyses of the way that ‘development discourse’ operates ‘behind the backs’ of actors (Ferguson, 1994), and more recently Mosse’s suggestion that there is an inevitability about ‘good policy’ being ‘unimplementable’ (Mosse, 2004, 2005).

My recent study of tenure security interventions in Cambodia (Biddulph, 2010) has suggested that where the agendas of external development agencies and host nation governments differ, that these differences will be resolved by the expedient of implementing interventions in places where they do not make a difference. This paper presents the hypothesis generated by that research and applies it to the case of REDD (reduced emissions from avoided deforestation and forest degradation) interventions.

The primary aim of this paper is to elicit criticism of this nascent hypothesis. Does it constitute worthwhile academic theory? And does it, as I claim, have the potential to deflate some of the overblown claims of development policy and generate debate which, even at the planning stage, more faithfully reflects the underlying conditions which determine the prospects of planned interventions?

The geography of evasion hypothesis

Evasion and Façade: origins in Cambodia tenure interventions

As formulated in Biddulph (Forthcoming Sept 2011), the Geographies of Evasion hypothesis states that:

If the development industry attempts to extend rights which host nation governments are not prepared to enforce, the result will not be a rejection of the industry’s programmes. Rather they will be welcomed, but channelled to places where those rights do not make a difference. This “geography of evasion” will be concealed by policy facades which measure success according to outputs and do not acknowledge the process of spatial marginalization.

This hypothesis was generated from a study of systematic land titling and community forestry in Cambodia (Biddulph, 2010). Systematic land titling was represented as addressing tenure insecurity in Cambodia, including land grabs by members of military and civilian elites. Provision of land titles would generate tenure security which would in turn lead to: increased investment in land; smallholders being able to raise more capital by using their land as collateral for loans; a market for land which would enable redistribution of land to the most efficient farmers. Progress could then be described in terms of the number of titles issued. However, the sort of insecurity the programme claimed to address was found in State forests, in border areas and in areas where there had been significant fighting and military deployments during the 1980s and 1990s. The land titling programme, however, had been implemented away from these insecure areas in the smallholder rice farming lowlands where the conditions promised by the titling intervention - tenure security, land as collateral and a market for land - already existed.

Similarly, community forestry was promoted as addressing the dual problem of forests being destroyed and forest dwelling people losing their traditional forest-based livelihoods. Community forestry would delegate control of forests to the local people who depended upon them and would therefore manage them sustainably. Progress could be monitored in terms of the number of community forests approved and the number of hectares under community forest management. However, community forestry was found only to be implemented on land which was already so degraded that the sort of ‘forest dependent’ NTFP-oriented livelihood depicted in community forestry literature was utterly unfeasible.

Hence the two key elements of the geography of evasion hypothesis emerge. First, a policy facade is constructed: a narrative of progress linked to indicators that conceal spatial difference. Second, behind the policy facade, an evasion whereby external interventions are implemented away from the problems that they are claimed to address.

The emergence of the hypothesis from a study on tenure rights led to the emphasis on rights in the way it is formulated. My assumption was that rights-based interventions would yield the sort of conflicting agendas that would lead to evasion. In the current case, however, it is not “rights that host nation governments are not prepared to enforce” that are the source of potential conflicting agendas, but rather the difference between global climate agendas and host nation development agendas. In either event the hypothesis invites scepticism about the potential of external intervention to generate results. I will note here that the mismatch between policy narratives (or policy facades as I term them in the context of evasion) and events on the ground reflects on the nature of the commitments of both host nation governments and external sponsors of change.

Before turning to the case of REDD I will first highlight three issues in development studies which are highlighted in relation to the Geographies of Evasion hypothesis

Issue	Relation to Geography of Evasion
Misrepresentation through simplification and spatial homogenisation	A policy narrative which appeals to all actors and which suggests a world amenable to external intervention is necessary to construct the facade behind which evasions are concealed. It is this policy imperative which explains long-standing traditions of development policy narratives misrepresenting and simplifying the livelihoods of populations targeted by intervention.
The development partner problematic	Host country leaderships are often actively engaged in the causes of the problems that external interventions address, but they must be represented as responsible, like-minded development partners. It is this which creates the incentive for evasion. If there is no tension between public agendas and hidden agendas there will be no evasion.
Agency dilemma	Do policy facades constrain agency by forcing actors to constantly reinterpret events to maintain the credibility of the policy narrative? Or do they enable practitioners to work intelligently behind the facade to produce valuable outcomes, but in ways that are more strategic and complex than is allowed in the policy narrative?

Misrepresentation: simplification and spatial homogenisation

The *misrepresentation problematic* highlights the fundamental ways in which reality will be misrepresented by the development industry according to Geographies of Evasion. Firstly, and this is a long-standing theme in academic development studies, the world must be described in simplified, stylised terms in order that it seems rather amenable to policy intervention. Secondly, and crucially, within this stylised and simplified narrative problems are universal and homogenous across space. Hence, it appears not to matter where interventions are located because the problems they address and the key cause and effect logics which justify them are found everywhere. Thus in the case of the tenure interventions mentioned above, tenure insecurity was represented as being ‘everywhere’ and all people living in or near forests were represented as being ‘forest dependent’ with sustainable forest-based livelihoods based principally on non-timber forest products. These simplified, stylised narratives concealing the uneven distribution of phenomena in space make it possible to create the illusion that progress against indicators (eg the number of land titles issued, the number of community forests approved) constitutes progress against the problem as a whole.

The case of land titling in Cambodia illustrated a tendency quite close to double-think. In the land titling policy documents on the one hand it was claimed that the titling intervention would address tenure insecurity and land grabs, on the other hand, in the same document, it also explained that titling would not be implemented in any places where there were unresolved conflicts. This kind of double-think is part of the long-standing tension between development practice and development research – dating back to Ferguson’s (1994) perplexity at the way practitioners in Lesotho could convince themselves that communities of migrant labourers storing their accumulated wealth as cattle were in fact ranchers.

The Development Partner Problematic

Intimately related with issues of misrepresentation is what I call the development partner problematic. All development industry interventions, whether part of ODA or delivered via civil society initiatives must have either the support or the approval of the host nation government. It is therefore necessary to describe the government of the host country as a legitimate development partner committed to solving the problem at hand. Often, of course, problems which the development industry seeks to address are caused quite directly by host nation governments and the deliberate strategies (formal or informal) of government leaders. For example, in the mid-1990s the Cambodian prime ministers routinely struck private deals in order to secure off budget revenues from illegal deforestation. These revenues were arguably crucial to the behind-the-scenes horse-trading and appeasement required to pacify military and political factions and generate national stability (see Le Billon, 2000). This stability provided the basis for the decade and a half of steady 8% per annum economic growth which followed. As such, the ‘problem’ of mismanagement of the forest resource at that time might justifiably be seen as a triumph of *realpolitik* by national politicians in the service of the greater national good.

The development partner problematic may involve a degree of ventriloquism. A ‘government’ identity is developed in policy documents by means of reference to commitments made in legal and policy documents and political speeches. This ‘government’ identity is often partially ventriloquized: the particular laws, policy papers and speeches that are referred to have often been developed with (and even drafted by) development industry actors. Government, as (mis)represented in this way, is

supportive, well-intentioned and essentially shares the values, beliefs and strategic approaches of the external sponsors of change. Thus a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper or equivalent, can be drafted by the staff of the World Bank or their ministry counterparts used to represent “government commitment” even while contradicted directly by government budgets and expenditures (Biddulph, 2001). A Geographies of Evasion perspective will be particularly alert to the way that policy documents represent the government as a legitimate and responsible development partner while putting distance between government figures and their engagement in processes which cause the problems that external interventions seek to address. Hence, in the case of the Cambodian land titling, the government’s commitment was ‘evidenced’ by its support of the titling project, while the business and military interests responsible for illegal land grabs were represented as unruly, rogue forces which the government is committed to address (World Bank, 2002). This notwithstanding the quite clear evidence that land grabs are only ever possible if conducted with the informal support of senior government figures.

Practitioner Agency under the Geographies of Evasion hypothesis

The agency problematic within the geographies of evasion thesis has points in common with the arguments developed by Mosse (2004, 2005) when he claimed that ‘good policy is unimplementable’. His argument (informed by Latour) was that the job of policy documents is to create a constituency for an intervention. However, the need to appease all stakeholders means that, inevitably, any policy document will be poorly fitted for any purpose beyond that recruitment of initial support. For Mosse this means that policy will then not so much govern events as follow them, and that the role of development practitioners will be to constantly interpret reality in such a way as to make the policy make sense.

I think that Mosse’s insight is valuable, but I prefer to retain the notion that interventions can and should be judged against their stated objectives. My suggestion is that what Mosse refers to as “good policy” and I refer to as “policy facades” creates two possibilities. One is somewhat corrosive as it involves practitioners being so trapped by the need to reproduce the realities of the policy framing that they become as simplified and limited in their responses as the policy documents they work to (and to which they are often held tightly accountable by donor head offices). The other, more enabling, suggests that practitioners understand the necessity of having a simplified and in some respects uncritical policy narrative, but are able to see beyond the policy simplifications and exaggerations and respond to the more complex and conflicted world in ways that are more strategic, nuanced and long-term than what is found in policy narratives and the related implementation apparatus of log-frames, milestones and timeframes. As researchers, then, we need to look not necessarily at whether policy is implemented as written, but rather whether policy constricts or enables worthwhile progress. This might include worthwhile progress towards goals that might be somewhat different to those stated in the policy narrative.

I have now, therefore, introduced the geographies of evasion hypothesis. It is a theoretical contribution derived from the observation of a specific case, which suggests that external interventions will systematically avoid the problems they claim to address and that this evasion will be systematically concealed by what I term policy facades. I have further suggested that this hypothesis casts new light on

issues of misrepresentation of local conditions, development partnership and practitioner agency. I now turn to the case of reduced emissions from avoided deforestation and forest degradation (REDD).

REDD+ - A Global Intervention to Limit Climate Change?

Introducing the Idea of REDD

Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and avoided forest Degradation (REDD) has emerged as a component in global climate negotiations (Angelsen & Wertz-Kanounnikoff, 2008). The fundamental principle of REDD is that countries currently undergoing deforestation should be compensated to the degree that they can prevent deforestation within their national boundaries. This, integrated into a global REDD agreement, would enable globally reduced deforestation and degradation to impact on the global climate: tropical deforestation and degradation have been estimated as being responsible for roughly 12% of anthropogenic CO₂ emissions (van der Werf et al., 2009).

A global climate agreement would involve national forest carbon accounting and international mechanisms for both certifying the extent to which deforestation has occurred and then providing financial compensation (either via some form of market or some form of fund or a combination of both). The combination of a complete global agreement and complete national accounting would address the fundamental problem of leakage (that stopping deforestation in one place will simply displace it to another place) which had prevented REDD from garnering broader support in earlier rounds of climate negotiation (Angelsen & Wertz-Kanounnikoff, 2008).

REDD has been seen as a relatively swift and cost-efficient way of achieving swift action against global warming. A global strategy has therefore been envisaged whereby rapid progress with REDD might buy time to develop a more climate smart global economy.

REDD in Practice

In its fully realised form REDD would imply a global climate agreement which established the rights and responsibilities of countries in relation to payments for avoided deforestation and degradation. While REDD was a relative success in comparison to other progress made at the UNCCC negotiations in Copenhagen, a comprehensive, detailed global REDD agreement remains a distant prospect. In that sense, REDD is currently no more than an idea that has yet to be realised. Meanwhile, however, funds devoted to REDD are already flowing and generating studies, policy documents, pilot projects and demonstration activities (Westholm, 2010).

The scale and reach of the REDD ambition is unprecedented in terms of the implied impact on land and forest resource use globally. The aim is to halve the rate of tropical deforestation globally by 2020 and to halt it completely by 2050. This would demand, amongst many other things, sufficient finance (from either a system of donations or a carbon/emissions market) to compensate countries for the opportunity costs of both deforestation and post-deforestation land-uses.

Leaving aside (for the moment) the possible mismatches between global and national political agendas, and also between the scale of the REDD ambition and the available financing, there is also a mismatch between the technical demands of the REDD idea, and the (highly variable) technical and human

resources of countries with tropical forests to implement the idea. To address this mismatch, it has been suggested that REDD might be implemented in a phased approach. This would enable countries that make rapid progress towards presenting a credible historical baseline (to establish their business as usual deforestation and emissions rates) and credible monitoring systems to start receiving payments for emissions reduction more quickly. Meanwhile, other countries with less technical capacity might spend longer in the early phases building up the technical, institutional and financial resources needed to participate fully in a REDD mechanism.

As it was originally articulated, the phased approach to REDD (Angelsen et al., 2009) would comprise three phases:

1. National REDD strategy development, including national dialogue, institutional strengthening, and demonstration activities.
2. Implementation of policies and measures (PAMs) proposed in those national REDD strategies
3. Payment for performance on the basis of quantified forest emissions and removals against agreed reference levels

Given that the ‘institutional strengthening’ required at Phase 1 does not only include the development of technical monitoring systems, but also the introduction of fair and fully functioning land and forest tenure regimes, it is anticipated that some countries may remain in Phase 1 for most of the four decade time frame envisaged for REDD (Larson, 2011).

What Geographies of Evasion Predicts for REDD

The geographies of evasion hypothesis predicts that avoided deforestation will be channelled towards places where deforestation is not really a problem, and that this diversion will be concealed by policy narratives (facades) that gloss over spatial difference.

My focus in this article is on national level dynamics, with the Cambodia case used to illustrate evasion dynamics at national and sub-national scales. However, the tendency towards evasion is apparent in REDD globally and internationally. It is clear, as van der Werf et al (2009, p. 738) have pointed out that “reducing fossil fuels remains the key element for stabilizing atmospheric CO₂ concentrations”. The fact that tropical deforestation has nevertheless been placed at the forefront of climate mitigation measures and regarded despite the obvious and well-known difficulties of halting deforestation in tropical countries (see Karsenty & Ongolo, 2011 forthcoming), suggests that international climate policy is systematically avoiding the problems it claims to confront. In this light the policy narrative that describes avoiding tropical deforestation as relatively easy and cost-efficient “low-hanging fruit” while a more carbon smart economy is being developed is recast as a policy façade to gloss over the fundamental evasion.

At international level there is also some evidence of evasion, particularly in the somewhat notorious case of Guyana. Guyana does not have a recent history of deforestation and therefore, according to the logic of the REDD idea, would not be eligible for payments for avoided deforestation. However, with the help of an international consulting company, the Guyanese government has successfully made the case to the Norwegian government that even though Guyana has not been prone to deforestation in the past it will

suffer from deforestation if preventive measures are not taken. On this basis a country which does not have a deforestation problem has attracted substantial funding to avoid deforestation (Henders, 2010).

While the Guyana case appears to support the geographies of evasion hypothesis other examples, in particular the Norway-Indonesia REDD project, where Norway has committed one billion dollars to be paid in relation to progress against deforestation nationally, seem to suggest a willingness to confront drivers of deforestation head on. It will therefore be of particular value to monitor that unfolding case in order to see whether that confrontation will continue or whether ways will be found for new narratives to be introduced that facilitate evasion.

It is at the national level that this paper focuses. Whilst the REDD idea involves national accounting, the phased approach allows the possibility that for a (undefined) period countries focus on capacity building/institutional development and on demonstration activities. The geographies of evasion hypothesis suggests that the opportunity created by this will be used to conduct pilots in places where deforestation is not a threat, while allowing business as usual deforestation elsewhere, but that this evasion will be concealed by a narrative that describes the pilots and the capacity building endeavours in terms that suggest that they are paving the way for large scale implementation.

Interestingly, this scenario recasts capacity building as a form of evasion. Within the Geographies of Evasion scenario, rather than being the crucial activity which will enable REDD to be implemented fully (as is suggested by the policy narrative), capacity building becomes the mechanism by which action is postponed and direct confrontation with the drivers of decentralisation can be avoided.

REDD and Deforestation: the Case of Cambodia

REDD in Cambodia

Cambodia underwent rapid deforestation during the war years, and this intensified during the 1990s as control of illegal forest revenues became key in securing post-war political power and stability (Le Billon, 2000). The Royal Government of Cambodia's policy position as stated in the Millennium Development goals is to maintain forest cover at 60% forest cover; current trends suggest that they are not on track as reported forest cover in 2006 was 59% and annual deforestation has been estimated at 0.5% per annum (Bradley, 2011, pp. 3-4)

Cambodia is a participant in both the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (completing its R-PIN in March 2009 and with a revised R-PP completed in March 2011) and UN-REDD (becoming one of the 14 UN-REDD pilot countries in March 2011). Cambodia is also host to two REDD demonstration activities, the most advanced of which is located in Oddar Meanchey province in north-west Cambodia and seeks to link 13 existing community forestry initiatives to the voluntary carbon market. At the time of writing this pilot has gone to market but no sales have yet been completed.

The UN-REDD and FCPF initiatives are oriented towards capacity building and preparing the ground for national scale REDD and do not currently fund any activities that would directly contribute to avoided deforestation. However, documentation in relation to the UN-REDD project preparation does stress the importance of piloting avoided deforestation through demonstration activities:

A critical issue concerns the current REDD+ pilot projects which are under development for the voluntary carbon market. These projects have received a high level of political attention, and it is important that they are completed successfully if a national REDD+ program is to be credible¹.

The findings in relation to the case of REDD+ in Cambodia are based on a review of studies and policy papers (both Cambodian government and aid industry sponsored) related to the implementation of REDD in the country, and in particular to two periods of field work in Oddar Meanchey province in north-west Cambodia where the REDD pilot activity linking existing community forestry initiatives to the voluntary carbon market is being implemented. During the field visits experienced, Khmer-speaking researchers interviewed provincial, district and local stakeholders as well as conducting village stays in two villages and conducting interviews with a total of 36 households including collection of basic household census information on the 108 adults belonging to those households.

The Oddar Meanchey REDD pilot

Oddar Meanchey province is situated in north-west Cambodia along the border with Thailand. In 2002, 75% of the province was forested, a figure that was reduced to 67% by 2006, giving the province an annual deforestation rate of 2002. This is the highest deforestation rate of any province in Cambodia and was given as a primary reason for locating the REDD pilot here (Bradley, 2009, p. 5). Oddar Meanchey also has the most extensive network of community forestry initiatives in Cambodia, with 13 community forests covering a total of 67,783 hectares, which is 10.2% of the land area of the province and 14.8% of the forested area (according to 2006 forest cover data).

Whilst much of Cambodia returned to peace following the removal of the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979, Oddar Meanchey remained insecure for a further 20 years, both because it was host to the Khmer Rouge stronghold of Anlong Veng, and also because of its proximity to the Thai border from where international support was delivered to the Khmer Rouge and their allies in their fight against the People's Republic of Kampuchea government. Notwithstanding logging by the military forces of both sides, the insecurity during this time explained why Oddar Meanchey remained both sparsely populated and heavily forested.

The rapid deforestation of the past decade has been driven by a number of sources. These might very summarily be described in terms of two top-down drivers and one bottom-up driver. The top-down drivers are the allocation of land to military use and to concessions (mining and agricultural) by the central government. The bottom-up drivers are the rapid influx of migrants from lowland provinces who come to Oddar Meanchey in the hope of securing agricultural land. The population has grown by 13% between 1998 and 2008, of which 9% is due to in-migration (Poffenburger, 2009, p. 292)

The community forests in Oddar Meanchey were established with support from international NGOs, in particular from Community Forestry International and from a European Union project sub-contracted to Oxfam Great Britain, one of them had a slightly longer history. The Sorng Rokavorn community forest was established by a Buddhist monk, who had grown up in the province but had then spent time in Thailand with forest monks there between 1995 and 2000. On his return to Cambodia he sought and

¹ Missing full citation reference, but taken from National Joint Programme (NJP) Submission to the UN-REDD Programme Policy Board

obtained permission to establish a protected forest in an area covering over 18 000 hectares. Both locally and internationally the coupling of Buddhism and environmental conservation, as well as the monk's personal qualities, have generated both financial and political support, to the extent that he reports having received offers of finance which he has not followed up because he has not had need of them yet.

Is the Oddar Meanchey Pilot Evasive?

The first impression when focusing on the pilot activity in Oddar Meanchey is that this is precisely the opposite of an evasion. Rather than selecting a location where there is no deforestation, or where measures to control deforestation are already in place, the supporters of this REDD pilot have chosen the province where deforestation is most rapid. However, there are two important points to make here that relate to the way the project is constructed at different scales and which open up the possibility for evasion.

Firstly, Oddar Meanchey has been selected as the reference region for the pilot. This means that the historical baseline against which progress is measured will be Oddar Meanchey province's deforestation rate (CFI, 2009, p. 39). In other words, if deforestation is halted completely in the pilot area, payments will compensate for emissions that would have occurred had 2% of the forest been removed each year. This means that the project will attract higher payments than would have been the case if, for example, national carbon accounting had been used and the national deforestation rate of approximately 0.5% had been the basis for payments.

Secondly, while the deforestation rates for the whole province provide the basis for the historical baseline, the pilot activity does not take place in the whole of Oddar Meanchey province, but rather it takes place in the established community forestry sites in the province which constitute only 14.8% of the province's forests.

In this scenario, then, there is the potential for a geography of evasion to be taking place within Oddar Meanchey. This will hold if it transpires that the places where the pilot is taking place are less prone to deforestation than the rest of the province. Our findings in 2011 were, in some respects, strongly supportive of this line of argument.

In our 2011 research, stakeholders at all level were asked to compare the situation of the community forests and the situation of the other forest in the province. Almost without exception, respondents were pessimistic about the condition of all the forests in the province outside the community forests². They believed that between the 'top-down' policies of land being allocated for either military use or for agricultural or mining concessions and the 'bottom-up' influx of migrants coming from lowland provinces in search of agricultural land, that there was little prospect of any land being left outside the community

² The one exception was a provincial land official who had been involved in provincial land use planning and said that in the six communes where this had been fully implemented that communities had identified areas of forest that they would protect. He felt that because this had been done in a participatory manner and an appropriate scale that some of these forest areas, even though not officially recognized as community forests, would in fact be well protected. By contrast he thought that some of the community forest boundaries were not well known by the communities and that the community forests might not be well protected.

forest areas. A typical response came from a young man asked whether the prospects for the forest inside and outside the community forest areas were similar or different:

Different. There won't be any trees left outside the community forest because the people cut them down every day. The woodcutters travel through the village with truck-loads of wood every day and nobody dares to do anything about it (Interview, Prey Chhngai, November 2011)

The respondent in the province with the most power was the one who expressed most pessimism. The provincial governor said that he could guarantee that he would be able to protect the monk's community forest, but that the other community forests he could not guarantee even though he would try, and that the rest of the forests in the province it was very difficult to provide any protection for.

Table 1: The solution avoiding the problem? Deforestation and avoided deforestation in Oddar Meanchey

	Likelihood of Deforestation	Avoided deforestation demonstration activity to be implemented there?
Monk's community forest	Quite low	Yes
Other community forests	Medium (opinions differ)	Yes
Other forest	Extremely high	No

In this sense, then, events do seem to be following the lines suggested by the Geographies of Evasion hypothesis. Oddar Meanchey is a province which as a whole is subject to rapid deforestation. Within the province, nowhere is completely safe from deforestation: even within the monk's community forest there are some violations. However, our findings suggest a very clear distinction between three sorts of forest: the monk's community forest which is relatively well protected; the other community forests which are susceptible to deforestation, especially that driven by national level decision-making, but which nevertheless have some prospect of being defended by the communities to whom management responsibility has been assigned, and finally the remainder of the forests in the province which all respondents seemed to agree had little prospect of surviving the onslaught of both top-down land allocations to military, agricultural or mining use and bottom-up migration. In this context the REDD intervention does seem to be tending away from the places where the problem is most severe and towards the places where the problem is least severe.

At village level there was further evidence of evasion as community forests were situated away from the locations where the community members were actively deforesting in order to secure the agricultural land which provided their reason for being in the province.

another form of evasion seemed to relate to the livelihoods of the people. While the inhabitants are typically described as forest dependent

The communities have long advocated for a collective, local approach to protecting the forest, in large part because it provides them more secure tenure for the forest resources they depend upon

for their livelihoods, which they want to conserve for their children and grandchildren (Bradley, 2009, p. 6)

Our findings indicated that people were principally dependent upon agriculture, and therefore on being able to clear forest land to farm. In one of our case study villages the community forest was over 10km from the village – this meant that the community forest was located away from the places where the community was active deforesting to secure its livelihoods. Our second case study village was one of the exceptional cases where the village is actually located inside the forest³; here there were some clear synergies between agricultural practice and forest protection, however, there was also tension between the villagers and the community forestry committee as villagers seemed to be increasingly frustrated that they were not allowed to clear more land for agriculture.

Discussion

Evasion and Facade

The very characterisation of an activity as a pilot or a demonstration makes a rhetorical claim: it suggests that what is now being implemented can then be replicated elsewhere. It therefore implies that the methods required later are being tested now. Our findings, however, suggested that whilst Oddar Meanchey province does contain powerful drivers of deforestation, the pilot itself is being implemented in the forested parts of the provinces that are relatively speaking, least prone to deforestation. The areas with community forests already established - and the project is said to be inspired by the efforts of the communities to protect their forest (Larson, 2011, p. iv) - are the ones that are least under threat.

Furthermore, the tendency to locate the community forests away from settlements also seems to point to a reluctance or inability to confront the deforestation being conducted by community members themselves as they attempt to consolidate sufficient land to secure agricultural livelihoods.

The clearest indication of evasion seems to come from Poffenberger, an experienced and insightful practitioner and commentator on community forestry in Southeast Asia who has both contributed to the establishment of the Oddar Meanchey pilot and written on it. On the one hand he presents the pilot as confronting deforestation:

Oddar Meanchey has the 'perfect storm' setting for a potential REDD project with a historic high rate of deforestation, multiple drivers of deforestation and forest degradation, with powerful political, economic and demographic momentum (Poffenburger, 2009, p. 289).

On the other hand when considering the capacity of the communities he suggests that they:

...lack the political influence to address more powerful drivers such as economic land concessions and military encroachment (Poffenburger, 2009, p. 289)

³ I am waiting for detailed maps to confirm this point and to establish average distances from villages to forest boundaries, but according to respondents only 2 of the 58 villages engaged in the 13 community forestry projects were actually located within forest.

With the national actors involved in REDD pointing at the importance of the Oddar Meanchey pilot succeeding (see above) while sponsors of the Oddar Meanchey pilot stress the importance of national level actors supporting the community forestry it appears that credible, concrete measures to tackle the main drivers of deforestation are being avoided.

The remaining discussion revisits the issues outlined in the introduction as being shown in a different light by geographies of evasion, namely the systematic misrepresentation of context, the development partner problematic and the relationship between policy facades and practitioner agency.

Misrepresentation: simplification and spatial homogenization

A number of characterisations of actors and processes in relation to the Oddar Meanchey pilot hover close to the sort of double-think discussed above. Communities are described as protecting the forests upon which they depend from the influx of migrants seeking to clear land for agriculture. However, given that the population of the province has trebled in the course of the past decade it is clear that these forest dependent communities are principally comprised of forest-clearing migrants: indeed one of our case study villages was established in 1999 so that all of the inhabitants were relatively new migrants. Poffenberger attempts to reconcile the tensions in these descriptions as follows:

While many of the project communities are comprised of recent migrants who have settled in the area over the past ten to fifteen years, they are motivated to retain their local forests, have substantial local knowledge of the forest ecosystems and are economically dependent on forest resources. Due to their physical presence in and around the forests, they are well positioned to defend forest resources from illegal logging and further clearing by more recent migrants (Poffenburger, 2009, p. 289)

However, as we have seen above, the idea that the “communities” have relations to “their local forest” conceals the extent to which commitment to protection of the community forest is dependent on access to other forests which can be cleared for agriculture.

Development Partner Problematic

Economic land concessions and the allocation of large tracts of forest to the military are two major drivers that appear to be beyond the capacity of the REDD pilot to address. Interviews with practitioners and the practitioner accounts of Poffenberger suggest that the Oddar Meanchey project was receiving significant political support and that this would enable these top-down drivers to be addressed:

To date, the Oddar Meanchey Project has received an extraordinary level of support from the Office of the Prime Minister (Poffenburger, 2009, p. 294)

And this emboldens him to represent the national government as having a position in respect to the pilot as follows.

The Royal Government of Cambodia views the Oddar Meanchey REDD project as a ‘test case’ to see if payments for forest carbon are a viable alternative to other production-oriented forest land management strategies (Poffenburger, 2009, p. 294)

This sort of national government commitment was striking in its absence when we conducted our field work in late 2011. Provincial and district officials and villagers all reported the continuation of national decisions to allocate forest land to both military use and for mining and agricultural concessions. Exactly the same rhetorical separation of rogue forces (not explicitly linked to the government) and supporters of the intervention (explicitly linked to the government) that was seen in the case of the land titling returns in the case of REDD. The “powerful political and economic actors” supporting the land concessions that drive deforestation are portrayed as though they have no relation to the Prime Minister and the Forestry Administration supporting community forestry and the REDD pilot.

The Geographies of Evasion hypothesis suggests that governments will allow a degree of policy ventriloquy: donors and their employees can articulate ‘government’ positions in order to keep the intervention (and all the associated diplomatic and financial benefits) in play. However, this will not result in concrete action, but will rather contribute to the formation of the facade behind which evasion can continue. In this case, the fact that the supporters of the project were able to garner apparent government support at the time when the proposal was being developed in 2008-9, but that business as usual seems to be operating with regards to land use decisions in 2011 tends to suggest that the key drivers had been avoided rather than addressed.

Practitioner Agency

The argument that the geographies of evasion hypothesis makes is structural. It does not argue that development practitioners as individuals are cynically avoiding difficulty. Certainly in the case of the Oddar Meanchey REDD pilot it is my firm understanding that the practitioners involved have a huge personal commitment to tackling deforestation – this includes displaying the physical courage required to conduct forest inventories in natural forest where there is still an unavoidable threat from unexploded land mines. The question that the geographies of evasion hypothesis highlights, however, is whether the requirement to maintain and/or work behind policy facades restricts practitioner agency or channels it into ultimately fruitless or futile activities.

If there are reasons to doubt the effectiveness of the Oddar Meanchey REDD project as a REDD pilot (because it does not engage the main drivers of deforestation, or because it may be operating at such a small scale that its climate effects are offset entirely by leakage), there remain other local justifications for the project. If the project generates medium term finance for the thirteen community forests and also enhances their legitimacy and effectiveness then these may be considered worthwhile goals in themselves irrespective of whether the promise of the climate policy narrative is fulfilled. These are not questions I have explored empirically in relation to the Oddar Meanchey case, and I am not sure that there would be a reliable way to do so. However, it is my impression that generally in the forestry development assistance sector that there is some scepticism about the entire REDD agenda, but that this is set aside because REDD financing can be used to pursue other worthwhile interests in terms of forest people’s rights and livelihoods and in terms of biodiversity and of other ecosystems services from forests. In this way allowing or even being complicit to some degree in evasion could be a smart and justifiable strategy by practitioners who can use REDD as a vehicle to achieve other worthwhile goals.

I have written elsewhere of the corrosive effects of misrepresenting forest dwelling people's livelihoods on practitioner agency. In my research in Kracheh province of Cambodia development workers, blind to the real livelihoods of villagers (and disabled by the structure of their project from acknowledging those livelihoods) were reduced to the rather futile resort of 'telling villagers the importance of valuing forest' (Biddulph, 2010). In the Oddar Meanchey pilot the same mythology was evident in project documentation (and the academic and grey literature generated by the practitioners); villagers who were clearly far from 'forest dependent' and even further from 'NTFP dependent' were nevertheless consistently represented as such. However, at the same time, active attempts were being made to lobby for the recognition of villagers' rights to agricultural land within the community forests suggesting again that the dynamics of agency need not always prevent practitioners from responding intelligently and strategically to the problems in front of them.

All of the above suggests that practitioner agency has not been neutralised or subverted by the evasions of practice. There is a three-stage argument that could be made to suggest that practitioner agency is being misdirected. That argument is that (1) the current state of play constitutes an evasion of the main drivers of deforestation; (2) that that evasion is symptomatic of the fact that the resources and mechanisms needed to significantly arrest deforestation in Cambodia have not yet been found; (3) rather than being complicit in concealing that deficiency by investing in processes that will not work, practitioners should be sending the problem back to the policy makers (national and international) and demanding a more convincing plan be formulated and agreed to⁴.

Conclusions

This analysis has sought to apply the geography of evasion hypothesis to the case of REDD implementation in Cambodia. It has explained how the idea of the phased approach creates the opportunity for the REDD solution to avoid the deforestation problem. In this analysis the role of capacity building and institutional development as means to avoid confronting problems is key, as is the selection of pilot sites that are less threatened by deforestation than other forest.

There are many ways to critique development interventions in general and REDD in particular. Karsenty and Ongolo's (2011 forthcoming) article on the inappropriateness of the REDD idea for "fragile states" diagnoses many of the problems raised in this paper. The virtue of Geographies of Evasion is that it highlights very simple questions for which data will usually be readily available. It asks first, where is the problem that is claimed to be addressed by the intervention? It then asks, where is the intervention being implemented? If the two are in different locations this immediately leads into a direct discussion of the reasons for this evasion, which means opening the discourse to include factors that are often systematically downplayed prior to implementation in order to get projects financed and underway.

It may be that avoiding direct confrontation with the most serious instances of a problem is a smart and strategic way of engaging with it. It may, for example, be a way of scoring some easy wins, building momentum and consolidating a larger constituency for reform. The geographies of evasion hypothesis draws attention to such possible explanations and holds them to scrutiny. Results so far, however, from

⁴ This is an argument I intend to test on both practitioners and independent academic researchers familiar with the pilot before I develop this paper further for publication.

both the land titling and community forestry cases that generated the hypothesis, and the case of REDD presented here, suggest that the reasons for evasion are not strategic but rather lie in the fact that those external actors seeking to effect change are doing so without sufficient financial resources, sufficient political will or sufficient wit to achieve it.

If the role of development research is to speak truth to power it may be that the Geographies of Evasion hypothesis may more speedily and effectively enable research to arrive at such truths than the Foucault inspired explanations of Ferguson, who tends to imagine discursive forces “behind the actors’ backs”, and therefore somehow beyond reach or correction, or than the Latour inspired explanations of Mosse, who, by suggesting that ‘good policy is unimplementable’, risks trivialising policy to the extent that the implication is that intended objectives are barely worth monitoring and that only unintended, behind-the-scenes achievements are of interest. It is my hope that the geographies of evasion hypothesis will be applied more widely, certainly beyond the case of Cambodia, and also beyond the case of interventions in land/forest administration and management. Hopefully this wider application might also yield some explanations of evasion different from the cases of tenure interventions and REDD in Cambodia which simply suggest that the development industry is attempting tasks that are far beyond its capacity to achieve.

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