

**Examining Equity:
a multidimensional framework for assessing equity
in payments for ecosystem services**

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ABSTRACT

Concern over social equity dominates current debates about payments for ecosystem services and reduced deforestation and forest degradation (REDD+). Yet, despite the apprehension that these initiatives may undermine equity, the term is generally left undefined. This paper presents a systematic framework for the analysis of equity that can be used to examine how local equity is affected as the global value of ecosystem services changes. Our framework identifies three dimensions that form the content (the *what*) of equity. The first, distributive equity, addresses the distribution of benefits and costs. The second, procedural equity, refers to decision-making. These are linked by the third dimension, contextual equity, which incorporates the pre-existing conditions that limit or facilitate people's access to decision-making procedures, resources and, thereby, benefits. The framework then asks how these dimensions are shaped by the scale and target group of concern (*who*), the framing of goals with respect to equity (*why*), and, crucially, *how* the decisions about the content, target and aims of equity are taken. By spurring debate around the fundamental ethical values at stake, this framework can guide analysts, policymakers and planners towards more open and inclusive processes for defining equity, along with affirmative efforts to engage marginalised people.