

David Aled Williams. 2023. *The politics of deforestation and REDD+ in Indonesia: Global climate change mitigation*. Routledge. ISBN 9781032213361. £31.19.

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In his book, *The politics of deforestation and REDD+ in Indonesia: Global climate change mitigation*, David Aled Williams presents findings from his decade-long research in Indonesia to critique the implementation of the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) scheme. REDD+ is a payment program for forest management aimed at reducing emissions and enhancing greenhouse gas removal, which Williams argues has complex and controversial impacts through its implementation in Indonesia. Throughout his book, Williams uses both quantitative data and narratives to highlight the relationship between politics, economics, social ties, and forest governance—including efforts to address deforestation.

Williams begins by reviewing the commitment of Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) during a speech at a G20 event in 2009. SBY pledged to reduce national carbon emissions twenty-six percent by 2020 through investment in renewable energy, limiting deforestation, and land use change (p. 1). This was especially important given that about half of global deforestation now occurs in two countries: Brazil and Indonesia (p. 5). However, Williams does not deny that rich countries also contribute to deforestation as they finance and consume the commodities that result from forest loss.

Chapter 1 critiques the REDD+ scheme as a form of neoliberal environmentalism from a political ecology perspective. According to Williams, REDD+ schemes are an incarnation of the market-based conservation instrument Payment for Ecosystem Services, relying on property rights and market mechanisms to manage natural resources. Such efforts have the potential to reinforce socioeconomic inequalities and place the burden of climate change mitigation on vulnerable groups; they also simultaneously fail to hold governments and corporations accountable for carbon emissions (p. 26). In short, REDD+ schemes only readjust the system of neoliberal capitalism. This is because existing approaches do not consider political contestation and power as important variables, which is why Williams' application of political ecology to this subject is so valuable.

Chapter 2 reviews the political history of Indonesia's forest governance from the pre-colonial period to the Reform Era and its relationship to the implementation of REDD+ schemes. William argues that forest governance in the colonial era led to the loss of control over forest resources and land ownership in most local communities. This then became a reference in forest governance in Indonesia after independence, including the New Order Era, the Reform Era, even until the first period of Joko Widodo's leadership from 2014 to 2019. Tensions between political elites, Indigenous Peoples, and other groups arose over access to and control over natural resources—especially forests and land—and still occur frequently (p. 60-61). Thus, Williams' main argument in Chapter 2 is that colonialism paved the way for political elites to regulate forest governance in Indonesia.

Chapter 3 highlights policy changes in REDD+ implementation in Indonesia, particularly the dissolution of the National REDD+ Agency (BP REDD+). BP REDD+ was a body agreed to by the Norwegian and Indonesian government and tasked with reporting directly to the President to coordinate development and implementation efforts. According to Williams, the dissolution occurred due to resistance from the national forestry bureaucracy and local governments (p. 74). This was because BP REDD+ had succeeded in narrowing the opportunities offered by the REDD+ scheme for corruption benefiting bureaucrats and politicians: "The Ministry of Forestry always get territorial if there is another agency that can take their authority, and the REDD+ agency consisted of civil society people. The Ministry of Forestry felt uncomfortable with a lot of the changes" (p. 73). The chapter also highlights that the Norwegian government did not react decisively to the dissolution of the REDD+ agency by neither suspending funding or their cooperation. Thus, Williams argues that neither party is truly committed to stopping deforestation through REDD+ implementation. REDD+ policies are not a priority for the oligarchs who have a strong influence in the forest sector, as they have a vested interest in land conversion activities.

Chapter 4 looks deeper into Indonesian REDD+ implementation. Williams highlights problems obtaining Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC) for REDD+ pilot program in an area with a relatively high deforestation rate in Central Sulawesi (specifically the villages of Lembah Mukti and Telaga). The Lembah

Mukti community agreed to carry out forest rehabilitation, while the Talaga community did not want to continue the REDD+ project (p. 99). Williams notes that, in addition to the intervention of local NGOs, these differences occurred because meetings held between communities and REDD+ parties tend to be aimed at socialization, education, and persuasion rather than open dialogue and processes to obtain community information and consent (p. 100). Williams also highlights that deforestation rates in Central Sulawesi were higher during the FPIC program than before. Given this, REDD+ implementation in the region did not have a significant impact on reducing deforestation and instead led to greater distrust of the state forestry bureaucracy.

REDD+ implementation in Indonesia has raised various socio-political challenges, such as corruption, excessive bureaucracy, and challenges to customary rights over forest land (p. 111). Thus, in Chapter 5, Williams analyzes the parties who benefit and lose in the implementation of REDD+. According to Williams, the winners are SBY's government (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, President from 2004-2014), which received economic support from Norway and successfully integrated REDD+ into its policies, Joko Widodo for the political support garnered from the dissolution of the REDD+ agency, several civil society groups through Norwegian grant funding, and the Norwegian government itself for the reputational and diplomatic benefits of REDD+ cooperation with Indonesia. Meanwhile, local communities were disadvantaged by the state's attempts to end customary tenure and impose new local natural resource management institutions, resulting in a decline in the sustainability of local practices and equitable distribution of resources (p. 115).

Williams' work is a useful resource for individuals interested in exploring issues of climate change, natural resource management, and environmental conservation. Williams' emphasis on both the political and economic aspects of REDD+ implementation makes this book a useful complement to political ecology literature. Scholars of international political economy interested by the structures of global environmental efforts—including the profitability of climate efforts and international influence on domestic environmental policies in Southeast Asia—are also likely to benefit from reading this book. In addition, Williams' analysis is crucial to prevent the inappropriate politicization of environmental policies through which long-term environmental sustainability is ignored in favor of short-term gains. Williams' study is engaging because it presents an in-depth analysis of climate change mitigation governance irregularities based on empirical evidence, which he uncovered in direct field research into the actual practice of REDD+ schemes in Indonesia. It also develops research methods that enable the disclosure of previously unreachable information.

Reference

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